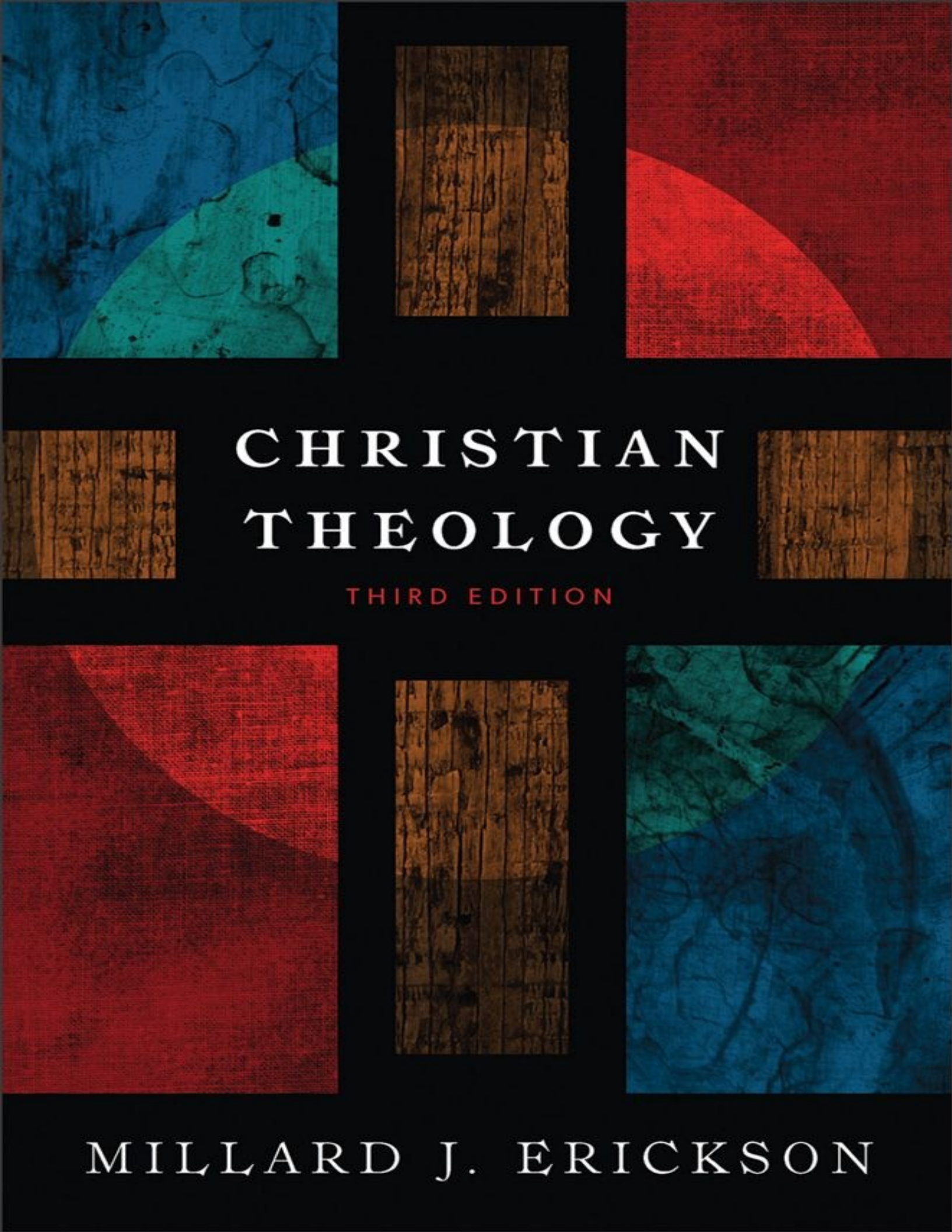

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THEOLOGY
THIRD EDITION
MILLARD J. ERICKSON

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

THIRD EDITION

MILLARD J. ERICKSON

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To

Bernard Ramm (in memoriam),
my first theology professor;

William E. Hordern,
my doctoral mentor;

and **Wolfhart Pannenberg**,
my postdoctoral mentor.

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Preface

A quarter century ago, concerned about the lack of a truly suitable introductory systematic theology textbook, I urged several leading evangelical theologians to write such a book. All agreed regarding the need, but each declined to undertake such a project. Finally, I resolved that I would have to write it myself, and proceeded to do so. The reception that the first edition received confirmed that it was meeting a need of others as well. Soon several other theologians penned similar textbooks, so that we now have more than a dozen fine evangelical introductory systematic theology books, any of which I would be pleased to use in teaching a survey of systematic theology. As the theological scene continued to change, I found it desirable to revise my original textbook in the 1990s. The translation of *Christian Theology* into numerous Asian and European languages was a surprising but gratifying development.

I have become increasingly aware that an updated version of *Christian Theology* is needed. New turns in the discussion of such doctrines as the atonement, justification, and divine foreknowledge deserve treatment in any study of basic doctrines of the Christian faith. In this third edition, I seek to address those discussions. In order to maintain the length of this volume, certain portions of the earlier editions have been condensed or eliminated.

I have sought to take into account feedback from professors and students who have used my textbook. One somewhat common comment was that a significant percentage of students lacked the background to derive maximum benefit from the more technical aspects of the methodological section of the book. Consequently, the material on biblical criticism and on religious language has been reduced, simplified, and combined into a single chapter. The chapter on postmodernism has been replaced by a new chapter dealing more broadly with the possibility of theology. Readers who wish for a more in-depth treatment of postmodernism are encouraged to consult my volume *Truth or Consequences*.[1] I also recommend as a companion to this volume my *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, which may prove helpful as a quick reference guide to theological terms. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the 2011 New International Version. Because this version sometimes interprets rather than

translates, I have at several points substituted other translations or given my own.

Even with respect to those issues where there have not been significant new developments or major controversies in recent years, there has continued to be new research and writing. I have made major efforts to keep abreast of such writings. In many cases, however, I have chosen to retain documentation from more classical versions of the same position, rather than using more recent instances from sources of less stature. A century or more from now, people will still be consulting Calvin and Barth, but some of today's authors (including myself) will be unknown. It is not necessary to accept recent developments in theology, but responsible scholarship requires being familiar with what is current.

A major phenomenon of the last two or three decades of Christian history is the rapid expansion of Christianity in places other than Western Europe.[2] Indeed, the term "majority world Christianity" is increasingly being used in place of the expression "third world Christianity."[3] This accelerating growth of the church in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia has not yet been matched by scholarly theological publication from those quarters, and relatively little of what has been done has been translated into English. I have tried to include some of the insights and address some of the issues coming from those segments of Christianity. An expansion of the section on the Holy Spirit is a result of this development. In the final analysis, this book has been designed primarily for North American, English-speaking students, and its treatment of theology has been contextualized especially for them. Yet I hope that enough has been done to state the essence of the doctrines to enable others to adapt these statements to their own situation. The translation of earlier editions of this book and its derivative volume, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, into Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Farsi, Chinese, Malaysian, and numerous other languages, and the reception I have experienced to my theological presentations in person in many countries outside the United States, encourage me to believe that the utility of this edition will also not be restricted to my home country.

One of the striking cultural developments in the United States is the increasing political polarization. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s there was considerable ideological overlap between the members of the two major political parties in the United States Congress, that had virtually disappeared by 2010.[4] I see certain parallels in evangelical Christianity, as well. One of my friends said of the Evangelical Theological Society, "We have the medievalists and the postmodernists in this society, and nothing in between." While that may have

been a bit of an overstatement, I see the tendency toward polarization that he referred to, and it concerns me. While I have taken definite positions on the issues currently under dispute in evangelicalism, I have attempted to depict the differing parties as fairly as possible. It is my hope that all segments of the theological spectrum, both evangelical and nonevangelical, will continue to engage in careful and respectful dialogue.

In the concluding chapter of this book I address the ongoing need for systematic theology. Postmodernists, including some "postconservative evangelicals," continue to decry the sort of objectivist thinking that they routinely identify as "modernist" and "Enlightenment." In so doing, however, they are, I believe, concentrating on the recent past and much of the present, but are failing to notice and respond to the indicators of what the future will bring. A number of cultural trends and even emerging academic methodologies indicate that the successor to postmodernism is becoming more clearly identifiable.[5] Among these trends can be noted the adoption of more scientific types of methods in the humanities and social sciences,[6] and the call for American education to develop in students the type of critical thinking with which the educational systems of many nations are already surpassing the United States.[7] In my judgment, evangelical theologians ignore such markers at their peril, and by so doing, will doom their theologies to early irrelevance.[8] While this is a time in which such critical and contrarian thinking is little appreciated, it has seldom been more needed than now.

I want to acknowledge again those whose advice, encouragement, and help contributed to the first and second editions of this book. My friend the late Clark Pinnock encouraged me to "make it sing like a hymnbook, rather than read like a telephone book," an ideal I have striven imperfectly to achieve. Several of my students read portions of the manuscript of the first edition and offered me reactions from a student perspective: Bruce Kallenberg, Randy Russ, and Mark Moulton, and my teaching assistant, Dan Erickson, read the entire manuscript. Laurie Dirnberger, Lorraine Swanson, Aletta Whittaker, and Pat Krohn typed portions of the manuscript. Three students, David McCullum, Stanley Olson, and Randy Russ, covenanted to support me through the original writing with prayer, without which I would never have been able to complete the mammoth project. Alan Fisher and Jim Weaver, then of Baker, guided the project through the publishing process, and Ray Wiersma did painstaking and excellent editorial work, ably supplemented by Maria denBoer's gracious and careful editing of the second edition. Robert Hand and Bethany Murphy have skillfully guided the third edition through the editorial process. My wife, Ginny, an English teacher, has been a valuable resource, particularly in matters of grammar and form, and

she has patiently accepted my investment of many hours in the writing of this book over the years.

I am grateful for Mr. Jim Kinney, editorial director of Baker Academic, who encouraged me to prepare a new edition, solicited comments from professors who have used the earlier editions as a textbook, and provided support in many ways. I am especially indebted to Dr. L. Arnold Hustad, professor of theology and philosophy at Crown College. His research on recent developments and literature was of great help to me, as were his insightful comments on the contemporary theological scene. Once my student and teaching assistant, he has truly become my colleague in this task. I am well aware that this book has many shortcomings, for which I am solely responsible.

Finally, I am immensely grateful to our Lord for the privilege and honor of being able to write this book and for the strength and perseverance he granted me. It is my prayer that it might be the means to the blessing of many and might bring glory to him.

PART 1
STUDYING GOD

1. What Is Theology? 3

2. The Possibility of Theology 23

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1
What Is Theology?

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Develop an understanding of the concept of religion in history.
2. Compose a brief definition of “theology” that focuses particularly on the understanding of the discipline.
3. Distinguish among biblical, historical, philosophical, and systematic theology.
4. Demonstrate the need for systematic theology in contemporary society.
5. Relate Christian theology to Christian living and Christian ministry in today’s world.

Chapter Summary

Theology in a Christian context is a discipline of study that seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding of reality. It seeks to understand God’s creation, particularly human beings and their condition, and God’s redemptive work in relation to humankind. Biblical, historical, and philosophical theology provide insights and understandings that help lead toward a coherent whole. Theology has practical value in providing guidance for the Christian life and ministry.

Study Questions

- In his philosophical works, to what extent did Immanuel Kant restrict religion?
- State and explain five facets of the definition of theology.
- Define systematic theology and explain how it relates to the three other disciplines of theology: biblical, historical, and philosophical.
- What is natural theology, and which theologian developed a more empirical approach to it?
- Defend the statement “Theology should continue to reign as Queen of the Sciences.”

Outline

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The Nature of Religion

Humans are wondrous and complex beings. They are capable of executing intricate physical feats, performing abstract intellectual calculations, and producing incredibly beautiful sights and sounds. Beyond this, human beings are incurably religious. For wherever we find humanity—in widely different cultures geographically dispersed, and at all points from the dimmest moments of recorded history to the present—we also find religion.

Religion is one of those terms that we all assume we understand, but is not easy to define. Disagreements, or at least variety, in definitions or descriptions often means either that there has not been sufficient study of, reflection on, and discussion of the subject, or that the subject matter is too rich and complex to be gathered into a single, comprehensive statement.

Certain common features appear in many descriptions of religion. There is belief in something higher than individual human persons, whether a personal god or supernatural beings, a force within nature, a set of values, or the human race as a whole. Typically there is a distinction between sacred and secular (or profane), whether persons, objects, places, or practices. The degree of force with which a religion is held varies among religions and among the adherents of a given religion.[9]

Religion also ordinarily involves a world-and-life view, that is, a perspective or general picture of reality as a whole and a conception of how individuals are to relate to the world in light of this perspective. A set of practices, of either ritual or ethical behavior or both, attaches to a religion. Certain attitudes or feelings, such as awe, guilt, and a sense of mystery, are found in religion. There is some sort of relationship or response to the higher object, such as commitment, worship, or prayer.[10] Finally, there are often, but not always, certain social dimensions. Groups are frequently formed on the basis of a common religious stance or commitment.[11]

Attempts have been made to find one common essence in all religion. For example, during much of the Middle Ages, particularly in the West, religion was thought of as belief or dogma. These beliefs distinguished Christianity from other religions and distinguished various branches of Christianity from one another. It was natural that doctrinal teachings should have been seen as primary during the period from the beginning of the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century. Since philosophy was a strong, well-established discipline, the character of religion as a worldview would naturally be emphasized. And since the behavioral sciences were still in their infancies, relatively little was said about religion as a social institution or about the psychological phenomena of religion.

With the start of the nineteenth century, however, the understanding of the locus of religion shifted. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, rejected the idea of either dogma or ethics as the locus of religion. Rather, he said, religion is a matter of feeling, either of feeling in general or of the feeling of absolute dependence.[12] This view has been developed by the phenomenological analysis of thinkers such as Rudolf Otto, who spoke of the numinous, the awareness of the holy.[13] This was continued in much of twentieth-century religious thought, with its reaction against logical

categories and “rationalism.” Popular contemporary Christian worship shows a strong emphasis on feeling.

Schleiermacher’s formulation was in large part a reaction to the work of Immanuel Kant. Although Kant was a philosopher rather than a theologian, his three famous critiques—*The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *The Critique of Judgment* (1790)—had an immense impact on the philosophy of religion.[14] In the first of these, he refuted the idea that it is possible to have theoretical knowledge of objects that transcend sense experience. This of course disposed of the possibility of any real knowledge of or cognitive basis for religion as traditionally understood.[15] Rather, Kant determined that religion is an object of the practical reason. He deemed that God, norms, and immortal life are necessary as postulates without which morality cannot function.[16] Thus religion became a matter of ethics. This view of religion was applied to Christian theology by Albrecht Ritschl, who said that religion is a matter of moral judgments.[17]

How, then, shall we regard religion? Religion is actually all of these—belief or doctrine, feeling or attitudes, and a way of life or manner of behaving. Christianity fits all these criteria of religion. It is a way of life, a kind of behavior, a style of living. And it is this not in the sense of merely isolated individual experience, but in giving birth to social groups. Christianity also involves certain feelings, such as dependence, love, and fulfillment. And Christianity most certainly involves a set of teachings, a way of viewing reality and oneself, and a perspective from which all of experience makes sense.

To be a worthy member of a group named after a particular leader, one must adhere to the teachings of that leader. For example, a Platonist is one who in some sense holds to the conceptions taught by Plato; a Marxist is one who accepts the teachings of Karl Marx. Insofar as the leader also advocated a way of life inseparable from the message he taught, it is essential that the follower also emulate these practices. We usually distinguish, however, between inherent (or essential) practices and accidental (or incidental) practices. To be a Platonist, one need not live in Athens and speak classical Greek. To be a Marxist, one need not be a Jew, study in the British Museum, or ride a bicycle.

In the same fashion, a Christian need not wear sandals, have a beard, or live in Palestine. But those who claim to be Christians will believe what Jesus taught and practice what he commanded, such as, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (e.g., Matt. 22:39). For accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives. What, then, is involved in being a Christian? James Orr put it well: “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of

God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny found only in Christianity."[18]

It seems reasonable, then, to say that holding the beliefs that Jesus held and taught is part of what it means to be a Christian or a follower of Christ. The study of these beliefs is the particular concern of Christian theology. Belief is not the whole of Christianity.[19] An experience or set of experiences is involved, including love, humility, adoration, and worship. There are practices, both ethical in nature and ritualistic or devotional. Christianity entails social dimensions, involving relationships both with other Christians in what is usually termed the church and with non-Christians in the world as a whole. Other disciplines of inquiry and knowledge investigate these dimensions of Christianity. But the central task of examining, interpreting, and organizing the teachings of the one from whom this religion takes its name belongs to Christian theology.

The actual living-out and personal practice of religion, including holding doctrinal beliefs, occur on the level of primary experience. There is also a level of reflection on what is occurring on the primary level. The discipline that concerns itself with describing, analyzing, criticizing, and organizing the doctrines is theology. Thus theology is a second-level activity as contrasted with religion. It is to religion what psychology is to human emotions, what aesthetics is to works of art, what political science is to political behavior.

Some other conceptions of theology than the one presented here need to be noted. They stem from the basic view of religion and of doctrine. To Gustavo Gutiérrez and liberation theologians, religion is clearly pragmatic, concerned with alleviating the injustices within the human race. Thus the role of doctrine is to speak to those inequities. Theology, then, becomes critical reflection on praxis.[20]

There are also those who take primarily a subjective view of religion. According to some, such as John Hick, the essence of religion is an experience of the one great reality, which he terms the "Eternal One."[21] This places him squarely in the Schleiermacherian tradition regarding the nature of religion. Doctrines, then, whether of different religions or of varying denominations within a given religion, are the differing interpretations various groups of people place on this generic experience as they interpret it through the grid of their own culture.[22]

Finally, my approach also differs from the approach of George Lindbeck and postliberals. Rejecting both the idea that religion consists primarily of its doctrinal teachings in propositional form and that it is primarily an expression of

emotional experience, he proposes the cultural-linguistic view. This is the idea that religion is a set of categories or teachings that each culture constructs to interpret life and on the basis of which its members function. It does not grow out of experience so much as it shapes it. It is a story, told by its adherents, on the basis of which they make sense of life.[23] Doctrine, on this view, is a second-level activity that serves a regulative function. Rather than giving us ontological knowledge about God, doctrines are rules governing the community, much the same way grammar is related to a language.[24]

Our contention is that doctrines do indeed consist of genuine knowledge about God, and that religion involves the whole person: intellect, emotions, and will. This view of doctrine and theology has two major advantages not possessed by any of the other views. It enables us to account for the full richness and complexity of human religions. Further, it fits more closely the actual understanding of religion and doctrine with which the early church and the authors of Scripture worked. And, to the extent that a Christian community today regards the Bible as valid, binding, and its primary authority, this view also fits the average Christian's understanding and practice of the Christian life. The other dimensions of Christian experience, such as the ethical application of Christian teachings and the wholehearted praise of God involved in worship, are intimately tied to our doctrinal understanding. But they are complementary, not alternatives to it.

The Definition of Theology

A good preliminary or basic definition of theology is *the study or science of God*. The God of Christianity is an active being, however, and so this initial definition must be expanded to include God's works and his relationship with them. Thus theology will also seek to understand God's creation, particularly human beings and their condition, and God's redemptive working in relation to humankind.

Yet more needs to be said to indicate what this science does. So we propose a more complete definition of theology: *the discipline that strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.* This definition identifies five key aspects of the task of theology.

1. Theology is biblical. It takes as the primary source of its content the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is not to say that it

simply draws uncritically on surface meanings of the Scriptures. It utilizes the tools and methods of biblical research. It also employs the insights of other areas of truth, which it regards as God's general revelation.

2. Theology is systematic. That is, it draws on the entire Bible. Rather than utilizing individual texts in isolation from others, it attempts to relate the various portions to one another to coalesce the varied teachings into some type of harmonious or coherent whole.

3. Theology also relates to the issues of general culture and learning. For example, it attempts to relate its view of origins to the concepts advanced by science (or, more correctly, such disciplines as cosmology), its view of human nature to psychology's understanding of personality, its conception of providence to the work of philosophy of history, and so on.

4. Theology must also be contemporary. While it treats timeless issues, it must use language, concepts, and thought forms that make some sense in the context of the present time. There is danger here. Some theologies, in attempting to deal with modern issues, have restated the biblical materials in a way that has distorted them. Thus we hear of the very real "peril of modernizing Jesus."[25] In attempting to avoid making Jesus just another twentieth- or twenty-first-century liberal, however, theologians sometimes state the message in such a fashion as to require the present-day person to become a first-century person in order to understand it. As a result, one finds oneself able to deal only with problems that no longer exist. Thus, the opposite peril, "the peril of archaizing ourselves,"[26] must similarly be avoided.

This is not merely a matter of using today's thought forms to express the message. The Christian message should address the questions and the challenges encountered today, even while challenging the validity of some of those questions. Yet even here there needs to be caution about too strong a commitment to a given set of issues. If the present represents a change from the past, then presumably the future will also be different from the present. A theology that identifies too closely with the immediate present (i.e., the "today" and nothing but) will expose itself to premature obsolescence.

5. Finally, theology is to be practical. By this we do not mean practical theology in the technical sense (i.e., how to preach, counsel, evangelize, etc.), but the idea that theology relates to living rather than merely to belief. The Christian faith gives us help with our practical concerns. Paul, for instance, gave assurances about the second coming and then said, "Encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). It should be noted, however, that theology must not be concerned primarily with the practical dimensions. The practical effect or

application of a doctrine is a consequence of the truth of the doctrine, not the reverse.

Locating (Systematic) Theology on the Theological Map

"Theology" is a widely used term. It is therefore necessary to identify more closely the sense in which we are using it here. In the broadest usage, the word encompasses all subjects treated in a theological or divinity school. In this sense, it includes such diverse subjects as Old Testament, New Testament, church history, evangelism, missions, systematic theology, philosophy of religion, Christian ethics, preaching, Christian education, pastoral ministry and leadership, and counseling. A narrower sense of the word refers to those endeavors that treat the specifically *doctrinal* character of the Christian faith. Here are found such disciplines as biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and philosophical theology. This is theology as contrasted with the history of the church as an institution, the interpretation of the biblical text, or the theory and practice of ministry. Within this collection of theological subjects (biblical theology, historical theology, etc., defined below), we may isolate systematic theology in particular. It is in this sense that the word "theology" will hereafter be used in this work (unless there is specific indication to the contrary). Finally, within systematic theology, there are various doctrines, such as bibliology, anthropology, Christology, and theology proper (or the doctrine of God). To avoid confusion, when the last-mentioned doctrine is in view, the expression "doctrine of God" will be used. Figure 1 may be helpful in visualizing these relationships.

FIGURE 1

Senses of "Theology"



Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology

When we inquire regarding the relationship of systematic theology to other doctrinal endeavors, we find a particularly close relationship between systematic theology and biblical theology. The systematic theologian is dependent on the work and insights of the laborers in the exegetical vineyard.

We need to distinguish three senses of the expression "biblical theology." Biblical theology may be thought of as the movement by that name that arose in the 1940s, flourished in the 1950s, and declined in the 1960s.[27] This movement had many affinities with neo-orthodox theology. Many of its basic concepts, such as the "distinctive biblical mentality," were severely criticized, particularly by James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language*.[28] The decline of the biblical-theology movement has been documented by Brevard Childs in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.[29] It now appears that, despite its name, the movement was not always especially biblical. In fact, it was at times quite *un*biblical.[30]

A second meaning of biblical theology is the theological content of the Old and New Testaments, or the theology found within individual biblical books. There are two approaches to biblical theology thus defined. One is the purely descriptive approach advocated by Krister Stendahl.[31] This is simply a presentation of the theological teachings of Paul, John, and the other New Testament writers. To the extent that it systematically describes the religious beliefs of the first century, it could be considered a systematic theology of the New Testament. (Those who see greater diversity would speak of "theologies of the New Testament.") This is basically what Johann Philipp Gabler called biblical theology in the broader sense, or "true" biblical theology. Gabler also spoke of another approach, namely, "pure" biblical theology, which is the isolation and presentation of the unchanging biblical teachings that are valid for all times. In this approach, these teachings are purified of the contingent concepts in which they were expressed in the Bible.[32] We might today call this the distinction between descriptive biblical theology and normative biblical theology. Note, however, that neither of these approaches is dogmatics or systematic theology, since no attempt is made to contemporize or to state these unchanging concepts in a form suitable for our day's understanding. Brevard Childs has suggested that this is the direction in which biblical theology needs to move in the future.[33] It is this second meaning of biblical theology, in either the "true" or the "pure" sense, that will ordinarily be in view when the term "biblical theology" appears in this volume.

A final meaning of the expression “biblical theology” is simply theology that is biblical, that is, based on and faithful to the teachings of the Bible. In this sense, systematic theology of the right kind will be biblical theology. It is not simply based on biblical theology; it *is* theology that is biblical. Our goal is systematic biblical theology, or “pure” biblical theology (in the second sense) contemporized. The systematic theologian draws on the product of the biblical theologian’s work. Biblical theology is the raw material, as it were, with which systematic theology works.

Systematic Theology and Historical Theology

If New Testament theology is the systematic theology of the first century, then historical theology studies the systematic theologies held and taught by various theologians throughout the history of the church. There are two major ways to organize historical theology. It may be approached through studying the theology of a given time or a given theologian or school of theology with respect to several key areas of doctrine. Thus, the theology of each successive century or major period of time would be examined sequentially.[34] This might be termed the synchronic approach. The other approach is to trace the history of thought regarding a given doctrine (or a series of them) down through the periods of the church’s life.[35] This could be called a diachronic approach. For instance, the history of the doctrine of the atonement from biblical times to the present might be examined. Then the doctrine of the church might similarly be surveyed. This latter method of organizing the study of historical theology is often referred to as the history of doctrines, whereas the former approach is generally termed the history of Christian thought.

Systematic theologians find significant value in the study of historical theology. First, it makes us more self-conscious and self-critical, more aware of our own presuppositions. We all bring to the study of the Bible (or of any other material) a particular perspective, which is very much affected by the historical and cultural situation in which we are rooted. Without being aware of it, we screen all that we consider through the filter of our own understanding (or “preunderstanding”). An interpretation already enters at the level of perception. The question is, How can we control and channel this preunderstanding to prevent it from distorting the material being worked with? If we are aware of our own presuppositions, we can make a conscious compensation for these biases. But how do we recognize that our preunderstanding is our way of perceiving the truth, and not the way things are? One way to do this is to study the varying interpretations held and statements made at different times in the church’s life.

This shows us that there are alternative ways of viewing the matter. It also makes us sensitive to the manner in which culture affects one's thinking. It is possible to study the christological formulations of the fourth and fifth centuries and recognize the influence that Greek metaphysics had on the development of the categories. One may do so, however, without realizing that one's own interpretation of the biblical materials about the person of Christ (and one's own interpretation of fourth-century Christology) is similarly affected by the intellectual milieu of the present. Failure to realize this must surely be a case of intellectual presbyopia.[36] Observing how culture influenced theological thinking in the past should call our attention to what is happening to us.

A second value of historical theology is that we can learn to do theology by studying how others have done it before us. Thomas Aquinas's adaptation of Aristotelian metaphysics to state the Christian faith can be instructive as to how we might employ contemporary ideologies in expressing theological concepts today. The study of the theologizing work of a John Calvin, a Karl Barth, or an Augustine will give us a good model and should inspire us in our own activity.

A third value of historical theology is that it may provide a means of evaluating a particular idea. It is often difficult to see the implications that a given concept involves. Yet frequently the ideas that seem so novel today have actually had precursors at earlier periods in the life of the church. In attempting to evaluate the implications of the Jehovah's Witnesses' view of the person of Christ, one might examine the view taught by Arius in the fourth century and see where it actually led in that case. History is theology's laboratory, in which it can assess the ideas that it espouses or considers espousing.[37] As George Santayana reminded us, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[38] If we closely examine some of our "new" ideas in the light of the history of the church, we will find that they are actually new forms of old conceptions. One need not be committed to a cyclical view of history[39] to hold with the author of Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9).

Systematic Theology and Philosophical Theology

Systematic theology also utilizes philosophical theology.[40] Basically, there are three contributions different theologians believe yourphilosophy or philosophy of religion may make to theology: philosophy may (1) supply content for theology, (2) defend theology or establish its truth, and (3) scrutinize its concepts and arguments. In the twentieth century, Karl Barth reacted vigorously against the first of these three views, and to a considerable extent against the second. His reaction was aimed at a type of theology that had become virtually a philosophy

of religion or natural theology. At the same time, the influential school of analytical philosophy restricted its work to the third type of activity. Here lies a major value of philosophy for the theologian: scrutiny of the meaning of terms and ideas employed in the theological task, the criticizing of its arguments, and the sharpening of the message for clarity. In my judgment, philosophy, within somewhat restricted scope, also performs the second function, weighing the truth-claims advanced by theology and giving part of the basis for accepting the message. Thus philosophy may serve to justify in part the endeavor in which theology is engaged.[41] While philosophy, along with other disciplines of knowledge, may also contribute something from general revelation to the understanding of theological conceptions, this contribution is minor, serving to illuminate the special revelation we have in the Bible.

The Need for Theology

But is there really a need for theology? If I love Jesus, is that not sufficient? Indeed, theology seems to have certain disadvantages. It complicates the Christian message, making it confusing and difficult for the layperson to understand. It thus seems to hinder, rather than help, communication of the Christian truth. Does not theology divide rather than unite the church, the body of Christ? Note the number of denominational divisions that have taken place because of a difference of understanding and belief in some minute area. Is theology, then, really desirable, and is it helpful? Several considerations suggest that the answer to this question is yes.

1. Theology is important because correct doctrinal beliefs are essential to the relationship between the believer and God. One of these beliefs deals with God's existence and character. The writer to the Hebrews, in describing those who, like Abel and Enoch, pleased God, states: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (11:6). Without these two items of belief one would not even attempt to approach God.

Belief in the deity of Jesus Christ also seems essential to the relationship. After Jesus had asked his disciples what people thought of him, he also asked, "Who do you say I am?" Peter's response, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," met with Jesus's resounding approval (Matt. 16:13–19). It is not sufficient to have a warm, positive, affirming feeling toward Jesus. One must have correct understanding and belief. Similarly, Jesus's humanity is important. First John was written to combat the teachings of some who said that Jesus had

not really become human. These “docetists” maintained that Jesus’s humanity was merely an appearance. John pointed out the importance of belief in the humanity of Jesus when he wrote, “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2–3). Finally, in Romans 10:9–10, Paul ties belief in Christ’s resurrection (both a historical event and a doctrine) directly into the salvation experience: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” These are but a few examples of the importance of correct belief. Theology, which concerns itself with defining and establishing correct belief, is consequently important.

2. Theology is necessary because truth and experience are related. While some would deny or at least question this connection, in the long run the truth will affect our experience. A person who falls from the tenth story of a building may shout while passing each window on the way down, “I’m still doing fine,” and may mean it sincerely, but eventually the facts of the matter will catch up with the person’s experience. We may continue to live on happily for hours and even days after a close loved one has, unknown to us, passed away, but again the truth will come with crushing effect on our experience. Since the meaning and truth of the Christian faith will eventually have ultimate bearing on our experience, we must come to grips with them.

3. Theology is needful because of the large number of alternatives and challenges abroad at the present time. Secular alternatives abound, including the humanism that makes the human being the highest object of value, and the scientific method that seeks truth without recourse to revelation from a divine being. Other religions now compete with Christianity, even in once supposedly secure Western civilization. Not merely automobiles, electronic devices, and cameras are exported to the United States from the East. Eastern religion is now also challenging the once virtually exclusive domain of Christianity. Islam is growing rapidly in the United States, especially among African American males. Numerous quasi-religions also make their appeal. Countless psychological self-help systems are advocated. Cults are not restricted to the big-name varieties (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism): numerous groups, some of which practice virtual brainwashing and mind control, now attract individuals who desire an alternative to conventional Christianity. Finally, many varieties of teaching, some mutually contradictory, exist within Christianity.

The solution to this confusion is not merely to determine which are false views and attempt to refute them. Authentic merchandise is studied in order to recognize counterfeits. Similarly, correctly understanding the doctrinal teachings of Christianity is the solution to the confusion created by the myriad of claimants to belief.

The Starting Point of Theology

The theologian attempting to develop a systematic treatment of Christian theology encounters a dilemma early on regarding the question of where to start. Should theology begin with the idea of God, or with the nature and means of our knowledge of him? In terms of our task here, should the doctrine of God be treated first, or the doctrine of Scripture? If, on the one hand, one begins with God, the question arises, How can anything meaningful be said about him without our having examined the nature of the revelation about him? On the other hand, beginning with the Bible or some other source of revelation seems to assume the existence of God, undermining its right to be considered a revelation at all. The dilemma theology faces here is similar to philosophy's problem of the priority of metaphysics or epistemology. On the one hand, an object cannot be investigated without a decision about the method of knowing. On the other hand, however, the method of knowing will depend, to a large extent, on the nature of the object to be known.

The former alternative, beginning with a discussion of God before considering the nature of Scripture, has been followed by a number of traditional theologies. While some simply begin using Scripture to study God without formulating a doctrine of Scripture, the problem with this is quite evident. A more common approach is to seek to establish the existence of God on some extrabiblical basis. A classic example is Augustus Hopkins Strong's systematic theology.[42] Strong begins his theology with the existence of God, but does not offer a proof of it. Rather, he maintains that the idea of God is a first truth, a rational intuition. It is not a piece of knowledge written on the soul, but a conception that is so basic that all other knowledge depends on it. It comes to consciousness as a result of sense experience, but is not derived from that sense experience. It is held by everyone, is impossible to deny, and cannot be resolved into or proved by any other ideas. Another form of this approach utilizes a more empirical type of natural theology. Thomas Aquinas maintained that the existence of God could be proved by pure reason, without relying on any external authority. On the basis of his observations he formulated five proofs (or a fivefold proof) for the existence

of God (e.g., the proof from movement or change, the proof from order in the universe). These proofs were formulated independently of and prior to drawing on the biblical revelation.[43]

The usual development of the argument of both varieties of this approach, the rational and the empirical, proceeds somewhat as follows:

1. God exists (this point is assumed as a first truth or established by an empirical proof).
2. God has specially revealed himself in the Bible.
3. This special revelation must be investigated in order to determine what God has revealed.

Certain problems attach to this approach, however. One is that the second statement does not necessarily follow from the first. Must we believe that God, of whose existence we are now convinced, has revealed himself? The deists did not think so. The argument, if it is to be an argument, must establish not only that God exists, but also that he is of such a character that we may reasonably expect a revelation from him, that he has actually done so, and that the record of this revelation is found in the Bible.

The other problem concerns the identity of this god whose existence has been established. It is assumed that this is the same God revealed in Scripture. But is this so? Many other religions claim that the god whose existence is thus established is the god revealed in their sacred writings. Who is right? Is the god of Thomas's fivefold proof the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The latter seems to have numerous qualities and characteristics that the former does not necessarily possess. Is not a further proof necessary, namely, that the god whose existence has been established and the God of the Bible are the same being? And, for that matter, is the god whose existence is proven by various arguments really just one being? Perhaps Thomas did not propound a fivefold proof for the existence of one god, but rather single proofs for the existence of five different gods—a creator, designer, mover, and so on. So while the usual procedure is to establish the existence of God and then present proofs for the supernatural character and origin of the Bible, it appears that a logical gap exists.

The alternative approach is to begin with the special revelation, the Bible. Those who take this approach are often skeptical about the possibility of any knowledge of God outside the Bible or the Christ-event; without special revelation, humans have no knowledge *that* God exists or of *what* he is like. Thus, Karl Barth rejected any type of natural theology. He begins his *Church Dogmatics,* following an introduction, with the doctrine of the Word of God, not

the doctrine of God. His concern is with what the Word of God is, and then with what God is known to be in the light of this revelation. He does not begin with what God is and then move to what revelation must be in the light of his nature.[44]

The problem with this approach is the difficulty of deciding what revelation is like without some prior idea of what God is like. The type of revelation a very transcendent God would give might well be very different from that given by a God immanent within the world and working through "natural" processes. If God is an all-controlling, sovereign God, his work of inspiring the Scriptures will be quite different from what it will be if he in fact allows a great deal of human freedom. In the former case, one might treat every word of Scripture as God's own message, while taking it somewhat less literally in the latter case. To put it another way, how we interpret Scripture will be affected by how we conceive of God.

A further problem for this approach is, how can Scripture be regarded as a revelation at all? If we have not already established God, have we any grounds for treating the Bible as more than simply religious literature? Unless we somehow prove that the Bible must have had a supernatural origin, it may simply be a report of the religious opinions of a variety of authors. It is possible to develop a science of fictional worlds or persons. One can develop a detailed study of Wonderland, based on Lewis Carroll's writings. Are there such places and persons, however? One could also presumably develop an extensive study of unicorns, based on the literature that refers to them. The question, however, is whether there are any such beings. The same issue attaches to a theology that, without first establishing God's existence, begins with what the Bible has to say about him and the other topics of theology. These topics may have no objective status, no reality independent of the literature (the Bible) in which they are discussed. Our systematic theology would then be no better than a systematic unicornology.

Is there some solution to this impasse? It appears to me that there is. Instead of beginning either with God, the object of knowledge, or the Bible, the means of knowledge, we may begin with both. Rather than attempting to prove one or the other, we may presuppose both as part of a basic thesis, then proceed to develop the knowledge that flows from this thesis and assess the evidence for its truth.

On this basis, both God and his self-revelation are presupposed together, or perhaps we might think of the self-revealing God as a single presupposition. This approach has been followed by a number of conservatives who desire to hold to a propositional or informational revelation of God without first constructing a natural-theology proof for his existence. Thus the starting point

would be something of this type: “There exists one Triune, loving, all-powerful, holy, all-knowing God who has revealed himself in nature, history, and human personality, and in those acts and words that are now preserved in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.”[45] From this basic postulate we may proceed to elaborate an entire theological system by unfolding the contents of the Scriptures. And this system in turn will function as a worldview that, like others, can be tested for truth. While no specific part is proved antecedently to the rest, the system as a whole can be verified or validated.

Theology as Science

Is theology entitled to be referred to as a science, and if so, of what is it a science? Another way of putting this question is to ask whether theology deals with knowledge, and if so, in what sense.

Until the thirteenth century, the term *science* was not applied to theology. Augustine preferred the term *sapientia* (wisdom) to *scientia* (knowledge). Sciences dealt with temporal things; wisdom related to eternal matters, specifically to God as the highest good. Science and knowledge could lead to wisdom. For this to happen, however, the truths acquired by the specific sciences would have to be ordered in relation to the highest good. Thus wisdom, including philosophy and theology, can serve as an organizing principle for knowledge.[46]

Thomas Aquinas thought of theology as the queen of the sciences. He maintained that it is a derived science, because it proceeds from the principles revealed by God.[47] It is nobler than other sciences. Science is partly speculative and partly practical. Theology surpasses other speculative sciences by its greater certitude, being based on the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled, while other sciences derive from the natural light of human reason, which can err. Its subject matter—those things that transcend human reason—is superior to that of other speculative sciences, which deal with things within human grasp. It is also superior to the practical sciences, since it is ordained to eternal bliss, which is the ultimate end to which science can be directed.[48]

As what we call natural science began to come into its own, the conception of science was gradually limited; a discipline had to meet more-rigid criteria in order to be designated as a science. In particular, science now is restricted to the objects of sense experience, which must be verified by the “scientific method,” which employs observation and experimentation, following strict procedures of inductive logic. On this basis, theology is rather obviously not a science, since it

deals with supersensible objects.[49] So, for that matter, are many of the other intellectual disciplines. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality is unscientific, since no one can see or measure or test such entities as the id, the ego, and the superego. In an attempt to be regarded as scientific, disciplines dealing with humanity have tended to become behavioristic, basing their method, objects, and conclusions on what is observable, measurable, and testable, rather than on what can be known introspectively.

Theology is then in a dilemma. Either it must so redefine itself as to fulfill the criteria of science, or it must claim a uniqueness not answering to science's norms—and thus surrender the claim to being a science and also virtually surrender the claim to being knowledge in the sense of involving true propositions about objective realities (i.e., realities existing independently of the knower).

Karl Barth has argued vigorously for the autonomy of theology. He notes Heinrich Scholz's six criteria that theology must meet if it is to be accepted as *Wissenschaft*:[50] (1) theology must be free from internal contradiction; (2) there must be a unity or coherence in its propositions; (3) its statements must be susceptible to testing; (4) it must make no assertion that is physically and biologically impossible; (5) it must be free from prejudice; (6) its propositions should be capable of being broken up into axioms and theorems and demonstrated on that basis. Barth accepts the first criterion only partially, and rejects the others. "Not an iota can be yielded here without betraying theology," he writes. It nonetheless is to be called a "science," because like all other sciences (1) it is a human effort after a definite object of knowledge; (2) it follows a definite, self-consistent path to knowledge; and (3) it is accountable to itself and to everyone capable of effort after this object and hence of following this path.[51]

What shall we say, then, about theology as a science? It must first be noted that the definition that virtually restricts science to natural science, and then tends to restrict knowledge to science, is too narrow.

Second, if we accept the traditional criteria for knowledge, theology must be regarded as scientific. (1) Theology has a definite subject matter to investigate, primarily that which God has revealed about himself. (2) Theology deals with objective matters. It does not merely give expression to the subjective feelings of the theologian or of the Christian. (3) It has a definite methodology for investigating its subject matter. (4) It has a method for verifying its propositions. (5) There is coherence among the propositions of its subject matter.

Third, to some extent, theology occupies common ground with other sciences. (1) Theology is subject to certain basic principles or axioms. In particular, it is

answerable to the same canons of logic as are other disciplines. (2) It involves communicability. What one theologian refers to can be understood, observed, and investigated by others as well. (3) Theology employs, to some extent at least, methods employed by other specific disciplines. It shows a particular affinity for the methodology of history, since it makes claims regarding historical occurrences, and for the methodology of philosophy, since it advances metaphysical claims. (4) It shares some subject matter with other disciplines. Thus it is possible that some of its propositions may be confirmed or refuted by natural science, behavioral science, or history.

At the same time, theology has its own unique status. It deals with unique objects or with common objects in a unique way. It shares with numerous other sciences humanity as an object, yet considers it in a different light than do any of these others. It considers what God has revealed about humankind; thus it has data of its own. And it considers humans in relationship to God; thus it treats the human within a frame of reference not examined by any of the other disciplines.

Why the Bible?

The question, however, may and should be raised as to why the Bible should be considered the primary source and criterion for building our understanding of Christian theology or even of Christianity. This calls for a closer analysis of the nature of Christianity.

Every organization or institution has some goals, objectives, or defining basis. These are usually formalized in something like a constitution or charter that governs the form and functions of the organization, and determines the qualifications for membership. Especially where this is a legally incorporated body, these standards are in effect unless replaced or modified by persons having authority to alter them.

Christianity is not an institution as such. While it may take institutional form, the movement known as Christianity is just that—a movement rather than an organization per se. Thus, while local churches may set up requirements for membership in their body, the universal church must look elsewhere.

From the name itself it should be apparent that Christianity is a movement that follows Jesus Christ. We would then logically look to him to state what is to be believed and what is to be done—in short, what constitutes being a Christian. Yet we have very little information outside the Bible regarding what Jesus taught and did. On the assumption that the Gospels are reliable sources of historical information (an assumption that we will test at a later point), we must turn to

them for reports of Jesus's life and teaching. Those books that Jesus endorsed (i.e., the books that we now refer to as the Old Testament) must be regarded as further sources for our Christianity. If Jesus taught that additional truth was to be revealed, that also is to be examined. If Jesus claimed to be God himself and if his claim is true, then of course no human has the authority either to abrogate or to modify what he has taught. The position that Jesus himself proposed in founding the movement is determinative, not what may be said and taught by others who at some later point may call themselves Christians.

This is true in other areas as well. While there may be some reinterpretation and reapplication of the concepts of the founder of a school of thought, there are limits beyond which changes cannot be made without forfeiting the right to bear that person's name. Thus, Thomists are those who hold substantially to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. When too much adaptation is done, the view has to be called *Neo*-Thomism. Usually these "neo-" movements fall within the broad stream and spirit of the founder but have made significant modifications. At some point the differences may become so great that a movement cannot even be considered a "neo-" version of the original. Note the arguments that went on among Marxists as to who were the true Marxists and who were the "revisionists." Following the Reformation there were divisions within Lutheranism between the genuine Lutherans and the Philippists, the followers of Philipp Melanchthon.

This is not to say that the doctrines will be maintained in precisely the same form of expression that was held to in biblical times. To be truly biblical does not ordinarily mean repeating the words of Scripture precisely as they were written. Indeed, to repeat the exact words of Scripture may be to make the message quite *unbiblical*. A biblical sermon does not consist exclusively of biblical quotations strung together. Rather, it involves interpreting, paraphrasing, analyzing, and resynthesizing the materials, applying them to a given situation. To give a biblical message is to say what Jesus (or Paul, etc.) would say today to this situation. Indeed, Paul and Jesus did not always give the same message in precisely the same way. They adapted what they had to say to their hearers, using slightly different nuances of meaning for different settings. An example is found in Paul's epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, which deal with basically the same subject, but with slight differences.

In making the Bible the primary or supreme source of our understanding, we are not completely excluding all other sources. In particular, if God has also revealed himself in general ways in such areas as nature and history (as the Bible itself seems to teach), then we may also fruitfully examine these for additional

clues to understanding the principal revelation. But these will be secondary to the Bible.

2

The Possibility of Theology

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the emphases and characteristics of modernism.
2. Compare and contrast modern themes with those of postmodernism.
3. Identify and assess several proposals regarding the nature and purpose of doctrine.
4. Recognize the effects of perspective on doing theology, and how they might be overcome.
5. Describe the three levels of activity identified as faith, doctrine, and theology.

Chapter Summary

Modernism, the view that dominated thinking from the eighteenth through the late twentieth centuries, emphasized rationality and certainty. As modernism fell out of favor, postmodernism rejected modern foundationalism as a test for truth, asserting that all knowledge is conditioned. This has affected many intellectual endeavors, including theology. Although the question regarding the purpose of doctrine has been answered in a variety of ways, the most acceptable is that doctrine is cognitive. Admitting that even doctrinal views are biased, we have

several ways by which to reduce the effects of this conditioning upon theology. Theology is an activity of the church in which believers may be engaged at three levels: the practicing believer, those who teach other believers, and the theoreticians.

Study Questions

- In what ways did modernism affect theology, especially apologetics, in the twentieth century?
- How would you summarize the postmodern response to modernism?
- What are some useful insights of the postmodern analysis?
- Describe the importance of doctrine being cognitive.
- How would you explain the difficulties faced by perspectivists in maintaining their own view?
- In what ways does classical foundationalism differ from neofoundationalism as proposed in this chapter?

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In every period of time, the church faces the question of the very possibility of theology. Can we develop a theology, and if so, what is required in order to do this? Upon the successful answer to this inquiry rests the possibility of the remainder of our endeavor.

The Changing Context of Theologizing

Modernism

The issues involved in this question vary with the era under consideration. In the modern period, from approximately the eighteenth through the late twentieth centuries, there was a belief in human rationality and the rationality of the universe. As in the premodern period, there was belief that the events of history constituted an order and pattern, but whereas premoderns looked for this in a realm external to nature, whether in supersensible Platonic forms or in the plan and working of a wise and powerful God, in the modern period such explanation or scheme was believed to be found within the realm of nature rather than beyond it. Events are explained in terms of the social realities that cause them, rather than in terms of the purpose of a transcendent God. Similarly, causation was thought of as efficient rather than final. There are no purposes for the sake of which something exists or happens. There are only causes leading to its occurrence.[52]

There is in modern thought a strong emphasis on rationality and certainty. This shows itself clearly in the thought of the man whom many consider the founder of modernism, René Descartes. A mathematician, Descartes sought for the same certainty in philosophy that can be found in mathematics. He resolved to doubt everything he could. This is classical foundationalism, a common characteristic of modern thought: the basing of one's thinking on some indubitable or obvious principles, from which reasoning can then proceed.

Another philosopher who contributed heavily to the modern view was Immanuel Kant. Inquiring into the nature of knowledge and how we acquire it, Kant concluded that there are two necessary elements in any theoretical knowledge. Sense experience supplies the data from which knowledge is made up. The logical or rational structure of the mind gives organization to those data, supplying wholes for the complex of data and such connecting elements as sequence and cause. Because we have no sensory experience of God, he cannot be the object of theoretical reason (or "pure reason," as Kant termed it). Yet he must be introduced as a practical necessity for morality. Practical reason requires

God, but as an object of faith, not proven by reason. Thus, an epistemological dualism was introduced, between reason (in science, history, and other intellectual disciplines) and faith (in religion).

A third development was the rise of modern science, as related to the thought of Bacon and exemplified most fully in the thought of Newton. This involved the idea that real knowledge came from the process of empirical observation and testing that science developed to the fullest. Part of the vindication for the scientific method came through technology, which is the application of the pure sciences to practical issues. The accomplishments here have been truly astounding. Communications, transportation, and medicine made huge leaps of progress.

One of the most insightful descriptions of the rise of the modern period is John Herman Randall's *Making of the Modern Mind.* We may draw from this book a number of characteristics of modernity.[53]

1. Modernism has been essentially humanistic. The human being is the center of reality, and in a sense everything exists for the sake of the human. Humans are now able to control nature through the use of science, and they are the ones who determine what happens in history.

2. Together with humanism is naturalism. Paralleling the shift from God to humanity is the shift from anything heavenly or ethereal to the earth. In practice, the tendency increasingly has been to restrict reality to the observable universe, and to understand even humans in light of this system of nature.

3. The scientific method, regarded as the best means for gaining knowledge, has increasingly come to be considered virtually the only means of investigating truth. Thus other disciplines increasingly have attempted to model themselves after the methods of natural science.

4. Nature, rather than being thought of as passive and an object of human activity, is considered dynamic, and the sole and sufficient cause and explanation of all that occurs. Humans are not as uniquely different from other living beings as was formerly thought.

5. Determinism is a strong element in modernism. Science is possible because there are certain regularities within reality, which can be discovered and formulated into laws. This enables humans both to predict and to control what happened.

6. This scientific method also tends to be practiced in a reductionistic fashion. Objects of study are regarded as "nothing but" something more basic. Thus, psychology tends to be reduced to biology, biology to chemistry, and chemistry to physics.

7. There is a strong tendency toward foundationalism. This, as we noted earlier, is the attempt to ground knowledge on some sure first principles. For Descartes, this was clear and distinct ideas, while for David Hume, an empiricist, sense experience was the basis. The logical positivists followed basically the empiricist route, seeking to get back to certain sentences based directly on sense experience. This means that knowledge is thought to be absolute and unqualified, whereas religion must base itself on faith.

8. There is a commitment to metaphysical realism. The objects of scientific inquiry are external to the consciousness of the knower, existing independently of any perception of them.

9. There is a representative view of language. In other words, language refers to real objects that are extralinguistic.

10. There is a correspondence theory of truth. Truth is a measure of propositions and is present in those propositions, which correctly correspond to the states of affairs that they claim to present.

In general, modernism has sought for an explanation that would cover all things. So the great systems of the modern period were omni-explanatory. Darwinism accounted for everything in terms of biological evolution. Freudian psychology explained all human behavior in light of sexual energy, repression, and unconscious forces. Marxism interpreted all events of history in economic categories, with the forces of dialectical materialism moving history toward the inevitable classless society. These ideologies offered universal diagnoses as well as universal cures.

We can consequently see why the battles of theology in the early part of the twentieth century were over such issues as miracles and evolution. Theology had to battle to establish its respectability, that is, its status as knowledge, in a world that tended to exalt science and reduce knowledge to the scientific. Apologetics sought to establish by natural reason the existence of God, and Christian evidences were adduced to certify the accuracy of the Scriptures.

There was also a broader or more offensive version of apologetics. Rather than simply conceding the modern conception of knowledge and attempting to make theology fit its standards, this approach challenged the modern idea of the firmness and objectivity of scientific thinking. It sought to show that even science had its own unproven assumptions, which it justified largely on pragmatic grounds.[54] One of Carl Henry's earliest writings took this approach, something that critics who simplistically label him "modern" overlook. His approach, more Augustinian than Thomistic, in some ways anticipated some of the critiques postmodernism directed at modernism.[55]

Postmodernism

Gradually the modern view has tended to fall from favor, particularly outside of scientific circles. Instead, a movement generally labeled “postmodernism” has been growing in ascendancy. In some ways, it represents an extension of some of the directions of modernism, but with a gradual decline of belief in the efficacy of these efforts. In some other ways, postmodernism represents a rejection of modernism’s approach, and thus is its successor. By its very nature, postmodernism denies the possibility of systematic descriptions of things, so that an attempt to describe and analyze it is an impossibility. It should be noted, however, that just as there are varying degrees of detail and precision of maps, so there can be sketches of a view, even if detailed and precise description of it is impossible. Thus, we may note several themes that recur, in varying form, in different varieties of postmodernism.[56]

1. The conditioned nature of knowledge. Whereas modernism thought that it saw things just as they were, most postmodernists insist that all knowledge is conditioned, that is, affected by one’s situation geographically and culturally. We really do not know the object of knowledge directly or as it is, but through the filter of our own experience and setting. The objectivity that the modernist sought is an illusion. Knowledge is relative to the knower. In theory, this could result in the conclusion that there are as many versions of truth as there are knowers, but postmodernism generally introduces the community as the check upon such unbridled variety.

2. The locus of meaning. With respect to texts, meaning does not reside exclusively within the text, in the sense of what the author intended to say thereby. Rather, the meaning of the text is the meaning as interpreted, that is, the meaning that it has to the reader. There is a “fusion of horizons,” in which the meaning intended by the author and the meaning understood by the reader interact.

3. Skepticism toward all-inclusive theories. Modernists were seeking one explanation that would account for everything, examples being those mentioned earlier or even current physicists’ superstring theory, popularly referred to as the “theory of everything.” Postmodernists reject these “metanarratives,” as they term them. Indeed, Jean-François Lyotard made incredulity toward metanarratives the defining feature of postmodernism.[57] Many reasons are given for this hesitation. Some object that no such theory can be constructed by finite humans, who cannot know everything. Others claim that such views have historically been used to justify oppression, as for instance social Darwinism argued that some persons are inherently superior to others. Sometimes the

perspectival character of knowledge, mentioned in the previous paragraph, has been invoked, showing that therefore there is no truth that is the same truth for everyone. Some insist that metanarratives are only constructed by ignoring certain considerations, and so must be "deconstructed" by calling attention to these contradictory elements. For any or all of these reasons, any claim to a universal theory must be regarded with a hermeneutic of suspicion.[58]

4. Distrust of the efficacy of reason as the sole source of knowledge. There is a real place for intuition, imagination, and other means to truth. Part of this is the result of realization of the function of power. Whereas the usual approach had been that knowledge is objective and enables us to gain understanding of reality, and to predict and even control it, postmodernists take a quite different stance. Truth is itself the product, not the producer, of power. Those who have the ability to do so decide what shall be the truth, through means such as the teacher deciding what the students shall be required to read.

5. Diminution of the value of propositions. The modern way of conveying truth was through the use of propositions, sentences purporting to accurately describe reality. These were to be made as precise as possible, in the hope of achieving the much-sought-after objectivity. Given its view of truth, however, postmodernism prefers a narrative approach. Just as Jesus often used parables, so the truth can often be better conveyed in story form, or telling one's personal experiences. This in turn highlights a preference for personal experience over experiment or investigation.

6. Rejection of foundationalism. Especially prevalent in recent postmodern work has been skepticism toward foundationalism as a test for truth. This refers to the structural scheme of knowledge. Foundationalism argues that propositions are justified by a demonstration of their relationship to certain basic propositions considered to be true, which form the basis or foundation on which all the others rest. In classical foundationalism, these basic propositions were considered unquestionable, whether they were self-evident, indubitable, or otherwise certain.For example, a sense experience may seem obviously true. Instead of justifying its propositions by appeal to such foundations, postmodernists prefer either coherentism or pragmatism. Coherentism is the theory that the truth of propositions is demonstrated by their coherence with other (and perhaps, all other) propositions believed true. Pragmatism is the theory that the truth of propositions is demonstrated by their practical effects.

7. Lessened optimism about the benefits of knowledge. In modernism, knowledge was considered inherently good, and as the means to the solution of human problems. This has proven to be the case in such areas as medicine, where whole diseases, such as smallpox and poliomyelitis, have been eradicated.

Other areas, however, such as human conflict leading even to war, have not proven similarly susceptible to human control.

It should be apparent that the challenges presented to theology in this period are quite different from those of the modern period. Here the issue is not so much whether Christian theology is true, but whether anything is "true," in the traditional sense, and if so, whether we can know with any certainty that it is true.

There are, however, some reasons to question postmodernism itself. There is much that is correctly insightful in the postmodern analysis. This is particularly true of perspectivalism, according to which each of us is affected by our situation, such as time and place, culture, gender, and race. Modernism, particularly in the form of scientism and reductionism, restricted reality to what fit a particular framework. Yet, this being said, there are points of weakness in postmodernism that should make us hesitant about too easy and complete an acceptance of it.

One of the central problems of deconstruction in literature, or of Richard Rorty's contention that linguistic terms do not represent any nonlinguistic entities, is the difficulty of maintaining it with any consistency. Deconstruction has been used by various groups to advance their specific agenda. Thus, feminists have deconstructed what they considered paternalistic texts, and Marxists have done the same with texts of oppression; but as James Sire points out, "the 'deconstruction' touted by Derrida and DeMan is in the last analysis universal. Depending on how it is interpreted, nihilism is either the legitimate father or legitimate child of 'deconstruction.' . . . In any case, neither feminism nor Marxism can withstand its acids. If no text is privileged, no story more 'true' than any other, then every ideology fails to be grounded."[59] Therefore, if deconstruction is correct, then it must also be deconstructed. If meaning does not reside within the text but is created by the interpreter, if history is created by the historian, if truth is what proves good for one's community, then this must be applied to deconstruction, neopragmatism, and the new historicism as well.

It is very difficult to be a deconstructionist and advocate deconstruction. It may very well be possible to be a consistent deconstructionist and keep that to oneself. As soon as one attempts to communicate deconstruction to others and argue that they should accept it as true, one has denied in practice what one is professing in theory. This is because that act seems to assume that the meaning of what one is saying is the meaning the speaker or writer intends, and that there is some common point of reference to which another person can also give attention.

This was brought out rather dramatically in the case of Derrida. John Searle wrote a response to an article of Derrida, challenging and criticizing several of his conceptions.[60] Searle's article was eleven pages in length. In his ninety-three-page reply, Derrida objected that Searle had been unfair to him and had at several points misunderstood and misstated his position. He even asserted at one point that what he had meant should have been clear and obvious to Searle.[61] John Ellis observes that some of Derrida's followers were embarrassed by this inconsistency between Derrida's profession and his actual practice in this article. Yet he maintains that those same disciples "generally have also done exactly what embarrassed them when they saw Derrida doing it (i.e., they also routinely accuse Searle of misunderstanding, missing the point of, and misstating Derrida's position)."[62] Similarly, Frank Lentricchia accuses the "Yale group" of misconstruing Derrida's writing by "ignoring . . . an important part of the author's intention."[63] If, however, the position of deconstruction is that the author's intention does not control the meaning of his or her text, then this would seem to be an inconsistent position.

The response, of course, to this criticism can be that it assumes a logic that deconstruction does not adopt. Therefore, the objection is not legitimate. But the question that must be asked is, What kind of logic is employed when we discuss kinds of logic? In other words, does the very response assume a kind of logic that it seems to reject? It would appear that for the response to make any sort of sense, or to have the right to be taken seriously, requires the assumption of some sort of logic at least resembling in some way the logic here assumed, that is, that *a* cannot both mean *x* and not-*x* at the same time and in the same respect.[64]

In practice, postmodernists do not really follow their theory. If all thought is conditioned, and therefore relative, then that applies to postmodernism as well. One would expect to find postmodernists couching their ideas in rather tentative fashion. Such is not ordinarily the case. Rather than saying, "This is my opinion," or "This is how I see it," they state their cases as if what they are advancing is really something that others should see, understand, and accept.

Another way to put it is this. The postmodern rejection of the rationalism of the modern period is both legitimate and desirable. But this does not mean that all rationality must also necessarily be rejected. Indeed, it is impossible to do so and still engage in meaningful thought and communication. Many postmodernists reject any sort of objective rational cognitive approach, dismissing it as modernism, by which is often meant the extremism of the Enlightenment. In reality, however, what they are rejecting is not just modernism, but the whole Western tradition, as one can see on closer examination of such thinkers as Augustine and Aquinas. Further, Paul Griffiths

has argued that the type of logic we usually identify as Western is not restricted to Westerners.[65]

One insight that a postmodern theology certainly must accept and utilize is the fact that we do our investigation and our thinking from a particular perspective, imposing certain limitations on our understanding. This distinction between the truth and our knowledge of the truth has frequently been neglected, with unfortunate results. Some, of a basically premodern and precritical mind, have assumed, because of their commitment to the objectivity of revealed truth, that their knowledge of that truth could be equated with the truth and therefore must also be absolute. On the other hand, some, holding a late modern or postmodern orientation, have concluded that if our knowledge is relative, then truth must be relative as well. This, however, eventually leads to some form of subjectivism.

The Nature of Doctrine

One important question is, what is the nature and purpose of doctrine? Over the years, a number of different answers to this question have been given.

1. Doctrine as conveyor of truth. This understanding, sometimes called the cognitive view of doctrine, has probably been the dominant one during the history of the church. According to this understanding, doctrines make statements that have truth value, that is, they are capable of being either true or false. They tell us what God is like, what he does, what his creatures are like and his relationship to them, as well as what his intentions are in the universe. They have a primarily descriptive character. This corresponded to the idea of religion as cognitive, or as involving belief.

2. Doctrine as interpretation of experience. Friedrich Schleiermacher concluded that the nature of religion, including the Christian religion, did not consist of either beliefs or actions but in feeling. In this scheme of things, doctrines are an expression of those feelings. To be a Christian is to feel oneself utterly dependent upon God. For Schleiermacher, doctrines were the result of reflection on those feelings. While they "are not necessary for religion itself, . . . reflection requires and creates them."[66] While for Schleiermacher this experience and reflection were individual matters, for the postconservative evangelical Stanley Grenz, it was rather a matter of the community. Defining evangelical Christianity as an experience (specifically the experience of new birth), Grenz classifies doctrine as a product of a second-level activity, reflection on that experience, insisting that theology is the believing community's reflection on its faith.[67]

3. Doctrine as practical action. There were two theological reactions to Immanuel Kant's contention that there could be no theoretical knowledge of supersensible objects, and thus of God. Schleiermacher, as we noted, shifted the locus of religion to feeling, but Albrecht Ritschl made it a matter of value judgments and thus of practical activity. From this came the ethical emphasis of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberalism. Increasingly this meant that doctrine would find its locus in such practice. One can see this in the thought of William Hamilton, a theologian in the "Death of God" movement, who suggested that theology would no longer be done in the study, but rather hammered out in involvement in the civil rights movement.[68] Various forms of liberation theology emphasize this in various ways, with Gustavo Gutiérrez insisting that theology should be understood as reflection on praxis, and black and feminist theologians also making the plight of oppressed peoples the object of their thought.[69]

4. Doctrine as linguistic rules. Some postliberals, particularly George Lindbeck, have proposed that doctrines are neither truth claims nor expressions of experiences, but rather operating rules of Christian communities. Doctrines resemble the rules of grammar. Just as the rules of grammar do not give us any information about the truth or falsity of what the sentences refer to, but only how those sentences are to be constructed and are to function, so doctrines do not inform us or convey information about any state of affairs. Rather, they are rules for the functioning of the community that adopts them.[70]

5. Doctrine as the story of God's working. On this view, rather than being expressed in a collection of propositions, doctrines should be thought of as a narrative of God's activity. Some have even said that we should not limit ourselves to the Scriptures, as the record of a particular period of God's working. Rather, we should remember that the Bible is a narrative account of God's past working, but he continues to work among those who are his believers through the history of the church. So, for example, James McClendon distinguishes between Jesus, who lived on earth for a period of about thirty years in the country of Palestine, in the first century, and Christ, who continues to work in his "body" (the church) throughout all ages.[71] Thus, in the formulation of our theology, we should include the lives and experiences of those who have lived since biblical times.

Each of these views contains an important insight and expresses an important part of what doctrine is and does. Certainly the biblical writers, the prophets and apostles, believed that the statements they were making about God, Christ, and the reality of salvation were describing something that really is that way. Further, they often were conscious that they were giving utterance to a profound

experience of God. Think for example of Moses's description of his experience at the burning bush, or of Paul's recounting of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. Much practical action was motivated by the truths that had been revealed. Paul appealed to believers on the basis of the incarnation, in Philippians 2. Similarly, the prohibition of murder in Genesis 9:6 is an implication of the teaching that all humans are made in the image of God. It was also evident that the teachings about God and his actions were the basis of the church's operation. This can be seen in passages such as Galatians 1, where the great teaching of justification by faith is to govern the church, or in James 2, where the equal value of humans, all of whom have been created by God, is to affect church practice. Certainly the Bible describes God's working in dramatic terms, and indicates that the church is a continuation of that working, in passages such as John 15 and Galatians 2.

The question, however, is which of these can best serve as the primary understanding of doctrine, and does the best job of incorporating the other aspects of the doctrine. It appears to me that the first, the idea of doctrine as cognitive, is the best candidate for this role. Doctrines certainly express an experience of the believer, but it is an experience that would not occur without the doctrinal framework within which it is embodied. If not, then, as John Hick has shown, the similarity of experiences among different religions might mean that each is equally valid,[72] something Scripture seems emphatically to reject (Exod. 20:2–3). Doctrines definitely have practical implications, but in the biblical pattern (as with Paul in Phil. 2:3–11 for example), the practice follows from the doctrine, rather than the reverse. Doctrines certainly do serve as guidelines for the functioning of the community that adopts them, but without some objective grounding in a reality that transcends the community, one is faced with the problem of which community to identify with, and why. Further, much of Scripture is narrative in nature, but major portions are not, and although God's working within the community was part of his ongoing revelation within biblical times, not all instances were treated equally positively, and criteria for evaluating these were applied. The description of the drama was incomplete without the didactic interpretation thereof. The church also made the judgment that there was a qualitative difference between the biblical community and that which followed. All in all, then, the first of these views, when sufficiently broad to include the other insights, appears to have been the dominant view held by the church throughout its history.

Perspectivism and Ideology

It is now widely recognized that because all thought proceeds from a specific point within history and culture, that situation influences what is seen, thought, and understood. It is generally something of which each person is unaware, so its influence is more subtle. It is believed to be universal. There is no absolute and unlimited perspective, no neutral standing point from which one can view reality as it is, pure and uncontaminated by some particularity. While this has been most extensively and vigorously contended by postmodernists, the insight is not unique to that philosophy, nor were postmodernists the first to assert it.

At this point, most perspectivists rest their case. They are content to use this as a means of relativizing or even refuting their opponents' position. Unfortunately, however, the insight is not usually carried over in application to that person's own view. One would expect that the view would be articulated with lavish expressions of its recognized tentativity and fallibility. Ordinarily, however, such admissions are absent. Opinions are presented as if they are not merely another culturally bound perspective; they carry the tone of being the way things really are.

Why is this seeming blindness so common? It takes different forms. Sometimes it is a simple case of what I have labeled "chronocentism." This is the idea that one's present time is not only superior to preceding periods; it is unique. It is superior to any that might follow, or it even is of such a quality of truth that it will not be supplanted by anything that follows.[73] This would be an acknowledgment that one is indeed conditioned, but that is not a bad thing, for the influences conditioning one's view are salutary in nature. So one may find criticism of a given theology on the basis that it is "modern" in character, while presumably being of a postmodern orientation is a good thing. Similarly, open theists have criticized the traditional view of divine foreknowledge on the basis that it is based on "Greek" philosophy, which presumably is a bad thing.[74] Some of them have acknowledged their own debt to process philosophy, without apparently considering that this has any bearing on the validity of their own view.[75] This is one form of saying that their view draws upon the correct (or at least a more correct) philosophy, while the other theology is based on a false or inadequate philosophy.

Probably a more common explanation is that one is simply so unable to escape one's own perspective as to be incapable of recognizing that it is just that, a perspective. In other words, one's own conditioning is so complete that it shields one from the recognition that one is not working from a neutral viewpoint. It may be an unrecognized and unacknowledged belief that the conditioning process has limitations.[76]

A third possibility, in the case of some postmodernists who follow the approach of Michel Foucault, is that one may hold the view that power makes truth, so if one is able to assert one's view and have that assertion go unchallenged, that person should simply go ahead and do so.

It is not merely theologians and philosophers who suffer from this ideological blind spot. The sociology of knowledge contends that beliefs and ideas grow out of the social setting in which they are held, and in more extreme forms of this sociology, they are thought of as having been determined by that social setting. This, however, raises the question of whether the sociology of knowledge does not also apply to the theory known as the sociology of knowledge, thus having the effect of relativizing it as well as other theories. Berger and Luckmann, however, respond that raising such a question is like trying to push a bus in which one is riding, which of course is argument by appeal to an analogy that is debatable at best. Since this is not part of the substantive content of sociology but rather part of the methodology of the social sciences, they decline to discuss the issue.[77] Bierstadt sees the implications of his position and is more forthright: "We unhappily confront a situation in which knowledge has lost its truth and so also have all propositions in the sociology of knowledge. The ultimate and unresolvable paradox . . . is that the sociology of knowledge destroys the possibility of a sociology of knowledge." He says that this is an unresolvable paradox, and he can only throw up his hands and quote Kant's statement that reason has the ability to raise questions to which it cannot give answers.[78]

Theology beyond Postmodernism

I would contend that we must go beyond any of these positions. In a sense, what I am advocating here is a post-postmodernism, although for me personally, this belief chronologically preceded the advent of postmodernism. If postmodernism holds that all beliefs are historically and culturally conditioned but does not apply this insight to its own position, without either arguing that its view is a valid exception or offering any exempting conditions, then the view I am advocating does not stop short but pushes further. It asserts that all views are conditioned and therefore biased, but then proposes that this is not the conclusion of the matter, but rather a transitional point. We must go beyond this to actively attempt to reduce the effect of this conditioning on our own outlook. This is to say that although perfect objectivity is not attainable, it is desirable, and as close an approximation as possible should be pursued.

If, however, doctrine is to be considered as at least in major part cognitive in nature, what should be the character of a theology built on this conception in the current environment? Several characteristics are especially prominent for this period, but are applicable to doing theology at other times as well.

Postperspectivism

Theology must recognize and give full weight to the fact that all of our knowledge is limited and is affected by the unique circumstances and experiences of an individual or a group. This, however, is not the answer; it is the question: namely, what shall we do about this? If we simply stop at this point, we are left with a relativism that ultimately must say something like, "That is how you see it, but I see it differently." Any attempt to establish one view as superior to another must either assume some standpoint of neutral perspective, or will ultimately reduce to the postmodern view that power establishes truth, which is either force or manipulation. Our theology must take full account of the fact of conditioning and perspectivism, as enunciated so forcefully by postmodernism.[79] Then, however, we will aim to decontextualize ourselves and our knowledge of things, to the maximum degree practical. This is postperspectivism, taking seriously the reality of perspectivism, but going beyond it. Several activities may help improve the situation, although we cannot hope to eliminate the subjectivity entirely.

One step in this process is to write one's intellectual autobiography. The purpose of this is to attempt to identify factors that affect how one perceives things. This ideally would make one identify one's possible biases, whether one was experientially aware of these or not. What could be done then is to compensate for the influence of such an unconscious bias. This is the type of thing that a hunter does without thinking, when he aims for a spot where his target is not currently located, but where he knows that target will be when the projectile arrives. The types of factors that would enter into these biases would be the geographical and ideological context of one's endeavor. A North American, for example, or a middle-class person, a white person, or a male might perceive matters in a particular way. In general, the more detailed such a self-examination is, the better. When we have prepared this intellectual self-examination, we will want to submit it to others, who often can see things that we ourselves have overlooked.

A second major step is interaction with different perspectives. This has two values. If the interaction is with a currently living person, that person may be able to point out to us the presence of biases of which we are unaware, simply

because they are so familiar to us. In addition, simply becoming aware of other viewpoints and their cogency is important. Frequently, we have become so familiar with our way of viewing things that we assume that this is simply the way things are, that there is no alternative. While in theory we should be able to see these differing approaches on our own, in practice that is not so easy. What is helpful is to try to place ourselves in the perspective of the other person, so that we really can see things as the other sees them. The dialogue partner should preferably be someone from another culture or time. Just as there is the problem of ethnocentrism, so, as we have indicated, there is also a problem with chronocentrism.

This means we must suspend the approach of examining the other viewpoint with the conviction that it is wrong, looking for ways to criticize the other. Instead, we will try to ask honestly, "Why does this look so persuasive to this other person or group?" It will mean attempting to critique our own position, to play the proverbial devil's advocate with ourselves. The value of debates is that they enable each side to display the best argument they can for their own viewpoint. We will therefore seek out the best and most persuasive advocates of different viewpoints. We will ask ourselves, "If I were assigned the task of refuting the position I currently hold, what would I say?" This is a procedure recommended by the noted economist Milton Friedman, who said, "You cannot be sure that you are right, unless you know the arguments against your view better than your opponents do."[80]

We should not expect that attaining the ability to be more objective will be a quick, easy, or complete process. What probably is the best we can hope for is to gradually approach the ideal in a sort of spiral maneuver, progressively approximating the final ideal. All of this will be very difficult intellectual work, but one must consider that the alternative is some sort of fixed or dogmatic position, which in other contexts would be labeled prejudice.

If we are fully aware of the reality of conditioning and of perspectivism, then we will want to consciously remind ourselves of our own fallibility and limitation, and hold our convictions with a degree of humility, so that we can correct ourselves as the process goes on.

Correspondence View of Truth

Much of the dispute has been in terms of the nature of truth. Traditionally, there have been three views of the nature of truth. The *correspondence* view says that propositions are true if they correctly describe things as they are. The *coherence* view of truth is that propositions are true if they agree with, or cohere

with, other propositions. The *pragmatic* theory is that propositions are true if they work out in practice.

In reality, these tend to be more a question of the tests or measures of truth than of the nature of truth. I would argue that in practice, in everyday living, every sane person proceeds with what I term a prereflective or primitive correspondence view. Alan White, in the article "Coherence Theory of Truth," says that "what the coherence theory really does is give the criteria for the truth and falsity of a priori, or analytic, statements."[81] He is referring to statements such as those of mathematics. This, he claims, means that, so far as the meaning of truth is concerned, the coherence theory actually says that truth means correspondence of a certain kind of proposition with the analytic facts—in other words, those that are not the objects of sense experience. Similarly, William James, one of the founders of pragmatism, says, "Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.'"[82] He contends that those he terms pragmatists and intellectualists agree on this definition, and only disagree on the meaning of "agreement" and "reality."[83]

Postmodernists have generally adopted either coherence or pragmatism as their view of truth. Taken as tests, rather than definitions, of truth, each has strengths but also serious points of weakness. Coherence is a necessary but not a sufficient test of truth. Incoherence is an indication of falsity, but coherence is not necessarily of truth. A work of fiction may be completely coherent, but still be fiction. Indeed, the basis for distinction between fiction and nonfiction in literature is something more than coherence. Similarly, a particular proposition or belief may work out very well in the short term, but one that does not agree with reality will not work well in the long term. In the realm of economics, in the late 1990s, those who believed that technology stocks, especially the internet stocks, would continue to rise indefinitely found that this view worked out very well for quite some time, but that action on the basis of that belief proved disastrous in 2000–2002. Similarly, those who organized their personal finances on the belief that housing prices would always rise and that therefore they could buy a large house using a no-money-down or an adjustable-rate mortgage because they could refinance in the future, found in the bursting of the housing bubble in 2007 and following that their theory did not work out well. While a view must be coherent to be true, and true views will work out in the long run, more comprehensive tests for truth are needed.

Neofoundationalism

One question that bears strongly on this wider question is the structure or architecture of knowledge. A widely held view in times past was foundationalism, the view that there are certain basic propositions that were regarded as true, and that other propositions were justified by their relationship to these. Thus, the theory resembled a building, with a foundation and a superstructure built upon it. In recent years it has been very popular to reject foundationalism. This has become almost a hallmark of recent philosophy. Among postmodernists, foundationalism is considered one of the major marks of modernism, and therefore to be avoided at all costs.

It is important to understand what we are referring to here. Virtually without exception, the foundationalism being rejected is classical foundationalism, or the idea that the foundational or basic beliefs are indubitable or incorrigible, and it is this very certitude that is most objectionable in the present time. This rejection is related to the belief in the conditioned nature of knowledge, and skepticism about objectivity. Indeed, when one examines the references of postfoundationalists or nonfoundationalists, it is clear that this is what they have in mind.

This, however, is a rather dated view of foundationalism, with the result that the criticism is actually of a straw man. Tim Triplett has given a more informed statement of the nature of foundationalism.

EF1: There are basic propositions.

EF2: Any justified empirical proposition either is basic or derives its justification, at least in part, from the fact that it stands in an appropriate relationship to propositions which are basic. In short, there are propositions that are starting points, and others that follow from them. There is a hierarchical structure to knowledge.[84]

The idea of the absolute certainty of these starting points is not inherent in foundationalism, being found only in classical foundationalism. This feature has been the primary object of attack by postmodernists and others. Among their criticisms is the epistemic regress problem. This is the problem that, having justified something by a justifier, one then must also justify the justifier. For example, if I assert that there is a yellow table in the room and am asked why I believe that, I may respond that I do because I am having a sensory perception of it. Then, however, I may be asked how I know that my sensory perception is accurate, and for whatever answer I give, I may be asked why I believe that to be persuasive. The second common objection is that foundationalism does not fulfill its own criteria, that to be rational a belief must be either foundational or derived from foundational beliefs. Further, Alvin Plantinga has argued, many of our common beliefs of ordinary life, on which we base our lives, such as that

there are stable external objects and that there are other persons, distinct from myself, while clearly justified beliefs, do not fit the criteria of foundationalism. It should be noted that these criticisms only apply to classical foundationalism, however, and the first of these only applies to what William Alston has labeled "iterative foundationalism." Indeed, Plantinga and others in the circle of Reformed epistemology have developed a type of foundationalism that does not require the foundations to be indubitable or incorrigible. Triplett comments about the present state of foundationalism: "It is not clear that the standard arguments against foundationalism will work against these newer, more modest theories. Indeed, these theories were by and large designed with the purpose of overcoming standard objections."[85]

What this means is that reasoning must start with something. As Triplett describes the numerous types of foundationalism, it appears that, despite all denials, beginning points can be found in various views, including even the thought of Richard Rorty, the arch antifoundationalist, whose view Triplett classifies as a variety of what he terms "contextual foundationalism."[86] Here the argument is not simply that contemporary foundationalism is not vulnerable to the standard criticisms of classical foundationalism, but that it has values not possessed by competitive theories.

The nature or locus of the foundational propositions may be varied. Frequently in the discussions, the foundations are sensory perceptions. Theologically, they may be biblical propositions, or even the starting point, "everything asserted in Scripture is true." The point is that there are some propositions that have precedence over others.

Foundationalism does not necessarily exclude the use of coherence, however. Robert Audi points out that at a number of points there are varieties of each that are mutually compatible.[87] One philosopher even went so far as to coin the term "foundherentism."[88] In recent years, it is coherentists that have tended to reject any place for the other approach.

Common Logic

One of the charges sometimes brought against theology as well as more traditional philosophies is that they rely on a conventional logic, whereas Derrida, some other postmodernists, and some of their followers do not. In my experience, this has often been simply an unwillingness to accept the implications of the position adopted.

The problem with this call for an alternative logic is that seldom is any real content given to it. This makes it difficult or even impossible to evaluate. At

times the view seems to resemble in some ways a sort of dialectic, not greatly unlike that of Hegel. In this, the tension and antithesis between propositions may be emphasized, but it should be noted that even the recognition of the antithesis requires the logic of opposition. Beyond this, however, is the problem that thinkers like Derrida have in trying to reject a traditional logic of opposition: that in order to do so, they have to assume the very thing that they are trying to refute, something that Derrida was willing to admit.[89] Indeed, to say that traditional logic of opposition is wrong and the alternative is correct assumes that they cannot both be correct, which is the very issue in dispute.

This can be seen on a more practical level, such as the liar's paradox, illustrated by an American Philosophical Society T-shirt. On the front are the words, "The sentence on the back of this shirt is false." The reverse side carries the message, "The sentence on the front of this shirt is true." Another is the statement I sometimes direct to a postmodernist, and then become silent, waiting for a reaction: "I agree with you completely—and you're totally wrong." No one really can mentally assimilate such conceptions. I would contend that an objective logic is, in the long run, essential not only to individual, but also to societal, functioning. This means that logic can be trusted and employed in doing theology.

What I am advocating here is what I would term a *classical objectivism*. This should not simply be dismissed as "unrepentant modernism." Such a comment reflects lack of awareness of the elements of continuity between the modern and premodern periods. This orientation can be found well beyond the period of the Enlightenment. It is not an absolutism that believes that one has perfect understanding of reality, but rather a belief that such knowledge is possible and desirable, and endeavors to approximate it ever more closely. It will utilize imagination and creativity in formulating its models and hypotheses. It is unfortunate that in our time such imagination has suffered considerable decline. While this has been depicted by some as a result of an overemphasis on science versus the arts, it appears that on a popular level, broader cultural changes have contributed to this. Television presents viewers with images, which in a time of radio had to be supplied by listeners themselves. Video games make imaginary matters as vivid as actual objects. Preformed opinions are readily available, in great quantity and often questionable quality, on the internet and on radio talk shows. Critical thinking and sanctified imagination both are needed to formulate new ways of conceiving of spiritual and theological truths and models of doctrines. In the final analysis, however, the products of imagination and intuition must be tested by other methods as well. To adapt Ronald Reagan's dictum: "Trust, but verify."

Faith, Doctrine, and Theology

It may be helpful to identify more specifically what we mean by the terms "faith," "doctrine," and "theology" and by the activities that accompany them. Several years ago, the ethicist Bernard Mayo developed what he called a "three-tiered model" to describe different aspects of ethics and morality. On the first tier are the actors, those engaged in the practice of a given activity. On the second level are the critics, who evaluate the actions of those on the first level. Finally, there are the philosophers, who debate the criteria of criticism employed by the critics. A problem, he acknowledges, is the impression the model gives of the separation of the levels.[90] Nonetheless, it is useful for us in understanding what are sometimes confused issues.

In any area of human activity, there are those who are engaged in that activity. In music, for example, there are those who actually play the piano. They may not know consciously a great deal about the theory of music, but on a prereflective level, they incorporate and utilize it. There are then the teachers of music, who, on the basis of having studied music more deeply, are able to instruct students of piano. There are also, in some cases, music critics on this level. Finally, there is a more abstract and reflective level. Here are to be found more advanced critics and music theorists. They reflect on and discuss the very criteria and appropriateness of criteria of quality in music. Similarly, there are artists who create works of art, art critics, and aestheticians. In the realm of the military, there are soldiers who actually engage in the battle, the commanding officer who decides on the tactics and in some cases on the strategy, and finally, the military theorists and planners who work on a broad scale, looking ahead and devising plans that may not have been used before. Some of them may actually be civilians, whose specialty is military planning. In sports, there are the athletes, who execute on the playing field, the coaches who instruct them and decide what plays will be run, and then the few "supercoaches" who devise new and creative offenses and defenses.

In our case, the model unfolds somewhat as follows. On the bottom level are believing and practicing Christians. Their faith is in God, through Jesus Christ, and they are engaged in living the Christian life. Doctrines, or beliefs about the nature of God and his relationship to the world, are embedded in their experience and activity, whether they can enunciate these consciously or not. In this respect, they are like the pianist who knows a great deal about music, whether she can explain it or not, or the athlete, who can execute well, but may not do so with that knowledge functioning on a conscious level. Much of life is lived on this level. The person typing at a keyboard does not consciously say to himself: "'s.'

That means push down with the fourth finger of my left hand, on the second row from the bottom of the keyboard," but he nonetheless has learned that and incorporated it into his behavior. Typically, this first-level activity cannot be done effectively until the knowledge becomes incorporated into the person's very nature. The coach or teacher will offer suggestions as to how to improve that behavior, such as "curl your fingers more." The very fact that this knowledge or belief is not consciously reflected on may cause some people not to recognize that it is there, but it is. So conceptions about who Jesus is are implicit within the believer's relationship to Christ. In the preceding chapter, we quoted James Orr's statement that belief in Jesus implicitly involves a number of beliefs.[91] So doctrine is present at the most basic level, even though it may be implicit. Here is where all Christians must live.

On the second level is the conscious reflection on doctrine that we may term theology. It is engaged in by those who teach other believers, such as pastors, Sunday school teachers, and others. It also involves a more sophisticated version of Christian faith, in which practicing believers seek to understand the meaning of Christian faith and life more fully. It is an attempt to think through more precisely just what is meant by these doctrinal beliefs, and to interrelate them in a more intentional fashion. It also is directed to examining the doctrines in light of the sources of doctrine, to make certain that the former relate as correctly as possible to the latter. At the same time, those who function on this level must also be engaged in the practice of Christianity. They are not merely detached, objective students of religious phenomena, a point that Helmut Thielicke makes quite eloquently.[92]

The third level consists of those who are the theoreticians of theology, who think through the meaning and possibilities of theology, seeking to refine it and relate it to new developments, cultural and otherwise. They also need to be practicing believers and have some experience in mentoring others.[93] The danger of the ivory tower is a very real one for theologians.[94] More recently, the problem has taken the opposite form. With many megachurches launching their own programs of training for practical Christian service, theologizing tends to be done by practioners, using criteria of short-term pragmatic success, to the neglect of more long-term reflection.

Theology, as an activity of the church, is a necessity if the church is to function well. It is also, we have argued in this chapter, a possibility.

3
The Method of Theology

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Examine the complexity of the theological scene today and show its expansive nature.
2. List and explain each of the steps involved in developing an adequate theology.
3. Demonstrate the use of Bible study and hermeneutical analysis in developing a biblically based theology.
4. Identify and describe the degrees of authority necessary to developing theological statements.

Chapter Summary

Christian theology today is not done in the context of the great theological systems of the past such as the work of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. The acceleration of change, the explosion of information, and the atomizing of information are a few of the complicating factors that make doing theology more difficult in today's world than was true in the slower-paced previous centuries. Theology is not done in a haphazard manner, however. There are several suggested steps to follow toward achieving a definite methodology. Theological

statements carry varying degrees of authority. Some are rooted in explicit statements of Scripture. Others are more speculative and hypothetical in nature.

Study Questions

- How would you characterize modern theologies that have entered the scene since the Reformation?
- What developments have occurred in the approaches to knowledge in systematic theology?
- What are the three lessons to be learned about the present-day theological environment, and what is the significance of each?
- Explain the process of doing theology and illustrate how it should be done.
- How does the listing of the degrees of authority in theology affect your interpretation of the variety of theologies present on the scene today?
- Why is *adduction* a better description for theological method?

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The Theological Scene Today

The doing of theology, like all other human endeavors, takes place within a given context. Each theologian and each student of theology lives at a specific point of time rather than in some timeless vacuum, and theology must be done within that situation. There are both theological and nontheological (or cultural) factors in every situation. Before we proceed, it is important for us to observe certain characteristics of the present-day theological scene.

1. The first theological factor that is significant and to some extent unique about the present period is the tendency for theologies to have brief life spans. In earlier times, a given form of theology might persist for decades or even centuries, but that seems to have changed. Augustine's synthesis of Platonic philosophy and theology (*The City of God*) in many ways dominated theology for more than eight hundred years. Then Thomas Aquinas synthesized Catholic theology with Aristotle's philosophy (*Summa Theologica*) and thus supplied a basis for theology until the Reformation—an interval of nearly three centuries. The Reformers developed a theology independent of the earlier Catholic syntheses, with Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* being the most thorough statement of the new understanding of Christianity. Although there were heretical movements from time to time, and a somewhat different understanding of evangelical theology came into being with the work of John Wesley, for a period of more than 250 years there was no major theological figure or writing to rival the influence of Calvin.

Then, with the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher came the birth of liberal theology, not as an outside challenge to orthodoxy, as deism had been, but as a competitor within the church.[95] Liberalism, in its many varieties, was to dominate European theology throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, its period of popularity being somewhat later in North America. If the nineteenth century ended in August 1914 for Karl Barth,[96] it was in 1919 that this change became apparent to the rest of the theological world, with the publication of his *Der Römerbrief* (*Epistle to the Romans*).[97] This marked the end of the liberal theology and the ascendancy of what came to be known as neo-orthodoxy. The duration of its supremacy proved notably shorter, however, than that of some of the preceding theologies. In 1941, Rudolf Bultmann's "New Testament and Mythology" heralded the beginning of a movement (or actually a program) known as demythologization.[98] This was to prove a short-lived and yet genuine displacement of the neo-orthodox view. In 1954, Ernst Käsemann's paper marked the resurgence of the search for the historical Jesus, calling into question Bultmann's view.[99] Yet this did not really

introduce a new system. It primarily indicated the end of regnant systems as such.

Note what has been occurring during this period. The first great theological systems lasted for hundreds of years, but the period of dominance of each was shorter than that of its immediate predecessor. With the life span of theologies becoming shorter and shorter, any theology that attempts to tie itself too closely to the present conditions in the intellectual world is evidently consigned to early obsolescence. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Death of God theology that flourished briefly in the mid-1960s, and then faded equally quickly. In the scientific terminology of the present day, the half-life of new theologies is very short indeed.

2. Another phenomenon of the present time is the demise of great schools of theology, definite movements, or clusterings of adherents around a given set of teachings. Today there are mostly individual theologies and theologians. In the 1950s, it was possible to classify theologians into camps or teams. Today matters are quite different. To use an athletic metaphor: whereas previously the playing field was occupied by several teams easily distinguishable by their uniforms, now each player seems to wear a different uniform. In a political metaphor, instead of parties, each participant in the process is a different party. There are, to be sure, specific theologies, such as the theology of hope or process theology. Yet these lack the internal coherence and complete set of doctrines traditionally manifested by theological systems built on an overall theme or even a mood.[100]

Whereas in earlier times there were distinctive theologies that had worked out their view of virtually every topic, and one could therefore find consistent answers to each particular question by accepting a system, this is no longer the case. There are only sketches rather than detailed blueprints of theology. Where there are thorough systems of theology, for the most part these basically follow the pattern of earlier systems.

3. Related to these two other developments is the fact that there do not seem to be the theological giants such as were abroad even a generation ago. In the first half of the twentieth century, there were great theological thinkers who formulated extensive, carefully crafted systems of theology: Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann. In conservative circles men like G. C. Berkouwer in the Netherlands and Edward Carnell and Carl F. H. Henry in the United States were recognized as leaders. Now those theologians have passed from the active theological scene, and no thinkers have risen to dominate the theological landscape quite as they did. Two who made noteworthy accomplishments are Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, but they did not garner sizable followings, and have now moved into retirement.

Consequently, there is a considerably larger circle of influential theologians, but the extent of the influence exerted by any one of them is less than that of the men already mentioned.

Paradoxically, however, in church life, there is a tendency to gravitate to a few superstar pastors and church leaders, and to become somewhat uncritical disciples of them. What happens is that people allow their critical thinking to become suspended because of the personal charisma of a leader, rather than their being persuaded by his or her reasoned arguments. This tendency may also spill over to theological study, where alliances are made around persons, rather than ideas. Yet, just as the place of prominence of a church leader gives way rather quickly to another, so is the case with theological leadership. Theological fads can fade rapidly.

4. Theology is now being done in a period characterized by, among other things, a "knowledge explosion." The amount of information is growing so rapidly that mastery of a large area of thought is becoming increasingly difficult. While this is especially true in technological areas, biblical and theological knowledge is also much broader than it once was. The result has been a much greater degree of specialization than previously required. In biblical studies, for example, New Testament scholars tend to specialize in the Gospels or in the Pauline writings. Church historians tend to specialize in one period, such as the Reformation. Consequently, research and publication are often in narrower areas and in greater depth.

This means that the systematic theologian will find it increasingly difficult to cover the entire range of doctrines. Systematic theology is further complicated by the fact that it requires knowledge of all of Scripture and of the development of thought throughout the whole history of the church. Moreover, as far as new information is concerned, systematic theology is not restricted to recent discoveries in the field of Hebrew philology, for example, but must also relate to modern developments in such "secular" areas as sociology, biology, and numerous other disciplines. Yet the task must be done—and at various levels, including the elementary or introductory.

Recent decades have seen the development of an intellectual atmosphere rather unfavorable to systematic theology. In part, this was a result of an atomistic (rather than holistic) approach to knowledge. Awareness of the vast amounts of detail to be mastered produced the feeling that the bits and pieces of data could not be effectively gathered into any sort of inclusive whole. It was considered impossible for anyone to have an overview of the entire field of systematic theology. This tendency of the modern period has been accentuated with the postmodern averseness to metanarratives, or all-inclusive views.

Another factor impeding systematic theology was that revelation was always given in concrete historical situations. Hence, what was revealed might be limited to that localized perspective, dealing with specifics rather than with universal statements about things in general. Sometimes there was a tendency to believe that this diversity of particulars could not be combined into any sort of harmonious whole. This, it should be noted, was based on the implicit assumption that reality is internally incoherent. Consequently, any attempt to harmonize or systematize would inevitably distort the reality under consideration.

The result of all this was that biblical theology was thought to be adequate and systematic theology dispensable. In effect, biblical theology was substituted for systematic theology.[101] This had two effects. First, it meant that the theology written and studied had a more limited scope. It was now possible to concentrate on Paul's anthropology or Matthew's Christology. This was a much more manageable endeavor than attempting to see what the entire Bible had to say on these subjects. The second effect was that theology became descriptive rather than normative. The question was no longer, "What do you believe about sin?" but, "What do you believe Paul taught about sin?" The views of Luke, Isaiah, and other biblical writers who mentioned sin might then in turn be described. Particularly where there was thought to be tension among these views, biblical theology could hardly be normative for belief. During those years, systematic theology was in retreat. It was engaged in introspective concern about its own nature. Was it in fact justified? How could it be carried out? Relatively little was being done in terms of comprehensive, overall treatments of theology. Essays on particular topics of theology were being written, but the synoptic system-building that had traditionally characterized the discipline was not being done.

Recently, however, that has been changing. There has been a virtual deluge of new systematic theology textbooks, especially those written from an evangelical perspective.[102] Now it is biblical theology that, far from replacing systematic theology, is being reevaluated. And one rather prophetic treatment of biblical theology in effect argued that it must move toward becoming more like systematic theology.[103] Even with the increasing emphasis on immediate experience, growing numbers of laypersons desire to engage in serious theological study. The growth of cults and other religions, some of them extreme in their control of their devotees and in the practices in which they engage, has reminded us that the reflective and critical element in religion is indispensable. And there has been a growing sense, partly through the rise of the "new hermeneutic," that it is not possible to formulate a theology simply on the basis of the Bible. Issues such as how the Bible is to be conceived of and how it is to

be approached in interpretation must be dealt with.[104] One is therefore plunged into the much larger realm of issues traditionally dealt with in systematic theology.

5. There is a tendency for those holding extreme positions on the theological spectrum to be more outspoken in their advocacy of their positions than those of a middle stance. This is perhaps because a sharply etched position is rhetorically more easily enunciated and supported than nuanced positions. A member of a society of evangelical theological scholars once remarked that "this society is made up of the medievalists, the postmodernists, and nothing in between." My initial reaction was to tend to agree with him. Upon further reflection, I observed that most of the leading scholars in the group were quite moderate in their views, but were not the ones speaking out most aggressively. Thus, whereas a decade earlier, those in the middle tended to be looked on as colleagues by those on both the right and the left, now they are less trusted by either side, as not totally agreeing with them. Some of this is the result of vigorous denominational struggles, but the attitude has become more widespread.

6. Another facet of the present theological environment is the increased influence of the behavioral sciences. In an earlier generation, philosophy and the natural sciences were used as the partners and even the sources of theology. The various liberation theologies, however, whether feminist, black, or third world, draw heavily on the insights of behavioral science, especially sociology.

7. Globalization is evident. In the past, theology has been written predominantly by Europeans and North Americans. Their insights were considered universal. With increasing contact with other nations and populations, and with the increasing vitality of Christianity in the third world, the perspectives of the theology written in the past are seen as somewhat limited. It is important to hear what other, non-Western voices are saying and to incorporate their valid insights into our theology. In general, as Philip Jenkins has pointed out, these third world varieties of Christianity tend to be considerably more conservative and more charismatic in nature, and as their influence spreads to the theological scene, we can expect to see theology shifting in those directions as well.[105] The result is a tendency toward isolation of American and western European Christianity from the rest of world Christianity, dramatically illustrated in the worldwide Anglican denomination.

8. In Anglo-American theology, a realignment of theological groups seems to be occurring. Whereas a clustering of identity between more liberal and more conservative theologies had developed, now there is a tendency of some who term themselves "postconservative evangelicals" to find more in common with postliberals than with traditional evangelicals, and to direct more of their

criticism at those to the right of them than those to the left. To some extent, the division is in terms of the degree of affinity for postmodernism.

9. Denominationalism, which is on the decline in American culture, is also a much less significant factor in theological work. Except in strongly denominational schools, Catholic, Lutheran, or Baptist theologies are not major topics of discussion. Just as churches have adopted more generic church names, so also in theological discussion; those doctrines that are especially related to denominational differences, such as the sacraments, are getting less attention than in the past.

One lesson that we might well learn from the foregoing brief survey of the recent and present status of the theological milieu is to beware of too close an identification with any current mood in culture. The rapid changes in theologies are but a reflection of the rapid changes in culture in general. In times of such rapid change, it is probably wise not to attempt too close a fit between theology and the world in which it is expressed. While we will in the chapters that follow discuss the matter of contemporizing the Christian message, it is perhaps prudent at the present time to take a step back toward the enduring form of Christian truth, and away from an ultracontemporary statement of it. A mechanical analogy may help here. It is good not to have too much looseness in a mechanical device, since this leads to excessive wear. But if the mechanism is tightened too much, there may not be enough play to allow for normal movement of the parts, and they may snap.

The theology to be developed within this work will seek to strike something of a balance between the timeless essence of the doctrines and a statement of them geared to the contemporary audience. To the extent that it concentrates on the former, it will make the elements found in the Bible normative for its basic structure. Along these lines, we should note that the orthodox form of theology is not the theology of any one particular period, not even a fairly recent one. This latter erroneous conception seems to underlie Brevard Childs's characterization of Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* as a "repristination of seventeenth century dogmatics."[106] To some, this present work may appear to be the same. To be sure, the incorporation or repetition of seventeenth-century statements of orthodox theology may justify a criticism of that type. But a theology should not be assessed as being nothing but a version of an earlier theology simply because it happens to agree with the theology of an earlier time. Rather, the two theologies may be differing versions of the traditional Christian position. Kirsopp Lake, himself not a conservative, acknowledged this point:

> It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few perhaps, but very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he; and I am sorry for anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The *Bible* and the corpus theologicum of the Church are on the fundamentalist side.[107]

While Lake's warning was directed to early twentieth-century liberals, it might serve as a caution to those who today tend to brand something as simply the product of the modern period.[108]

A second lesson that we may learn from our survey of the present-day theological scene is that a degree of inclusiveness is both possible and desirable. This is not to suggest the incorporation of ideas from a wide variety of perspectives that presuppose mutually exclusive bases. Rather, it is to note that today issues are generally being treated on a less strongly ideological basis. As a result, distinctive systems are not as readily produced. It also is a recognition that as fallible human beings, theologians seldom see the truth perfectly and capture it exclusively within one system. We need to keep our doctrinal formulations flexible enough to be able to recognize and utilize valid insights from positions with which in general we disagree. While we are to systematize or integrate the biblical data, we ought not do so from too narrow a basis.

A third lesson to be derived from the present situation is the importance of maintaining a degree of independence in one's approach to doing theology. There is a tendency to simply adopt a theological giant's treatment of a particular doctrine. But the result of unreserved commitment to another person's system of thought is that one becomes a disciple in the worst sense of that term, merely repeating what has been learned from the master. Creative and critical independent thinking ceases. But the fact that there are no undisputed superstars, or at least very few of them, should spur us to be both critical of the teaching of anyone whom we read or hear and willing to modify it at any point where we think we can improve on it.

The Process of Doing Theology

We now turn to the actual task of developing a theology. There is a sense in which theology is an art as well as a science, so that it cannot follow a rigid structure. Yet procedures need to be spelled out.[109] The steps outlined here will not necessarily be followed in this sequence, but there must be a comparable

logical order of development. The reader will notice that in this procedure biblical theology, in both the "true" and "pure" sense, is developed before systematic theology, so that the sequence is exegesis–biblical theology–systematic theology. We do not move directly from exegesis to systematic theology.

1. Collection of the Biblical Materials

The first step in our theological method will be to gather all the relevant biblical passages on the doctrine being investigated. This step will also involve a thorough and consistent utilization of the very best and most appropriate tools and methods for getting at the meaning of these passages.[110]

Before we can get at the meaning of the biblical passages, however, we should give attention to the procedures of exegesis. Sometimes we tend to assume that we are working with neutral methods. In reality, however, there are interpretative factors inherent within the methodology itself; therefore, careful and continued scrutiny and refinement of the methodology are required. We have already noted the importance of knowing the whole philosophical framework within which a theologian is functioning. This applies at the level of exegesis as well; the exegete will want to make certain that the presuppositions of the tools and methods employed are harmonious with those of the exegete. Exegesis involves, among other things, consulting grammars and dictionaries. These will have to be carefully analyzed. An example is the massive and prestigious *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (often referred to simply as "Kittel").[111] Each of the contributors to this work operates within a tradition and context of his own. James Barr has pointed out and Kittel himself has observed that such presuppositions underlie this reference work.[112] The theologian will insist, as part of the preexegetical task, on investigating the presuppositions of the authors consulted, or, at the very least, on being alert to the presence of factors that might influence what is said. Inquiry into the intellectual biography and pedigree of even these authors should sensitize the exegete to the possible presence of unacceptable presuppositions.

Not only the tools but the methods of exegesis as well must be scrutinized.[113] Here one must insist that the method not preclude anything which, at least on a surface examination, the documents seem to assume. Since the Bible reports the occurrence of miracles, a methodology that virtually assumes that everything can be explained without resorting to supernatural concepts or causes will result in an interpretation at variance with what the Bible claims has happened. This is true not only with respect to the events reported within the Bible, but also with

respect to the very process of production of the Bible. If the assumption is that the existence of the documents can be fully accounted for simply by tracing the history of the formation of the tradition, then any possibility of direct revelation or communication from God will be minimized.[114]

The opposite problem may also occur. A supranaturalistic approach may be taken, in which the Bible is regarded as so unique that the types of criteria and methods used to interpret and evaluate other historical documents are excluded in interpreting and evaluating the Bible. In this case, the Bible will be virtually taken out of the class of historical materials. If the former approach emphasizes too strongly the human character of the Bible, the latter may assume too strongly its divine character.

We are suggesting an approach that is open to any possibilities. Thus, it should not be assumed that the most supernatural explanation possible must be what occurred, nor that it cannot have occurred. Rather, we should assume that it may or may not have happened, the objective being to determine just what did happen. In particular, it is important to take seriously what the biblical text claims, and to assess that claim carefully. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer means by grasping what is said in its distance from the interpreter.[115] That is, the interpreter should simply attempt to see what was said, what the writer or speaker meant, and how the ancient message would have been understood by its original readers or hearers.

It is possible merely to adopt uncritically the methodology of another without asking whether it is really consistent with the material being examined or with our own perspective. If we do so, we will to a certain extent have built in certain conclusions at the very beginning. Interpretation is in many ways like navigation. In dead reckoning, a pilot works with the information that the ship or aircraft begins from a given point and proceeds in a certain direction at a certain speed for a certain length of time. Even if the speed and direction of the wind or current and the speed of the vessel or craft have been precisely and accurately determined, the correctness of the course will depend on the accuracy of the compass (or, more exactly, the accuracy of the pilot’s knowledge of the compass, since all compasses have slight variations at different headings and at different longitudes). If the compass reading is merely one degree off, then after one hundred miles of travel, the craft will be almost two miles off course. The larger the error, the greater the departure from the intended course. Similarly, a slight error in the presuppositions of a methodology will adversely affect the conclusions. What we are warning against here is blind acceptance of a particular set of presuppositions; rather, theologians should self-consciously scrutinize their methodology and carefully determine their starting point.[116]

Once the theologian has carefully defined the methodology to be used, it will then be important to make the broadest possible inquiry into doctrinal content. This will include careful word study of the terms that apply to the issue under consideration. A correct understanding of faith, for example, will be dependent on a careful examination of the numerous uses of the word *pistis* in the New Testament. Lexical studies will often be the foundation of doctrinal inquiry.

There must also be close examination of what is said about the topic in the didactic sections of Scripture. Whereas lexical studies give us general insight into the building blocks of meaning, the portions of Scripture in which Paul, for example, expounds upon faith will give us a deeper understanding of the specific meanings of the concept. Particular significance should be attached to those passages where the subject is afforded a thorough, systematic treatment, rather than a mere incidental reference.

Attention also needs to be given to the narrative passages. While these are not so easily dealt with as the didactic passages, they often shed special light on the issue, not so much in defining or explaining the concept, as in illustrating and thus illuminating it. Here we see the doctrinal truth in action. In some cases, the term under consideration may not even occur in a relevant passage. For example, Genesis 22 describes the testing of Abraham; he was asked to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, a burnt offering. The words *faith* and *believe* do not appear in the passage, yet it is a powerful description of the dynamics of faith, and the writer to the Hebrews in the famous chapter on faith identifies Abraham's willingness to offer up his son as an act of faith (11:17–19).

It will be important, in studying the biblical material, to view it against the historical and cultural background of its time. We must guard against modernizing the Bible. The Bible must be allowed to say first what it was saying to the readers and hearers of that time, rather than what we think it should have said, or what we think it is saying to us. There are a time and a place for this, but not at this step.

2. Unification of the Biblical Materials

We must next develop some unifying statements on the doctrinal theme being investigated. Rather than having simply the theology of Paul, Luke, or John on a particular doctrine, we must attempt to coalesce their various emphases into a coherent whole.

We are proceeding on the assumption that there are a unity and a consistency among these several books and authors. We will, then, emphasize the points of agreement among the Synoptic Gospels and interpret the rest in that light. We

will treat any apparent discrepancies as differing and complementary interpretations rather than contradictions. Even without undue or strained effort, if we expect harmony, we will generally find it to be greater than we would if we expected paradox.

Note that this is the procedure ordinarily followed in other areas of research. Usually, in investigating the writings of an author or of a school of thought or even of diverse contributors on a given subject, the researcher begins by attempting to see whether the various passages can be interpreted to reveal coherence rather than diversity and disparity. We are not here advocating a forced interpretative approach that seeks agreement at any cost. Rather, we are proposing that the theologian seek out the points of harmony rather than discord.

To use a Reformation term and principle, the *analogia fidei* or analogy of faith should be followed in interpretation. The whole Bible must be taken into account when we interpret Scripture. The Old Testament and New Testament are to be approached with the expectation that a unity between the two exists. This is simply practicing biblical theology in Gabler's "pure" sense.

3. Analysis of the Meaning of Biblical Teachings

Once the doctrinal material has been synthesized into a coherent whole, it is necessary to ask, "What is *really* meant by this?" Take as examples references to the church as the body of Christ and Jesus's statement, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Numerous other biblical terms and concepts come to mind as well. What do they really mean? In a homogeneous group these terms may become signals that evoke a particular reaction on the basis of a conditioned response. Once one goes beyond that closed circle in which people share the same experience, however, communication may be difficult. And difficulty making something clear to someone else may be an indication that we ourselves do not really understand what we mean.

At this point, we are still dealing with the meaning of the biblical concepts as biblical concepts. The theologian will relentlessly press the question, "What does this really mean?" If these biblical concepts are to be translated into contemporary form, it is essential that their biblical form be precisely analyzed. Failure to do so will result in even greater imprecision at later points in the process as the ambiguity is compounded.

4. Examination of Historical Treatments

While the utilization of history may take place at any one of several stages in the methodological process, this seems to be a particularly appropriate point. In chapter 1 we discussed some of the roles that historical theology plays in the doing of systematic theology. At the very least, the examination of these various interpretations should impart an element of humility and tentativeness to our commitment to our own view. We may also be able to detect within the many variations the common element that constitutes the essence of the doctrine (the next step in our methodological process), although we must be careful not to assume that the lowest common denominator is necessarily the essence.

Historical theology may be of direct value for constructing our own expressions of theology. In periods very similar to our own, we may find models that can be adapted for modern doctrinal formulations, or we may find that some current expressions are but variations of earlier instances of the same basic view. We may then see what the implications were, at least in terms of the historical consequences.

5. Consultation of Other Cultural Perspectives

Earlier we noted the phenomenon of globalization and the benefits of consulting other cultural perspectives. We may have been blinded to our own cultural perspective to the point where we identify it with the essence of the doctrine. For example, one Japanese Baptist pastor told a Baptist theology professor from the United States, “Your view of the priesthood of the believer is based more on the American Constitution than it is on the New Testament.” Was he right? That is not the point. Perhaps the Japanese pastor’s view is based more on the Japanese structure of society than on the New Testament, but the point to be borne in mind is that we may unconsciously read our own experience into the Scriptures. Interaction with other cultural perspectives will help us distinguish the essence of the biblical teaching from one cultural expression of it.[117]

6. Identification of the Essence of the Doctrine

We will need to distinguish the permanent, unvarying content of the doctrine from the cultural vehicle in which it is expressed. This is not a matter of “throwing out the cultural baggage,” as some term it. It is rather a matter of separating the message to the Corinthians as first-century Christians living in Corinth, for example, from the message to them as Christians. The latter will be the abiding truth of Paul’s teaching, which in an appropriate form of expression

applies to all Christians at all times and places, as contrasted with what was pertinent in that restricted situation. This is Gabler's "pure" biblical theology.

In the Bible, permanent truths are often expressed in the form of a particular application to a specific situation. An example of this is the matter of sacrifices. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were regarded as the means of atonement. We will have to ask ourselves whether the system of sacrifices (burnt offerings—lambs, doves, etc.) is of the essence of the doctrine, or whether it was simply an expression, at one point, of the abiding truth that there must be vicarious sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

7. Illumination from Extrabiblical Sources

While the Bible is systematic theology's major source, it is not the only one. Although the use of other sources must be very carefully limited, it is a significant part of the process. Some Christians, noting the excesses to which natural theology has gone in constructing a theology quite apart from the Bible, have overreacted to the point of ignoring the general revelation. But if God has revealed himself in two complementary and harmonious revelations, then at least in theory something can be learned from the study of God's creation, especially in shedding light on the special revelation or filling it out at certain points where it does not speak, as we will see in chapter 6.

If, for instance, God has created human beings in his own image, as the Bible teaches, in what does this image of God consist? The Bible tells us little, but does seem to make clear that the image of God is what distinguishes humans from the rest of the creatures. Since the Bible and the behavioral sciences intersect one another at this point of common interest and concern, the behavioral sciences may be able to help us identify what is unique about the human, thus yielding at least a partial understanding of the image of God. The data of these behavioral sciences will have to be studied and evaluated critically, of course, to make sure that the sciences' presuppositions are harmonious with those of our biblical inquiry. If the presuppositions are harmonious, the behavioral sciences may be helpful in illuminating the truth of what God has done.

Other areas of inquiry will also be of service. If God's creation involves the rest of the universe, both living and inert, then the natural sciences should help us understand what he has done. Salvation (particularly such aspects as conversion, regeneration, and sanctification) involves the human psychological makeup. Thus psychology, and particularly psychology of religion, should help illuminate this divine work. If, as we believe, God is at work within history, then

the study of history should increase our comprehension of the specific outworkings of his providence.

We should note that historically the nonbiblical disciplines have in fact contributed to our theological knowledge—sometimes despite the reluctance of biblical exegetes and theologians. It was not primarily exegetical considerations that moved theologians to observe that, of the various possible meanings of the Hebrew word יוֹם (*yom*), "a period of time" might, in the case of interpreting the creation account, be preferable to the more literal and common "twenty-four-hour day."

We need to be careful in our correlation of theology and other disciplines, however. While the special revelation (preserved for us in the Bible) and the general revelation are ultimately in harmony with one another, that harmony is apparent only as each is fully understood and correctly interpreted. In practice, we never have a complete understanding of either of these sources of God's truth, so some friction between the two may well occur.

8. Contemporary Expression of the Doctrine

Once we have determined the essence of the doctrine, the next task is to give it a contemporary expression, to clothe the timeless truth in an appropriate form. This can be done in several ways, one of which is to find the present form of the questions to which the specific doctrine offers answers. This is similar to Paul Tillich's method of correlation.

Tillich characterized his theology as an apologetic or answering theology.[118] He viewed the theologian as moving back and forth between two poles. One pole is the theological authority, the source from which the theology is drawn. In our case, it is the Bible. This pole is necessary in order to ensure that the theology is authoritative. The other pole is what Tillich calls the situation. By this he does not mean the specific predicament of individuals or a temporary facet of this year's headlines. Rather, he means the art, music, politics of a culture—in short, the whole expression of the mind-set or of the mood or outlook of a given society. From an analysis of this situation it will become apparent what questions the culture is asking, either explicitly or implicitly. Such an analysis, in Tillich's judgment, is largely the role of philosophy.

In this dialogical approach (question and answer) to the doing of theology, the authoritative pole supplies the content of theology. But the form of expression will be determined by correlating the answers offered by the Bible with the questions being asked by the culture. Thus, the message is not proclaimed without regard for the situation of the hearer. Nor is it proclaimed in the manner

of an ideologue who shouts, “I have an answer! I have an answer! Who has the question?” Rather, an analysis of the situation, that is, of the questions being asked, will give a general cast, an orientation, to the message.

It is necessary to emphasize again that the questions influence only the form of the answer, not the content. One problem of theological modernism in the United States during the early twentieth century was that it was too concerned with the immediate situation and could not adjust when the situation changed. Underlying this problem was the fact that modernism tended to determine not only theology’s form but also its content from the situation it faced. Thus, theology did not merely restate its answers; it actually restructured them. It did not offer the permanent answer in a new form; it gave a new answer, a different answer. Any subsequent theology is subject to the same danger. The analysis of a culture must be carefully and thoroughly done. A superficial treatment will often be very misleading, for the apparent situation may in fact belie the actual questions being asked.

Another way of stating the thesis of this section is to say that we should attempt to find a model that makes the doctrine intelligible in a contemporary context. A model is an analogy or image used to represent and clarify the truth being examined or expressed. The search for contemporary models will constitute a major part of the work of systematic theology (unlike biblical theology, which restricts itself to biblical models). We are here speaking of synthetic rather than analytical models. The latter are tools of understanding, the former tools of expression. The synthetic model should be freely exchangeable for other, more suitable and useful models.

What we are calling for here is not to make the message acceptable to all, particularly to those who are rooted in non-Christian assumptions of the time. There is an element of the message of Jesus Christ that will always be what Paul called a “stumbling block” or an offense (1 Cor. 1:23). The gospel, for example, requires a surrender of the autonomy to which we tend to cling so tenaciously, no matter in what age we live. The aim, then, is not to make the message acceptable, but to make sure, as far as possible, that the message is at least understood.

A number of themes will present themselves as fruitful for exploration as we seek to formulate a contemporary expression of the message. Although our age seems to be increasingly characterized by depersonalization and detachment, there are indications that there is a real craving for a personal dimension in life, to which the doctrine of the God who knows and cares about each one can be profitably related. This can be seen in the popularity of social media that increase contact with others, but introduce an element of distance between the

persons. And although there has been a type of confidence that modern technology could solve the problems of the world, there are growing indications of an awareness that the problems are much larger and more frightening than realized and that the human race is its own greatest problem. Against this backdrop, God's power and providence have a new pertinence. In addition, giving a different cast to our theology may enable us to make the world face questions that it does not want to ask, but must ask.

In recent years it has become popular to speak of "contextualizing" the message.[119] Because the message originally was expressed in a contextualized form, it must first be "decontextualized" (the essence of the doctrine must be found). Then, however, it must be recontextualized in three dimensions.

The first dimension we may refer to as length, involving the transition from a first-century (or earlier) setting to a twenty-first-century setting. The second is what we might refer to as breadth. At a given time period, there are many different cultures. It has been customary to observe the difference between East and West, and to note that Christianity, while preserving its essence, may take on somewhat different forms of expression in different settings. Some institutions have disregarded this, and the result has been a ludicrous exportation of Western customs; for example, little white chapels with spires were sometimes built for Christian worship in the Orient. Just as church architecture may appropriately take on a form indigenous to a given part of the world, so also may the doctrines. We are becoming increasingly aware that the most significant distinction culturally may be between North and South, rather than between East and West, as the third world becomes increasingly prominent. This may be especially important to Christianity, as its rapid growth in places like Africa and Latin America shifts the balance from the traditional centers in North America and Europe. Missions, and specifically cross-cultural studies, are keenly aware of this dimension of the contextualization process.[120]

There is also the dimension of height. Theology may be dealt with on varying levels of abstraction, complexity, and sophistication. We may think of this as a ladder with rungs from top to bottom. On the top level are the theological superstars. These are the outstanding thinkers who make profoundly insightful and innovative breakthroughs in theology. Here are found the Augustines, Calvins, Schleiermachers, and Barths. In some cases, they do not work out all the details of the theological system that they found, but they begin the process. Their writings are compulsory reading for the large number of professional theologians who are one level below. One rung down from professional theologians are students in theological schools, and persons engaged in the practice of ministry. While they study theology with competence, that is only

one part of their commitment. Consequently, their understanding of theology is often, but not always, less thorough and penetrating than that of those who devote themselves full-time to its study.

On lower rungs of the ladder are laypeople—those who have never studied theology in a formal setting.[121] Here several levels of theological literacy will be found. Various factors determine where each layperson stands on the ladder—for example, the amount of background in biblical study (as in church and/or Sunday school), chronological age or maturity, or the number of years of formal education. True contextualization of the message means that it can be expressed at each of these levels. Most persons in ministry will be called on to interpret the message at a level about one step below where they are personally; they should also try to study some theology at least one step above their position in order to remain intellectually alive and growing.

It is particularly important to bear in mind the practical nature of the issues to which laypeople must relate their theology, as is also true of the theologian when not functioning purely as theologian. Kosuke Koyama has reminded us that in his country of Thailand, the people are primarily concerned with down-to-earth issues such as food and waterbuffalo.[122] It is not just Thai people, however, whose major questions are of this type. The theologian will need to find ways to relate doctrine to such concerns.

9. Development of a Central Interpretive Motif

Each theologian must decide on a particular theme that, for her or him, is the most significant and helpful in approaching theology as a whole. Considerable differences will be found among leading thinkers in terms of the basic idea that characterizes their approach to theology. For example, many see Luther's theology as centering on salvation by grace through faith. Calvin seemed to make the sovereignty of God basic to his theology. Karl Barth emphasized the Word of God, by which he meant the living Word, Jesus Christ; as a result some have characterized his theology as Christomonism. Paul Tillich made much of the ground of being. Nels Ferré and the Lundensian school of such Swedish thinkers as Anders Nygren and Gustaf Aulén made the love of God central. Oscar Cullmann stressed the "already but not yet." Some postmodern theologies stress community.

There are values in formulating such a central motif. It will lend unity to the system, and thus power to the communication of it. I was once taught in an introductory speech course that just as a basket has a handle by which it can be picked up, so a speech should have a central proposition or thesis by which the

whole can be grasped, and in terms of which the whole can be understood. The metaphor applies equally to theology. There is also the fact that a central motif in one's theology will give a basic emphasis or thrust to one's ministry.

One might think of the central motif as a perspective from which the data of theology are viewed. The perspective does not affect what the data are, but it does give a particular angle or cast to the way in which they are viewed. Just as standing at a particular elevation or location often enables us to perceive a landscape more accurately, so a useful integrative motif will give us a more accurate understanding of theological data.

It could be argued that any coherent theology has an integrating motif. It could also be argued that sometimes there may be more than one motif, and these may even be somewhat contradictory in nature. What is being pled for here is conscious and competent choice and use of an integrating motif.

Care must be exercised lest this becomes a hindering, rather than a facilitating, factor. Our central motif must never determine our interpretation of passages where it is not relevant. This would be a case of eisegesis rather than exegesis. Even if we hold that "already but not yet" is the key to understanding Christian doctrine, we should not expect that every passage of Scripture is to be understood as eschatological, and find eschatology "behind every bush" in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the potential abuse of a central interpretive motif should not deter us from making a legitimate application of it.

The integrative motif may have to be adjusted as part of the contextualization of one's theology. It may well be that at a different time or in a different cultural or geographical setting one's theology should be organized on a somewhat different fulcrum. This is true where a major element in the milieu calls for a different orientation. For example, one structures the expression of one's theology somewhat differently in an antinomian than in a legalistic atmosphere.

By basing our central motif on the broadest possible range of biblical materials rather than on selected passages, we can make sure the motif will not distort our theology. The result may be a somewhat broad and general motif, but we will be assured it is truly comprehensive.[123] Another important guideline is to keep the motif constantly subject to revision. This is not to say that one will frequently exchange one motif for another, but that the motif will be expanded, narrowed, refined, or even replaced if necessary, to accommodate the full set of data it is intended to cover. What we are advocating is a "soft" integrative motif, which remains implicit in the theology, rather than a "hard" integrative motif, which is constantly explicitly related to each topic. The latter is more susceptible to distortion of the material than is the former.

The central motif around which theology will be developed in this work is the *magnificence of God*. By this is meant the greatness of God in terms of his power, knowledge, and other traditional "natural attributes," as well as the excellence and splendor of his moral nature. Theology as well as life needs to be centered on the great living God, rather than on the human creature. Because God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, it is appropriate that our theology be constructed with his greatness and goodness as the primary reference point. A fresh vision of the magnificence of the Lord of all is the source of the vitality that should pervade the Christian life. (Magnificence here is to be understood as encompassing what has traditionally been associated with the expression "the glory of God," but without the connotation of self-centeredness sometimes carried by that expression.)[124]

10. Stratification of the Topics

The final step in the theological method is to range the topics on the basis of their relative importance. This is, in effect, to say that we need to outline our theology, assigning a Roman numeral to major topics, a capital letter to subtopics, an Arabic numeral to topics subordinate to the subtopics, and so on. We need to know what the major issues are. And we need to know what can be treated as subtopics, that is, which issues, while important, are not quite so crucial and indispensable as are the major divisions. For example, eschatology is a major area of doctrinal investigation. Within that area, the second coming is a major belief. Rather less crucial (and considerably less clearly taught in Scripture) is the issue of whether the church will be removed from the world before or after the great tribulation. Ranging these topics on the basis of their magnitude should help spare us from expending major amounts of time and energy on something that is of secondary (or even tertiary) importance.

Once this is done, there will also need to be some evaluation even of the topics that are on the same level of the outline. While they have equal status, there are some that are more basic than others. For example, the doctrine of Scripture affects all other doctrines, since they are derived from the Scriptures. Further, the doctrine of God deserves special attention because it tends to form the framework within which all the other doctrines are developed. A modification here will make a considerable difference in the formulation of the other doctrines.

Finally, we need to note that at a particular time one doctrine may need more attention than another. Thus, while we would not want to assert that one doctrine is superior to another in some absolute sense, we may conclude that at this point

in time one of them is of greater significance to the total theological and even ecclesiastical enterprise, and therefore deserves greater attention.[125]

Degrees of Authority of Theological Statements

Our theology will consist of various types of theological statements that can be classified on the basis of their derivation. It is important to attribute to each type of statement an appropriate degree of authority.

1. Direct statements of Scripture are to be accorded the greatest weight. To the degree that they accurately represent what the Bible teaches, they have the status of a direct word from God. Great care must of course be exercised to make certain that we are dealing here with the teaching of Scripture, and not an interpretation imposed upon it.

2. Direct implications of Scripture must also be given high priority. They are to be regarded as slightly less authoritative than direct statements, however, because the introduction of an additional step (logical inference) carries with it the possibility of interpretational error.

3. Probable implications of Scripture, that is, inferences that are drawn in cases where one of the assumptions or premises is only probable, are somewhat less authoritative than direct implications. While deserving respect, such statements should be held with a certain amount of tentativeness.

4. Inductive conclusions from Scripture vary in their degree of authority. Inductive investigation, of course, gives only probabilities. The certainty of its conclusions increases as the proportion between the number of references actually considered and the total number of pertinent references that could conceivably be considered increases.

5. Conclusions inferred from the general revelation, which is less particularized and less explicit than the special revelation, must, accordingly, always be subject to the clearer and more explicit statements of the Bible.

6. Outright speculations, which frequently include hypotheses based on a single statement or hint in Scripture, or derived from somewhat obscure or unclear parts of the Bible, may also be stated and utilized by the theologians. There is no harm in this, as long as the theologian is aware and warns the reader or hearer of what is being done. A serious problem enters if these speculations are presented with the same degree of authoritativeness attributed to statements of the first category listed above.

The theologian will want to employ all of the legitimate material available, giving it in each case neither more nor less credence than is appropriate in view

of the nature of its sources.

Induction, Deduction, and Adduction

We have described both inductive and deductive dimensions of theological method. The method cannot be exhaustively classified as either of these, however, nor even a combination of the two. There are points at which theology goes beyond both of these, in what we may term *adduction*.[126] Even in science, there is a measure of creativity and adjustment of theories. A theory or model is conceived and then an attempt made to fit it against the relevant data, noting the implications to be drawn. Adjustments and modifications are made, with some data still not fitting perfectly into the theory. There is a progressive adaptation of the view. So with theological method, there cannot be a completely straight-line or mechanical process of formulating the doctrine. There are aspects in which theology resembles art more than science. Some anomalies will always remain, and some insights emerge without a clear and obvious connection with the data. Elements of imagination and creativity are involved. Sometimes aspects of the doctrine are added to round out areas that are not directly addressed, or to illuminate more obscure dimensions of doctrine. Some dimensions of this will be explored when we discuss religious language and how it functions.

4
Contextualizing Theology

Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Develop an appreciation of the changes in and differences among cultures.
2. Analyze and describe the elements of Christianity that are eternal and unchanging and contrast them to the temporal expressions.
3. Compare and contrast different approaches to contemporizing theology and differentiate among the values of each.
4. Determine that the essential goal of theology is the identification of core truths and doctrines as essential to Christianity and place them in their cultural context.

Chapter Summary

The world of the Bible and this present world are very different. It is important to state the gospel message in terms that will be understood in today's world. Many theologians have tried to do this in order to make the message palatable to the modern mind. Some theologians have changed not merely the form of expression, but the substance as well. The goal for contemporizing the Christian message is to retain the content and biblical doctrine while making the message more

understandable today. Five criteria are presented to assess the integrity of the message.

Study Questions

- How would you respond to Rudolf Bultmann's attempt to demythologize Christianity in the modern world?
- Name and briefly describe the permanent elements of Christianity discussed in this chapter and explain what makes them essential to Christianity.
- Compare the views of contemporizing theology proposed by the transplanters, the transformers, and the translators.
- What criteria are used to identify the essence of a doctrine?
- How would "conformers" differ from "reformers," and "transformers" differ from "deformers"?

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The Challenge of Intelligibility

One problem of particular concern to the theologian, and of course to the entire Christian church, is the apparent difference between the world of the Bible and the present world. To many persons today, not only the language and concepts, but in some cases the entire frame of reference, seems so sharply different. We begin this chapter by describing an extreme view of the difference.

In the 1940s, the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann shook the theological world with his conception of myth in the New Testament.[127] According to the biblical writers, he said, reality was structured on a three-level world, with heaven, inhabited by God and the angels, above; earth, on which we live, in the middle; and hell, with the devil and his demons, below. Beyond that, what happened on earth was thought of as caused by the activities of angels and demons, with demon possession being a frequent explanation for human illnesses. This was simply the view of reality that the biblical writers held in common with others of their time.

Such a set of conceptions is no longer tenable, however. We now understand that reality is not a flat, three-layer structure. We also know that illnesses are caused by bacteria and other natural causes, and are healed by medical means. Persons do not come back to life after being dead for more than a day. Modern persons cannot accept this mythical picture, nor need they.[128] A correct understanding of the Bible enables us to see that the biblical writers were not attempting to describe external realities that were literally true. Rather, they were giving expression to existential truths, truths about the nature of life as they experienced it. Thus, what is needed is demythologization. By this he did not mean discarding these biblical myths, but reinterpreting them, finding and stating their true meaning.

If Bultmann raises logical objections to holding what he regards as outmoded myths, there is also a psychological difficulty. The average Christian, even the one who attends church regularly, lives in two different worlds. On Sunday morning, from eleven o'clock to noon, such a person lives in a world in which axheads float, rivers stop as if dammed, donkeys speak, people walk on water, dead persons come back to life—even days after death—and a child is born to a virgin mother. But during the rest of the week, the Christian functions in a very different atmosphere. Here technology, the application of modern scientific discoveries, is the norm. The believer drives away from church in a modern

automobile, with automatic transmission, power steering, power brakes, AM/FM stereo radio, air conditioning, and other gadgets, to a home with similar up-to-date features. In practice, the two worlds clash. In the Christian's biblical world, when people are ill, prayer is uttered for divine healing, but in this secular world, they go to the doctor. For how long can this kind of schizophrenia be maintained? As radical as is Bultmann's position, it does point out something of the predicament of present-day persons.

There are other serious differences between the biblical view and the outlook of many today. We live in a time in which the old structures of authority have crumbled or are being challenged. The idea of a king or emperor or even a small elite possessing the power to govern human lives is foreign. There is instead a strong emphasis on the importance and autonomy of the individual. Individual rights, rather than responsibilities, are emphasized. Yet the Bible speaks much of God as King and Lord, with absolute sovereignty. Beyond that, today there is a strong emphasis on positive thinking. Human nature is considered basically good, spoiled only by adverse circumstances. Everyone needs their self-esteem built by positive reinforcement, by praise, high grades, and other evaluations. Yet the Bible teaches that all are sinners, naturally inclined toward self-interest. This conflict is also an obstacle preventing many today from accepting the biblical message.

The problem, however, is not merely the difference induced by the separation in time from the biblical situation. It is the fact that at the present time, Christianity exists in many different cultures. For much of its modern history, the model of Christianity was that of European and then of North American Christianity. As missionaries went from those countries to evangelize in other parts of the world, they tended to identify their own practices as the biblical norm, and prescribe them to the exclusion of more indigenous nuances of belief and practice. Even church architecture reflected Nashville more than Nairobi, in some cases. Worship was with Western hymns, not native music. Some missionaries forbade the use of drums in African churches or clapping in Latin American services. Theology was often couched in Euro-American form.

Today, however, the real centers of vital biblical Christianity are not in North America and certainly not in Western Europe, but in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. To worship in different places is to experience an amazing variety of expressions of piety. I have spent an entire month in one Asian country, in numerous churches, schools, and conferences, and the total number of times I was hugged during that month was one. Shortly thereafter, at my first Sunday worship service in one Latin American country, I received a crash course in cheek-kissing on Sunday morning. I have seen churches where

the pew backs were equipped with desk tops, which were folded down at the beginning of the sermon, to facilitate note-taking, almost like a college lecture, and I have also been in services where worshipers threw themselves face-down on the floor in worship.

In many cases, these world Christians have seen and adopted dimensions of biblical practice and belief that those in the West have tended to overlook or may even have distorted, because of their Western orientation. Christians from different cultures, whether from different countries or different subcultures within a given country, need one another, and the Christian message is capable of being expressed in culturally appropriate ways in these different settings. No less urgent than contemporizing is the need for cultural contextualizing.

The Locus of Permanence in Christianity

To be faithful Christians and theologians, it is essential that we ask the question, What must we retain in order to maintain genuine Christianity, or to remain genuinely Christian? Different theologians and segments of Christianity have suggested various answers as to what the abiding element is in Christianity.

An Institution

A first answer, most fully enunciated by the Roman Catholic Church, is that the permanent element in Christianity is institutional. While the teaching and doctrine may grow and develop, the continuity of the institutional church remains constant.[129]

Acts of God

Another answer given in the latter half of the twentieth century is that the permanent element of Christianity is certain unique historical events or mighty acts of God, such as the exodus and the "Christ event." This position was taken by the "biblical theology" or "Heilsgeschichte" school of thought.[130] On this basis, it is the acts of God, not biblical accounts, which are the permanent and authoritative element in Christianity.

Experiences

Some hold that abiding experiences are the essence, the permanent factor, of Christianity. While doctrinal beliefs may change, people of all periods have the same experiences. A notable example of such experiences is the universal hope of immortality. Harry E. Fosdick considered the biblical idea of the resurrection of the body as the way persons living in biblical times gave expression to their hope of immortality, but considered this grossly materialistic and substituted for it the idea of the immortality of the soul. While changing the doctrine, he felt that this preserved the abiding experience of hope.[131]

A Way of Life

Yet another view is that it is a way of life, not a set of beliefs, that distinguishes true Christianity and must be preserved. Following in the direction pointed to by Immanuel Kant and later by Albrecht Ritschl, those who hold this view see the essence of religion as lying in behavior rather than belief. Walter Rauschenbusch was a leading exponent of this view. The task of Christians is building the Kingdom (or reign) of God on earth, in what came to be called the "social gospel." This concern for righteousness, justice, social equality, and democracy was the core of Jesus's teaching and practice and should be our ideal also.[132]

Each of these views has validity, if taken as part of the answer. Certainly, when Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, he was describing the permanence of the church, although the meaning of that church needs to be determined. The emphasis on the crucial events such as Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection makes clear that they are essential to genuine Christianity. Certainly the experiences of reconciliation to God, a continuing relationship with him, and a hope for the future are indispensable elements of what it means to be a Christian. The emphasis on holiness and justice, including concern for one's neighbor, runs throughout the Old Testament, Jesus's teachings, and the New Testament epistles. Therefore, in my judgment, all of these need to be retained.

Yet, that being said, there is also the element of a set of beliefs that are inseparable from this complex of factors. As we observed in chapter 1, both in Scripture and throughout the history of the church doctrinal beliefs have been considered essential to Christianity. All religions have some sort of permanent organizational structure, which is emphasized more strongly in some than in others. All have had crucial events and significant leaders, to which they attach vital importance. All cultivate certain experiences, some quite similar in nature to those of Christian piety. Even secular movements may evoke a kind of loyalty

and fervor. Other religions than Christianity emphasize a way of life, and humanist concern for social righteousness may well parallel Christianity's. It is only when these elements are joined with an enunciated framework of belief that we can say that genuine Christianity is present, although its precise expression may vary in different times and places. Since this is a study of Christian theology, not of evangelism, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, or Christian ethics, it is on the framework of belief that we will concentrate in this work.

Three Approaches to Contextualizing Theology

It should be apparent, from the view of religion adopted in the first chapter, that the doctrinal content is a major component of Christianity, and is therefore to be preserved. For our purposes in this volume, it will be regarded as a necessary but not sufficient component of Christianity. But if we are to maintain the pertinence of the Christian religion, we must at this point introduce an additional concern: how to contemporize theology.

Transplanters

Some contend that no effort of contextualizing is necessary. One should simply declare the message as it is stated in biblical form, rather than attempting to restate it in contemporary or local categories. This assumes that there are universal human qualities found in all times and places, and that, consequently, anyone can understand the message. Sometimes a theological rationale is given: it is God, and specifically the Holy Spirit, who brings about understanding and conviction. This may be accompanied by a strong emphasis on human depravity, such that the unregenerate person cannot comprehend the truth. There may be a sense that it is presumptuous of the human messenger to attempt to explain things. This approach, to be sure, has the virtue of some biblical support, for Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would supply understanding and conviction (John 16:8–11), as we shall see in the chapter on illumination of the Scripture. In practice, however, there are several difficulties with this approach.

First, while there are many common elements between different time periods, and, within a given time period, between different cultures, there are also points of sufficiently great difference as to result in lack of understanding, or worse, actual misunderstanding. If one does not know what language a speaker is speaking, she will not understand, or may think she understands but obtain an

erroneous meaning. An example of the former may be the imagery Jesus frequently used of the shepherd and the sheep, which, while familiar to his hearers, may be opaque to a modern person who has spent all her life in an urban setting, and may literally never have seen a sheep, and thus not be personally familiar with the characteristics of sheep that made the imagery so useful for Jesus's purpose. An example of the latter can be seen in the changing meaning of language between different biblical translations, so that "we . . . shall not prevent them" (1 Thess. 4:15 KJV) meant something different in 1611 than those words would mean to a current reader of the Bible.[133] This problem can occur in ordinary communication today as well. An uncomfortable situation could occur if a hearer mistakenly assumed that the speaker or writer was using the single word *gift* in English, rather than German, where it means "poison," or Swedish, where it means "married."

This approach also fails to take account of the fact that the message as it is found in the Bible is often already contextualized. Many of the statements are directed to particular persons, situations, occasions, or problems. As such, they may not be applicable, at least in that specific form, to different contexts or audiences. Much of the Bible is indeed narrative in character, and one part of the narrative may be rather different from another part. This accounts for contradictions that appear between different statements drawn from different contexts. Paul's statements in Galatians about the role of works in justification were directed to a very different situation than the one to which James directed his instruction on the subject.

Beyond that, however, this approach goes contrary to the practices actually engaged in by biblical speakers and writers. Paul, for example, framed his message somewhat differently when speaking to Jews and to Gentiles, as seen quite clearly in his address to the Areopagus, in Acts 17. Jesus also drew from different areas of activity when he used illustrations from the realm of commerce and finance (Luke 16:1–9; 7:40–50), as well as from fishing (Matt. 13:47–50), baking (Matt. 13:33), and agriculture (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43); but he always used models that would be familiar to his audience.

There does not seem to be any biblical basis for asserting that the human messenger should not attempt to make the message as clear as possible. There certainly are indications that this alone will not suffice, but from the fact that something is not sufficient, it does not follow that it is not necessary, or at least, desirable. Taken to its logical extreme, this would mean that one should make no attempt to present the message at all, instead relying on a direct work of special manifestation by God to another person.

Actually, it is unlikely that anyone really follows this approach to its logical conclusion. I have never, for example, heard a sermon that was composed entirely of direct quotations from Scripture. Some form of adaptation, explanation, restatement, or application is usually found in any presentation of biblical truth.

While this approach is often found among laypeople, it can also be found, in a somewhat more elaborate fashion, in the thought of very sophisticated theologians. Karl Barth seemed to be advocating this. I once met a Barthian theologian who did not believe in the use of sermon illustrations, since this was a human effort to make spiritual truth acceptable to the unregenerate mind. In a different fashion, Middleton and Walsh suggest that we think of the Bible as being like an unfinished manuscript, of which we then are to write the concluding chapters, but they give little guidance to the believer as to how this is to be done.[134] Kevin Vanhoozer speaks of a theodrama, in which God continues to direct the life of the believer and the church, but seems to leave the direction to God.[135]

In light of the terms that we will apply to the next two methods of contextualization, we might term this the approach of transplanting. A belief or a practice is simply taken from its setting and placed into a new setting, where it is expected to function much as it did in the original context.

Two differing approaches are taken by those who see the beliefs involved in Christianity as important but in need of contemporary statement. (In this section we are no longer considering those persons who do not consider the concepts to be of great importance and who are therefore somewhat indifferent as to what is done with them.) The classification used by William Hordern is helpful. He denominates the two types of approach as those of the translators and the transformers.[136] The translators are theologians who feel a need for reexpressing the message in a more intelligible form, but intend to retain the content, as one does when translating from one language to another. The transformers, however, as the name would indicate, are prepared to make rather serious changes in the content of the message in order to relate it to the modern world. This latter, more radical view will be examined first.

Transformers

Transformers are convinced that the world has undergone a serious change since biblical times. Whether they are thinking of the technological transformations of the past few years or the large changes in basic science of recent centuries, the world of today is simply no longer the world in which

Christianity arose and grew. Moreover, Christianity's beliefs as they stand are so inseparably tied to that ancient worldview that they cannot be maintained independently of it. In other words, the beliefs are the dependent variable, and the broader intellectual milieu, the independent variable. There really is no possibility of retaining the beliefs by merely restating or modernizing them.

Liberals espouse this position. While some preferred the label *modernist*, seeing themselves as updaters of the old beliefs, most liberals do not really regard the essence of Christianity as bound up with the particular doctrines that were held by ancient believers. Consequently, it is not necessary to preserve those doctrines.

The transformers also believe that humanity has radically changed with the passage of time. Whereas at one point the message may have been suitable and helpful to humans in addition to being acceptable to them, they are now so different, their very nature so altered, that the message will fall on unresponsive or even rejecting ears.[137]

Since truth is to a large extent considered relative, humanity today is the judge of what is right and wrong. In no real sense is there the idea of a revelation from God that somehow is the source and criterion of truth. As a result, there is nothing normative outside human experience, nothing that could sit in judgment on human ideas. If there is to be any alteration to produce consistency between traditional Christianity and present-day people's thinking, it is Christian doctrine that must change, not the human. "Relevance" is the key word, rather than "authoritativeness." The sources from which the content of Christianity is drawn will thus be considerably broader than in traditional Christianity. Not merely some sacred documents of truth, but rather the whole sweep of literature, philosophy, and the sciences is to be consulted in informing the Christian belief.

Clear cases of the transformer approach can be found in radical feminist theology, such as that of Mary Daly. She objects to the traditional view of God as a supreme being distinct from the world but controlling and directing it according to his sovereign will. This view has been used oppressively against women. Because this idea of God contradicts her one criterion, women's experience of oppression and liberation, it must be rejected and replaced with the conception of God as a verb rather than a noun. God is the ultimate transcendence in which women participate in the surge of self-affirmation.[138]

Translators

To the translators, the transformers seem not to have reexpressed the message, but to have substituted another message for it. A Christianity without God, or at

least without a transcendent God, and without a qualitatively unique place for Jesus Christ, scarcely seems to them worthy of being called Christianity any longer. The translators share with the transformers the desire to speak a fresh and intelligible word to the modern world. They emphasize much more strongly, however, the need for making certain that it is the authoritative message that is being spoken. One of their aims is to retain the basic content of the message. In this sense, translators are conservatives. Another aim is to put the message in a new form, to speak the language of the hearer. Just as one would not think of preaching a sermon in biblical Greek to someone who does not know the language, so it is crucial to get away from old and unfamiliar expressions and use synonyms drawn from contemporary experience. The translators attempt to say what the Bible would say if it were being written to us in our present situation.[139]

In conservative Christian circles there seems to be a real desire for this type of endeavor. The popularity of paraphrases of the Bible testifies to this perceived need. The Living Bible, the J. B. Phillips version, and even the Cotton Patch version make the events of the Bible seem real. While biblical translators and exegetes frequently decry these paraphrases of the Bible as poor translations (they were, of course, never intended to be exact translations), the laypeople of our day frequently find them helpful and enlightening. The success of paraphrases may suggest that in the past, biblical scholars did a better job of finding out what the Bible meant to the original hearers than of stating what it means for the present day.

The translator maintains that the human is not the measure of what is true. It is God who speaks and human beings who are on trial, not vice versa. If transformation is needed, the human, not the message, must be transformed. While translators aim to make the message intelligible or understandable, they do not expect to make it acceptable on contemporary humans' own grounds. There is a built-in dimension of the message that will always be a cause of offense to the non-Christian. The message must challenge the contemporary mind-set, not simply accommodate to it.[140] Perhaps even more offensive than the belief structures of the Bible are its ethical teachings. These seem to call into question not merely what one believes, but also what one does and even what one is. Whether doctrinal or ethical in nature, a friction will be created by the biblical message, a friction that the theologian and the church should not attempt to remove.

The translator endeavors to distinguish carefully the message from the interpretations and traditions that have grown up about it. The latter sometimes have become as influential as the message itself. Indeed, some persons are

unable to distinguish the interpretation from the message. To them, any attempt to restate the message seems to be a tampering with and a modification or abandonment of the message. They must be mindful, however, that the non-Christian may find a particular interpretation disagreeable, and hence reject the message. There is no virtue, from the translator's standpoint, in attempting to preserve for all time one way of expressing a concept. Particular interpretations are the proper subject of historical theology, what has been believed, rather than of systematic theology, what we are to believe.

Part of the difficulty in contemporizing the message stems from the fact that the biblical revelation came to particular situations. Thus, the message took on a localized form. The problem is to detect what was simply something to be believed and done in that situation, and what is of more universal application. Examples readily come to mind: Is footwashing a practice that the church is to continue, much as it does baptism and the Lord's Supper, or was it simply something appropriate to that specific situation? Is the mode of baptism essential to the act, so that we must determine and attempt to preserve the precise mode used in biblical times? And what of church government? Does the New Testament give the normative form for all time, or are there only suggestions we may feel free to modify as needs require?

An additional complication arises from the fact that the Bible does not address fully the issues connected with certain doctrines. In contemporizing the message, are we to limit ourselves to the explicit statements of Scripture, or may we assume that the biblical writers, had they faced the more complex issues we face, would have said more? An example is the doctrine of the Trinity, which nowhere in Scripture is explicitly and directly addressed. This is not to say that there were no conceptions about the Trinity in biblical times, but that reflection on and formulation of the doctrine had not progressed to such a point as to warrant specific expression in Scripture. Consequently, on this doctrine we do not have a biblical outworking such as Paul gives us on the doctrine of justification, for example.

Another difficulty stems from the necessity of relating the biblical revelation to our more complete current understanding of the general revelation. For example, Paul taught quite clearly that all humans are sinners (he discussed in detail our corrupted, sinful nature and our consequent guilty standing before God). He attributed this in some way to Adam and his sin (Rom. 5:12–21). Today, biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and numerous other disciplines pose new questions about human nature, the soul (including whether it exists), and the basis of personal traits. If we are to relate the biblical revelation to our modern culture, we are now required to deal with questions that

Paul did not address. If he had by inspiration somehow discussed them, his first readers would not have understood him.

Further, some biblical truths are expressed in forms not meaningful to persons living today. Note that we are talking about the form of expression of a truth rather than its essence. The doctrine of God's providence is the teaching that God watches over and guides all that is and happens. To illustrate this truth, the Bible compares God to the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep; it also notes that God protects the birds of the air, feeding them and protecting them from danger. Many modern persons living in urban settings rarely see birds and may never have seen shepherds caring for their sheep. If such persons are to be given a concrete picture of providence, imagery of a very different form will have to be selected. What is the relationship of God's providence to cybernetics or to modern nuclear war, for example?

It is sometimes said that there are two steps we must take if our aim is to preserve the essential content but give a contemporary statement of a biblical teaching: first we must determine what it meant in its original context, and then we must tell what it means today. What is being advocated is a direct translation of meaning from the past situation to the present. This parallels the method of learning a foreign language to which most of us were probably exposed.

In this method, we learn what word in one language is equivalent to what word in another language. Thus, English-speaking persons learning German are taught that *der Stuhl* = the chair. We memorize this equivalent. We look up a German word in the German-English dictionary to find an English equivalent. But the meaning of *der Stuhl* is not "the chair." The real meaning is an object with a seat, a backrest, and four legs. "The chair" is only a particularization of that meaning in one language, English, just as *der Stuhl* is a particularization in German, *la chaise* in French, *la silla* in Spanish, and so on. We are not arguing that the real meaning of *der Stuhl* is "chairness." We are referring to a particular object. We are referring to the meaning that object has in common in all cultures. Nor are we attempting to make a case for conceptual-dynamic (as opposed to verbal) inspiration.[141] The problem with this approach to learning a language is that it can work with only two specific languages at a time. And when in either language a word involved takes on a different meaning, the expression of the truth becomes obsolete.

There is another method of language teaching, one that is usable simultaneously with people who speak many different languages. Here the instructor does not say, "*Der Stuhl* (or *la chaise* or *la silla)* means the chair." She simply points to or touches a chair and says "*der Stuhl*." (The class will usually understand by her inflections and her actions that they are to repeat the word

after her.) She touches the wall and says, "*die Wand*." By demonstration, the words for various actions can also be taught. Abstract concepts, of which theology is largely composed, are more difficult to express, but can also be conveyed, once more basic and concrete words and meanings have been grasped. This method is currently used, not only in classes, where an instructor is present, but also through computerized learning programs, where the student speaks into a computer microphone, and the sound waves are compared to those of a native speaker.

We have brought this second type of language teaching into our discussion of theological methodology in order to make a crucial point. In the process of contemporizing a biblical statement, we must introduce a middle step between determining what it meant in its original context and telling what it means today. Therefore the first type of language teaching is an inadequate metaphor. For we must find the essential meaning underlying all particular expressions of a biblical teaching. Thus, if the biblical teaching is that God is high above the earth, we must discover its permanent thrust, namely, that God is transcendent. He is not limited to a certain spot within nature. Rather, he is beyond nature. He does not have the limited knowledge that we do. His love, mercy, and other attributes go far beyond anything found in human beings. To make this truth meaningful for today will mean giving it a concrete expression, just as was done in biblical times. Note that we are not giving a "dynamic equivalent" of the biblical statement. What we are doing instead is giving a new concrete expression to the same lasting truth that was concretely conveyed in biblical times by terms and images that were common then.

Criteria of Permanence

It will be seen from the foregoing that the really crucial task of theology will be to identify the timeless truths, the essence of the doctrines, and to separate them from the temporal form in which they were expressed, so that a new form may be created. How can we locate and identify this permanent element or essence? In some cases, this is quite simple, for the timeless truth is put in the form of a universal didactic statement. Examples of this are quite numerous in the Psalms. One is found in Psalm 100:5—"For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." In other cases, the timeless truth must be extracted from a narrative passage or from a teaching dealing with a particular problem. There are a number of criteria by which the permanent factors or the essence of the doctrine may be identified: (1) constancy

across cultures, (2) universal setting, (3) a recognized permanent factor as a base, (4) indissoluble link with an experience regarded as essential, and (5) final position within progressive revelation.

Constancy across Cultures

We are aware of the variety of cultures present in our world today, and of the vast span of time separating us from biblical times. We sometimes forget that the biblical period did not consist of a uniform set of situations. The temporal, geographical, linguistic, and cultural settings found within the canonical Scriptures vary widely. Many centuries intervened between the writing of the first books of the Old Testament and the last books of the New. Geographical and cultural situations range from a pastoral setting in ancient Palestine to the urban setting of imperial Rome. There are differences between Hebrew and Greek culture and language, which, although sometimes exaggerated, are nonetheless very real. If, then, there is a constancy of biblical teaching across several settings, we may well be in possession of a genuine cultural constant or the essence of the doctrine. Variations may be thought of as part of the form of the doctrine.

One illustration of constancy across cultures is the principle of sacrificial atonement, and with it the rejection of any type of works-righteousness. We find this principle present in the Old Testament sacrificial system. We also find it in the New Testament teaching regarding the atoning death of Christ. Another example is the centrality of belief in Jesus Christ, which spans any gap between Jew and Gentile. Peter preached it at Pentecost in Jerusalem to Jews from various cultures. Paul declared it in a Gentile setting to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31).

Universal Setting

Another criterion by which to determine the essence of a doctrine is to note what elements are put forth in a universal fashion. Baptism is mentioned not only with reference to the specific situations where it was practiced, but also in the universal setting of the Great Commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20). On several counts we can regard this as a universal setting: (1) Jesus’s statement that *all* authority

had been given to him suggests that, as he transfers his functions and responsibilities to his disciples, he has in mind a task that is presumably to carry on indefinitely. (2) The "all nations" suggests a universality of place and culture (cf. the commission of Acts 1:8—"and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth"). (3) That Jesus would be with them always, even to the end of the age, suggests that this threefold commission is to apply permanently. On the basis of this type of consideration, we may conclude that baptism was not merely an isolated phenomenon, localized at one time and place. It is of permanent applicability.

On the other hand, the footwashing incident in John 13 is not put into a general or universal setting. While Jesus did say, "You also should wash one another's feet" (v. 14), nothing is said about the duration of the practice. While he said, "I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you" (v. 15), there is reason to believe that his example was not necessarily to be extended universally *in this precise form*. He does not indicate that the practice is to be perpetually performed.[142] The underlying reason for his action appears in his statement regarding the servant's not being greater than the master (v. 16). What he was attempting to instill within his disciples was the attitude of a servant: humility and a willingness to put others ahead of oneself. In that culture, washing the feet of others would symbolize such an attitude. But in another culture, some other act might more appropriately convey the same truth. Because we find humility taught elsewhere in Scripture without mention of footwashing (Matt. 20:27; 23:10–12; Phil. 2:3), we conclude that the attitude of humility, not the particular act of footwashing as such, is the permanent component in Christ's teaching.

A Recognized Permanent Factor as a Base

A particular teaching based on a recognized permanent factor may itself be permanent. For example, Jesus bases his teaching about the permanence of marriage on the fact that God made humanity as male and female and pronounced them to be one (Matt. 19:4–6, citing Gen. 2:24). The antecedent is assumed to be a once-for-all occurrence having permanent significance. From this, the permanent nature of the marriage relationship is deduced. Similarly the priesthood of all believers is based on the fact that our great High Priest has once for all "gone through the heavens." We therefore can "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb. 4:14–16). Moreover, because Jesus is a priest forever (Heb. 7:21, 24), it is always the case that all are saved who draw near to God through him (v. 25).

Indissoluble Link with an Experience Regarded as Essential

In Rudolf Bultmann's view, the *Geschichte* of the resurrection (the renewal of hope and openness to the future that we experience) is independent of the *Historie* (the question of whether Jesus actually was raised). Paul, however, asserts that the experience is dependent on Christ's resurrection. He says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). If our experience of the resurrection is real and permanent, the resurrection of Christ must be factual, permanent, and universal. Replacing or changing this doctrine in any way will be accompanied by a similar change in the experience. If we regard this experience as essential, abandonment of what the Bible affirms to be the cause will require finding some other basis to explain the result. Our experience of believing that evil will be overcome is based on belief in a supernatural work of God in connection with the second coming. Fosdick's experience of believing that evil will be overcome is quite different, for he bases it on belief in progress, which requires a certain type of human effort and is accompanied by a corresponding degree of insecurity.[143] His experience, then, is built on a less than solid foundation and will prove impermanent. Whenever, on the other hand, our experience proves to be real and permanent, we can be assured that the biblical doctrine on which it is dependent is permanent as well.

Final Position within Progressive Revelation

A final criterion relates to the matter of progressive revelation. If we understand God to have worked in a process of accomplishing redemption for humanity, revealing himself and his plan gradually, we will weight later developments more heavily than earlier ones. The assumption is that we have transient or anticipative forms in the earlier cases, and that the latest case is the final form. An example would be the sacrificial work of Christ. Whereas the Old Testament called for continual offerings of sacrifice in the court, twice-daily offerings of incense in the outer tent, and an annual sacrifice by the high priest in the inner place, the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:1–10), Christ brought this process to an end by fulfilling it (v. 12). His offering of his own blood was once for all. Furthermore, Jesus often said, "You have heard that it was said . . . , but I say to you that . . ." In these instances Jesus was making a statement of the essence of the doctrine to replace earlier approximations of it.

In some cases, the essence of a doctrine was not explicitly realized within biblical times. For example, Jesus elevated dramatically the status of women in

society. Similarly, Paul granted an unusual status to slaves. Yet the progress of each of these groups was not necessarily limited to that status. So to find the essence of how such persons should be treated, we must look to principles laid down or implied regarding their status, not to accounts of how they actually were treated in biblical times.

We will attempt to get at the basic essence of the message, recognizing that all of the revelation has a point. We are not speaking here of separating the kernel from the husk, as did people like Harnack, and then discarding the husk. Nor are we talking about "discarding the cultural baggage," as some anthropologically oriented interpreters of the Bible say in our time. We are referring to finding the essential spiritual truth on which a given portion of Scripture rests, and then making a contemporary application of it.

It is common to observe (correctly) that very few Christians turn to the genealogies in Scripture for their personal devotions. Yet even these portions must have some significance. An attempt to go directly from "what a genealogy meant" to "what it means" will probably prove frustrating. Instead, we must ask, "What are the underlying truths?" Several possibilities come to mind: (1) all of us have a human heritage from which we derive much of what we are; (2) we have all, through the long process of descent, received our life from God; (3) God is at work providentially in human history, a fact of which we will be acutely aware if we study that history and God's dealings with humans. These truths have meanings for our situations today. Similarly, the Old Testament rules of sanitation speak to us of God's concern for human health and well-being, and the importance of taking steps to preserve that well-being. Pollution control and wise dietary practices would be modern applications of the underlying truth. To some exegetes this will sound like allegorizing. But we are not looking for symbolism, spiritual meanings hidden in literal references. Rather, what we are advocating is that one ask for the real reason why a particular statement was spoken or written.

In doing all of this, we must be careful to recognize that our understanding and interpretation are influenced by our own circumstances in history, lest we mistakenly identify the form in which we state a biblical teaching with its permanent essence. If we fail to recognize this, we will absolutize our form, and be unable to update it when the situation changes. I once heard a Roman Catholic theologian trace the history of the formulation of the doctrine of revelation. He then attempted to describe the permanent essence of the doctrine, and stated very clearly and accurately a twentieth-century neo-orthodox, existentially oriented view of revelation!

It is important to note that finding the abiding essence is not a matter of studying historical theology in order to distill out the lowest common denominator from the various formulations of a doctrine. On the contrary, historical theology points out that all postbiblical formulations are conditional. It is the biblical statements themselves from which we must draw out the essence, and they are the continuing criteria of the validity of that essence.

Objections to This Approach to Contextualizing

In general, objections have recently been raised to this procedure by evangelical theologians. One is that the approach of taking the content from the theological source, in this case, from Scripture, while allowing the form of the theology to be formulated as a response to the questions posed by culture, is inadequate. Culture, according to this view, should do more than merely guide the form; it should actually contribute to the content itself.[144] This, which constitutes a modification of the Wesleyan quadrilateral of authority, assumes that there is not a fixed content to the doctrine. Such an assumption may be true, but we should note that it conflicts with an early position of the church that there is a fixed body of tradition, which came to be referred to as "the faith." Philip Jenkins contends that "the debate over substance and accidents [of the faith] goes back to the very origins of Christianity."[145] This comes into play at a number of points in Scripture. Paul's response to the Galatians in Galatians 1:6–9 is perhaps the clearest instance of this. When discussing the approach of those who advocated the continued keeping of the law as a means to righteousness, he was forthright and direct: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned" (v. 9). Similarly, Jude speaks of "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). In this and numerous other passages, there is no hint of any anticipation that there would be later additions to the content of that faith. It was assumed that there was a finality to what they had received.

The point of this examination of the biblical understanding of the message and the faith is this. It may be that later culture should add to that faith. If so, however, this very concept is different from the understanding in biblical times, and in the earliest centuries of the church. There the church found itself being challenged by elements of the culture of the time, with the contention that the earlier formulation was inadequate. Time and time again, the response was to turn back to the Scriptures to vindicate a particular belief. Even Harvey Cox observes that the early church did not simply adopt or adapt to its culture.

Sometimes it had to challenge it.[146] To be sure, that belief was often expressed using the categories of the prevalent philosophy of the time, but this was treated as a means of elaborating the true meaning of that original message, rather than altering, supplementing, or correcting it. The idea that culture augments Scripture as a source of doctrine may be correct. It is, however, something different than the view that has ordinarily been called Christianity.

A second objection raised by a contemporary evangelical has been to the process of principlizing as a means to contemporizing the faith.[147] One of these objections is that it substitutes something else for the Bible itself, in this case, certain principles that are thought to stand behind the text. As Kevin Vanhoozer puts its, "One significant drawback of principlizing is the assumption that what really matters is the principle *behind* the text, regardless of the genre, a surefire strategy for putting the variety of biblical genres into eclipse. Such a move produces the odd, and undesirable, consequence of making the abstract principles superior to Scripture itself. Principlizing thus turns out to be an arch-form of modern propositionalism."[148]

A further criticism of this approach is that the principles or abiding essential elements tend to be quite general.[149] This, in the very nature of biblical application, is true and necessary. "Murder is wrong" is necessarily more general than God telling Cain that it was wrong to kill Abel; it enables us, not just Cain, to see the relevance of God's word to us.

Critics also contend that the search for timeless truths ignores the conditioned nature of the interpreter, resulting in the interpreter's cultural biases being read into the process. As we have pointed out, this problem is endemic to the human situation, but there are steps that can and should be taken to reduce the conditionedness. It is at this point that a post-postmodern approach differs from the typical postmodern approach.

The objections have themselves several flaws within them. One is that the idea that this substitutes something else for the Scriptures themselves is fallacious. It would apply only if the principle were something foreign to the Scripture. Actually this objection could be raised in some form to every approach that does something other than merely repeat Scripture. Despite its sophistication, the objection seems to assume a literalistic approach to Scripture. That, however, fails to give adequate weight to the variety of statements found within the Scriptures themselves. It appears that for the most part, the biblical statements were addressed to rather particular situations, or, in other words, were in many cases themselves contextualized. One must then ask what it is that is in common among these several statements. Otherwise, one will be simply repeating a particular form of expression, the ultimate in a non-dialogical

approach. It is necessary to ask what the message of Scripture is. Is it merely the words of the text? To be biblical does not mean to limit a meassage entirely to quotations from Scripture. Another way of putting this is to ask, "If Paul were to say this to a different audience (for example, to us here and now), how would he say this?" In addition, although any given principle may be rather general, a contemporary formulation may incorporate a number of principles into a rather complex and quite concrete belief or course of action.

Other alternatives face no lesser difficulties than the principlizing approach. For example, unless some effort is made to identify the basis of the specific statements of Scripture, there is little ground for applying them to situations beyond the original. Thus, many of the commands and prohibitions that occupied the attention of the biblical writers do not apply, since those situations no longer arise. More than that, the Bible provides little guidance for dealing with many current issues, which did not, and in some cases could not, arise in biblical culture. Global warming, euthanasia, abortion, nuclear warfare, even the appropriate use of the internet in evangelism are topics on which the Bible is of little help in terms of specific statements, but it may contain principles that can be applied to some of these issues.

Furthermore, while the criticism that such an approach fails to see the conditioned situation of itself may well apply to some principlizing, this criticism fails to take account of the dialogical approach we have advocated herein, and in particular, the concern enunciated for the theologian to consider his own contextualized situation, and how to minimize the effect of such conditioning. Unfortunately, as we noted earlier, many who proclaim the conditioned and perspectival nature of theological endeavor proceed as if they were themselves immune to the problem.

A further problem with this objection is the narrowness of the assumptions it utilizes. For example, it neglects some vital and potentially helpful philosophical traditions, thus revealing its own unconsciously conditioned status. One underutilized school of philosophy is phenomenology. In this philosophy, especially as practiced by Edmund Husserl, concrete instances of a given phenomenon are "bracketed," or stripped of the particular elements that attach to it, in order to get to the "pure essence" of the concept. An early example of this in the realm of religion was Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*.

Beyond that, however, some objection to abstracting the essence ignores the insights of modern linguistic theory, as seen in the inductive teaching of languages, as we noted earlier. What is being done here is that the learner is being introduced to the essence of what the text means in a given language, rather than the equivalents of words from different languages. The learner is

being taught to think in that language. This should not simply be dismissed as substituting something (behind the text) for the text itself. The question is rather in what sense the text is authoritative for us.

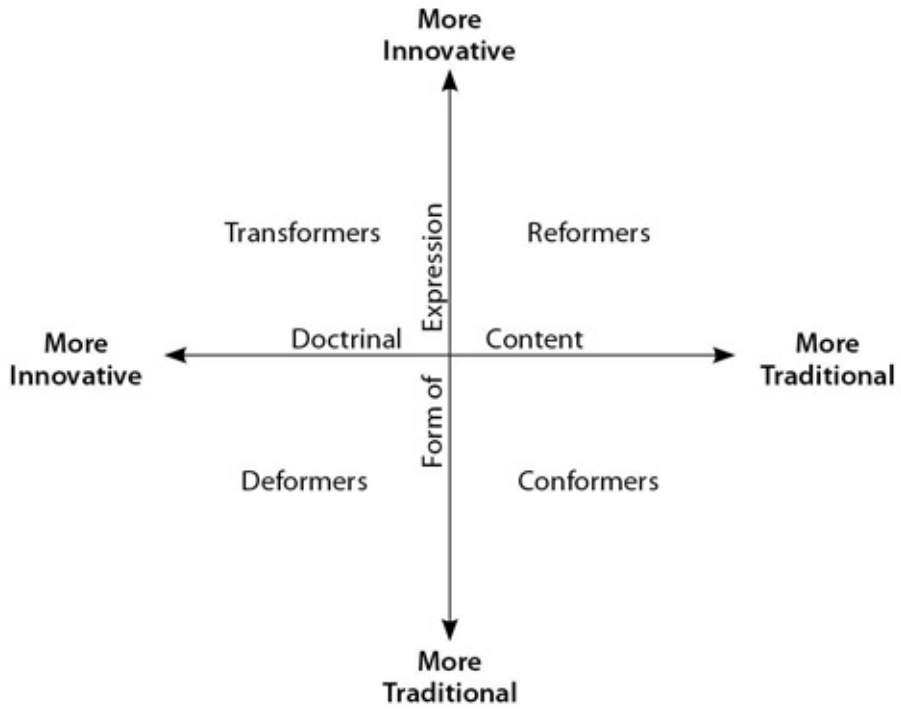
One must ask not merely whether there are problems with this approach, but what the alternative is, and whether such an alternative has fewer difficulties. Here it is significant that in a symposium on moving from text to theology, all of the authors of the alternative approaches acknowledge their own dependence on principles.[150] For example, Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach, a modification of the paradigm approach, runs the risk of not only making something (praxis) superior to the text, on his terms, but also of forming a canon within a canon in deciding which exemplars to elevate to normative status. His own approach, which suggests that theology is a drama, in which the present life and message of the church is to be a continuation of the biblical drama into the present on the basis of improvisation, is exceedingly vague and nebulous.[151]

There are several advantages to the approach we are advocating:

1. It is a widely used approach, in fact referred to by some as a "consensus," especially among those, such as pastors, who are directly ministering the Scriptures to diverse groups.[152]
2. It can be used equally with ethical, spiritual, and theological issues.[153]
3. It can be applied to a wide variety of biblical material.[154]
4. It can be utilized with all three dimensions of contextualizing mentioned in chapter 3 of this work (pp. 66–67).[155]

It may be helpful to directly address the question of the senses in which changes may be made in the enunciation of theology. Some Christians are hesitant to restate theology for a different time and place for fear that they are thereby departing from the faith once delivered. We should distinguish changes in the actual content of our doctrines from changes in the expression thereof. Perhaps we can think of the variation as taking place along two axes: greater or lesser innovation in doctrinal content, and greater or lesser innovation in the form of expression. This would yield four quadrants (although more could be drawn by simply identifying more than two positions on each axis), with a label attached to those occupying each.[156] This would yield a matrix something like this:

FIGURE 2



Those who seek to preserve both a traditional content to the doctrine and a traditional formulation of it would on this scheme be denominated “conformers,” while those who seek to preserve the traditional content but seek new expressions of it would be called “reformers.” Those who are prepared to modify both the content and the forms of expression could be identified as “transformers,” while those who change the doctrines but use traditional expressions would be called “deformers.”[157] From my perspective, the aim of the theologian should be to retain the content of the doctrine, but find new ways of describing it.

One additional dimension should be added to the diagram, a line intersecting the intersection of the other two, in a three-dimensional space. That line could be termed something like “delivery methods,” or even “delivery systems.” Traditionally, theology has been delivered through spoken word (lecture, sermon, etc.) or through printed page (books, journals, periodicals, pamphlets). Today many more possibilities exist, both in these two categories and in new categories. Examples at the time of this writing include radio, television, podcasts, streaming video webcasts, electronic books, and so on. So long as no modification of the essential content results from the use of a given medium, I find no objection to such innovation, and see numerous possibilities for conveying the message.[158]

5

Two Special Issues:
Biblical Criticism and Theological Language

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe the various forms of criticism of biblical documents.
2. Demonstrate how the varying forms of criticism affect our study of Scripture today.
3. Effectively evaluate critical methodologies.
4. Assess the value and importance of meaning in language and how it is operative specifically when one is studying language.
5. Identify and recognize the use of functional analysis when studying language.
6. Inspect four responses to the charge of meaninglessness, specifically relating to personal language, eschatological verification, metaphysical synthesis, and as a means to discernment and commitment.
7. Examine speech-act theory and its implications for religious language.

Chapter Summary

In modern times, biblical study has been challenged by a variety of critical methodologies. This critical study of the Bible began with historical and textual criticism of the authorship of the books of the Bible. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, what came to be categorized as higher criticism developed. Four recent influential types include form criticism, redaction criticism, reader-response criticism, and canonical criticism. Although biblical-critical methods may be useful tools to study of the Bible, if they are based on natural presuppositions instead of supernatural ones, they can result in a misunderstanding of the biblical message. A second concern is how adequately religious language expresses that message. Religious language often transcends sensory experience. To the modern mind, which seeks empirical verification, this kind of language may seem unsatisfactory. It is true that religious language may not be subject to direct verification, but religious language can be cognitively meaningful, through a broad system of synthesis.

Study Questions

- Name and briefly explain the different forms of criticism.
- What is the German phrase used to describe a writer's environment, and what is its significance in the study of the biblical writers?
- What values has the use of redaction criticism produced? Are there negative aspects to redaction criticism?
- What are "language games" and how often do we use them?
- What are the three elements involved in Ferré's general theory of signs?
- What value does the speech-act theory hold for finding meaning in religious language, and how can it be used?

Outline

The Nature of Biblical Criticism [92]

Form Criticism

Background
Axioms of Form Criticism
Values of Form Criticism
Criticism of Form Criticism
Redaction Criticism
Development and Nature of the Discipline
Criticisms of Redaction Criticism
Values of Redaction Criticism
Structural Criticism
Reader-Response Criticism
Canonical Criticism
Guidelines for Evaluating Critical Methods
The Study of Theological Language [107]
Theological Language and Verificational Analysis
Theological Language and Functional Analysis
Answers to the Accusation of Meaninglessness
Theological Language as Personal Language
Theological Language and Eschatological Verification
Theological Language as Metaphysical Synthesis
Theological Language as a Means to Discernment and Commitment
Speech-Act Theory

Having discussed the possibility and method of doing theology and of making it relevant to the here and now, we must now examine two special issues that have been deferred. The first concerns special methods of determining the biblical message. The second is a matter of how language can adequately express that message. These are referred to respectively as biblical criticism and theological language.

For much of the history of the church, the task of theology was considered to be relatively simple. On the one hand, the Bible was considered a straightforward statement of past occurrences and divine pronouncements. The theologian could therefore simply summarize its doctrinal teachings. Further, its statements, although often referring to supernatural and supersensible matters, were considered to have meaning in some sense. Both of these assumptions have been challenged in modern times. The purpose of this chapter is to examine and

respond to these challenges in such a way as to be able to pursue theology's endeavor responsibly.

The Nature of Biblical Criticism

In biblical studies of the past, the various books of the Bible were assumed to have been written by the traditional authors, and at the dates usually ascribed to them. Gradually the approach to the study of the Bible changed, however.[159] The discipline of historiography was developing new methodologies.

It is possible today to distinguish several types of criticism:

1. Textual criticism (which in the past was sometimes referred to as lower criticism) is the attempt to determine the original text of the biblical books, by comparing the various extant manuscripts.
2. Literary-source criticism is the effort to identify the various literary sources on which books of the Bible are based or from which they derive.[160]
3. Form criticism is the endeavor to get behind the written sources of the Bible to the period of oral tradition, and to isolate the oral forms that went into the written sources. Insofar as this attempts to trace the history of the tradition, it is known as tradition criticism.
4. Redaction criticism is a study of the activity of the biblical authors in shaping, modifying, or even creating material for the final product that they wrote.
5. Historical criticism in a sense employs all of the above and, in addition, draws on the data of archaeology and of nonbiblical historical sources. It has as its aim the determination of the authorship and date of the biblical books, and the establishment and interpretation of what actually occurred historically.
6. Comparative-religions criticism assumes that all religions follow certain common patterns of development. It explains the history of the Judeo-Christian faith in terms of these patterns. A common assumption in this endeavor is that religions develop from polytheism to monotheism.
7. Structural criticism attempts to investigate the relationship between the surface structure of the writing and the deeper implicit structures that belong to literature as such. These implicit structures are the formal literary possibilities with which the author must work.

8. Reader-response criticism regards the locus of meaning not as the text, but the reader. The reader creates the meaning, rather than finding it there. Consequently, attention is concentrated on the reader rather than the text.

The view of faith and reason espoused in this book will not permit the question of the relationship between the contents of the Bible and historical reality to be ignored or settled by presumption. We must, then, examine these critical methods carefully. The stance adopted on this matter, and the assumptions that go into one's methodology, will have far-reaching effects on the theological conclusions.

We have chosen to limit ourselves to the New Testament, and particularly the Gospels, and to concentrate on some recent types of criticism, since an adequate examination of all types of criticism of both Testaments would require several volumes. This may serve to illustrate the type of biblical study that lies behind our citation of the biblical texts.

Form Criticism

Form criticism was in many ways a logical outgrowth of source criticism, as biblical scholars sought to get behind the written sources to determine the growth of the tradition in the preliterary or oral period. While the early concentration was on the Synoptic Gospels, it has been extended to other portions of the New Testament, and to the Old Testament as well.

BACKGROUND

By 1900, source critics had reached something of a consensus regarding the Gospels. Mark was believed to have been written first, and Matthew and Luke were thought to have depended in their writing on Mark and another source referred to as "Q" (from the German word *Quelle*, meaning source), believed to have been made up, to a large extent, of Jesus's sayings. In addition, Matthew and Luke were each thought to have relied on an independent source of material unique to the particular Gospel, initially referred to as special Matthew and special Luke.

There was a growing conviction, however, that behind these written documents were oral traditions. Form criticism represented an attempt to get at these oral forms and trace the history of their development. Thus, this methodology has been called *Formgeschichte* or "form-history."[161]

Axioms of Form Criticism

1. Jesus's stories and sayings were first circulated in small, independent units.[162] On careful examination, the chronological and geographical transitions between many of the stories in the Gospels are seen to be vague, and are assumed to be the work of an editor trying to fit the stories together in some sort of coherent form. The Gospels also present some of the same incidents in different settings. This bears out the view that the evangelists had stories before them "like a heap of unstrung pearls" that they strung together in a way that seemed to make good sense.

2. These self-contained units or elements of material found in the Gospels can be classified according to their literary forms.[163] This tenet is based on the observation that the oral traditions and literary works of primitive cultures follow comparatively fixed patterns and occur in a few definite styles. First there are the sayings, which include a variety of subtypes: parables, proverbs of the sort found in wisdom literature (such as Jewish, Greek, or Egyptian), prophetic and apocalyptic utterances, legal prescriptions (including community rules), and "I" words (e.g., "I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it"). There are also the stories, which include several subtypes: (a) "Apothegm stories" provide a historical setting for a saying or pronouncement of Jesus. (b) Miracle stories. (c) Legends resemble the tales or fragments of tales concerning saints or holy men and women in both Christian and non-Christian traditions. (d) Myths are literary devices used to convey a supernatural or transcendent truth in earthly form. They usually present the words or works of a divine being.[164]

3. Once classified, the various units of Gospel material can be stratified, or arranged in terms of their relative ages.[165] From this, the historical value of various types of Gospel units can be determined. The earlier the material, the more historically reliable or authentic it is.

If we know the general processes and patterns that oral traditions follow, it will be possible to ascertain at what stage a certain element is likely to have entered. This is particularly true if we know at what time specific influences were present in the community preserving and transmitting the tradition.

Several conclusions emerge with respect to the Gospel materials. For example, the parables themselves are likelier to go back to Jesus's own sayings than are the explanations and moralizing applications, which probably represent the work of the church serving as interpreter.[166] The miracles can often be stratified as well. Some miracles (healings and exorcisms) are considered typically "Jewish," and therefore from an early period of the church. The so-called nature miracles, such as the stilling of the waters and the cursing of the fig

tree, reflect the Hellenistic interest of a later period. Arising from the earlier period, the former are likelier to be authentic than are the nature miracles.

4. The setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*) of the early church can be determined.[167] A careful study of the Gospels will reveal to us the problems faced by the early church, affecting the form of the tradition. Specific words of Jesus were preserved in order to deal with the needs of the church. In some cases sayings may even have been created and attributed to him for this purpose. What we have therefore in the Gospels is not so much what Jesus said and did, as what the church preached about him (the kerygma). Most critics considered the Gospels more like sales or promotional literature than like carefully controlled research bulletins.

Values of Form Criticism

Form criticism has made several positive contributions to understanding of the Bible.

1. Form criticism has pointed out the vital connection between the incorporation of Jesus's deeds and words into the Gospel accounts and the faith and life of his followers.[168] Perhaps the clearest statement of this was made by John: "These [things] are written that you may believe" (John 20:31). It is also apparent that the Gospel writers were not concerned to dwell on aspects of Jesus's life and sayings that were not significant for faith.

2. The form critics have pointed out that the Gospels are products of the *group* of believers. While this might seem to be a disadvantage, leading to skepticism, the opposite is actually the case.[169] The Gospels reflect the sort of well-balanced judgment that is possible when one's ideas are subjected to the scrutiny of others, rather than merely private interpretation.

3. Form criticism points out that we are able to learn a considerable amount about the early church and the situations it was facing from the material the Gospel writers chose to include or emphasize.[170] Certainly the Holy Spirit inspired the recording of matters he knew would be of importance to the church at later times, but its expression related particularly to situations the church was facing at that time.

4. Form criticism, when its presuppositions are not contrary to the perspectives and positions of the biblical authors, is able to help confirm some of the basic assertions of Scripture. For example, contrary to the expectations of some form critics, what they judge to be earlier elements in the tradition do not show a nonsupernatural Jesus.[171]

Criticism of Form Criticism

There are, however, a number of points at which caution must be exercised, relating to both the presuppositions and the application of form criticism.

1. There seems to be an implicit assumption that the early Christians, or those who preserved the traditions and reduced them to writing, were not too interested in history. On the contrary, these were people to whom historical events were very important.[172] The crucifixion and resurrection, for example, were very significant in Peter's preaching (Acts 2:22–36) and Paul's writing (1 Cor. 15).

Stephen Neill has raised the question of why the first-generation church should have been so uninterested in Jesus's actions and the historical context in which his teachings were set, and the second-generation believers then have had such a strong interest in historical events.[173] Although by this time the number of eyewitnesses was beginning to thin, is it not likely that these eyewitnesses would have passed on information about the setting or framework along with the sayings?

2. Form criticism assumes that the Gospel writers were not persons of historical ability and dependability. But is this assumption justified? There are several problems with the idea that the historical references were created for the occasion. First, it seems to assume that data about the occurrences were not available. This, however, fails to take account of the eyewitnesses who helped form and preserve the tradition.[174] Further, these were men who would place a high value on veracity. James Price observes that in their background, tradition was very important, and that, being Jewish, they were possessed of a conservative mentality. Nor should the tenacity of the Oriental memory be forgotten. Moreover, in view of what these men proved themselves willing to do and suffer for the sake of what they proclaimed as true, the possibility of intentional falsification is not a tenable suggestion.[175] The Scandinavian school has pointed out that the words of a rabbi were regarded as holy, and to be preserved in every detail by the pupil.[176]

3. The effort to stratify the forms tends to break down. The entire system depends on this step, yet there are some forms that defy such analysis, and at other points considerable artificiality enters the endeavor.[177] The classification of some items as Judaic and therefore early, and others as Hellenistic and therefore late, seems to assume that a similarity of style indicates a common origin. But is this not somewhat subjective? One author may write in rather different styles in different situations, or in dealing with different topics. Further, there is a prevailing Semitic character throughout the Synoptic tradition.

Some assumptions operative within form criticism bear further examination, such as the assumption that the miracle stories are largely late additions, and that explicit Christology arose first in the church rather than in the teaching of Christ. These have not yet been sufficiently justified to warrant the extent to which they govern the method.

4. The *Sitz im Leben* is regarded as the explanation for the inclusion or even creation of many items. But comparing the Gospels with the known *Sitz im Leben* of the church at certain points in its early period yields some strange findings. On the one hand, some matters that we would expect to find Jesus addressing are not present, such as speaking in tongues, circumcision, Jewish-Gentile relationships, or food offered to idols. Conversely, some matters are present that we would not expect the church to have included, such as references that cast the leaders of the early church in an unfavorable light. For instance, Mark 8:32–33 records Jesus's rebuke of Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." In Mark 9:19, the disciples' lack of faith and consequent lack of power are recorded.[178] The other possibility is that inclusion and omission were determined not by the *Sitz im Leben*, but by the concern of the writers and of the transmitters of the tradition for a reliable and historically accurate account.

5. Form criticism apparently regards uniqueness as the criterion of authenticity. A saying cannot be considered an authentic word of Jesus if there are parallels in the rabbinical records or the life of the early church. But as F. F. Bruce points out, such a standard of authenticity "would not be countenanced by historical critics working in other fields."[179]

6. Form criticism seems to make little allowance for the possibility of inspiration. Rather, the process was governed by the immanent laws that control the formation of all oral traditions, and the writer was limited to received materials. This theory allows no room for the active direction and guidance by the Holy Spirit in the process of formation of the oral tradition.

7. Finally, the possibility that some of the eyewitnesses may have made written records of what they had just observed is ignored. But what about Matthew the tax collector, for instance? He was familiar with record keeping.[180] Would it not be strange if not one of the twelve disciples had kept a diary of some sort?

While form criticism has useful contributions to make in clarifying the biblical account, these considerations temper our judgment of its ability to evaluate the historicity of the material.

Redaction Criticism

Development and Nature of the Discipline

Redaction criticism is an attempt to move beyond the findings of literary-source, form, and tradition criticism, using the insights gathered from them. It rests on the assumption that the Gospels grew out of a theological concern that each of the Gospel writers had. These authors were, in a real sense, more theologians than historians.

The discipline that came to be known as redaction criticism developed and flowered following World War 2. While some critics had been utilizing some of its insights, a trio of New Testament scholars working independently were the first to give it full application, each concentrating on a different book.[181] Willi Marxsen gave the method the name *Redaktionsgeschichte*.

Redaction critics view the Synoptic writers as self-conscious theologians, including, expanding, compressing, omitting, and even creating material for their account in keeping with their theological purposes. In a sense, this makes the author simply the last stage in the process of the development of the tradition. Thus it has become customary to speak of three *Sitze im Leben:* (1) the original situation in which Jesus spoke and acted, (2) the situation faced by the early church in the conduct of its ministry, and (3) the situation of the Gospel writer in his work and purpose.[182]

A number of redaction critics begin like the more radical form critics, assuming that the evangelists were not greatly concerned about what Jesus said and did. On this basis, the Gospel writers are regarded as saying those things that served their purposes.[183] Such an approach presupposes that the burden of proof lies on the person who assumes the reported words are authentic words of Jesus. The Gospels give us to a large extent the theology of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Faith becomes a faith, not in the Jesus who was, but in the Jesus who was believed in, and in whom the evangelists want us to believe.

William Walker has compiled a list of steps to follow in attempting to distinguish redactional from traditional material.[184] His criteria include both functional and linguistic factors. Those passages may be considered redactional which (1) explain, interpret, or otherwise comment on the accompanying material; (2) provide condensed summaries of some general feature of Jesus's preaching, teaching, healing, or fame; (3) foreshadow or anticipate events to be related later in the Gospel; (4) introduce collections of sayings or narrative material; (5) provide brief indications of time, place, or circumstance. Significant linguistic phenomena occurring often in one Gospel but seldom or never in the others may be a sign of redactional origin. While Walker lays the

burden on proving that a piece of material is redactional rather than traditional, many others would turn the process around.

Criticisms of Redaction Criticism

R. S. Barbour has pointed up well the shortcomings of redaction criticism:[185]

1. Redaction criticism seems to credit the evangelists with a remarkable refinement of theological purpose and method. But it seems unlikely that they had this amount of ingenuity and creativity.

2. The search for the *Sitz im Leben* has a tendency to assume that everything in the Gospels or even the entire New Testament is said with a particular audience and a particular issue in view. While this is true of much of the New Testament, it is highly questionable that all of it should be so regarded.

3. The force of linguistic or stylistic criteria varies greatly. It may indeed be significant that the little word τότε (*tote*), meaning "then," occurs ninety-one times in Matthew, six times in Mark, fourteen in Luke, and ten in John. But to conclude that a certain phrase is redactional because it occurs four times in Luke and Acts but not in the other Gospels is unwarranted.

4. It is sometimes assumed that the theology of the author can be determined from the editorial passages alone. But the traditional material is in many respects just as significant for this purpose, since the editor did choose to include it, after all.

5. Redaction criticism limits itself to the investigation of the evangelists' situation and purpose. It does not raise questions about the historicity of the material recorded in their works. It was the present experience with the risen Lord that motivated the evangelists.[186]

Values of Redaction Criticism

Are there not values in a careful use of redaction criticism, if the criteria of authenticity are made more reasonable and some of the more subjective methodological assumptions are eliminated or restrained? A number of evangelical biblical scholars have argued for a restricted use of redaction criticism, utilizing its techniques, but on the foundation of presuppositions harmonious with the Bible's own claims.

Grant Osborne lists three values of redaction criticism:[187]

1. Sound redaction criticism can help rebut the destructive use of critical tools and substantiate the veracity of the text.

2. The delineating of redactional emphases aids the scholar in determining the particular emphases of the evangelists.
3. Use of the redactional tools helps answer Synoptic problems.

To these I would add a fourth. By observing how a given evangelist adapted and applied the material he had received, we can gain insight into how the message of Christ can be adapted to new situations that we encounter.[188]

The evangelists' activity, then, included interpretation. They were taking Jesus's statements and paraphrasing them, expanding them, condensing them. They were, however, remaining true to Jesus's original teaching. Just as a preacher or writer today may make the same point somewhat differently or vary the application in accordance with the audience, so the evangelists were adapting, but not distorting, the tradition. And the idea that they actually created sayings of Jesus, putting their own words and ideas in his mouth, is to be rejected. What we have, then, is not *ipsissima verba*, but the *ipsissima vox.* We do not have exactly the words that Jesus spoke, but we do have the substance of what he said.[189]

Structural Criticism

A new turn to critical study of the Bible was signaled with the application of the categories and methods of structuralism in literary study to the study of the Bible.

Structuralism began with the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and was applied to anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss. As the name indicates, this structuralism emphasized not the external reference of the categories, but their form or structure. Structuralism, then, represents an attempt at a different approach to biblical studies. Instead of looking for the external referent to which the biblical text directs us, this method looks within, to the structure of the text itself. Daniel Patte points out that the structuralists assume that the methodological presuppositions with which the exegete works must be those of his culture.[190] In this sense structural exegesis is a postmodern endeavor, not assuming that the past can simply be assimilated by scientific historiography. Structural exegesis has a very different understanding of its semantic concern than did the traditional approach. Whereas traditional exegesis looked for a single meaning, that intended by the author, this approach expects to find a plurality of meanings, a variety of kinds of structure:[191]

1. The author's concrete situation, or *Sitz im Leben*. Patte terms these *structures of the enunciation*.
2. The constraints of *cultural structures* or *cultural codes*.
3. The *deep structures*, the constraints that impose themselves on any author or speaker.[192]

While traditional exegesis deals with the first two, structural exegesis primarily concerns itself with the third, the deep structures, of which there are two types. One is narrative structures.[193] There also are mythical structures, which interact with the narrative structures, since myths are frequently expressed in the form of a narrative. The mythical structure as a whole interrelates the various mythemes (or basic mythical units).

Structuralism, however, has proved not to be a basically stable view. It has yielded to successors in two directions: semiotic and reader-response criticism. Structuralism's shortcomings, which have led to what Anthony Thiselton terms the demise of structuralism in biblical studies,[194] include the following:

1. In its early days there was a quasi-objectivism about structuralism. This optimism was based on the use of methodology from the social sciences. There has been a turning from confidence in the human subject, hastened at least in part by post-Freudian psychoanalytic approaches to the text, which heighten the capacity of the self for self-deception.[195]

2. There has been a lack of clarity regarding what would count as verification of the results of this procedure, as well as questions about the usefulness of the results, relative to the amount of effort invested in the structuralist endeavor.[196]

3. There has been so much modification of the earlier objectivist ideas of structure that it is questionable how appropriate the designation of structuralism is for the later work. It has tended to slide into reader-oriented forms of criticism.[197]

Reader-Response Criticism

Structuralism was an approach of mutuality between the text and the reader. Each was expected to transform the other. Since the late 1960s, however, biblical criticism moved increasingly in the direction of the supremacy of the reader over the text. This is particularly true of the complex of approaches known broadly as reader-response criticism. Thus, various types of hermeneutics and critical methodologies have arisen, whether known as poststructuralism, reader-response theories, or deconstruction. For our purposes, we refer herein to reader-response criticism as representative of the group, although there are many other types of

subjective views and many varieties of views that go by this general name. In many ways, it comes very close to deconstruction, as being a sequel to and in some ways a reaction against structuralism.

These various postmodern types of criticism are often thought of as standing in opposition to historical criticism. Actually, many advocates see them as supplements to, rather than successors of, the historical method. Fred Burnett, however, probably speaks correctly when he characterizes historical criticism as seeking an acceptable range of determinate meanings of a text, whereas postmodern reading styles emphasize "indeterminacy, the production of meaning by the reader, and, in many cases, the refusal to appeal to consensual criteria in order to adjudicate between different readings." He contends that historical criticism can accommodate reader-centered approaches and survive, but that both the critic and method will require metamorphosis.[198]

Stanley Fish, one of the most radical and most influential of the reader-response critics, argues vigorously against the idea that meaning is embedded in the text and that the task of the reader is to extract it. Fish, however, introduces what he believes to be an objectifying factor in the presence of the community. An individual reader is not free to find just anything within the text, being constrained by the community of which the reader is a part. He says, "They [meanings] will not be subjective because that point of view will always be social or institutional."[199] Most biblical critics and hermeneuts have not gone as far as Fish in their approach to the text. A number of them have utilized elements of reader-response theory, but have followed more closely the approach of Wolfgang Iser, whom Fish has criticized very sharply.[200] Among these are Susan Wittig,[201] James L. Resseguie,[202] Robert Fowler,[203] Jouette M. Bassler,[204] and Alan Culpepper.[205]

Some New Testament scholars have begun to place more credence in the more radical reader-response criticism of Fish and others such as Jeffrey Stout.[206] One of these is Stephen Fowl. Drawing on the thought of Fish and Stout, he believes that the search for meaning in texts is fundamentally nonproductive, because the idea of what counts for meaning varies tremendously, in part dependent on where one does one's academic work. He agrees with Stout that there is no way of adjudicating between competing conceptions of the meaning of the text, let alone an adequate theory of interpretation.[207] He therefore advocates that those in biblical studies "give up discussions of meaning and adopt Stout's position of dissolving disputes about meaning by explicating these disputes in terms of interpretative interests."[208]

The reader-response critics have commendably called attention to what actually is often the case, that the interests of the reader affect the understanding

of what the text says. Rather than asking how this may be neutralized or reduced, however, these interpreters work from that diversity as a given and shift the very locus of meaning. Several problems emerge, however.

1. The question of meaning should apply not only to the biblical text, but to all texts, including the reader-response critic's discussion of meaning and the biblical text.

2. This approach seems to divide theories of meaning into either formalist or contextual-pragmatic. Yet Wittgenstein, in rejecting the absoluteness of formalism, did not find it necessary to move all the way to a position like that of Fish: "Don't say: 'There *must* be . . .' but *look* and see whether there is."[209] In other words, Fish appears to be guilty of the same prescriptive approach to language that characterized logical positivism.

3. The appeal to communities does not solve the seemingly inherent tendencies to subjectivism. The community is merely a larger version of the individual. Indeed, as Wittgenstein points out, on one level of sophistication the individual must evaluate and choose the community of which to be a part. In fact, not being a citizen of any community of ideas is what makes a philosopher a philosopher.[210]

4. If taken seriously, this philosophy, which Thiselton calls "socio-pragmatic philosophy," could never be more than a narrative philosophy, telling the story of a particular philosophical tradition. In theory, this approach is merely one story among many. Yet, as Christopher Norris has pointed out, there is a rejection of other stories of a more definitive or restrictive nature: "Under cover of its liberal-pluralist credentials, this narrative very neatly closes all exits except the one marked 'James and Dewey.'"[211]

Canonical Criticism

Of some special interest is the approach of Brevard Childs, sometimes referred to as "canonical criticism," although the term is somewhat misleading. Childs's view has been developing over a period of time; nonetheless, because of its uniqueness, his view warrants examination here.

Childs's view is sometimes pictured as a rejection of standard biblical criticism. This is not fully true, for he accepts and utilizes critical methodology. What he rejects is the utility or final authority of the results of criticism. He is concerned about the theological value and purpose of the biblical text, and for this it is the final canonical shape of the Scriptures that is relevant. The critical approach, in his judgment, has performed a valuable role in showing us the problems connected with the text. Precritical and uncritical scholars had largely

ignored these, with the result that there was a rather flat reading of the text, that is, that texts are treated the same regardless of where they are found in the biblical corpus.[212]

For purposes of constructing our theology, it is the final form of the canon that is significant. This is because this is what has been "received and used as authoritative scripture by the community."[213] The final form of the text gives a fuller theological meaning than would be found by examining simply the view found in any of its sources, such as the traditional J, E, D, and P.[214] It is apparent that Childs's hermeneutic has as its purpose "applying [the historical past] to the modern religious context."[215] While recognizing that the critical reconstruction of the text may reveal that its final form results from other factors than concern for the theological significance, he does not think this to be a significant objection to his theory. For one thing, the problem can sometimes be resolved by further historical critical study.[216] Another response is to acknowledge that the final canonical form may not always have been a result of a conscious intention by the author, but rather of unintentional factors, or what he terms "canonical intentionality."[217]

As might be expected, Childs's approach has not met with widespread acceptance among his Old Testament colleagues. It is of value, however, for pointing out that the basic purpose of Scripture was the life of the church, and that standard critical study in itself leaves the Scripture a document of interest primarily to scholars somewhat abstracted from life. While his analysis of the validity of critical scholars is considerably more positive than what I would accord to it, there is much in his primary emphasis that parallels the concerns I have expressed herein.

Guidelines for Evaluating Critical Methods

1. We need to be on guard against assumptions that are antisupernatural in import. For example, if the miraculous (particularly, the resurrection of Jesus) is considered unhistorical because it contradicts our uniform experience of today, we ought to be aware that something such as Bultmann's "closed continuum," according to which all events are bound in a causal network, is present.

2. We need to detect the presence of circular reasoning. Critics who use stories in the Gospels to help them reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church, and then use this *Sitz im Leben* to explain the origin of these same stories, are guilty of this.[218]

3. We should be watchful for unwarranted inferences. A similarity of thought is sometimes understood to indicate a common origin or a causal connection.

Identifying the circumstances in which an idea was taught is sometimes thought to exclude the possibility of its having been taught in other circumstances. It is supposed that a saying that expresses a belief of the church was never spoken by Jesus. There is a suppressed premise here, namely, "If something is found in the teaching of the church (or Judaism), it could not have been part of Jesus's teaching as well." Uniqueness (what Perrin calls "dissimilarity"[219] and Reginald Fuller calls "distinctiveness"[220]) is regarded as the criterion of authenticity. But this assumption, when laid bare in this fashion, begins to look rather arbitrary and even improbable.

4. We need to be aware of arbitrariness and subjectivity. For example, redaction critics often attach a considerable degree of conclusiveness to their reconstructions of the *Sitz im Leben*, to their explanations of causes and origins. Yet these conclusions really cannot be verified or checked by an independent means.

5. We should be alert to the presence of assumptions regarding an antithetical relationship between faith and reason. For example, Perrin speaks of the view that the early Christian preaching was interested in historical reminiscence and the "opposite view" that it was theologically motivated.[221] This seems to suggest that there is a conflict between theological motivation (faith) and historical interest and concern. This apparent conflict is reflected in the rather sharp distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. We should be aware, however, that it is only an assumption.

6. We need to note that in all these matters, we are dealing with probability rather than certainty, and that where probabilities build on one another, there is a cumulative effect on the conclusion. For example, if we work with a premise that has a probability of 75 percent, then the probability of the conclusion is 75 percent. If, however, we work with two such premises, the probability of the final conclusion is only 56 percent; three, 42 percent; four, 32 percent. In much redaction criticism there is a whole series of such premises, each depending on the preceding one, and with a correspondingly declining probability.

Biblical criticism need not be negative in its results. When the method is formulated using assumptions that are open to the possibility of the supernatural and of the authenticity of the materials, and criteria are applied that are not more severe than those used in other areas of historical inquiry, very positive results occur. Thus Joachim Jeremias says that the language and style of the Synoptic Gospels show "so much faithfulness and such respect towards the tradition of the sayings of Jesus that we are justified in drawing up the following principle of method: In the Synoptic tradition it is the inauthenticity, and not the authenticity, of the sayings of Jesus that must be demonstrated."[222] Biblical criticism, then, if

carefully used and based on assumptions that are consistent with the full authority of the Bible, can be a helpful means of shedding further light on the meaning of Scripture. And although the Bible need not satisfy biblical criticism's criteria of authenticity to be accepted as dependable, when it does satisfy those standards, we have additional confirmation of its reliability.

The Study of Theological Language

The church has always been concerned about its language, since it is engaged in the activity of communicating and believes that what it has to communicate is of vital importance. Thus, Augustine and even earlier theologians gave serious attention to the nature and function of theological language.[223] In the twentieth century, however, this concern took on a new dimension of urgency, as philosophy, which has so often been a conversational partner with theology, began to give primary and in some cases virtually exclusive attention to the analysis of language.

Theological Language and Verificational Analysis

Early in the twentieth century, the movement known as logical positivism focused on the meaning of meaning. Logical positivists observed that there are two basic types of cognitive propositions. One type is a priori, analytic statements, such as two plus two equals four, in which the predicate is contained, by definition, within the subject of the sentence. Such mathematical-type statements are necessarily true, but they are uninformative regarding the empirical world.[224]

The other type is synthetic statements, in which there is something in the predicate that was not contained within the subject. Whereas "all bachelors are unmarried" is an example of the first type of statement, "all bachelors are tall" would be an example of the latter type. This is not a tautology, for nothing about height is contained inherently within the definition of "bachelor." The truth or falsity of such a statement can be determined only by an examination of the real world.

What is it that makes a statement meaningful? Analytic, a priori statements are meaningful because they define terms. Synthetic, a posteriori (scientific-type) statements, according to logical positivism, are meaningful because there is a set of sense data that will verify (or falsify) them.[225] It is not necessary on these grounds that a statement be true in order to be meaningful, as long as the

statement is in principle verifiable. On the other hand, any statement that purports to be synthetic (i.e., factually informative), but is not at least in principle verifiable by sense data, must be discarded as literally non-sense.[226]

Although they bear the form of valid synthetic statements, many theological propositions are meaningless, on these criteria. Take, for example, the statement "God is a loving Father" or "God loves us as a father loves his children." What is the meaning of this? What counts for the truth of this statement? And, equally important, what counts against it? Frequently, rather strained explanations are offered for why seemingly conflicting circumstances do not count against God's love. With such an approach, "God is a loving Father" is a non-sense statement. It really has no meaning at all.[227]

Logical positivism recognizes a use of language other than the representative, namely, the expressive or emotive use. Here language does not actually describe or denote anything, but rather expresses the feelings of the speaker or writer. Such propositions are more like "Wow!" "Hurray!" "Ouch!" and similar expressions. They are not susceptible to verification and falsification. Most of the history of philosophy has apparently been a highly sophisticated series of grunts and groans.[228]

What is true of philosophy's utterances is also true of theology's. Since they do not meet the criteria required of all representative use of language, they must be expressive. Theologians may think they are telling us something about how things are, but in reality they are merely giving vent to their feelings.

Many philosophers grew uneasy regarding logical positivism, however. It virtually discarded many traditional uses of language despite the fact that those who employed ethical and religious language found them serviceable and highly meaningful. Another very basic and serious problem concerned the status of the verifiability principle. This seemed not to be an analytic statement, but also no empirical considerations seem to count for or against it. On its own terms, this central principle appeared to be meaningless. Although some logical positivists tried to defend the principle, other philosophers concluded that logical positivism in its original form had to be abandoned or greatly modified.

Theological Language and Functional Analysis

Analytical philosophy then moved to another stage. Whereas the earlier form had attempted to *prescribe* how language must be used, "functional analysis," as Frederick Ferré termed it, attempted instead to *describe* how language actually is used.[229] Philosophers focusing on functional analysis ask, "How are these statements to be verified, or tested, or justified? What are their use and function,

what jobs do they do?" Wittgenstein in his later work was a pioneer in this area. In his *Philosophical Investigations* he spoke of various "language games." He listed such varied uses of language as giving orders, reporting an event, making up and telling a joke, cursing, praying.[230] He used the term "language game" to point up the fact that language is an activity. A major role of philosophy, then, is to examine the way language actually functions in context. And beyond that, the philosopher attempts to uncover misuses of language when they occur.[231]

To the functional analyst it is apparent that the different language games each have their own rules. Problems arise either when these rules are violated, or when one slips from one form of language game into another without realizing it, or tries to apply the rules of one game to another, just as players in one sport cannot play by the rules of another. The functional analyst says treating theological language about divine creation as a statement about the empirical origin of the universe is a switch from one language game to another, from theological language to empirical language. Mixing the uses of language in one game with those of another is called a category transgression. It leads to confusion and constitutes a misuse of language.[232]

Instead of telling theologians and practicing Christians what their language is and does, the later analytical philosophers have allowed the theologians to explain religious language. The philosopher's task is to assess the appropriateness of the explanation, and to judge whether the language is being used correctly or incorrectly, that is, to look for possible category transgressions.

Answers to the Accusation of Meaninglessness

Theological Language as Personal Language

Theologians have responded in several ways to this challenge to clarify their language usage. William Hordern, after reviewing the various kinds of language games, notes that religious and theological language follows the pattern of personal language.[233] It is not merely that language about God is like language about human persons. Rather, there is *overlap* between our language about God and our language about other persons. When Hordern comes to apply this model of the personal-language game to his understanding of the nature and function of theological language, he turns to revelation. Just as we know persons only as they reveal themselves, so the personal God is known only through his revelation of himself. Certain problems attach to Hordern's approach, however. The analogy of language about God and about human persons breaks down,

because we have sensory experience of the latter, but not of the former. Just how our language derives from the relationship with God is unclear.

Theological Language as Eschatological Verification

John Hick accepted the verifiability principle, and sought to retain meaningfulness for the language of Christianity, introducing the concept of "eschatological verification." Although we do not currently have verification of our theological propositions, we will one day.[234] Several problems also attach to this approach. Just what does it mean to speak of this eschatological occurrence as empirical? In what way will we have sensory experience of God in the future, if we do not now? As creative as this and the previous view are, two other approaches within the functional analysis model offer more promise.

Theological Language as Metaphysical Synthesis

Frederick Ferré has insisted that Christianity is cognitive, that is, that the truth status of its tenets is determinable. But we must still ask what this means. If theological discourse refers to reality, to some state of affairs, to facts of some kind, just how does it do so? What is the nature of those facts? It is not dealing with merely natural facts, which can be stated in simple concrete sentences, such as that the specific gravity of lead is greater than the specific gravity of water. Rather, the reference of theology's symbols is to metaphysical facts of some kind. The nature of metaphysics is *conceptual synthesis*.[235] And a metaphysical fact, then, is a concept that plays a key role within that system.

A further word of explanation is in order. A metaphysic is a worldview, a scheme that ties together the varied experiences we have. It is to the whole of reality what the rules and strategies of a sport are to the sometimes confusing and even seemingly contradictory events that go on in a game.

Consciously or unconsciously, in crude or sophisticated fashion, everyone has some sort of worldview. And Ferré maintains that, despite widespread denials, it is possible and necessary not only to formulate such syntheses, but also to evaluate them, grading some as preferable to others. He suggests criteria for evaluating the way in which a synthesis relates to the facts that it synthesizes.

Ferré develops a general theory of signs (in this case, the units of language that compose the synthesis), following and at points adapting the scheme of Charles W. Morris.[236] Three elements are involved. First, there is the relationship between the sign and its referent, or *semantics*. While this term has come in popular usage to designate virtually the whole of the theory of signs, it is helpful to retain the narrower meaning. Second, there is the relationship

among the several signs in the system, or *syntactics.* Third, there is the relationship between the sign and the interpreter, or, as Ferré terms it, *interpretics*.[237] (Morris had used the term *pragmatics*, which I find preferable.[238]) In dealing with Christian theology as a metaphysical conceptual synthesis, Ferré is referring to its semantic dimension. When one evaluates its semantic sufficiency, however, the other two dimensions enter in as well.

Ferré speaks of "grading" metaphysical systems.[239] Older metaphysical endeavors frequently sought to prove the truth of their system and refute the competitors. Ferré sees the task as less clear-cut, the preferences not so categorical. Every metaphysical system with any cogency and appeal has some points of strength, and all have weaknesses. The question is which has more strengths and fewer weaknesses than the others.

Ferré suggests two classes of criteria, with two criteria in each class. There are the classes of internal criteria and external criteria.[240] The former relate particularly to the syntactic dimension, the relationships among the signs, whereas the latter pertain to the more strictly semantic. The first internal criterion is *consistency*, the absence of logical contradiction among the symbols in the system. Consistency is, as Ferré points out, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for acceptance of a metaphysical system. That is, a system cannot be considered true if it is not consistent, but it may be false even if it is.

The second internal criterion is *coherence.* It is not sufficient for the symbols in a system merely to be consistent. Absence of contradiction may be due to the fact that the statements are unrelated. For example, consider the following three statements: the price of bananas at the supermarket just went up; the wind is blowing from the west this morning; my dog is sleeping in the corner of the room. All three statements may be true. Certainly there is no logical inconsistency among them. But there also is no coherence among them. They are simply three unrelated, isolated statements. Coherence means a genuine unity, an interrelatedness among the components of a system.

If Christianity is to be judged empirically meaningful, it must meet the external criteria as well. The first external criterion is *applicability*. The synthesis "must be capable of illuminating some experience naturally and without distortion." For example, inclusion (within one's worldview) of an understanding of the human as a psychosomatic unity must reflect what one actually finds happening to one's emotions when tired, hungry, or ill. The second external criterion is *adequacy.* Since a worldview is intended to be a conceptual *synthesis*, it must in theory be capable of accounting for *all* possible experience. A naturalist may have a very consistent theory of the nature of the human being, but find that theory strained by becoming a parent for the first time.

If these criteria are fulfilled by a particular worldview, then may we not claim truth for the system? This is not a mere theoretical model we are talking about. The content of the metaphysical synthesis found in the system of Christian theology offers the promise of forgiveness, purpose, guidance, and much else for all of human life. We are not advocating pragmatism, the philosophy that something is true because it is workable. But it is reasonable to expect that if something is true, it will be practical.

We need finally to note that the nature of the description of reality found in a conceptual synthesis is not quite the same as that present within scientific statements or protocol empirical statements such as "the book is on the chair." The relationship between language and referent will not always be obvious.[241] Because the meaning of a "fact" is related to the system of interpretation within which it is placed, it will not always be possible to establish the meaning of each symbol individually in isolation from the system, or to verify each proposition independently. But to the extent that the whole is shown to be meaningful and each proposition coheres with the whole, each of the parts is also meaningful.[242]

In recent years, one criticism raised against this type of approach is that it assumes certain universally accepted, or objective, criteria. Rather, say the objectors, it is not possible to find any neutral, *non*perspective point from which to make such an assessment. While space does not permit a complete argument here, we would contend that in practice, even on a prereflective level, these sorts of criteria are rather widely employed by those who care about truth issues. They may be similar to what David Ray Griffin terms "hard-core commonsense notions."[243] Our contention here, then, is that the language of Christian theology is cognitively meaningful, for its truth status is that of a metaphysical system. Its truthfulness can be tested by the application of the several types of criteria.

Theological Language as a Means to Discernment and Commitment

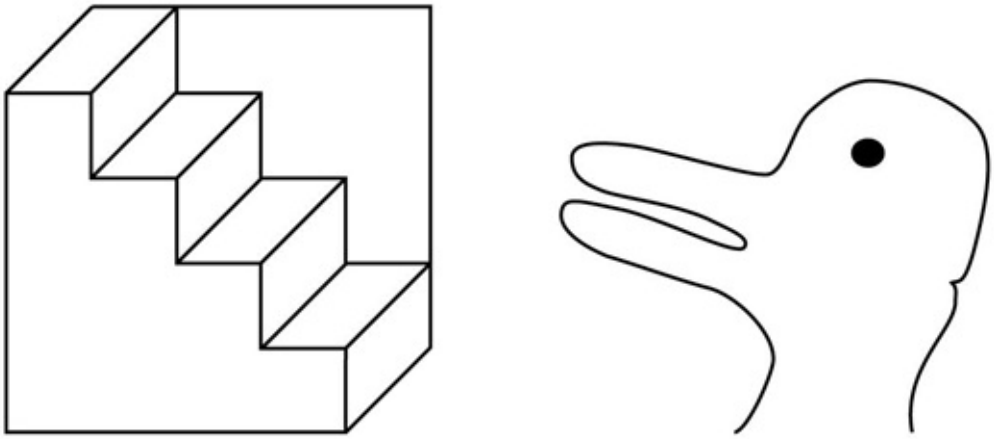
Ferré has made the whole class of religious propositions respectable by observing that they are cognitively meaningful as signs of a metaphysical synthesis. But the problem of the meaning of individual religious propositions remains. How can we assess the applicability and adequacy of the components in the system unless we know what these components are saying?

Ian Ramsey notes that religious language is not a set of labels for a group of hard, objective facts whose complete meaning can be immediately perceived by passive observers.[244] There are, in fact, two levels of meaning. One is the empirical reference that lies on the surface and is quickly understood. The other

is a deeper meaning that is also objectively there, but must be drawn out. Ramsey gives numerous examples of what he calls “the penny dropping,” “the light dawning,” or “the ice breaking.”[245] He is referring to situations in which a second level of meaning becomes apparent as one’s perspective changes.

In figure 3, the drawing on the left may appear to be either a stairway viewed from above or from below. The drawing on the right may appear to be either a duck or a rabbit.[246] In each case, both are present, but only one is seen at a time. Discernment must occur for each meaning to be seen. Similarly, one may see only the individual pieces of a mosaic or see the overall pattern.

FIGURE 3



Religious language is much the same. There are two perspectives, two levels of meaning. Language that has an obvious empirical referent also signifies an objective situation, which is not so apparent. An example is the new birth. The word “birth,” which is immediately understood on the sensory level, is qualified or modified in logically odd ways. Thus it is shown to signify something more than the mere literal meaning of the symbol. If written language successfully accomplishes the author’s purposes, it will evoke a discernment of this “something more.” Yet the something more was always objectively present. Religious language will commit whatever category transgressions are necessary to convey the meaning that cannot simply be unpacked by an exegesis of the literal meaning. Thus, in referring to the Trinity, one may find it helpful to utilize faulty grammar, such as “He are three,” and “They is one.” Or one may use riddles, puns, analogies, illustrations, all of which will “nibble at the edges,” as it were, of the deeper, fuller meaning, in the hope that discernment will occur. One additional element should be added to Ramsey’s analysis. The discernment of

which he speaks should be attributed to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Note that the goal of religious language is not merely discernment. It is also intended to elicit commitment.[247]

To summarize: we have rejected the narrow criterion of meaningfulness proposed by logical positivism. We have, however, maintained that although knowledge is not gained exclusively through sense experience (there is such a thing as direct revelation from God to human beings), its meaning is grasped on an empirical basis. Meaning is found in symbols that on the surface refer to sense experiences. But the meaning of theological language goes beyond anything literal in those symbols. With Ramsey, I hold that while that meaning is objectively present in the symbols, it must be discerned. It cannot be extracted by a strictly scientific method. And yet, as Ferré has shown, the propositions of religious language are cognitively meaningful, not as isolated statements of fact concerning sense experience, but as parts of a broad metaphysical synthesis.

Speech-Act Theory

The third stage of the twentieth-century philosophical treatment of the meaning of language, speech-act theory, owes its genesis to John Austin. He began by questioning the long-standing assumption in philosophy that to say something, at least in all cases worth considering, is to *state* something.[248] Consequently, Austin sought to examine certain forms of speech that did not fit into the categories developed by analytical philosophers up to this point. He concluded that utterances are to be thought of as actions and analyzed in terms of what type of acts they are.

John Searle has taken this analysis even further. He declares: “The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the word, symbol or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech-act.”[249] Austin classified speech-acts into three groups:

1. Locutionary: “roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense.”
2. Illocutionary: “acts such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, etc., i.e., utterances which have a certain (conventional) force.”
3. Perlocutionary: “what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring.”[250]

Searle modified this listing somewhat. His grouping of types of speech-acts is as follows:

1. Utterance acts: uttering words
2. Propositional acts: referring, predicating
3. Illocutionary acts: stating, questioning, commanding, promising, and the like[251]

In these schemes, as well as those devised by Recanati and others, the emphasis is on what the sounds spoken or written are intended to accomplish. Searle also distinguished types of utterances in terms of their direction of fit of words and world. Some utterances, such as assertions, have as their aim to get the words to fit the world. Others, such as promises and commands, aim to get the world to fit the words.[252] Something similar was also involved in Austin's distinction between the meaning and the force of an utterance.

This type of classification leads to broader grounds for assessment of a speech-act than simply true or false. Austin uses the idea of felicitous or infelicitous. There are, in his judgment, six rules that govern speech-acts, and an utterance may "misfire" or "go wrong" by failing to satisfy any one or more of these rules. For example, "a certain accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect" must exist, and the procedure must be used with appropriate persons and in appropriate circumstances. To fail at any of these points is an infelicity. One may thus speak of "happy" or "unhappy" outcomes of utterances.[253]

Does this view give promise of helpfulness in dealing with religious language? A number of theologians and hermeneuts have found it useful, including adapting its use to written language, as found in the Bible. Perhaps the most extensive use thus far is by James McClendon and James Smith. They lay down certain principles: (1) The starting point is what members of religious communities say, especially to one another. (2) In determining the meaning of these speech-acts, the crucial evidence is the community's testimony, as embodied in its practices, especially linguistic. (3) The categories of assessment used are dictated by the kind of utterances these are within a given community. (4) These standards appropriate in one community are not necessarily appropriate in another.[254]

McClendon and Smith are then faced with the problem of whether there are any criteria that can be utilized to evaluate statements across religious communities, thus avoiding the possibility of mere relativism. They hold that all reasoning is done from a convictional position. After rejecting the traditional

types of proof, they suggest that while an apologetic cannot be offered for one's convictions, there is a process of justification of convictions, and certain loci of justification can be identified. They illustrate the process with respect to one of these loci, truth. While it is only contingent that humans agree as much as they do, these general agreements, such as being dissatisfied with overt inconsistency, at least as a practical matter, do become grounds for justification, even if not necessary grounds.[255]

Anthony Thiselton has especially applied speech-act theory to the practice of hermeneutics. He picks up on the idea of the illocutionary function of language, and relates it particularly to the role of promise in shaping the world to fit the word. He notes of such uses of language directives, thanksgiving, and other performative utterances, that they leave neither the speaker nor the hearer uninvolved and unchanged. He believes that the use of speech-act theory enables us to unlock the real meaning of a number of otherwise puzzling passages of Scripture.[256]

Finally, we should examine briefly Kevin Vanhoozer's treatment of speech-act theory. Modifying Searle's categories, he analyzes speech-acts in terms of four factors:

1. Proposition—Fact—Issue
2. Purpose—Function—Intention
3. Presence—Form—Incarnation
4. Power—Force—Illocution

This means the following:

1. Every text is about something, proposes something for consideration.
2. There is usually an intention to communicate something.
3. An author then seeks to express this in a form appropriate to his or her purpose.
4. The power or force of the text depends on these three preceding factors.[257]

A number of theological implications follow from these considerations. God reveals himself in the Bible through inscribed discourse acts, and one should not make a priori judgments about what sort of genres he must or did use. Scripture does many things, so that its authority is multifaceted. This means that we need not restrict the idea conveyed by the word "inerrancy" to merely assertive speech-acts. Making "inerrancy" a subset of the word "infallible," which

Vanhoozer believes historically meant what “inerrancy” now does, he argues for the infallibility of all divine speech-acts, meaning that whatever their purpose, they do not fail to achieve that. This does not mean that the response is always positive, but that the communication is felicitous, or meets the conditions for a proper speech-act, whatever the illocution. In this case, the infallibility of illocutionary speech-acts depends on something being true.[258]

Speech-act theory can be of valuable assistance to us, by reminding us of the variety of genres in the Bible, their differing purposes, and the several elements that go into communication. It is most useful within a community of those who share a common religious experience. To be effective more broadly, however, it requires something of the discernment analysis that Ramsey elucidated. To the extent that it does not fall into the trap of making all meaning relative to the conventions of a particular community, it can be compatible with an evangelical understanding of the nature of theology and of biblical authority, and is useful in understanding the varied purposes of revelation.

It is important to note, however, that while speech-act theory is helpful in understanding the varied uses of religious language, it cannot alone resolve the most basic issue of religious language, as stated at the beginning of this chapter. That problem is still the question posed by logical positivists and others: What is the cognitive status of purportedly assertive propositions that deal with claimed supersensible realities? Speech-act theory’s role is more hermeneutical than epistemological.

We have examined the various critical methodologies used to gain greater understanding of the biblical message. Many of them rely upon presuppositions that immediately distort the biblical world-and-life view. When restricted from such conceptions and judiciously applied, however, critical methodology can be useful to the theologian. We have also seen that contrary to more naturalistically minded critics, theological language is a meaningful variety of communication.

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KNOWING GOD

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6
God's Universal Revelation

Chapter Objectives

After completing the reading of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the nature of revelation and distinguish general from special revelation.
2. Identify the loci of general revelation.
3. Comprehend the full significance and importance of general revelation.
4. Appreciate the significance of personal human responsibility in response to general revelation outside God's special revelation.
5. Develop an understanding of the implications of general revelation.

Chapter Summary

The study of God's revelation of himself to humanity has been classified in two ways: general revelation and special revelation. The general revelation of God has been found in three areas: nature, history, and humanity. Theologians concerned with the comprehensiveness of general revelation have developed what is known as natural theology. This theology studies the way in which God's existence is known outside the biblical source, specifically through the use of reason. Some theologians, such as Karl Barth, reject both general revelation and natural theology. The view presented here is that there is general

revelation without natural theology, but the effect of sin prevents the unbeliever from coming to the knowledge of God. The salvation of the individual through God's general revelation can only be measured by faith.

Study Questions

- In what areas of humanity do we find God's general revelation?
- Explain the apostle Paul's understanding of general revelation in Romans 1 and 2.
- Describe and evaluate the assumptions of natural theology.
- What makes natural theology ineffective in bringing the Christian message to the unbeliever?
- Identify and explain Karl Barth's understanding of general revelation.
- How is humanity involved in the general revelation of God outside special revelation?

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The Nature of Revelation

Because humans are finite and God is infinite, if they are to know God, that knowledge must come about by God taking the initiative to make himself known. There are two basic classifications of revelation. General revelation is God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places. Special revelation involves God's particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations that are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings.

A closer examination of the definition of general revelation discloses that it refers to God's self-manifestation through nature, history, and the inner being of the human person. It is general in two senses: its universal availability (it is accessible to all persons at all times) and the content of the message (it is less particularized and detailed than special revelation). Traditionally, a number of questions have been raised. One concerns the genuineness of the revelation. Is it really there? If it exists, what can be made of it? Can one construct a "natural theology," a knowledge of God from nature? Could someone who has not been exposed to special revelation be savingly related to God through the general revelation alone?

In the twenty-first century, general revelation is especially significant, for a number of reasons. One is the religious pluralism of our world. Each of these religions has its own authoritative source, often written, to which it appeals. If there is to be conversation between different religions, it must begin in some more common source of experience. Further, in countries such as the United States that have a separation of the state from any official religion, matters of public policy cannot be settled by appeal to considerations unique to any single religion.

The rise of more inclusive views of salvation, even among evangelicals, is based on a belief in the efficacy of general revelation for a salvific relationship to God. It is important that this question be explored in greater depth.

Christianity is especially growing in areas outside of Western Europe and English-speaking North America. In many of these cultures, nature is held in high regard. Thus, we may expect an increased interest in a theology of the created order.

Finally, a growing awareness of the ecological problems of our world focuses attention on the function of nature in communicating God. For if the world about us is polluted and distorted, its witness to the Creator and its function of sustaining human life are seriously impaired.

The Loci of General Revelation

The traditional loci of general revelation are three: nature, history, and the constitution of the human being. Scripture itself proposes that there is a knowledge of God available through the created physical order. The psalmist says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1 NRSV). And Paul says, “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20 RSV). These and numerous other passages, such as the “nature psalms,” suggest that God has left evidence of himself in the world he has created. General revelation is most frequently thought of in connection with the creation’s amazing and impressive character, pointing to a very powerful and wise person, capable of designing and producing intricate variety and beauty. The person who views the beauty of a sunset and the biology student dissecting a complex organism are exposed to indications of God’s greatness.

The second locus of general revelation is history. Scripture indicates in numerous places that God is moving the course of history, controlling the destinies of nations (Job 12:23; Pss. 47:7–8; 66:7; Isa. 10:5–13; Dan. 2:21; Acts 17:26). If God is at work in the world and is moving toward certain goals, it should be possible to detect the trend of his work in events that occur as part of history. The evidence here is less impressive than that of nature. For one thing, history is less accessible than is nature. One must consult the historical record. One either will be dependent on secondhand materials, the records and reports of others, or will have to work from one’s own experience of history, perhaps too limited a segment to permit detection of the overall pattern or trend.[259]

An example often cited of God’s revelation in history is the preservation of the people of Israel. This small nation has survived over many centuries within a basically hostile environment, often in the face of severe opposition. Anyone who investigates the historical records will find a remarkable pattern. This, however, requires access to the facts of history. More general is God’s constant provision through the ordinary courses of nature, producing “rain from heaven and crops in their seasons,” as Paul puts it in Acts 14:15–17.

The third locus of general revelation is God’s highest earthly creation, the human. Some think of God’s general revelation as seen in the physical structure and mental capacities of humans. It is, however, in the moral and spiritual qualities of humankind that God’s character is best perceived. Paul speaks of a law written on the hearts of persons who do not have the specially revealed law (Rom. 2:11–16).

Humans make moral judgments, that is, judgments of what is right and wrong. This involves something more than our personal likes and dislikes, and something more than mere expediency. We often feel that we ought to do something, whether advantageous to us or not, and that others have a right to do something that we may not personally like. Immanuel Kant asserted in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the moral imperative requires the postulate of a life hereafter and of a divine guarantor of values. Others have also called attention to the evidential value of the moral impulse that characterizes human beings.[260] These theologians and philosophers do not contend that all persons hold to a given moral code but that all have a moral impulse or moral consciousness.

General revelation is also found in humanity's religious nature. In all cultures, at all times and places, humans have believed in the existence of a higher reality than themselves, and even of something higher than the human race collectively. While the exact nature of the belief and worship practice varies considerably from one religion to another, many see in this universal tendency toward worship of the holy the manifestation of a past knowledge of God, an internal sense of deity, which, although it may be marred and distorted, is nonetheless still present and operating in human experience.

Biblical Passages Dealing with General Revelation

Among the Old Testament passages pointing to God's witness to all persons through the cosmos are the nature psalms, of which probably the clearest is Psalm 19. Here the psalmist speaks of how the heavens declare the glory of God. The words are emphatic: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (v. 1). To the psalmist, the creation is a constant evidence of the greatness of the one who has made it: "day after day . . . night after night" (v. 2). Whereas human priests and prophets must interrupt their declarations, nature never does. Not only is this a constant witness, but it is found everywhere: "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world" (vv. 3–4). Since the incident of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11), the barrier of language has hindered communication among different peoples, but the language of the created world is universal.

Psalm 104 has a somewhat different emphasis. It consists of a declaration of God's creative work, a recitation of all that he has done: "He stretches out the heavens like a tent" (v. 2); "He set the earth on its foundations" (v. 5); "At [his]

rebuke the waters fled" (v. 7); "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate" (v. 14). This inspires the psalmist to expressions of praise and worship: "How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (v. 24). "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works" (v. 31). "I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live" (v. 33). Here the psalmist does not emphasize the witness that the creation gives to the Creator, but rather gives expression to the effect that these works have on him, the observer.

Passages such as these teach that God's work testifies of him and his greatness. This is a testimony that should be evident to those who view it. It is notable, however, that the psalmist who testifies to God's glory on the basis of the witness of the creation is a believer, who presumably has come to know God as a result of what we would term today special revelation. We cannot draw any firm conclusions from these psalms regarding the efficacy of the creation to those who do not know of God on any independent basis. To put it another way: these psalms indicate that a witness is objectively present in the creation. They do not indicate whether that witness brings about faith in Jehovah for someone who has not been exposed to his special revelatory action.

When we come to Paul's writings, we find more direct indications of the locus of divine general revelation. The opening chapter of his letter to the Romans, especially verses 18–32, strikes an initially positive note in what is a primarily negative beginning section of the book, a declaration of God's judgment. It is noteworthy that the whole framework of the passage is the objective nature of things. The wrath of God, for example, is treated as part of the situation, which Barclay observes when he says that Paul does not speak of God's being angry, but of the wrath of God as a fact. Paul is saying that the wrath of God is something that is consequently connected with humans' sin as a cause. If you break the laws of agriculture, harvest fails. If you break God's moral law, wrath and judgment are the consequence.[261] The parallel is that the witness to God is there, objectively, apart from the human response to it.

In verse 19, the word used is *to gnōston*. In the most general sense, this refers to what can be known. In the New Testament, it usually refers to what is known, but if it bore that meaning here, the clause would be a tautology: what is known is known. Paul says that what can be known is plain "in them," which could be taken as an internal revelation, not unlike the revelation he describes in chapter 2. Paul uses this prepositional expression very frequently, in fact almost twice as often, relative to the amount of writing, as the remainder of the New Testament. Consequently, Leon Morris contends that the expression should be considered

equivalent to the dative case, so that it should be read as “to them,” rather than “in them.”[262]

Paul seems to speak of the reality and clarity of the witness. The words are *phaneron* and *ephanerōsen*. Bauer says of the former, the adjective, that it means “visible, clear, plainly to be seen, open, plain, evident, known.”[263] Thus, if there is a failure of knowledge, the problem appears not to lie with the witness itself. The word for God’s power here is an unusual one, appearing nowhere else in the New Testament. Sanday and Headlam say that it “is a summary term for those other attributes which constitute Divinity,” and Leon Morris claims that “Paul is laying it down that what is revealed is God himself. In nature we see something of nature’s God.”[264] The grammatical forms here, as Gifford points out, are the most general and abstract, the present tense and the passive voice, suggesting the universality of the revelation, that it is to everyone, everywhere.[265] Yet it is in “what is made” (v. 20), apparently the creation, that the invisible things are seen.

In Romans 2:14–16 the locus is quite different. Rather than being located in the external created world, Paul here emphasizes the human heart. Referring to those who do not have the law, presumably the law revealed in the Old Testament, he speaks of those who nonetheless do the things required by the law (v. 14). He says that by so doing, they show that “the requirements of the law are written on their hearts” (v. 15). He does not make clear whether this is an inward awareness of the specific requirements of the law, or merely the consciousness that there is a holy God, whose expectations we must fulfill. It appears that, without determining the content of the inner revelation, Paul is asserting that God has left within the human moral makeup some witness of his requirements for human beings.

The passages we have been considering to this point are basically didactic passages, or teaching or expositional statements about general revelation and its effects. Another type of consideration is the narratives, the descriptions of persons and of the type of faith they may have had without prior exposure to the special revelation.

One version of this that has been proposed is what some term “holy pagans,” or “the Melchizedek factor.” They note that Melchizedek came from outside the covenant community of Israel, and yet was a priest of the true God, which Abraham recognized by offering tithes and sacrifices to him (Heb. 7:1–11). Another instance is Cornelius, who as a Gentile “God-fearer” was, in the judgment of some, already a saved person when he came to Peter (Acts 10).[266] Yet another case cited is that of Abimelech, in Genesis 20, who seemed to know Jehovah.[267]

On closer examination, however, these instances are not as helpful in understanding the scope and efficacy of general revelation as we might hope. The problem is that we do not know enough about Melchizedek to know the basis for his relationship with Jehovah. It may be that God had appeared to him by a special revelation, not recorded for us in Scripture. Even less impressive is the case of Cornelius. In Peter's recounting of what the angel had said to Cornelius, presumably informed by what Cornelius had told him, Peter says, "He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved'" (Acts 11:13–14). This seems to indicate that Cornelius did not experience salvation until Peter presented the gospel to him. Note, as well, that an angelic appearance is special, not general, revelation. In the case of Abimelech, we should observe that God appeared to him in a dream, one of the primary modalities of special revelation.

Perhaps more helpful are those cases where, when presented with special revelation, a person recognizes that the author is the true God. Among these cases could be mentioned Pharoah (Gen. 41:37–39), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:47; 3:26), and the sailors on the ship that Jonah took (Jon. 1:3–16). While these passages do not offer evidence that these persons from outside the covenant community knew Jehovah solely on the basis of general revelation, they do bear witness to the possibility that general revelation enabled the persons to recognize the genuineness of the God who specially revealed himself. To put it conversely: when special revelation came, it awakened the realization of the general revelation's authenticity.

A final set of narrative considerations are those in which the speaker seems to assume some prior acquaintance with God. This can be seen for example in Paul's ministry, in Acts 14:15–17. The people of Lystra had thought Paul and Barnabas were gods. They began to worship them. In attempting to divest the people of this idea, Paul pointed out that they should turn to the God who had made heaven and earth. He then observed that even while God had allowed the nations to walk in their own ways, he had left a witness of himself to all peoples, by doing good, providing rain and fruitful seasons, and satisfying their hearts with food and gladness. The point is that God had given witness of himself by the benevolent preservation of his creation. Here the argument appears to relate to God's witness to himself in nature and (perhaps even more so) in history.

The final passage of particular significance for our purposes is Acts 17:22–31. Here Paul appears before a group of philosophers, the Athenian Philosophical Society, as it were, on the Areopagus. Two points are of particular significance in Paul's presentation. First, Paul had noticed an altar "to an unknown god" in

the Athenians' place of worship. He proceeded to proclaim this god to them. The god whom they sensed from their speculations, without special revelation, was the same God whom he knew from special manifestation. Second, he quotes an Athenian poet (v. 28). The significant item here is that a pagan poet had been able to come to a spiritual truth without God's special revelation.

Bruce Demarest has provided us with a convenient and accurate summary of what the biblical passages on general revelation tell us about God:

> God exists (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19)
> God is uncreated (Acts 17:24)
> God is Creator (Acts 14:15)
> God is Sustainer (Acts 14:16; 17:25)
> God is universal Lord (Acts 17:24)
> God is self-sufficient (Acts 17:25)
> God is transcendent (Acts 17:24)
> God is immanent (Acts 17:26–27)
> God is eternal (Ps. 93:2)
> God is great (Ps. 8:3–4)
> God is majestic (Ps. 29:4)
> God is powerful (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20)
> God is wise (Ps. 104:24)
> God is good (Acts 14:17)
> God is righteous (Rom. 1:32)
> God has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26)
> God has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15)
> God should be worshiped (Acts 14:15; 17:23)
> Man should perform the good (Rom. 2:15)
> God will judge evil (Rom. 2:15–16)
> *In sum*: God's glory (Ps. 19:1), divine nature (Rom. 1:20), and moral demands (Rom. 2:14–15) are to some extent known through general revelation.[268]

Differing Assessments of the Value of General Revelation

Natural Theology

Regarding the nature, extent, and efficacy of general revelation, there are some rather sharply contrasting views. One of these positions is natural theology, which has had a long and conspicuous history within Christianity. It maintains

not only that there is a valid, objective revelation of God in such spheres as nature, history, and human personality, but that it is actually possible to gain some true knowledge of God from these spheres—in other words, to construct a theology apart from the Bible.

Certain assumptions are involved in this view. One is, of course, that there is an objective, valid, and rational general revelation—that God actually has made himself known in nature (for example) and that patterns of meaning are objectively present—independently of whether anyone perceives, understands, and accepts this revelation. In other words, truth about God is actually present within the creation, not projected upon it by a believer who already knows God from other sources, such as the Bible. And this view assumes that nature is basically intact: that it has not been substantially distorted by anything that has occurred since the creation. In short, the world we find about us is basically the world as it came from God's creative hand, and as it was intended to be.

A second major assumption of natural theology is the integrity of the person perceiving and learning from the creation. Neither humanity's natural limitations nor the effects of sin and the fall prevent humans from recognizing and correctly interpreting the Creator's handiwork. In terms of categories to be developed at greater length later in this work, natural theologians tend to be Arminian or even Pelagian in their thought rather than Calvinistic or Augustinian.

Another assumption is that there is a congruity between the human mind and the creation about us. The mind's coherence with the world order enables inferences from the data it perceives. The validity of the laws of logic is also assumed. Such logical principles as the law of identity, the law of contradiction, and the law of excluded middle are not merely abstract mental constructs, but are true of the world. Natural theologians assiduously avoid paradoxes and logical contradictions, considering them something to be removed by a more complete logical scrutiny of the issues under consideration. A paradox is a sign of intellectual indigestion; had it been more completely chewed, it would have disappeared.

The core of natural theology is the idea that it is possible, without a prior commitment of faith to the beliefs of Christianity, and without relying on any special authority, such as an institution (the church) or a document (the Bible), to come to a genuine knowledge of God on the basis of reason alone. Reason here refers to the human capacity to discover, understand, interpret, and evaluate the truth.

Perhaps the outstanding example of natural theology in the history of the church is the massive effort of Thomas Aquinas. According to Thomas, all truth belongs to one of two realms. The lower realm is the realm of nature, the higher

is the realm of grace. While the claims pertaining to the upper realm must be accepted on authority, those in the lower realm may be known by reason.

In Thomas's time the church was coming into contact with heterogeneous cultures. For the first time, the church was encountering Jews, Muslims, and even complete pagans on a large scale. It was of no value to quote one's authority to these persons. The Jew would simply quote the Torah, and the Muslim the Qur'an, and all of them, including the pagan, would simply look puzzled when the Christian theologian cited the Bible or the teaching of the church. If any real impact was to be made on these persons, it would be necessary to enter some neutral arena where no special authority need be appealed to, and to settle the matter on terms accepted by all rational persons.[269]

Thomas contended that he could prove certain beliefs by pure reason: the existence of God, the immortality of the human soul, and the supernatural origin of the Catholic Church. More specific elements of doctrine, such as the triune nature of God, could not be known by unaided reason, but must be accepted on authority. These are truths of revelation, not truths of reason. (Of course, if one of the natural truths established by reason is the divine origin of the Catholic Church, then by inference one has established its authority and, consequently, the truth of the higher or revealed matters on which it speaks.) Reason rules the lower level, while the truths on the upper level are matters of faith.

One of the traditional arguments for the existence of God is the *cosmological* proof, of which Thomas has three or possibly even four versions. The argument proceeds somewhat as follows: In the realm of our experience, everything that we know is caused by something else. There cannot, however, be an infinite regress of causes, for if that were the case, the whole series of causes would never have begun. There must, therefore, be some uncaused cause (unmoved mover) or necessary being. And this we (or all people) call God. Anyone looking honestly at the evidence must reach this conclusion.

Another argument frequently employed, and found in Thomas as well, is the *teleological* argument. This focuses particularly on the phenomenon of orderliness or apparent purpose in the universe. Thomas observes that various parts of the universe exhibit behavior that is adaptive or that helps bring about desirable ends. When such behavior is displayed by human beings, we recognize that they have consciously willed and directed themselves toward that end. Some objects in our universe, however, cannot have done any purposive planning. Certainly rocks and atmosphere have not chosen to be as they are. Their ordering according to a purpose or design must come from somewhere else. Some intelligent being must, therefore, have ordered things in this desirable fashion. And this being, says Thomas, we call God.

In addition to these two major arguments, two others appear in the history of philosophy and theology, although perhaps less prominently than the cosmological and the teleological arguments. These are the *anthropological* and the *ontological*. The anthropological argument is not found explicitly in Thomas's thought, although it may be implicit in the fourth proof.[270] It sees some aspects of human nature as a revelation of God. In Kant's formulation (in the *Critique of Practical Reason*) it appears somewhat as follows: We all possess a moral impulse or a categorical imperative. Following this impulse by behaving morally is not very well rewarded within this life, however. Being good does not always pay! Why should one be moral then? Would it not be wiser to act selfishly at times? There must be some basis for ethics and morality, some sort of reward, which in turn involves several factors—immortality and an undying soul, a coming time of judgment, and a God who establishes and supports values, and who rewards good and punishes evil. Thus, the moral order (as contrasted with the natural order) requires the existence of God.

All of these are empirical arguments. They proceed from observation of the universe by sense experience. The major a priori or rational argument is the *ontological* argument. This is a pure-thought type of argument. It does not require going outside one's own thinking, out of the realm of abstract thought, into the realm of sensory experience. In the *Proslogion* Anselm formulated what is undoubtedly the most famous statement of the argument, and René Descartes also presented a version of it,[271] as did Georg Hegel in a considerably different form.[272] In more recent times, Charles Hartshorne has argued for its validity,[273] and there has been renewed discussion of it in the twentieth century by both theologians and philosophers.[274]

Anselm's statement of the argument is as follows. God is the greatest of all conceivable beings. Now a being that does not exist cannot be the greatest of all conceivable beings (for the nonexistent being of our conceptions would be greater if it had the *attribute* of existence). Therefore, by definition, God must exist. There have been several responses to this, many of which follow Kant's contention that, in effect, existence is not an attribute. A being that exists does not have some attribute or quality lacked by a similar being that does not exist. If I imagine a dollar and compare it with a real dollar, there is no difference in their essence, in *what* they are. The only difference is in whether they are. There is a logical difference between the sentence "God is good" (or loving, or holy, or just) and the sentence "God is." The former predicates some quality of God; the latter is a statement of existence. The point here is that existence is not a necessary predicate of the greatest of all conceivable beings. Such a being may exist, or it may not. In either case its essence is the same. (It should also be noted

that Anselm was working within a Platonic framework, in which the ideal is more real than the physical or material.)

With the increase in competent Christian philosophers, there has been something of a revival of formulations of the theistic arguments. Some of these are propounded by clear evangelicals. These have been advanced in conjunction with a strong belief in special revelation.[275]

The Denial of General Revelation

In the first half of the twentieth century, Karl Barth rejected both natural theology and general revelation. Barth was educated in the standard liberalism descending from Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack, and was particularly instructed by Wilhelm Herrmann. Liberalism did not take the Bible very seriously, resting many of its assertions upon a type of natural theology. Barth had good reason, on an experiential basis, to be concerned about the belief in a general revelation and about the liberals' attempt to develop a natural theology from it. He had seen the effect of too closely identifying developments in history with God's working. In 1914, he was shocked when a group of ninety-three German intellectuals endorsed Kaiser Wilhelm's war policy. The names of several of Barth's theology professors appeared on this list. They felt that God would accomplish his will in the world through that war policy. Their view of revelation had made them extremely undiscriminating regarding historical events. Together with the shift of Ernst Troeltsch from the faculty of theology to that of philosophy, this disillusioning experience indicated to Barth the shallowness and bankruptcy of liberalism. Thus, from a theological standpoint, August 1914 in a sense marked the end of the nineteenth century in Europe.[276] In the early 1930s, the process was virtually repeated. In desperate economic straits, Germany saw its hope in Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party. A major segment of the state church endorsed this movement, seeing it as God's way of working in history. Barth spoke out against the Nazi government[277] and, as a result, was forced to leave his teaching post in Germany. In each case, later political developments proved that Barth's apprehensions about liberalism's theological conclusions were well founded.

Barth's understanding of revelation is significant because for him, revelation is redemptive in nature. To know God, to have correct information about him, is to be related to him in a salvific experience. Disagreeing with many other theologians, he comments that it is not possible to draw from Romans 1:18–32 any statement regarding a "natural union with God or knowledge of God on the part of man in himself and as such."[278] In his debate with Emil Brunner, Barth

said: “How can Brunner maintain that a real knowledge of the true God, however imperfect it may be (and what knowledge of God is not imperfect?), does not bring salvation?”[279]

Barth is very skeptical of the view that humans are able to know God apart from the revelation in Christ. This would mean that they can know the existence, the being of God, without knowing anything of his grace and mercy. This would injure the unity of God, since it would abstract his being from the fullness of his activity.[280] A human who could achieve some knowledge of God outside of the revelation in Jesus Christ would have contributed at least in some small measure to his or her salvation or spiritual standing with God. The principle of grace alone would be compromised.

For Barth, revelation is always and only the revelation of God in Jesus Christ: the Word become flesh.[281] Apart from the incarnation, there is no revelation. Behind this position lies (probably unrecognized by Barth) an existentialist conception of truth as person-to-person and subjective, going back to Søren Kierkegaard. The possibility of knowledge of God outside the gracious revelation in Christ would eliminate the need for Christ.

Barth recognizes that several biblical passages have traditionally been cited as justification for engaging in natural theology (e.g., Ps. 19 and Rom. 1). What is to be done with them? He states that the “main line” of Scripture teaches that what unites a human with God is, from God’s side, his grace. How can there be, then, some other way by which humans can approach God, another way of knowing him? His way of handling the apparent discrepancy between this main line and the “side line” of Scripture (those passages that seem to speak of a natural theology) is to interpret the side line in such a way as not to contradict the main line. For example, in interpreting Psalm 19, Barth understands verse 3, “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard,” as adversative to verses 1 and 2. Thus the psalmist denies in verse 3 what he seems to affirm in verses 1 and 2. Barth also maintains that the first six verses of the psalm must be understood in the light of verses 7–14. Thus, the witness that humans see in the cosmos “does not come about independently, but in utter coordination with and subordination to the witness of God’s speaking and acting [the law of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, etc.] in the people and among the people of Israel.”[282] Barth must admit that Romans 1:18–32 definitely states that humans have knowledge of God. Barth denies, however, that this knowledge of God is independent of the divine revelation of the gospel. Rather, he maintains that the people Paul has in view have already been presented with the revelation that God declared.[283]

Essentially, then, Barth's interpretation of both passages is the same. The persons in view do find God in the cosmos, but they do so because they already know God from his special revelation. Therefore, what has happened is that they have read into, or projected upon, the created order what they have known of him from the revelation.

In later portions of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth seemed to modify his position somewhat. Here he grants that although Jesus Christ is the one true Word and Light of life, the creation contains numerous lesser lights that display his glory. Barth, however, does not speak of these as revelations, reserving that designation for the Word. He retains the term "lights." It is also notable that in his later summary statement, *Evangelical Theology*, Barth made no mention of a revelation through the created order.[284] Thus it seems to have made little or no real practical impact on his theology.

Barth's offensive against natural theology is understandable, especially given his experience with how some had applied it, and of certain assumptions that he seems to bring to the discussion:

1. God's revelation is exclusively in Jesus Christ.
2. Genuine revelation is always responded to positively rather than being ignored or rejected.
3. Knowledge of God is always redemptive or salvific in nature.

Evaluation of These Two Views

When we look at these two diametrically opposed views, each seems to draw upon cogent considerations, and yet the shortcomings of each seem evident. Those of natural theology may be enumerated first.

The arguments in many cases rest upon assumptions that may in the past have been universally made, but no longer are. For example, Thomas's arguments all assume that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. Not everyone would agree today. Further, he assumes that motion (in the broad sense of activity) must have a cause. Yet many philosophers, especially those of a process orientation, and some contemporary physicists, look upon the world not as static but as dynamic. Motion or activity need not be accounted for or have a cause. It is simply present in the cosmos.

Further, there is the problem of proportional causation. Thomas assumes that if something needs a cause, that cause is God, or as he says of the unmoved mover, for example, "and this all men call God." The problem is that in order to account for a finite effect, it is not necessary to posit an infinite cause. If I lift a

fifty-pound weight, that does not prove that I could lift a seventy-pound weight. Only a cause sufficient to produce the effect need be posited. Similarly, if a God is required to cause a finite effect (a limited universe), that does not establish that this God is omnipotent, which Christianity has generally claimed is the nature of its God. Perhaps this was as much as he was capable of doing.

The teleological argument has come in for special criticism in the past century and a half. One critique was brought by evolutionists, who offered an alternative explanation of the apparent order in the world. It is there, said the evolutionists, not because some all-wise and all-powerful being structured it into creation, but rather because those forms that did not have the physiological or psychological qualities that enabled them to survive did not, whereas those that possessed such qualities did.

The other difficulty for the teleological argument is what we may term the problem of the dysteleological. While there is much about our universe that seems to conduce to good results, there is also much that is not as felicitous. This is particularly the case with the phenomena related to the problem of evil. These characteristics of the world do not seem to witness to the existence of a good and wise god. Rather, the designer of them was apparently either evil or limited in his ability. Perhaps what the teleological argument has established is the existence of a non-good or non-omnipotent God, or possibly the existence of the devil.

This points up another problem with natural theology. Even if the arguments succeed in proving the existence of a divine being, there is still a problem if this is to be considered a proof for the Christian God. For this is a bare theism. Further argumentation is needed to establish that this is the Christian God, with the attributes that are unique to him. And in the case of Thomas's fourfold proof, there is still the necessity of demonstrating that the unmoved mover, the first cause, the designer, are all the same God.

More recently, there have been some renewed efforts at construction of at least elements of a natural theology. One of these is the work of process theologians.[285] Another is the intelligent design movement, which has worked particularly with mathematical probability theory to suggest an alternative to the natural selection argument of evolution.[286] The increasing number of Christian philosophers, even in secular departments, has produced a growing body of arguments for the existence of God.[287] Finally, physicists, especially in quantum mechanics, have contributed significantly to discussions of issues of cosmology. While discussions of this literature go beyond the limitations of this chapter, in one way or another each of these has either some of the shortcomings noted here or problems unique to its own system.

Similarly, there are problems with such a strong rejection of general revelation as that of Barth. For the texts that we cited earlier are hard not to understand as indicating that an objective manifestation of God exists within the creation. In the case of Psalm 19, Barth's rendering "there is no speech" seems to be an inaccurate exegesis of the passage. It appears that Barth's assumptions have overwhelmed the rather clear teaching of the passage. Some other forms of rejection of general revelation seem to assume that any knowledge of God that humans might have independently of special revelation would be a human accomplishment; but if there is general revelation, it is by God's initiative, as genuinely as in the case of special revelation. The desire to protect the uniqueness of special revelation is commendable, but if special revelation bears witness that there is general revelation, then we do not honor the former by denying the latter.

General Revelation, but without Natural Theology

Calvin's position appears more consistent with the biblical data and with the philosophical observations than those of Thomas and Barth. Basically, this is the view that God has given us an objective, valid, rational revelation of himself in nature, history, and human personality. Regardless of whether anyone actually observes it, understands it, and believes it, even though it may well have been disturbed by the fall, it is nonetheless present. This is the conclusion to be drawn from passages like Psalm 19:1–2 and Romans 1:19–20. General revelation is not something read into nature by those who know God on other grounds; it is already present, by God's work of creation and continuing providence.

Paul asserts, however, that humans do not clearly recognize and acknowledge God in the general revelation (Rom. 1:21–23). Sin (meaning here both the fall of the human race and our continuing evil acts) has a double effect on the efficacy of the general revelation. On the one hand, sin has marred the witness of the general revelation. The created order is now under a curse (Gen. 3:16–19). The ground brings forth thorns and thistles for the man who would till it (v. 18); women must suffer the multiplied anguish of childbearing (v. 16). Paul speaks in Romans 8:18–25 about the creation's having been subjected to futility (v. 20); it waits for its liberation (vv. 19, 21, 23). As a result, its witness is somewhat refracted. While it is still God's creation and thus continues to witness to him, it is not quite what it was when it came from the hand of the Maker. It is a spoiled creation. The testimony to the Maker is blurred.

The more serious effect of sin and the fall is on humans themselves. Scripture speaks in several places of the blindness and darkness of humans' understanding.

Romans 1:21 has already been noted, where Paul says that they knew God but rejected this knowledge, and that blindness followed. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul attributes this blindness to the work of Satan: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Although Paul is here referring to ability to see the light of the gospel, this blindness would doubtless affect the ability to see God in the creation as well.

General revelation evidently does not ordinarily enable the unbeliever to come to the knowledge of God. Paul’s statements about general revelation (Rom. 1–2) must be viewed in the light of what he says about sinful humanity (Rom. 3—all persons are under sin’s power; none is righteous) and the urgency of telling people about Christ (10:14): “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Thus in Paul’s mind the possibility of constructing a full-scale natural theology seems seriously in question.

What is necessary, then, is what Calvin calls “the spectacles of faith.” He draws an analogy between the condition of the sinner and that of a person with a sight problem.[288] The latter looks at an object, but sees it only indistinctly. Spectacles clarify the view. Similarly, the sinner does not recognize God in the creation. But when the sinner puts on the spectacles of faith, spiritual sight improves, and God can be seen in his handiwork.

When persons are exposed to the special revelation found in the gospel and respond, their minds are cleared through the effects of regeneration, enabling them to see distinctly what is there. Then they can recognize in nature what was more clearly seen in the special revelation. The psalmist who saw a declaration of the glory of God in the heavens saw it *clearly* because he had come to know God from the special revelation, but what he saw had always been genuinely and objectively there. He did not merely project it upon the creation, as Barth would have us believe.

Scripture contains nothing constituting a formal argument for the existence of God from the evidences within the general revelation. The assertion that God is seen in his handiwork is scarcely a formal proof of his existence. Note also that when Paul made his presentation and appeal to the Athenians, some believed, some rejected, and some expressed interest in hearing more on another occasion (Acts 17:32–34). Thus the conclusion that there is an objective general revelation, but that it cannot be used to construct a natural theology, seems to fit best all the data of Scripture on the subject.

General Revelation and Human Responsibility

But what of the judgment of humankind, spoken of by Paul in Romans 1 and 2? If it is just for God to condemn humans, and if they can become guilty without having known God's special revelation, does that mean that without special revelation they are able to avoid God's condemnation? In Romans 2:14 Paul says: "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law"(RSV). Is Paul suggesting that they could have fulfilled the requirements of the law? But that never happens even for those who have the law (see Gal. 3:10–11 as well as Rom. 3). Paul also makes clear in Galatians 3:23–24 that the law was not a means of justifying us, but a παιδαγωγὸς (*paidagōgos*) to make us aware of our sin and to lead us to Christ.

Now the internal law unbelievers have performs much the same function as does the law Jews have. From the revelation in nature (Rom. 1), people ought to conclude that a powerful, eternal God exists. And from the revelation within (Rom. 2), they should realize that they do not live up to the standard. While the content of the moral code will vary in different cultural situations, all humans have an inner compulsion that there is something to which they ought to adhere. And everyone should reach the conclusion that he or she is not fulfilling that standard. In other words, the knowledge of God that all humans have, if they do not suppress it, should bring them to the conclusion that they are guilty in relationship to God.

What if someone then were to throw himself or herself on the mercy of God, not knowing on what basis that mercy was provided? Would not such a person in a sense be in the same situation as the Old Testament believers? The doctrine of Christ and his atoning work had not been fully revealed to these people. Yet they knew that there was provision for the forgiveness of sins, and that they could not be accepted on the merits of any works of their own. They had the form of the gospel without its full content. And they were saved. Now if the god known in nature is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (as Paul seems to assert in Acts 17:23), then it would seem that persons who come to a belief in a single powerful God, who despair of any works-righteousness to please this holy God, and who throw themselves upon the mercy of this good God would be accepted as were the Old Testament believers. The basis of acceptance would be the work of Jesus Christ, even though the person involved is not conscious that this is how provision has been made for his or her salvation.[289] We should note that the basis of salvation was apparently the same in the Old Testament as in the New. Salvation has always been appropriated by faith (Gal. 3:6–9); this salvation

rests on Christ's deliverance of us from the law (vv. 10–14, 19–29). Nothing has been changed in that respect. This view is held by more evangelical theologians than is often recognized, but most of them are not saying that they are confident that there are persons saved this way, as Clark Pinnock and John Sanders affirm. They are simply not sure that the biblical witness excludes the possibility. They are willing to leave open the possibility that God has not told us everything on the subject. [290]

Three objections are frequently raised against this type of statement. One is a fear that special revelation is being displaced by general revelation, or by human discovery. If, however, the special revelation witnesses to the existence of a general revelation, it does not honor that special revelation to reject the idea of general revelation.[291] Further, some fear that the urgency of the missionary enterprise will be diminished if the possibility is allowed of some being saved without hearing the specially revealed gospel. This, however, is basically a pragmatic argument, not a biblical one.[292] We do not, as evangelicals, adopt the most useful theological conclusions, but rather, those most faithful to Scripture. A further argument is that everything has changed so radically with the coming of Christ that comparisons to the situation of Old Testament believers no longer apply.[293]

This last contention is insufficiently argued. The problem of evil is also made even more severe by the contention, in effect, that Romans 1:20 means that God holds persons responsible for failure to fulfill conditions that they could not possibly meet. It appears that those who hold this position go beyond the clear statements of Scripture, and create a problem that they do not adequately answer regarding the salvation of those who die in infancy.[294] Further, those who hold this view do not spell out how much must be believed in order to be saved, especially as applied to the young who are thought old enough to exercise saving faith. Presumably, it is not enough simply to believe in someone named Jesus; but how much must one believe about the incarnation, the Trinity, atonement, justification, and other doctrines to be saved? Beyond that, the restrictivist view not only assumes that being chronologically posterior to Christ equates to being epistemologically posterior but also tends to treat time in a commonsense Newtonian fashion, in which there is absolute time, identical for everyone. Many contemporary physicists hold a more relative view of time, whether Einstein's paradox of simultaneity or the theories of quantum mechanics.

What inference are we to draw, then, from Paul's statement in Romans 2:1–16?[295] Is it conceivable that one can be saved by faith without having the special revelation? Paul seems to be leaving open this possibility. Yet we have no indication from Scripture how many, if any, actually experience salvation

without having special revelation.[296] Paul suggests in Romans 3 that no one does. And in chapter 10 he urges the necessity of preaching the gospel (the special revelation) so that people may believe. Thus it is apparent that in failing to respond to the light of general revelation that they have, humans are fully responsible, for they have truly known God, but have willfully suppressed that truth. That there is a possibility of somehow entering a relationship of favor with God on this basis seems to be required by Paul's words, "So that [they] are without excuse" (1:20).[297]

In the final analysis, dogmatism about these matters could well be displaced by the "humble agnosticism" that John Stott recommends to John Piper.[298] Harold Netlund sums up well the position that I find most adequate in dealing with the several lines of evidence: "It seems to me that the wisest response to this perplexing issue is to recognize that we cannot rule out the possibility that some who never hear the gospel might, nevertheless, through God's grace, respond to what they know of God through general revelation and turn to him in faith for forgiveness. But to go beyond this and to speculate about how many, if any, are saved this way is to move beyond what the Scriptures allow."[299]

Implications of General Revelation

1. There is a common ground for a point of contact between the believer and the nonbeliever, or between the gospel and the thinking of the unbeliever. All persons have a knowledge of God. Although it may be suppressed to the extent of being unconscious or unrecognizable, it is nonetheless there, and there will be areas of sensitivity to which the gospel message may be effectively directed as a starting point. These areas of sensitivity will vary from one person to another, but there are features of the creation to which the believer may point, features that will enable the unbeliever to recognize something of the truth of the message. It is therefore neither necessary nor desirable to present the message to all hearers in an identical and purely kerygmatic fashion.

2. We may understand more about the specially revealed truth by examining the general revelation. We understand in more complete detail the greatness of God, we comprehend more fully the image of God in the human, when we attend to the general revelation. This should be considered a supplement to, not a substitute for, special revelation. Sin's distortion of human understanding of the general revelation is greater the closer one gets to the relationship between God and humans.[300] Thus, sin produces relatively little obscuring effect upon the understanding of matters of physics, but a great deal with respect to matters of

psychology and sociology. Yet it is at those places where the potential for distortion is greatest that the most complete understanding is necessary.

3. God is just in condemning those who have never heard the gospel in the full and formal sense. No one is completely without opportunity. All have known God; if they have not effectually perceived him, it is because they have suppressed the truth. Thus all are responsible. This increases the motivation of the missionary endeavor, for no one is innocent. All need to believe in God's offer of grace, and the message needs to be taken to them.

4. General revelation serves to explain the worldwide phenomenon of religion and religions. All persons are religious, because all have a type of knowledge of God. From this indistinct and perhaps even unrecognizable revelation, religions have been constructed which unfortunately are distortions of the true biblical religion.

5. Since both creation and the gospel are intelligible and coherent revelations of God, there is harmony between the two, and mutual reinforcement of one by the other. The biblical revelation is not totally distinct from what is known of the natural realm.

6. In a pluralistic society, particularly one such as the United States where there is official separation of church and state, religious sources may not be appealed to in disputes over matters of ethics and politics. General revelation provides a possibility of arguing for these on a broader basis. For example, in an issue such as abortion, official church dogma cannot be introduced, but scientific evidence that the fetus is a living human organism may be.

7. As the third world church continues to grow, we may expect a greater interest in nature and matters related to it. This will not take the form of formal arguments, so much as a direct relationship to and appreciation for nature, as the locus of God's activity.

8. Genuine knowledge and genuine morality in unbelieving (as well as believing) humans are not their own accomplishments. Truth arrived at apart from special revelation is still God's truth. Knowledge and morality are not so much discovery as they are "uncovery" of the truth God has structured into his entire universe, both physical and moral.

7

God's Particular Revelation

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and identify the need for God's special revelation to humans.
2. Identify three characteristics of special revelation, including personal, anthropic, and analogical.
3. Comprehend and restate the modes of God's special revelation through historical events, divine speech, and the presence of God in Christ.
4. Distinguish between propositional and personal revelation and identify the significance of each.
5. Affirm the importance of Scripture as God's special revelation to humanity.

Chapter Summary

Most people need a more personal understanding of God than is available through nature and general history. God has provided particular revelation of himself. The way by which personal revelation of God is fashioned includes God's dealing with persons, everyday human experience, and human language and understanding. The modalities that God uses include historical events, divine speech, and the incarnation of God in Christ. Theologians have disagreed as to whether special revelation is propositional or personal. The Bible provides both

cognitive and affective knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is possible because God bridges the gap between himself and humankind.

Study Questions

- What is the nature of special revelation, and how did Old and New Testament believers view special revelation?
- Name and describe three characteristics of special revelation. What does each contribute to our understanding of special revelation?
- Through what three means has God chosen to reveal himself? How does each contribute to our understanding of special revelation?
- What inferences did the people of Israel attribute to God according to G. Ernest Wright?
- What is the meaning of the "Pannenberg circle's view of revelation"?
- Why is the incarnation the most complete modality of special revelation?
- How would you compare and contrast personal and propositional revelation? Which is more important and why?

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The Definition and Necessity of Special Revelation

By special revelation we mean God's manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him. The Hebrew word for "reveal" is גָּלָה (*galah*). A common Greek word for "reveal" is αποκαλύπτω (*apokaluptō*). Both express the idea of uncovering what was concealed. The Greek φανερόω (*phaneroō*), which especially conveys the idea of manifesting, is also frequently used.

Special revelation was necessary because humans had lost the relationship of favor that they had with God prior to the fall. They needed to come to know God in a fuller way if the conditions of fellowship were once again to be met. This knowledge had to go beyond the initial or general revelation that was still available, because now, in addition to the natural limitation of human finiteness, there was also the moral limitation of human sinfulness. It was now insufficient simply to know of God's existence and something of what he is like. While Adam and Eve in their original state had been positively inclined (or, at the very least, neutral) toward God, and could respond in a direct fashion, after the fall they were turned away from God and in rebellion against him; their understanding of spiritual matters was obscured. Their relationship with God was not merely inactive; it was lost and in need of rebuilding. So the human situation was more complicated than originally, and more complete instruction was consequently needed.

Note that the objective of special revelation was relational. The primary purpose of this revelation was not to enlarge the general scope of knowledge. The knowledge *about* was for the purpose of knowledge *of*. Information was to lead to acquaintance; consequently, the information revealed was often quite selective. For example, we know relatively little about Jesus from a biographical standpoint. We are told nothing about his appearance, his characteristic activities, his interests, or his tastes. Details such as are ordinarily found in biographies were omitted because they are not significant for faith. How we relate to Jesus is quite independent of whether he was tall or short, or whether he spoke in a tenor or a bass voice. The merely curious are not accommodated by God's special revelation.

A further introductory word is needed regarding the relationship of special to general revelation. It is commonly assumed that special revelation is a post-fall phenomenon necessitated by human sinfulness. It is frequently considered *remedial*.[301] Of course, it is not possible for us to know the exact status of the relationship between God and humankind before the fall. We simply are not told

much about it. Adam and Eve may have had such an unclouded consciousness of God that they were constantly aware of him everywhere, in their own internal experience and in their perception of nature. There is no indication that such was the case, however. The account of God's looking for Adam and Eve in the Garden subsequent to their sin (Gen. 3:8–9) gives the impression that this was one in a series of special encounters. Further, the instructions given to humans (Gen. 1:28) regarding their place and activity in the creation suggest a particular communication from Creator to creature. If this is the case, special revelation antedated the fall.

When sin entered the human race, however, the need for special revelation became more acute. God's direct presence, the most direct and complete form of special revelation, was lost. In addition, God now had to speak regarding matters that were previously not of concern. The problems of sin, guilt, and depravity had to be resolved; means of atonement, redemption, and reconciliation had to be provided. And now sin diminished human comprehension of general revelation, thus lessening its efficacy. Therefore, special revelation had to become remedial with respect to both knowledge of, and relationship with, God.

It is common to point out that general revelation is inferior to special revelation, in both the clarity of the treatment and the range of subjects considered. The insufficiency of general revelation therefore required special revelation. The special revelation, however, requires the general revelation as well.[302] Without the general revelation, humans would not possess the concepts that enable them to know and understand the God of the special revelation. Special revelation builds on general revelation. The two mutually require each other and are harmonious. Only if the two are developed in isolation from one another does there seem to be any conflict between them. They have a common subject matter and perspective, yielding a harmonious and complementary understanding.

The Style of Special Revelation

The Personal Nature of Special Revelation

We need to ask about the style of special revelation, its nature or fashion. It is, first of all, personal. A personal God presents himself to persons. This is seen in a number of ways. God reveals himself by telling his name. Nothing is more personal than one's name. When Moses asked who he should say had sent him to the people of Israel, Jehovah responded by giving his name, "I AM WHO I AM [or

I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE]" (Exod. 3:14). Moreover, God entered into personal covenants with individuals (Noah, Abraham) and with the nation of Israel. And note the benediction Aaron and his sons were to pronounce upon the people: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24–26). The Psalms contain numerous testimonies of personal experience with God. And the goal of Paul's life was a personal acquaintance with God: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10).

All Scripture is personal in nature. What we find is not a set of universal truths, like Euclid's axioms in geometry, but rather a series of specific or particular statements about concrete occurrences and facts. Neither is Scripture a formal theological presentation, with arguments and counterarguments, such as one would find in a theological textbook. Nor are there systematized creedal statements. There are elements of creedal affirmation, but not a thoroughgoing intellectualization of Christian belief.

There is little speculation about matters not directly concerned with God's redemptive working and his relationship with humankind. Cosmology, for example, does not receive the scrutiny sometimes found in other religions. The Bible does not digress into matters of merely historical concern. It does not fill in gaps in the knowledge of the past. It does not concentrate on biographical details. What God reveals is primarily himself as a person, and especially those dimensions of himself that are particularly significant for faith.

The Anthropic Nature of Special Revelation

The God who is revealed is, however, a transcendent being, outside our sensory experience. The Bible claims that God is unlimited in his knowledge and power; he is not subject to the confines of space and time. Consequently, the revelation must involve God's condescension (in the good sense of that word). Humans cannot reach up to investigate God and would not understand even if they could. So God has disclosed himself by a revelation in *anthropic* form. This should not be thought of as anthropomorphism as such, but as simply a revelation coming in human language and human categories of thought and action.[303]

This anthropic character means the use of human languages common at the time. Koiné Greek was once believed to be a special, divinely created language since it is so different from classical Greek. We now know, of course, that it was simply the vernacular language. Idioms of the day appear in Scripture. And it

utilizes ordinary ways of describing nature, of measuring time and distance, and so on.[304]

The revelation is also anthropic in the sense that it often came in forms that are part of ordinary, everyday human experience. For example, God frequently used dreams to reveal himself. Yet few experiences are as common as dreams. Not the particular type of experience employed, but the unique content supplied and the unique utilization of this experience distinguished revelation from the ordinary and natural. The same is true of the incarnation. When God appeared to humanity, he used the modality of an ordinary human being. Apparently Jesus carried no visible sign of distinctiveness. Most persons took him for an ordinary, average human being, the son of Joseph the carpenter. He came as a human, not an angel or a being clearly recognizable as a god.

To be sure, there were revelations that clearly broke with typical experience. The voice of the Father speaking from heaven (John 12:28) was one of these. The miracles were striking in their effect. Yet much of the revelation was in the form of natural occurrences.

The Analogical Nature of Special Revelation

God draws on those elements in the human universe of knowledge that can serve as a likeness of or that partially convey the truth in the divine realm. His revelation employs analogical language, which is midway between univocal and equivocal language. In univocal usage, a term is employed in only one sense. In equivocal usage, a term possesses completely different meanings. Thus, if we use the word *row* as a noun to describe a configuration of trees and as a verb to refer to propelling a boat by means of oars, we are using the word equivocally. In univocal usage, a term employed predicatively with two different subjects has the same meaning in both instances, as when we say, for example, that a man is tall and a building is tall. In analogical usage, there is always at least some univocal element, but there are differences as well, as when we say that runners run a marathon and that a train runs between Chicago and Detroit.

Whenever God has revealed himself, he has selected elements that are univocal in his universe and ours. Langdon Gilkey has pointed out that, in the orthodox view, when we say that God acts or loves, we have the very same meaning in mind as when we say that a human acts or loves.[305] When we say that God stopped the Jordan River, we have the very same thing in mind as when we say that the Army Corps of Engineers stopped a river from flowing. While there would be differences of method and materials, the action is basically the same in its effect: the water in the river would cease to flow beyond a certain

point. The acts of God are occurrences within a space-time universe. The death of Jesus was an event observably the same as that of James, John, Peter, Andrew, or any other human. A physician examining Jesus when he was taken down from the cross would have discovered no respiration or pulse. An electrocardiogram or an electroencephalogram would have given no discernible reading. And when the Bible says that God loves, it means just the same sort of qualities that we refer to when we speak of humans loving (in the sense of *agapē*): a steadfast, unselfish concern for the welfare of the other person.

As we are here using the term *analogical*, we mean "qualitatively the same"; in other words, the difference is one of degree rather than of kind or genus. God is powerful as humans are powerful, but much more so. When we say that God knows, we have the same meaning in mind as when we say that humans know—but while a human knows something, God knows everything. God loves just as humans love, but God loves infinitely. We cannot grasp how much more of each of these qualities God possesses, or what it means to say that God has humans' knowledge amplified to an infinite extent. Having observed only finite forms, we find it impossible to grasp infinite concepts. In this sense, God always remains *incomprehensible*. It is not that we do not have knowledge of him, and genuine knowledge at that. Rather, the shortcoming lies in our inability to encompass him within our knowledge. Although *what* we know of him is the same as his knowledge of himself, the degree of our knowledge is much less. It is not exhaustive knowledge of him, as is his knowledge of himself, and in that respect it will be incomplete or non-exhaustive even in the eschaton.

This analogical knowledge is possible because God selects the components he uses. Unlike humans, God is knowledgeable of both sides of the analogy. If humans by their own natural unaided reason seek to understand God by constructing an analogy involving God and humanity, the result is always some sort of conundrum, for they are in effect working with an equation containing two unknowns. For instance, if one were to argue that God's love is to humans' love what God's being is to humans' being, it would be tantamount to saying x/2 = y/5. Not knowing the relationship between God's being (or nature, or essence) and that of humanity, humans cannot construct a meaningful analogy.

God, on the other hand, knowing all things completely, therefore knows which elements of human knowledge and experience are sufficiently similar to the divine truth that they can be used to help construct a meaningful analogy. Since we do not have any way of verifying such an analogy independently, it will always remain a presupposition and in that sense a matter of faith that it indeed corresponds to the truth God is portraying. We should note in this connection that how closely our ideas approximate what they are supposed to represent is

also unprovable and therefore taken on faith. In this respect, the theologian working with special revelation is in a situation similar to that of the empiricist, who cannot be certain that sensory perceptions accurately correspond to the objects they are purported to represent.

The Modes of Special Revelation

We now turn to examine the actual modes or means or modalities by which God has revealed himself: historical events, divine speech, and the incarnation.

Historical Events

Much has been made in the twentieth century of the idea that God's self-revelation is to be found in his personal action in history or his "mighty deeds." This is appropriate, for God has been at work in concrete historical ways within our world, affecting what occurs.

The Bible emphasizes the whole series of divine events by which God was made known. From the perspective of the people of Israel, a primary event was the call of Abraham, to whom they looked as the father of their nation. The Lord's provision of Isaac as an heir, under most unlikely conditions, was another significant divine act. God's provision in the midst of the famine during the time of Joseph benefited not only the descendants of Abraham, but the other residents of the whole area as well. Probably the major event for Israel, still celebrated by Jews, was the deliverance from Egypt through the series of plagues culminating in the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. The conquest of the promised land, the return from captivity, even the captivity itself, were God's self-manifestation. Jesus's birth, wondrous acts, death, and particularly his resurrection were God at work. In the creation and expansion of the church God was also at work, bringing his people into being.

All of these are acts of God and thus revelations of his nature. Those we have cited here are spectacular or miraculous. God's acts are not limited to such events, however. He has also been at work in the more mundane events of the history of his people.

While we have spoken of historical events as a mode of special revelation, it is still necessary to ask just what is meant by this. What exactly is the relationship between revelation and historical occurrences? We will examine three different views: (1) revelation in history, (2) revelation through history, and (3) revelation as history.

1. G. Ernest Wright insists that what is authoritative about the Bible is the narrative, which is to be understood as a recital of the historical events confessed by the people of Israel (in the Old Testament) and the Christian church (in the New). Wright is eager to distinguish between understanding the Bible as a collection of doctrines and as a historical recital. The Bible, strictly speaking, is not the Word of God, but rather a record of the acts of God and the human response to those acts. Biblical doctrine is inferred from the historical recital.[306] The attributes of God, as they are termed, are not timeless truths given to us in didactic form in Scripture. Rather, they are inferences drawn from the way God has acted. Thus, the very concept of God is thought of not in terms of his being and essence, but rather of his acts.

This historical recital can be seen in the kerygma that runs through both the Old and New Testaments. An excellent example in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 26:5–9. In the New Testament, we find an example in Paul's message in Acts 13:16–41, which, beginning with the patriarchs, continues through David to Jesus Christ. The common element uniting the two Testaments is the one history of the acts of God. Although set within the context of universal history, it is not this universal history from which the attributes of God are inferred. Wright notes three major attributes of God, which he maintains the people of Israel inferred as they attempted to explain the events leading to the establishment of their nation. A first inference, which was derived from the election of Israel, is that God is a God of grace. A second inference is that the elected people are a "covenant community" united to a God of law who governs communal life. A third inference is that God is Lord of nature, his control of nature being primarily a witness to his relation to history and human society.[307]

Wright cautions that we should not assume, however, that the biblical account is simply to be taken at face value. The reports of historical events include a number of conceptions that are not to be taken literally. The reason for this is that the interpretations placed on these events were not specially revealed by God. The events are the locus of the revelation; the inferences are only inferences. As such, the inferences drawn by the biblical writers are subject to correction and revision. There are within the biblical accounts materials that historical criticism finds inauthentic. Thus, the use of all the biblical data to shape theology will be, as David Kelsey puts it, somewhat misleading. For some features of the understanding of God were inferred by the biblical writers in the course of narrating the history; some were inferred from the history of the development of the narratives themselves; yet others were inferred from the way the narratives are structured and organized. It is the concepts found within the historical narrative or legitimately drawn from it that are the authoritative

factor.[308] It is the task of biblical studies to determine how much within what is presented as history is actual history. The task of the theologian therefore is to determine what characteristics of God can be inferred from that actual history. The revelation, then, is within the history; it is not to be equated with the history.

There is a problem of inconsistency with Wright's approach. On the one hand, he seems to say that because the categories of today are those of act and history rather than being, essence, or substance, we should restate the biblical concepts, that is, in a form that makes sense for persons today. This seems to imply that Wright finds concepts of God's being and essence in Scripture. Yet all along he has insisted that the biblical writers did not think in terms of being and essence. A further difficulty is that to restate biblical concepts in current categories is to allow a twentieth-century presupposition to control the interpretation of biblical events.

2. A major representative of the revelation through history approach is the view that was known popularly as neo-orthodoxy. God has worked within history, manifesting himself to humans. Historical events should not be identified with revelation, however.[309] They are merely the means through which revelation came. For revelation is not seen as the communication of information to humanity, but as God's presentation of himself.[310] Revelation is a personal encounter between God and human. For example, in the incident of the burning bush (Exod. 3), Moses actually met with God and knew him in a direct way. And in the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw God in all his majesty and grandeur (Isa. 6). But the accounts of these events are not revelation, for the events themselves were not revelation. Thus, one may record the words spoken by God, as the book of Exodus claims that Moses did, and another may read those words, and read of the circumstances of the event, but one will not thereby have obtained revelation. The revelation of God came through the words and deeds of Jesus, but those words and deeds were not the revelation per se. Thus, the Pharisees did not meet God when Jesus performed miraculous deeds. Rather, they maintained that he did what he did by the power of Beelzebub. There were many who saw and heard Jesus, but did not meet God. They simply came away convinced that he was a remarkable man. A particularly striking occurrence is the incident reported in John 12. When the Father spoke from heaven, some said that an angel had spoken to Jesus. Some said it had thundered. Only a few actually met with God as a result.

Revelation, then, is not perceived as an occurrence of history. The event is merely the shell in which the revelation was clothed. Rather, the revelation is something extra added to that event.[311] It is God's direct coming to someone through that event. Without this direct coming, the historical event is opaque;

indeed, this was the case for numerous persons who observed but stood by unmoved. Thus, the narrative of the Bible (or, for that matter, any other part of the Bible) is not revelation as such, for the simple reason that the revelation cannot be captured and recorded. The Bible is a record that revelation has occurred in the past. The popular conception that neo-orthodoxy views the Bible as the record of revelation is not, strictly speaking, correct. The Bible is a report that there has been revelation, but is not a record of what that revelation was. It is also a pointer and a promise that revelation may again occur.[312] As someone is reading the Bible, or hearing it proclaimed, the God who manifested himself to a person in the biblical incident being considered may renew his revelation and repeat what he did in the biblical situation. He may present himself in an encounter with the person reading or hearing the Bible. In that moment one may truthfully say that the Bible is the Word of God, but not through some inherent quality it has. It becomes the Word of God.[313] When, however, God withdraws his presence, the Bible is simply what it was before: the words of Moses, Isaiah, Luke, or whomever.

God is completely sovereign in revelation, according to this view. No human can do anything to compel God to reveal himself.[314] Nor can persons even predict when or where God will again "speak." The best that can be done is to lay oneself open to the words of Scripture, with a desire and prayer that God will manifest himself. But God chooses the time, place, and person to whom he will reveal himself. He is not restricted to the use of the Bible, for that matter. Barth says that God may speak through a bush, a dead dog, or even the words of an atheist. This does not mean that the church is commissioned to go about proclaiming the words of atheists. Rather, it is called to declare the words of Scripture, for these particularly bear witness to what God has done and what he promises to do.[315] No self-respecting neo-orthodox preacher, however, would preface the reading of Scripture by saying, "We will now hear the Word of God." That would be blasphemy, presuming to tell God when and to whom he is to speak.

Here again, much as with Wright's position, is a view that reality and truth are dynamic rather than static or substantive. Truth is personal, not propositional. Revelation is something that *happens*, not something that *is*. Consequently, when the neo-orthodox speak of revelation, they have in mind the *process* as opposed to the *product* of revelation (what is said or written about it), and the *revealing* as opposed to what is *revealed*. The historical event and, for that matter, the account of it are not the revelation. The historical event as that which is observable and reportable is merely the vehicle through which revelation comes. Revelation is a direct relationship to God rather than an observable event that

can be examined through the methods of historical research. Revelation comes *through* the occurrences of history, but not *as* those events. One should never identify the channel or means with the revelation itself, except under those conditions when, as we have described, that channel or means becomes the Word of God.

This view permits historical criticism. Criticism works on the historical events, but since they are not the revelation, revelation is safeguarded from the potentially corrosive effect of criticism. Whereas those who hold Wright's position engage in historical criticism in an attempt to find revelation within history, the neo-orthodox view allows historical criticism to sift through the material to ascertain as much as possible about the record, but this does not yield revelation. Revelation always remains in the control of God himself, whence it cannot be extracted by any human effort. It comes only as God makes it accessible by his sovereign grace.

3. The final position sees revelation not in or through, but *as* history. In the 1960s, a resurgence of this view took place through the efforts of the "Pannenberg circle." Their cooperative endeavor, *Revelation as History*,[316] was correctly named, for these men maintained that God has acted in history in such a way that the events actually were and are revelation of himself. God's attributes are actually seen in, not simply inferred from, his actions in history. Langdon Gilkey has pointed out that the biblical theology movement had problems with the idea of God as acting in history; they did not view the acts of God in history as having the same sense as the acts of a human person in history.[317] Pannenberg and his followers, however, use the word *actions* univocally when they speak of the actions of God in history and ordinary human actions. They regard God's actions in history as literal, not figurative or metaphorical.[318] The resurrection of Jesus, perhaps the supreme act of God in history, can be proved by reason, just as any other fact of history, says Pannenberg.

We should note that Pannenberg and his circle have universal history in mind; they regard all of history, not simply or exclusively the events recorded in Scripture, as a revelation of God.[319] In so doing, they have virtually obliterated the distinction between general and special revelation. Nevertheless, with respect to the relationship between history and revelation, they have restored a correct understanding. The view that historical events do not merely promise or contain or become revelation, but actually are revelation, seems close to the claim advanced by the biblical witness itself.

Moreover, Jesus maintained that there was an objective revelation associated with historical events. Thus he said in response to Philip's request to be shown

the Father, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Furthermore, Jesus placed responsibility on those who had heard him (and had also seen his miracles): “He who has ears, let him hear” (e.g., Matt. 11:15). He inveighed against the Pharisees for attributing to Beelzebub the deeds he had done, which were actually the Holy Spirit’s works through him. Thus he seemed to be saying that the historical events really were revelation. For that matter, the psalmists and prophets speak as if they and the people of Israel had actually seen God’s works (e.g., Ps. 78).

Divine Speech

The second major modality of revelation is God’s speech. A very common expression in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament is the statement, “The word of the LORD came to me . . .” (e.g., Jer. 18:1; Ezek. 12:1, 8, 17, 21, 26; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 3:1). The prophets had a consciousness that their message was not of their own creation, but was from God. In writing the book of Revelation, John was attempting to communicate God’s message. The writer to the Hebrews noted that God had spoken often in times past, and now had particularly spoken through his Son (Heb. 1:1–2). God does not merely demonstrate through his actions what he is like; he also speaks, telling us about himself, his plans, his will.

We may be inclined to think that God’s speech is really not a modality at all. It seems so direct. However, it always comes in some human language, the language of the prophet or apostle, whether that is Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Yet God presumably does not have a language in which he speaks. Thus, the use of language is an indication that God’s speech is mediated rather than direct revelation.[320]

Divine speech may take several forms.[321] It may be an audible speaking. It may be a silent, inward hearing of God’s message, like the subvocal process that slow readers engage in (they “hear” in their heads the words they are reading). It is likely that in many cases this was the mode used. Often this inaudible speech was part of another modality, such as a dream or vision. In these instances, the prophet heard the Lord speaking to him, but presumably anyone else present at the time heard nothing. Finally, there is “concursive” inspiration—revelation and inspiration have merged into one. As authors of Scripture wrote, God placed within their minds the thoughts he wished communicated. This was not a case of the message’s already having been revealed, and the Holy Spirit’s merely bringing these matters to remembrance, or directing the writer to thoughts with which the writer was already familiar. God created thoughts in the mind of the

writer as he wrote. The writer could have been either conscious or unconscious of what was happening. In the latter case, he may have felt that the ideas were simply dawning on him. Although Paul occasionally indicates that he "thinks" he has the Spirit of God (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:40), at other times he is more definite that he has received his message from the Lord (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:23). There are also some cases (e.g., Philemon) where Paul does not indicate consciousness of God's directing his writing, although God was doubtless doing so.

Quite frequently, the spoken Word of God was the interpretation of an event. While this event was usually something past or contemporary with the writing, there were times when the interpretation preceded the event, as in predictive prophecy. Our contention, despite some strong recent disagreements, is that not only the event but also its interpretation was revelation from God; the interpretation was not merely the insight or product of the reflection of a biblical writer. Without this specially revealed interpretation, the event itself would often be opaque and thus quite mute. It would be subject to various interpretations, and the scriptural explanation might then be merely an erroneous human speculation. Take such a central event as Jesus's death. If we knew that this event had occurred, but its meaning had not been divinely revealed to us, we might understand it in widely differing ways, or find it simply a puzzle. It might be regarded as a defeat, or a sort of moral victory, a martyr dying for his principles. The revealed word of explanation tells us that Jesus's death was an atoning sacrifice. The same is true of the resurrection. It could be interpreted merely as God's vindication of Jesus's cause, proving him to have been unjustly condemned by the Jews.

The question here is whether the biblical writers' interpretation or explanation is to be accorded the same status as the event itself. A number of contemporary scholars have observed that the biblical writers themselves seem to regard their interpretations as possessing the same status of divine origin as the events of which they are speaking. James Barr in particular has pointed out the difficulty of trying to fit all of revelation into the model of revelation as divine acts within history. He points out three salient types of materials that do not fit:

1. The wisdom literature presents a particular problem. What are the events to which these writings refer?[322] Even G. Ernest Wright himself had to concede that wisdom literature "does not fit into the type of faith exhibited in the historical and prophetic literature."[323]

2. Even those events regarded as examples of the "revelation in history" view present difficulties.[324] Wright's "God who acts" school considers certain aspects of the present form of the tradition as interpretations of or meditations on God's acts. For example, Moses's interpretation of the event of the burning bush was

not divine revelation. In the original account, this is presented as a direct communication from God to Moses of his purposes and intentions. Barr comments that we may continue to hold the other position (that we have here Moses's insights, not divine revelation) but that would be on *critical* rather than *biblical* grounds.[325]

3. Finally, apart from the type of biblical book involved, there is a good deal of material in the Bible where a narrative deals with divine actions, but the circumstances are such that the term "history" is appropriate only if we stretch the meaning of the word beyond its normal usage. Who, for example, was present to observe and report the acts of God at the creation? These accounts certainly have a somewhat different status than do the record of the exodus or Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem. Barr therefore asserts that revelation goes beyond the acts of God in history:

> Direct communication from God to man has fully as much claim to be called the core of the tradition as has revelation through [in] events in history. If we persist in saying that this direct, specific communication must be subsumed under revelation through [in] events in history and taken as subsidiary interpretation of the latter, I shall say that we are abandoning the Bible's own representation of the matter for another which is apologetically more comfortable.[326]

Vincent Taylor and C. H. Dodd have made similar observations. Taylor says: "On *a priori* grounds there is no compelling reason why Revelation should be found in 'mighty acts' of God, but not in words. Indeed, words can be a better medium of communication than events which need to be explained."[327] Dodd observes that the biblical writers "firmly believed that God spoke to them, spoke to the inward ear in the spiritual sense. . . . The interpretation which they offered was not invented by a process of thought. It was the meaning which they experienced in the events when their minds were open to God as well as open to the impact of the outward facts."[328] We must conclude that the position that best accords with the biblical writers' own understanding and claims is that direct communication of truth from God is a modality of revelation as genuine as that of his acts in history.

The Incarnation

The most complete modality of revelation is the incarnation. The contention here is that Jesus's life and speech were a special revelation of God. We may again be inclined to think that this is not a modality at all, that God was directly present in unmediated form. But since God does not have human form, Christ's humanity must represent a mediation of the divine revelation. This is not to say

that his humanity concealed or obscured the revelation. Rather, it was the means that conveyed the revelation of deity. Scripture specifically states that God has spoken through or in his Son. Hebrews 1:1–2 contrasts this with the earlier forms of revelation, and indicates that the incarnation is superior.

Here revelation as event most fully occurs. The pinnacle of God's acts is to be found in the life of Jesus. His miracles, death, and resurrection are redemptive history in its most condensed and concentrated form. Here too is revelation as divine speech, for Jesus's message surpassed those of the prophets and apostles. Jesus even dared to place his message over against what was written in the Scriptures, not as contradicting, but as going beyond or fulfilling them (Matt. 5:17). When the prophets spoke, they were bearers of a message from and about God. When Jesus spoke, it was God himself speaking. There was a directness about his message.

Revelation also took place in the very perfection of Jesus's character. There was a godlikeness about him that could be discerned. Here God was actually living among humans and displaying his attributes to them. Jesus's actions, attitudes, and affections did not merely mirror the Father, but were the actual presence of God. The centurion at Calvary, who presumably had seen many persons die of crucifixion, apparently saw something different in Jesus, which caused him to exclaim, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, fell on his knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). These were people who found in Jesus a revelation of the Father.

Here revelation as act and as word come together. Jesus both spoke the Father's word and exhibited the Father's attributes. He was the most complete revelation of God, because he was God. John could make the amazing statement, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched" (1 John 1:1). And Jesus could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Special Revelation: Propositional or Personal?

The primary result of special revelation is knowledge of God. By this we mean knowledge not only of the person of God, but also of what he has done, of his creation, of the nature and situation of humans, of the relationship between God and humans. It should also be noted that this is real, objective, rational information communicated from God to humanity.

It is necessary at this point to carefully examine and evaluate a position that became popular in the twentieth century. This is the view that revelation is not the communication of information (or propositions), but God's presentation of himself. Revelation, then, is not propositional; it is personal. To a large extent, our view of faith will reflect our understanding of revelation.[329] If revelation is regarded as the communication of propositional truths, then faith will be viewed as a response of assent, of believing those truths. If, on the other hand, revelation is regarded as the presentation of a person, then faith will correspondingly be viewed as an act of personal trust or commitment. According to this latter view, theology is not a revealed set of doctrines. It is the church's attempt to express what it has found in God's revelation of himself. This view of revelation has been especially identified with neo-orthodoxy, but it has been fairly widespread throughout the rest of recent theology as well. It was found in precursors of neo-orthodoxy, and it lingered on in somewhat diminished form after the pinnacle of that movement had passed.

It should be noted that there is still room in neo-orthodoxy for doctrinal propositions. William Temple has said that while there are no revealed truths, for God does not reveal truths as such, there are, however, truths of revelation.[330] For Emil Brunner this is something quite different from propositional revelation. Doctrine is indissolubly connected with the encounter "as instrument, as framework, as token."[331] But this is not to say that these truths are divinely communicated. When one has encountered God, one may then speak out of what has been encountered. This grows out of the personal relationship or communion between God and humans. When one shifts from the person-to-person relationship that constitutes revelation to the description of this relationship, which is the doing of theology (or preaching, for that matter), a subtle shift has taken place in the nature of the language. In the former case, the language expresses an I–Thou relationship, personal in character. In the latter, the language expresses an I–it relationship, impersonal in nature. The former is the language of prayer and worship; the latter, the language of discourse.[332]

The view that revelation is personal derives from Søren Kierkegaard's distinction between objective and subjective truth and from later existentialist discussions. In seeking objective truth (which comes in the form of propositions) one attempts to define an item by putting it into various classes. In so doing, however, one inevitably limits the item, making it finite ("defining" it). The aim of gaining objective information about an item is basically to bring it under one's control. Thus, if we conceive of our knowledge of God as basically objective (propositional), we are making him into something less than God. We are making him a *thing*, an object.

The focus of subjective truth, on the other hand, is personal relationship rather than objective information. In emphasizing subjective knowledge, Barth and others of his school of thought have been wary of falling into the trap of subjectivism—the position that truth is nothing but one's subjective reaction or response. To avoid this trap, they assert that faith as trust also requires faith as assent. Barth, for example, insists that faith is *fiducia* (trust), but that it also includes *notitia* (knowledge) and *assensus* (assent) as well.[333] Edward Carnell has expressed this by saying that all vital faith rests on general faith. General faith is believing a fact; vital faith is trusting in a person. He maintains that wherever there is trust, there is at least an implicit belief. He points out that he does not simply embrace the first woman he meets. Rather, before doing so, he ascertains that she is his wife. While the process of determining this may not be very lengthy, detailed, or formal, it does occur.[334]

That there must be belief before there can be trust is evident from our own experiences. Suppose I have to make a bank deposit in cash, but am unable to do so in person. I must ask someone else to do this for me. But whom will I ask, entrusting myself, or at least a portion of my material possessions? I will trust or commit myself to someone whom I believe to be honest. Believing in that person depends on believing something about him or her. I will probably select a good friend whose integrity I do not question. If my situation is so desperate that I must ask for help from a stranger, I will certainly make at least some sort of preliminary assessment of his or her honesty, crude and incomplete though such a judgment must necessarily be.

Similarly, the advocates of the view that revelation is personal (as well as those who advocate the view that it is propositional or informational) recognize that their faith must rest on some basis.[335] The question is whether the nonpropositional view of revelation provides a sufficient basis for faith. Can the advocates of this view be sure that what they encounter is really the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? In the nineteenth century, Ludwig Feuerbach pointed out (in *The Essence of Christianity*) that the object of faith may be nothing more than one's own self-projection. Or perhaps one's trust may be simply in a father image, one's superego, or something of that type. For those who hold to the propositional or informational view of revelation, faith consists in believing certain affirmations about God—that he is all-powerful, loving, everywhere present, triune—and then placing one's trust in the God so defined. In theory, it is possible to offer evidence that would serve to confirm or verify these affirmations.

In neo-orthodoxy's view, however, God does not tell us information about himself. We simply know him in the encounter. But how do we know that it is

the Christian God that we encounter, unless he tells us who he is and what he is like? Are there any criteria by which we can recognize that our encounter is an encounter with the Christian God? Bear in mind our earlier discussion of the personal nature of religious language (chapter 5). Because of this personal nature, we can come to know God as we know other humans. The parallel eventually breaks down, however, for while we have sensory experiences of other humans, presumably we have none of God. We can recognize a person we know by a glance at her or his face, without verbal communication. But this is not true of God. How do we recognize him as being triune instead of single in person? While neo-orthodoxy maintains that God is genuinely known in the encounter, and that faith evokes implicit belief in the truth of certain claims or propositions, it does not make clear just how this happens. The most common answer is that the revelation is self-certifying (not self-evident). In addition, the neo-orthodox suggest that just as the best response to the question "How will I know when I am in love?" is "You will simply know," the answer to the question, "How do I know it is God I am encountering?" is "You simply know."[336]

There is the question of books other than the Bible that also claim to be God's Word. What about the god met through them? Is it the Christian God? Brunner's first response is that these books simply do not apply to non-Muslims or non-Hindus. His second response is that the voice of a stranger is heard in these books, that is, a voice other than that which we hear in the Bible. But is this really an adequate answer? He says that the voice heard in these other books may somehow be God's voice, too, but it is scarcely recognizable. Hundreds of millions of Muslims and Hindus find reality in the encounter with the god they meet through their books, some as emphatically as any Christian. Are they wrong, or are we all encountering the same thing? Again his answer seems merely to be, "We are not Muslims or Hindus."[337] Apparently God and truth can be encountered in various ways. But does this not teeter on the brink of subjectivism?

This poses another problem, the problem of theology. Those who maintain that revelation is personal are nevertheless very concerned about correctly defining belief, or stating correct doctrinal understandings, while insisting that faith is not belief in doctrinal propositions. Barth and Brunner, for example, argued over such issues as the nature and status of the image of God in humans, as well as the virgin birth and the empty tomb. Presumably, each felt he was trying to establish the true doctrine in these areas. But how are these doctrinal propositions related to, or derived from, the nonpropositional revelation? There is a problem here, for Brunner insists that doctrine as token is "indissolubly

connected with the framework it represents," that is, our personal encounter with God.[338] He also says that God "does not deliver to us a series of lectures in dogmatic theology or submit a confession of faith to us, but He *instructs* us authentically about Himself. He tells us authentically who He is and what He wills for us and from us."[339] This almost sounds like the revealed truths that Brunner has taken great pains to avoid. And what is the nature of the indissoluble connection between doctrine and encounter if there is no revealed truth? His response is to introduce an analogy between doctrine and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As the Lord himself is present in, with, and under the elements (which are the token of the sacrament), so the Lord is present in, with, and under the doctrine, which is the token of the encounter.[340] His presence cannot be maintained without the doctrine.

There are several problems with this analogy. One is that it tries to explain the obscure by the more obscure—a conception of the Lord's Supper based on a now obsolete or at least incomprehensible metaphysic. But apart from this there is still a difficulty. It is one thing to say that the presence of the Lord cannot be maintained without the doctrine. But how is this doctrine arrived at? How is it derived from the encounter? How does one establish that Brunner's form of the doctrine is more correct than Barth's? Bernard Ramm has pointed out that Barth has somehow derived six million words of propositions (in the *Church Dogmatics*) from nonpropositional encounter. Ramm remarks that "the relationship of doctrinal statements and the encounter is in a poor state of integration within neo-orthodoxy."[341] John Newton Thomas speaks of the "anomalous state of Scripture" in Barth's thinking—revelation is maintained to be nonpropositional, and yet the words of Scripture somehow express that revelation's cognitive content. Thomas complains that Barth proceeds to settle doctrinal issues by quoting the Bible in the same fashion as does the fundamentalist, whose views he has rejected.[342]

Some have interpreted Barth's view in a way that is more congruent with the traditional orthodox understanding. John Morrison classifies as "Barthians" a whole group of neo-orthodox theologians who would not say that the Bible *is* the Word of God, but rather that it becomes the Word of God when God chooses to make it such: David Mueller, Otto Weber, T. F. Torrance, and Daniel Migliore.[343] The same interpretation is found in evangelical misunderstandings of Barth by Cornelius Van Til, Gordon H. Clark, and Carl Henry,[344] as well as evangelicals more sympathetic to Barth, such as Bernard Ramm[345] and Donald Bloesch.[346]

One evangelical who has a different understanding of Barth's view is Bruce McCormack. He contends that evangelicals' hesitation about Barth stems from failure to understand his doctrine of the Word of God, and even faults Stanley

Grenz and Roger Olson for seeing tension between Barth's theory of Scripture and his use of it.[347] The misunderstanding has resulted from two oversights: failure to take some of Barth's more emphatic statements in their context, and failure to take account of Barth's ontology of Scripture. To McCormack, Barth's theological ontology is that of being in becoming. "Everything that is has its being in becoming. *But not everything becomes what it is under the same set of conditions*."[348] God's willing to become what he is should be seen as "God gives to himself, appoints for himself, decides for a being that he will have for all eternity to come."[349] In the case of humans, "The human being is elected by God in eternity to be God's partner in the covenant of grace. This eternal divine decision is itself determinative of all the self-determining activities of human individuals. . . . Human beings can choose to live as covenant-breakers, as those who refuse to act as the covenant-partners God has appointed them to be." Despite all this, however, "even where this occurs, the human cannot really cease to be what he or she is."[350]

In the case of the Bible, we must take into account two unequal wills, that of God and of "the fallen human interpreter." With respect to the former, "what the Bible *is*, is determined by the will of God as expressed in his act of giving it to the church. And this means that where and when the Bible *becomes* the Word of God, it is only becoming what it already is." In the case where the Bible does not become the Word of God, however, "this changes nothing whatsoever as to the true nature of the Bible as defined by the divine will which came to expression in the giving of the Bible to the church. It only means that God does not will, for the time being, that the Bible should *become* what it is for these readers."[351] Noting Barth's parallel between the three persons of the Trinity and the three forms of the Word of God, McCormack asserts that Barth, as a Reformed theologian, does not hold to the Lutheran doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, whereby the attributes of the deity are communicated to the humanity of Jesus, and vice versa. Rather, the two natures are kept distinct. The same is true of the Bible. Thus, McCormack suspects that evangelicals' stumbling at Barth's contention that "the human words of the prophets and apostles" are not "divinized through the sacramental union by which God joins them to the Word of God" is "not because they are evangelicals, but because they are not *Reformed* evangelicals."[352]

If McCormack is correct, then a host of such sophisticated theologians as Torrance, Bloesch, and Ramm are wrong, which in itself should be somewhat cautionary. Another possibility is that McCormack has not fully accounted for Barth's dialectical methodology. It will not do simply to contrast "essentialism" and "Greek substance categories" with "relational and actualistic" categories,

while contending these are in Barth's case strictly theological, and do not represent the imposition of any philosophical categories.[353] In general, the twentieth century was hostile to substantives, much preferring verbs and adjectives, and Barth (and perhaps McCormack as well) seems to have been influenced by that ethos, despite his attempt to purge it from his theology.[354] McCormack appears to acknowledge that Barth used modern rather than ancient philosophies, and he speaks of Barth in terms of "the translation of these ancient philosophical categories into modes of reflection that are more congruent with what philosophers think today."[355] In the Barthian dialectic, there is reluctance to fuse two alternatives, such as that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is not the Word of God. Although it is customary to restrict the dialectic approach to Barth's early period, this tendency seems to have persisted in his later theology. Note, for example, his noncommittal statement regarding the alleged universalistic implications of his theology: "Does this mean universalism? I wish here to make only three short observations, in which one is to detect no position *for or against* that which passes among us under this term."[356]

This is not to suggest that there cannot be a connection between nonpropositional revelation and propositions of truth, but that this connection has not been adequately explicated by neo-orthodoxy. The problem derives from making a disjunction between propositional and personal revelation. Revelation is not *either* personal *or* propositional; it is *both/and.* What God primarily does is to reveal himself, but he does so at least in part by telling us something about himself.

But do we not face the problem of impersonality when discussing propositions about God? Does not this give us I–it relationships rather than I–Thou? The analysis implied by these two expressions is both incomplete and misleading. There are actually two variables involved here, for the shift from I–Thou to I–it involves a shift not only from personal to impersonal, but also from second to third person. Two other categories are needed, which we will call "I–you" and "I–he/she."

It is possible to have second person language (or language of address) that is very impersonal (I–you). The expression, "Hey, you!" is an example. It is also possible to speak about a third person in personal terms. The language of discourse can display concern, respect, warmth, and even tenderness. That is "I–he/she" language. We need not turn persons into things when we shift from speaking to them to speaking about them. Thus, propositions about God need not be impersonal.

Scripture as Revelation

If revelation includes propositional truths, then it is of such a nature that it can be preserved. It can be written down or *inscripturated.* And this written record, to the extent that it is an accurate reproduction of the original revelation, is also by derivation revelation and entitled to be called that.

The definition of revelation becomes a factor here. If revelation is defined as only the actual occurrence, the process or the *revealing*, then the Bible is not revelation. Revelation is something that occurred long ago. If, however, revelation is also the product, the result or the *revealed*, then the Bible may also be termed revelation.

Similarly, the word "speech" may mean the actual occurrence, the mouthing of words, the gestures (the "speaking"). It may also mean that which was spoken. Thus, we might well argue whether a transcript (or an audio or video recording) can be called the speech. Someone might maintain that it is not the speech. That took place last Tuesday between 7:30 and 8:00 p.m. Nevertheless, it is the speech, for it preserves the content of what was said.

Linguist Kenneth Pike notes that denial of propositional revelation is based on too narrow a view of language. Certainly language has social relevance and purpose, and is designed to communicate with and affect other people. But it also serves other purposes: talking with oneself, formulating ideas for oneself, storing these ideas. The neo-orthodox insistence that there is no revelation without response ignores the fact that while a message may be available for others, they might not as yet be prepared to receive it. Pike uses the illustration of a great scientific scholar who gives a lecture to a group of graduate students, none of whom understand what is said. A recording is made of the lecture, however, and after three years of study the students listen to it again and now understand it. Nothing, however, has happened to the content of the recording. It was truth on both the earlier and later occasions.[357]

If revelation is propositional, it can be preserved. And if this is the case, then the question of whether the Bible is in this derivative sense a revelation is a question of whether it is inspired, of whether it indeed preserves what was revealed. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

We should also note that this revelation is *progressive*. Some care needs to be exercised in the use of this term, for it has sometimes been used to represent the idea of a gradual evolutionary development. That approach, which flourished under liberal scholarship, regarded sections of the Old Testament as virtually obsolete and false; they were only very imperfect approximations of the truth. The idea we are here suggesting, however, is that later revelation builds on

earlier revelation, complementing and supplementing, rather than contradicting it. Notice how Jesus elevated the teachings of the law by extending, expanding, and internalizing them. He frequently prefaced his instruction with the expression, “You have heard . . . but I say to you.” Similarly, the author of Hebrews points out that God, who in the past spoke by the prophets, has in these last days spoken by a Son, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature (Heb. 1:1–3). The revelation of God is a process even as is redemption, and a process that moved to an ever more complete form.[358]

Propositions or Narrative?

In recent years some have expressed a preference for the idea that revelation is in narrative or story form, rather than propositions.[359] Part of the objection to propositional theology has been that it converts the various genres of Scripture into a cognitive-propositional form. The narrative emphasis has largely been a result of postmodern epistemology.[360] It is certainly true that much of Scripture is in story form. For example, Jesus used parables extensively. Further, the psalmists and the prophets frequently used illustrations and imagery to convey their point. It is notable, however, that Jesus also gave his disciples a propositional interpretation of his parables. This phenomenon is found elsewhere in Scripture, for example, Ruth 4:7, where an explanation of the narrative is given, without which it would be opaque. This suggests that the major value of narrative is what I have termed the communicative function, rather than the hermeneutical or heuristic functions.[361]

A number of books have been written, advocating the use of narrative theology.[362] What is interesting, however, is that virtually without exception, they are propositional or non-narrative discussions of narrative theology, supplemented by narrative or story illustrations. This suggests that the polemic against propositional revelation and theology may be misplaced, and that rather than exclusive of one another, propositions and narrative may be complementary, with the propositional being primary.

The Possibility of Knowledge of God

For more than two centuries theology has struggled with the epistemological problems raised by Immanuel Kant, especially in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. While the issues are much too complex to discuss at length here, we may at least

describe briefly the nub of the issue and some recent attempts to resolve the difficulty. Kant sought to combine empiricism and rationalism by maintaining that all genuine knowledge consists of two elements. Sense experience provides the content, but the rational structure of the mind provides the order or form. Without either component there can be no knowledge. Specifically, for our purposes, there can be no genuine rational or cognitive knowledge of supersensory objects. All that can be known of physical objects is the thing as it appears to us, or the phenomenon. We can never be absolutely sure that this is identical with the noumenon, or the thing as it is in itself. In the case of supersensible objects, such as God, there is not even any phenomenon. Kant contended that when one attempts to apply the categories of the understanding to the supersensible, one comes to two equally plausible options, or antinomies, and it is impossible to choose between them, such as the existence of God or the nonexistence of God.[363]

Various attempts were made to bridge this chasm. Hegel took the antinomies and made them his key to the truth. For each thesis, there is an antithesis, but Hegel maintained that these two then were combined or fused into a synthesis. Thus, the irreconcilable was reconciled, and the truth was neither of the options, but a synthesis of them.[364] Kierkegaard also held to this dialectic or opposition of concepts, but contended that they could not be reconciled. He was fond of statements such as “Either-or is the way to heaven; both-and is the road to hell.” One must choose by making an existential leap, which in itself is not rational. It is not a function of reason, but of will.[365] Barth as well as the other early “dialectical theologians” or “theologians of crisis” maintained that this tension could not be removed. Rather, the truth lies in the tension between the two, a tension that cannot be relieved by any human effort, but only by God initiating the crossing of the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and the human. This correctly emphasizes the difference between knowing a passive, inanimate object and an active, personal one.

More recently, attention has focused on the divine side of the chasm. Kevin Vanhoozer has attempted to describe the process using categories of speech-act philosophy. God is the divine speaker, who utilizes locutions (what he says) in a fashion that should be understood in terms of illocution, or what he intends to accomplish by these locutions.[366] Building on and supplementing this view, John Morrison has drawn on Einstein’s concept of multiple levels. We think our way back to knowledge of God by retracing, as it were, our way up the levels of meaning, down through which God has come in revelation.[367]

The value of these discussions is in reminding us that the two partners in the dialogue are not merely coequal partners. God is on a different level of reality

than we are. A gap that cannot be bridged from the human side may not be quite such an insuperable difficulty from the divine side. This is part of the greatness, the magnificence, of God. The Kantian problem of how it is possible to know the noumena, or even that of which we have no phenomena, may be lessened by recourse to another concept in Kierkegaard's thought: the idea of dimensional beyondness of God in relationship to us. Rather than being simply far removed from us within our own dimensions of reality, God is in a different dimension of reality than are we. While we cannot move into his dimension, he can bridge it from his side to ours. Recently physicists have pointed out that if there are more than three spatial dimensions, a being operating in four dimensions would be able to intervene in a three dimensional world.[368] For a God who exists beyond all spatial dimensions, this would be even simpler.

8

The Preservation of the Revelation: *Inspiration*

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to achieve the following:

1. Define inspiration of Scripture and the relation of the Holy Spirit to that process.
2. Review the ways in which Scripture supports itself concerning inspiration.
3. Identify the issues involved in formulating a theory of inspiration.
4. Compare and contrast previous theories of inspiration.
5. Examine the approaches that have been used to formulate a theory of inspiration.
6. Measure the extent of inspiration in the Scriptures.
7. Analyze the intensiveness of inspiration both within Scripture and outside it.
8. Construct a model of inspiration that integrates both the didactic material and the phenomena of Scripture.

Chapter Summary

One of the topics that is hotly debated today is the degree to which Scripture is inspired by God. Inspiration is necessary because it confirms the nature of God's special revelation through Scripture. An important part of theology is the formulation of a theory of the extent to which the Bible is inspired. A variety of theories have been propounded. These are scrutinized and evaluated. Over centuries the biblical writers support a high view of inspiration. While in the proper sense, inspiration is of the writers, in the derivative sense, we may also say that the writings themselves are inspired.

Study Questions

- Why is inspiration so important to the authority of Scripture?
- In what ways does the Bible witness to its divine origins?
- Name the issues and responses in formulating a theory of inspiration.
- Compare and contrast the five theories of inspiration.
- What are the two basic methods of formulating a theory of inspiration, and who is associated with each method?
- What are Dewey Beegle's problems with biblical phenomena?
- How would you summarize the characteristics that should be included in an appropriate model of inspiration?

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Definition of Inspiration

By inspiration of Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers that rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or that resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God. This is merely a preliminary definition, in need of amplification.

While revelation benefits those who immediately receive it, that value might well be lost for those beyond the immediate circle of revelation. Since God does not ordinarily repeat his revelation for each person, there has to be some way to preserve it. It could, of course, be preserved by oral retelling or by being fixed into a definite tradition, and, as we argued in chapter 5, this certainly was operative in the period that sometimes intervened between the occurrence of the initial revelation and its inscripturation. Certain problems attach to this, however, for over centuries and even millennia oral tradition is subject to erosion and modification. It is apparent, then, that something more than oral retelling is needed.

While revelation is the communication of truth from God to humans, inspiration relates more to the relaying of that truth from the first recipient(s) of it to other persons, whether then or later. Thus, revelation might be thought of as a vertical action, and inspiration as a horizontal matter. While revelation and inspiration are usually thought of together, it is possible to have one without the other. There are cases of inspiration without revelation. The Holy Spirit in some instances moved Scripture writers to record the words of unbelievers, words that certainly were not divinely revealed. Some pieces of information in Scripture were readily available to anyone who would make the inquiry. The genealogies, in both the Old Testament and New Testament (the listing of Jesus's lineage), may well be of this character. There also was revelation without inspiration: instances of revelation that went unrecorded because the Holy Spirit did not inspire anyone to write them down. John makes this very point in John 21:25, when he says that if everything that Jesus did were written down, he supposed that "even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." The Spirit was apparently very selective in what he inspired the biblical authors to report.

The Fact of Inspiration

Throughout Scripture there is the claim, or even the assumption, of its divine origin, or of its equivalency with the actual speech of the Lord. This point is

sometimes spurned on the grounds of its being circular. Any theology (or any other system of thought for that matter) faces a dilemma when dealing with its basic authority. Either it bases its starting point upon itself, in which case it is guilty of circularity, or it bases itself upon some foundation other than that upon which it bases all its other articles, in which case it is guilty of inconsistency. Note, however, that we are guilty of circularity only if the testimony of Scripture is taken as settling the matter. But surely the Scripture writer's own claim should be taken into consideration as part of the process of formulating our hypothesis of the nature of Scripture. Other considerations will of course be consulted by way of evaluating the hypothesis. What we have here is somewhat like a court trial. The defendant is permitted to testify on his or her own behalf. This testimony is not taken as settling the matter, however: that is, after hearing the defendant's plea of "not guilty," the judge will not immediately rule, "I find the defendant not guilty." Additional testimony is called for and evaluated, in order to determine the credibility of the defendant's testimony. But his or her testimony is admitted.

There is one other consideration in answering the charge of circularity. In consulting the Bible to determine the authors' view of Scripture, one is not necessarily presupposing its inspiration. One may consult it merely as a historical document that informs us that its authors considered it the inspired Word of God. In this case one is not viewing the Bible as its own starting point. This is circularity only if one begins with the assumption of the inspiration of the Bible, and then uses that assumption as a guarantee of the truth of the Bible's claim to be inspired. It is permissible to use the Bible as a historical document and to allow it to plead its own case.

The Bible witnesses to its divine origin in several ways. One of these is the view of New Testament authors regarding the Scriptures of their day, which we would today term the Old Testament. Second Peter 1:20–21 is a cardinal instance: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Here Peter is affirming that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. Rather the writers were moved or borne along (φερόμενοι —*pheromenoi*) by the Spirit of God. The impetus that led to the writing was from the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Peter's readers are to pay heed to the prophetic word, for it is not simply humans' word, but God's Word.

A second reference is that of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." In this passage Paul is exhorting Timothy to continue in the

teachings that he has received. Paul assumes Timothy is familiar with the "holy Scriptures" (v. 15) and urges him to continue in them since they are divinely inspired (or more correctly, "God-spired" or "God-breathed"). The impression here is that the Scriptures are divinely produced, just as God breathed the breath of life into the human (Gen. 2:7). They therefore carry value for building up the believer into maturity in order to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). Nothing is said about the authority or lack of authority of the Scriptures for matters other than these practical spiritual concerns, such as their dependability with respect to historical and scientific issues, but this omission is not significant given the context.

When we turn to the early church's preaching, we find a similar understanding of the Old Testament. In Acts 1:16 Peter says, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David," and then proceeds to quote from Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 regarding the fate of Judas. Peter not only regards David's words as authoritative, but he actually affirms that God spoke by the mouth of David. David was God's "mouthpiece," so to speak. The same thought, that God spoke by the mouth of the prophets, is found in Acts 3:18, 21, and 4:25. The kerygma, then, identifies "it is written in the scripture" with "God has said it."

This fits well with the prophets' own testimony. Again and again they declared, "Thus says the Lord." Micah wrote: "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken" (4:4). Jeremiah said: "These are the words the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah" (30:4). Isaiah affirmed: "The LORD spoke to me. . . . He said . . ." (8:11). Amos declared: "Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel" (3:1). And David said: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Statements like these, which appear repeatedly in the prophets, indicate that they were aware of being "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Finally, we note our Lord's own view of the Old Testament writings. In part, we may infer this from the way he related to the view of the Bible held by his dialogical opponents, the Pharisees. He never hesitated to correct their misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the Bible, but he never challenged or corrected their view of the nature of the Scripture. He merely disagreed with their interpretations of the Bible, or the traditions they had added to the content of the Scriptures themselves. In his discussions and disputes with his opponents, he repeatedly quoted from the Scriptures. In his threefold temptation, he responded to Satan each time with a quotation from the Old Testament. He spoke of the authority and permanence of the Scripture: "the Scripture cannot be

broken" (John 10:35); "until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). Two objects were regarded as sacred in the Israel of Jesus's day, the temple and the Scriptures. Jesus did not hesitate to point out the transiency of the former, for not one stone would be left upon another (Matt. 24:2). There is, therefore, a striking contrast between his attitude toward the Scriptures and his attitude toward the temple.[369]

We may conclude from the foregoing that the Scripture writers' uniform testimony is that the Bible has originated from God and is his message to the human race. This is the fact of the Bible's inspiration; we must now ask what it means.

Issues in Formulating a Theory of Inspiration

Several questions should be on the agenda of anyone attempting to formulate a theory of inspiration. These are questions that need to be addressed if there is to be a full understanding of the nature of inspiration.

1. Can we really formulate a theory of inspiration? It should be apparent that such a question is necessary before even beginning the procedure. Some would say that such a procedure is neither necessary nor helpful. We should instead simply use the Bible rather than theorize regarding its nature. We should be content with the fact that the Bible is inspired rather than ask how it was inspired. This argument, however, is faulty. The fact is that our utilization of the Bible will be influenced by what we think about its nature. We will, whether consciously or unconsciously, be dealing with it on the basis of an implicit theory of its nature. It is therefore desirable to think out our view of inspiration.

Another objection is that since the Bible does not present a full-fledged doctrine of Scripture, we should simply limit ourselves to the use of biblical terminology and concepts. If this advice were followed consistently, however, our biblical and theological understanding would be considerably impoverished. The Bible does not use the term "Trinity," but this concept is called for if we are to understand the material. Similarly, the biblical writers do not discuss "Q" or the *Logia*, nor does the term "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) appear in the canon. These, however, are part of the analytical mechanism we employ to understand biblical truth better. Similarly, a more complete understanding of the nature of inspiration (even though not fleshed out in Scripture) is both desirable and necessary for a more complete understanding of the Bible.

Our aim here is not primarily a statement of how the Bible was inspired; that is, we are not inquiring into the process or method by which God brought it into being. There is room for such an inquiry, but we are primarily asking about the extent to which the Bible is inspired. Our question lies between the questions *whether* and *how* the Bible is inspired; namely, *what* precisely in the Bible is inspired, or how inspired is the Bible?

2. Does the Bible supply us with a basis for formulating an understanding of its inspiration? If there is not a full theory stated in the Bible, is there at least sufficient material from which we can develop such a theory? And if so, are we bound to accept and follow the Scripture writers' views on this subject, or are we at liberty to criticize, modify, or even reject the understanding they present?

3. Should we, in formulating our understanding, give primary weight to the Bible's teaching about itself, or should we primarily emphasize the nature of Scripture, the characteristics it displays? We might term these, respectively, the didactic material and the phenomena of Scripture. The two approaches are sometimes referred to, respectively, as the deductive and inductive approaches, but this terminology is somewhat misleading. Most theories of inspiration utilize both types of material. The crucial question is, which type will be interpreted in the light of the other? Perhaps the most significant differences among evangelical theories of inspiration occur at this point.

4. Is inspiration uniform throughout the Bible, or are there different degrees or differing levels of inspiration? We are not asking here about the nature of the material, but rather about the nature and degree of inspiration. May it be that at some points in the Bible the words that were written were actually dictated, while elsewhere there was merely a directing of the writer's thoughts, and at still others perhaps only an impulse to write?

5. Is inspiration a detectable quality? Is there something about inspired material so unique that we can perceive or recognize it as inspired? In answering this question affirmatively, some liberals have gone to the extreme of saying in effect that "inspired" equals "inspiring." One can measure the degree of inspiration by the degree to which a portion of written material inspires the reader. On this basis, the Sermon on the Mount was deemed more inspired than the genealogies. Can canonicity be determined by this method; can one, for example, detect qualitative differences between the book of Hebrews and the *Shepherd of Hermas*? If one holds that there are also degrees of inspiration within the canon, it should be possible to sort out those differences as well.

6. How does inspiration relate to the use of sources? Does it mean that everything written was somehow given in an immediate fashion by the Holy

Spirit? Or does it allow for drawing upon historical documents, perhaps even engaging in extensive research?

7. If inspiration includes the use of sources, does inspiration guarantee their accuracy? If the Scripture writer used a historical source that contained an error, did the Holy Spirit guide and direct to correct the error? Or does inspiration merely mean that the author reported precisely what was found in the document used, even if erroneous?

8. Does inspiration relate to the shaping and preparing of the material prior to its actual utilization by the author of Scripture? In some cases long periods of time elapsed from the occurrence of the event until its recording in Scripture. During this period, the community of faith was transmitting, selecting, amplifying, and condensing the received tradition as well. Did inspiration extend to this process, or was all of this merely governed by normal laws of group psychology and the formation of tradition?

9. Is inspiration broadly or narrowly related to the Scripture writer? That is, is inspiration something that characterizes only the actual moment of writing, or does it involve earlier experiences that prepare the author for that moment? Does inspiration also involve formation of the author's personality, background, vocabulary, and whole way of viewing things?

10. Is inspiration a quality permanently attached to the Scripture writer, or to the office of prophet or apostle as it were; or is it a special influence at a particular time? If it is the former, then by virtue of the office, whatever a prophet or apostle wrote on a matter of spiritual or religious concern would be inspired and hence authoritative. Thus, anything Paul wrote, any letter dealing with the Christian life, would be inspired and ought to be included in the canon simply because of its author. In the latter case, only what Paul wrote under the special influence of the Holy Spirit would be considered Scripture.

11. Is inspiration properly to be attributed to the Scripture writer or to the Scripture written? In the former case, inspiration would apply especially to the relationship between God and the author, to something done to the apostle or prophet. In the latter case, the emphasis is placed more on the resulting product. Another possibility is to combine these two options: it is primarily the author that is inspired, and secondarily the writing.

12. Finally, to how much of the material dealt with by the author does inspiration apply? Does it pertain only to salvific matters, so that when dealing with supporting matters, such as science and history, the author is largely unaided? Or does inspiration operate with respect to the other matters as well?

Theories of Inspiration

A number of views have arisen regarding the nature of inspiration. A brief survey will help us see the various ways in which the issues we have just raised have been worked out.

1. The *intuition* theory makes inspiration largely a high degree of insight. Some within left-wing liberalism hold such a view. Inspiration is the functioning of a high gift, perhaps almost like an artistic ability, but nonetheless a natural endowment, a permanent possession. The Scripture writers were religious geniuses. The Hebrew people had a particular gift for the religious, just as some groups seem to have special aptitude for mathematics or languages. On this basis, inspiration of the Scripture writers was essentially no different from that of other great religious and philosophical thinkers, such as Plato and Buddha. The Bible then is great religious literature reflecting the Hebrew people's spiritual experiences.[370]

2. The *illumination* theory maintains that there is an influence of the Holy Spirit upon the authors of Scripture, but involving only a heightening of their normal powers. There is no special communication of truth or guidance in what is written, but merely an increased sensitivity and perceptivity with regard to spiritual matters. It is not unlike the effect of stimulants students sometimes take to heighten their awareness or amplify the mental processes. Thus, the work of inspiration is different only in degree, not in kind, from the Spirit's work with all believers. The result of this type of inspiration is increased ability to discover truth.[371]

3. The *dynamic* theory emphasizes the combination of divine and human elements in the process of inspiration and the writing of the Bible. The Spirit of God works by directing the writer to the thoughts or concepts, and allowing the writer's own distinctive personality to come into play in the choice of words and expressions. Thus, the writer will give expression to the divinely directed thoughts in a way uniquely characteristic of that person.[372]

4. The *verbal* theory insists that the Holy Spirit's influence extends beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words used to convey the message. The work of the Holy Spirit is so intense that each word is the exact word God wants used at that point to express the message. Ordinarily, great care is taken to insist that this is not dictation, however.[373]

5. The *dictation* theory is the teaching that God actually dictated the Bible to the writers. Passages where the Spirit is depicted as telling the author precisely what to write are regarded as applying to the entire Bible. Different authors did not write in distinctive styles. Most adherents of the verbal view do take great

pains to dissociate themselves from the dictation theorists. There are, however, some who would accept this designation of their view.[374] Although John Calvin and other Reformers used the expression *dictation* when describing inspiration, it seems unlikely that they meant what is usually denoted by this term.[375]

The Method of Formulating a Theory of Inspiration

Before continuing, we must examine the two basic methods of formulating a theory of inspiration. The first, represented by the "Princeton School" of B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, and A. A. Hodge, places its primary emphasis on the biblical writers' actual statements about the Bible and the view of it revealed in the way they use it.[376] The second approach, represented by Dewey Beegle, examines what the Bible is like, analyzing the various ways in which the writers report events, to compare parallel accounts.[377]

The method used in constructing the doctrine of inspiration should parallel the method used to formulate other doctrines. With respect to the question of the sanctification of the believer, the first method would emphasize the didactic biblical passages that describe and define sanctification. The second approach would look at actual cases of Christians and try to determine what sanctification actually produced in their lives. This approach would use biblical instances (narrative and description) as well as historical and contemporary biographies of Christians. Regarding the question of perfection, the first method would look at the teachings of Paul and other Scripture writers on the subject; the second would examine whether Christians actually display a life of perfection. If the issue is whether Jesus was sinless in his life on earth, the former method would consult didactic doctrinal passages such as Hebrews 4:15. The latter approach would instead examine the narrative accounts of Jesus's life, asking whether his cursing of the fig tree, his casting the moneychangers out of the temple, his denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees, his behavior in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of his betrayal, and other similar actions were really the actions of a sinless person, or should rather be interpreted as instances of petulance, anger, and fear, which in an ordinary human would be termed sin.

With respect to the doctrines just enumerated, the approach in this volume (and of most theologians who emphasize the supreme authority of the Bible) is to place the major emphasis on the didactic material and make the phenomena secondary. The actual phenomena of Scripture will be used to help determine the meaning of the didactic material. Regarding the doctrine that Jesus was without sin, passages like Hebrews 4:15 establish the doctrine; the narratives of Jesus's

life help us understand just what it means. Both aspects are needed, but one must carry greater emphasis, and consistency of theological methodology dictates beginning with the teachings rather than the phenomena. The teachings will give us the formal nature of the doctrine, while the phenomena help fill out the content.

There has sometimes been considerable confusion about the difference between the biblical teaching about Scripture and the phenomena that illumine the nature of Scripture. By the former we mean the doctrine held by Jesus and the apostles (and other biblical authors) about the nature of the Bible. Their view of the degree of inspiration or the intensiveness of inspiration is usually not stated explicitly, but can often be inferred from what they said about the Scriptures or how they regarded what the Scriptures taught. Jesus and the apostles regarded Scripture as authoritative because they believed that God had directed the biblical writer—what he wrote was what God said. If they regarded even minute details as binding, it indicates that they felt that inspiration by God extended even to the smallest particulars. From this we can infer the doctrine that Christ and the apostles held regarding the degree and intensiveness of God's inspiration of the Scriptures.

The phenomena, on the other hand, concern what the Scriptures are actually like rather than what the authors thought about their own or other biblical writers' writing. Here we become engaged in comparing parallel passages, evaluating the degree of accuracy of the writings, and similar activities. Note carefully the distinction between didactic material and phenomena in the following example, which pertains to the doctrines of sanctification and perseverance. That John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas and later returned to usefulness is a phenomenon (i.e., what Mark did) that may shed light on these doctrines. Paul's official position on this is part of the didactic material; that Paul was reconciled with Mark and received him back, although it makes no explicit comment on sanctification and perseverance, enables us to infer something about them. In this particular case, we derive our knowledge of both the phenomenon (Mark's return to usefulness) and Paul's teaching (inferred from the fact that Paul once again found Mark useful) from Paul's writing (2 Tim. 4:11). Nevertheless, there is a logical distinction between the phenomenon and the didactic material. This distinction should be carefully kept in mind—especially when we are investigating the nature of Scripture. For in that case the topic of investigation is also the source of the didactic material.

The Extent of Inspiration

The question here is the extent of inspiration, or to put it somewhat differently, of what is inspired. Is the whole of the Bible to be thus regarded, or only certain portions?

One easy solution would be to cite 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful." There is a problem, however, because of an ambiguity in the first part of this verse. The text reads simply πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος (*pasa graphē theopneustos kai ōphelimos*). It lacks the copula ἐστί (*esti*). Should the verb be inserted between γραφὴ and θεόπνευστος? In that case the sentence would literally say, "All scripture is God-breathed and profitable." Or should the copula be placed after θεόπνευστος? In that event, the sentence would read, "All God-breathed scripture is also profitable." If the former rendering is adopted, the inspiration of all Scripture would be affirmed. If the latter is followed, the sentence would emphasize the profitability of all God-breathed Scripture. From the context, however, one cannot really determine what Paul intended to convey. (What does appear from the context is that Paul had in mind a definite body of writings known to Timothy from his childhood. It is unlikely that Paul was attempting to make a distinction between inspired and uninspired Scripture within this body of writings.)

Can we find additional help on this issue in two other texts previously cited—2 Peter 1:19–21 and John 10:34–35? At first glance this seems not to succeed, since the former refers specifically to prophecy and the latter to the law. It appears from Luke 24:25–27, however, that "Moses and all the Prophets" equals "all the Scriptures," and from Luke 24:44–45 that "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" equals "the Scriptures." In John 10:34, when Jesus refers to the law, he actually quotes from Psalm 82:6. In John 15:25, he refers to a clause found in Psalm 35:19 as "what is written in their Law." In Matthew 13:35, he refers to "what was spoken through the prophet" and then quotes from Psalm 78:2. Moreover, Paul refers to a number of different types of passages as "law": Isaiah 28:11–12 (1 Cor. 14:21); Psalms and Isaiah (Rom. 3:19); and even Genesis 16:15 and 21:9, which are narrative passages (Gal. 4:21–22). And Peter refers to the "word of the prophets" (2 Pet. 1:19) and every "prophecy of Scripture" (v. 20) in such a way as to lead us to believe that the whole of the collection of writings commonly accepted in that day is in view. It appears that "law" and "prophecy" were often used to designate the whole Hebrew Scriptures.

Can this understanding of inspiration be extended to cover the books of the New Testament as well? This problem is not so easily solved. We do have some indications of belief that what these writers were doing was of the same nature as

what the writers of the Old Testament had done. One explicit reference of one New Testament author to the writings of another is 2 Peter 3:16. Here Peter refers to Paul's writings and alludes to the difficulty of understanding some things in them, which, he says, "ignorant and unstable people distort, *as they do the other Scriptures*." Thus Peter groups Paul's writings with other books, presumably familiar to the readers, which were regarded as Scripture. Moreover, John identified what he was writing with God's Word: "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6). He makes his words the standard of measurement. In addition, throughout the book of Revelation there are indications of John's consciousness of being commanded to write. In Revelation 22:18–19, he speaks of the punishment upon anyone who adds to or subtracts from what has been written in that book of prophecy. The expression used here is similar to the warning that appears three times in Old Testament canonical writings (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6). Paul wrote that the gospel received by the Thessalonians had come by the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5) and had been accepted by them as what it really was, the Word of God (2:13). While the question of what books should be included in the New Testament canon is another matter, it should be clear that these New Testament writers regarded the Scripture as being extended from the prophetic period to their own time.

Another important question that must be addressed is whether this inspiration was a specific action of the Holy Spirit at particular times, or the writers' permanent possession by virtue of who they were. To put it differently, was this an intermittent or a continuous activity of the Holy Spirit? As noted earlier, one position attaches inspiration to the prophetic or apostolic office per se.[378] According to this view, when Jesus commissioned the apostles to be his representatives, he gave them the authority to define and teach truth. Those who hold this view ordinarily cite Jesus's commissioning of the apostles in Matthew 16:17–20, in which he gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, noting that what Peter had just said had been revealed to him by the heavenly Father, not by flesh and blood. The commission in Matthew 28:19–20 and the promises of the Holy Spirit's guiding, teaching, and illumining ministry (John 14–16) are also regarded as substantiating this view. Inspiration by the Holy Spirit is, according to this position, virtually equivalent to being filled with the Holy Spirit. Whenever proclaiming a Christian message, a prophet or apostle will, by virtue of office and through the Holy Spirit, be speaking the truth.

But can this view of inspiration be squared with the data of Scripture? It appears, rather, that the power to prophesy was not constant. In Ezekiel 29:1, for

instance, there is a very precise dating (in this case down to the exact day) as to when the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel. The same is true of the word of God coming to John the Baptist (Luke 3:1–2). There is also precise dating in the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:41–42, 59–79). Further, some who were not prophets prophesied. This was true of Balaam (Num. 22:28–30) and of Saul (1 Sam. 19:23–24).

This intermittent character was true of other supernatural gifts. The ability to speak in languages not previously learned came suddenly upon the disciples (Acts 2:4), and there is no indication that they continued to practice this gift. In Acts 19:11–12 we read that God performed extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, but there is no indication that this was a regular occurrence. It is reasonable to suppose that the inspiration for writing Scripture was intermittent as well.

Finally, we note that at times apostles seemed to stray from what presumably was God's will for them, and from the practice of spiritual truth. Peter, for example, compromised by withdrawing from eating with Gentiles when certain Jews came (Gal. 2:11–12). Paul found it necessary to correct Peter publicly (2:14–21). Paul himself was hardly blameless, however. Acts 15:38–41 describes contention between Paul and Barnabas so severe that they found it necessary to separate. Although we cannot determine the nature and extent of fault in this situation, it does appear that Paul was at least partially in error. The objection that these men strayed in their actions, not their teaching, does not really carry much cogency since teaching is done as much by modeling as by proclamation. We conclude that inspiration was not a permanent and continuous matter tied inseparably to the office of prophet and apostle. While it may have operated at other times than the precise moment of writing Scripture, it apparently did not extend to all of the author's utterances and writings.

We raised earlier the question of whether the term "inspiration" should be applied to the community that preserved, reflected on, and transmitted in oral form the divine revelation. Canonical criticism has located inspiration within this community, rather than in the individual writer.[379] While God was certainly at work in this process, it is worth noting that the Bible does not refer to inspired communities. It rather speaks of prophets and apostles who spoke and wrote, and who often had to call the community to repent of its misdeeds and correct its misunderstandings. If the community-inspiration idea is taken as meaning that the community knows God through its own investigation and research, this concept is especially suspect.[380] It may be preferable to refer to God's working through the community as providence and reserve the term "inspiration" for the actual occasion of the writing.

The Intensiveness of Inspiration

How intensive was the inspiration? Was it only a general influence, perhaps involving the suggesting of concepts, or was it so thoroughgoing that even the choice of words reflects God's intention?

When we examine the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament, an interesting feature appears. We sometimes find indication that they regarded every word, syllable, and punctuation mark as significant. At times their whole argument rests on a fine point in the text that they are consulting. For example, Jesus's argument in John 10:35–36 rests on the use of the plural number in Psalm 82:6: "If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?" In Matthew 22:32, his quotation of Exodus 3:6, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," the point depends on the tense of the verb, which leads him to draw the conclusion, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." In verse 44, the point of the argument hangs on a possessive suffix, "The Lord said to *my* Lord." In this last case, Jesus expressly says that when David spoke these words, he was "speaking by the Spirit" (v. 43). Apparently David was led by the Spirit to use the particular forms he did, even to the point of a detail as minute as the possessive in "*my* Lord." (The same quotation occurs in Acts 2:34–35.) And in Galatians 3:16, Paul makes his argument rest on the singular in Genesis 12:7: "The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Since the New Testament writers considered these Old Testament minutiae authoritative (i.e., as what God himself said), they obviously regarded the choice of words and even the form of the words as having been directed by the Holy Spirit.

One other argument regarding the intensiveness of inspiration is the fact that New Testament writers attribute to God statements in the Old Testament that in the original form are not specifically ascribed to him. A notable example is Matthew 19:4–5, where Jesus asks, "Haven't you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said . . . ?" He then proceeds to quote from Genesis 2:24. In the original, however, the statement is not attributed to God. It is just a comment on the event of the creation of woman from man. But the words of Genesis are cited by Jesus as being what God said; Jesus even puts these words in the form of a direct quotation. Evidently, in Jesus's mind anything that the Old Testament asserted was what God said. Other instances of attributing to God words not originally ascribed to him are Acts 4:25–26,

quoting Psalm 2:1–2; Acts 13:35, quoting Psalm 16:10; and Hebrews 1:6–7, quoting Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint; cf. Ps. 97:7) and Psalm 104:4.

In addition to these specific references, we should note that Jesus often introduced his quotations of the Old Testament with the formula, "It is written." Whatever the Bible said he identified as having the force of God's own speech. It was authoritative. This, of course, does not speak specifically to the question of whether the inspiring work of the Holy Spirit extended to the choice of words, but does indicate a thoroughgoing identification of the Old Testament writings with the word of God.

On the basis of this type of didactic material, we may conclude that the inspiration of the Scripture was so intense that it extended even to the choice of particular words. If, however, we are also to take into account the phenomena of Scripture, the characteristics of the book, then we find something a bit different. Dewey Beegle has developed a theory of inspiration based primarily on the phenomena.[381] He notes, for example, that some chronological problems in the Bible are very difficult to harmonize. The reign of Pekah is a most prominent one. The chronology of Abraham is another. Beegle notes that in Acts 7:4, Stephen refers to Abraham's leaving Haran after his father died. We know from Genesis that Terah was 70 at the birth of Abraham (11:26) and died in Haran at age 205 (11:32); Abraham, therefore, was 135 at the death of his father. However, Abraham left Haran at the age of 75 (Gen. 12:4), which would be some sixty years before the death of his father. On the basis of such apparent discrepancies, Beegle concludes that specific words certainly are not authoritative. That would involve dictation.

Beegle also observes that quotations from nonbiblical books are found in the New Testament. For example, Jude 14 quotes *1 Enoch* 1:9 and Jude 9 quotes the *Assumption of Moses*. These two cases present a problem for the argument that quotation in the New Testament indicates the New Testament writer's belief in the inspiration and consequent authority of the material being quoted. For if authoritativeness is attributed to Old Testament material by virtue of quotation in the New Testament, should it not be attributed to these two apocryphal books as well? Beegle concludes that quotation in the New Testament is not a sufficient proof of inspiration and authoritativeness.

A Model of Inspiration

Can we maintain and integrate both kinds of material? In keeping with the methodology stated earlier, we will give primary consideration to the didactic

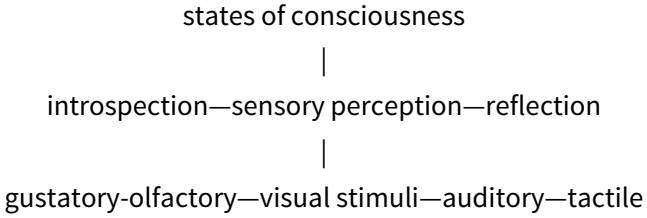
material. This means concluding that inspiration extends even to the choice of words (i.e., inspiration is verbal). We will determine the exact meaning of that choice of words, however, by examining the phenomena.

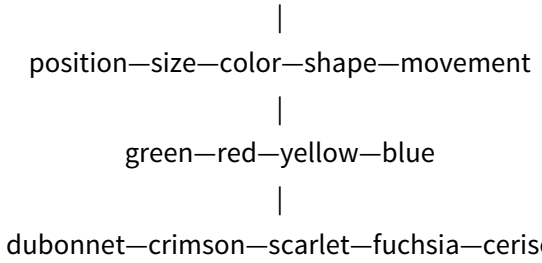
Note that in concluding that inspiration is verbal we have not employed the abstract argument based on the nature of God. That is the contention that since God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and precise, and has inspired the Bible, it must be fully his Word, even down to the choice of particular terminology. Rather, our case for verbal inspiration is based on the didactic material, the view of Scripture held and taught by Jesus and the biblical writers, not on an abstract inference from God's nature.

An important point to notice is that the words-versus-thoughts issue is an artificial one. The two cannot really be separated. A particular thought or concept cannot be represented by every word available in the given language. Only a limited number of words will function effectively. The more precise the thought becomes, the more limited is the number of words that will serve the purpose. Finally, at some point only one word will do, if the match of word to thought is to be precise. Notice that we are not referring to how specific (that is, how detailed) the concept is; rather, we are talking about the degree of clarity or sharpness of the thought. We will refer to the former as the degree of specificity or detail, and to the latter as the degree of precision or the focus. As the degree of precision (or clarity and sharpness in the mind) increases, there is a corresponding decrease in the number of words that will serve to convey the meaning.

We are suggesting that what the Spirit may do is direct the thoughts of the Scripture writer. That direction, however, is quite precise. God being omniscient, it is not gratuitous to assume that his thoughts are precise, more so than ours. Consequently, within the vocabulary of the writer, one word will most aptly communicate the thought God is conveying (although that word in itself may be inadequate). By creating the thought and stimulating the understanding of the Scripture writer, the Spirit will lead him in effect to use one particular word rather than any other.

FIGURE 4





While God directs the writer to use particular words (precision) to express the idea, the idea itself may be quite general or quite specific. This is what linguist Kenneth Pike has called the dimension of magnification.[382] One cannot expect that the Bible will always display maximum magnification or a great deal of detail. It will, rather, express just that degree of detail or specificity that God intends, and, on that level of magnification, just that concept he intends. This accounts for the fact that sometimes Scripture is not as detailed as we might expect or desire. Indeed, there have been occasions when the Holy Spirit, to serve the purpose of a new situation, moved a Scripture writer to reexpress a concept on a more specific level than its original form.

Figure 4 will help illustrate what we have in mind. This figure depicts various levels of specificity or detail or magnification. The dimension of specificity involves vertical movement on the chart. Suppose the concept under consideration is the color red. This idea has a particular degree of specificity, no more and no less. It is neither more specific (e.g., scarlet) nor less specific (color). It occurs in a particular location on the chart—both vertically on the generality-specificity axis, and horizontally on its given level of specificity (i.e., red, versus yellow or green). In another instance, one may have either more or less detail in a picture (a higher or lower degree of magnification, in Pike's terminology), and a sharper or fuzzier focus. At a less precise focus, of course, the detail will become blurry or even get lost. These two dimensions (detail and focus) should not be confused, however. If the idea is sufficiently precise, then only one word in a given language, or in the vocabulary of a given writer, will adequately communicate and express the meaning. Some languages are richer in distinctions, allowing more precision. Arabic, for example, has many more words for "camel" than does English. English, on the other hand, has many more words for "automobile" than does Arabic. In both cases, many of these words are used because of their connotation rather than denotation.

It is our contention here that inspiration involved God's directing the thoughts of the writers, so that those thoughts were precisely the ones that he wished expressed. At times these thoughts were very specific; at other times they were more general. When they were more general, God wanted that particular degree

of specificity recorded, and no more. At times, greater specificity might have been distracting. At other times specificity was important. The concept of propitiation, for example, is a very specific concept.

To determine the degree of specificity, it is helpful to be able to do careful exegesis in the original biblical languages. Knowing the degree of specificity is important because in many cases it bears on the type of authoritativeness that should be ascribed to a particular passage. At times the New Testament writers applied a biblical truth in a new way. They interpreted and elaborated it; that is, they made it more specific. At other times they retained and applied it in exactly the same way. In the former case, the form of the Old Testament teaching was not normatively authoritative for the New Testament believer; in the latter case, it was. In each case, however, the account was historically authoritative; that is, one could determine from it what was said and done and what was normative in the original situation.

We have concluded that inspiration was verbal, extending even to the choice of words. It was not merely verbal, however, for at times thoughts may be more precise than the words available. Such, for example, was probably the case with John's vision on Patmos, which produced the book of Revelation.

At this point the objection is generally raised that inspiration extending to the choice of words necessarily becomes dictation. Answering this charge will force us to theorize regarding the process of inspiration. Here we must note that the Scripture writers, at least in every case where we know their identity, were not novices in the faith. They had known God, learned from him, and practiced the spiritual life for some time. God therefore had been at work in their lives for some time, preparing them through a wide variety of family, social, educational, and religious experiences for the task they were to perform. In fact, Paul suggests that he was chosen even before his birth ("God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace," Gal. 1:15). Through all of life God was at work shaping and developing the individual author. So, for example, the experiences of the fisherman Peter and of the physician Luke were creating the kind of personality and worldview that would later be employed in the writing of Scripture.

This means that we should bear in mind, in discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, that although the final work of inspiration was one in which the Holy Spirit played the primary role, there is a sense in which inspiration is a work of the entire Trinity. As we shall see in a later chapter, even those divine works attributed to one member of the Trinity were actually trinitarian activities, in which one member of the Trinity acted on behalf of the entire Godhead.[383]

It is sometimes assumed that the vocabulary that is distinctive to a given writer is the human element in Scripture, a limitation within which God must necessarily work in giving the Bible. From what we have just seen, however, we know that the vocabulary of the Scripture writers was not exclusively a human factor. Luke's vocabulary resulted from his education and his whole broad sweep of experience; in all of this, God had been at work preparing him for his task. Equipped with this pool of God-intended words, the author then wrote. Thus, although inspiration in the strict sense applies to the influence of the Holy Spirit at the actual point of writing, it presupposes a long process of God's providential working with the author. Then, at the actual point of writing, God directs the author's thinking. Since God has access to the very thought processes of the human, and, in the case of the believer, indwells the individual in the person of the Holy Spirit, this is not difficult, particularly when the individual prays for enlightenment and displays receptivity. The process is not greatly unlike mental telepathy, although more internalized and personalized.

But is such thought control possible short of dictation? Remember that the Scripture writer has known God for a long time, has immersed himself in the truth already revealed, and has cultivated the life of devotion. It is possible for someone in this situation, given only a suggestion of a new direction, to "think the thoughts of God." Edmund Husserl, the phenomenologist, had a devoted disciple and assistant, Eugen Fink. Fink wrote an interpretation of Husserl's philosophy upon which the master placed his approval.[384] It is reported that when Husserl read Fink's article, he exclaimed, "It is as if I had written it myself!" To give a personal example: a secretary had been with a church for many years. At the beginning of my pastorate there, I dictated letters to her. After a year or so, I could tell her the general tenor of my thinking and she could write my letters, using my style. By the end of the third year, I could have simply handed her a letter I had received and told her to reply, since we had discussed so many issues connected with the church that she actually knew my thinking on most of them. The cases of Eugen Fink and my secretary show that it is possible without dictation to know just what another person wants to say. Note, however, that this assumes a close relationship and a long period of acquaintance. So a Scripture writer, given the circumstances we have described, could, without dictation, write God's message just as God wanted it recorded.

There are, of course, portions of the Bible where it appears that the Lord did in effect say, "Write: '. . .'" This is particularly true in prophetic and apocalyptic material, but the process described above was not the usual and normative pattern, nor is prophetic and apocalyptic material more inspired than the rest of the Bible. Furthermore, while we have already noted that there is, in direct

contrast to passages that show evidence of dictation, some material in Scripture that is not specially revealed (e.g., readily available historical data), such biblical material is not without God's inspiration. There is no special correlation, then, between literary genre and inspiration; that is, no one genre is more inspired than another. While we sometimes discriminate among portions of the Scripture on the basis of their differing potentials for edifying us in various types of situations, that does not mean that they reflect differing degrees or types of inspiration. While the Psalms may be more personally satisfying and inspiring than 1 Chronicles, that does not mean they are more inspired.

While inspiration conveys a special quality to the writing, that quality is not always easily recognized and assessed. On the one hand, the devotional materials and the Sermon on the Mount have a quality that tends to stand out and can be fairly easily identified. In part, this is due to the subject matter. In other cases, however, such as the historical narratives, the special quality conveyed by inspiration may instead be a matter of the accuracy of the record, and this is not as easily or as directly assessed. Nevertheless, the sensitive reader will probably detect within the whole of the Bible a quality that clearly points to inspiration.

The fact that we might be unable to identify the quality of inspiration within a particular passage should not alter our interpretation of that passage. We must not regard it as less authoritative. Verbal inspiration does not require a literal interpretation of passages that are obviously symbolic in nature, such as "those who hope in the LORD . . . will soar on wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31). It does require taking very seriously the task of interpretation, and making an intelligent, sensible effort to discover the precise message God wanted conveyed.

Inspiration is herein conceived of as applying to both the writer and the writing. In the primary sense, the writer is the object of the inspiration. As the writer pens Scripture, however, the quality of inspiredness is communicated to the writing as well. It is inspired in a derived sense.[385] This is much like the definition of revelation as both the revealing and the revealed (see pp. 163–64). We have observed that inspiration presupposes an extended period of God's working with the writer. This involves not only the preparation of the writer, but also the preparation of the material for this use. While inspiration in the strict sense probably does not apply to the preservation and transmission of this material, the providence that guides this process should not be overlooked.

In this chapter we have considered the question of method and have chosen to construct our view of inspiration of the Bible by emphasizing the teachings of the Bible regarding its own inspiration, while giving an important but secondary

place to the phenomena of Scripture. We have attempted to construct a model that would give due place to both of these considerations.

Certain other issues raised in the early part of this chapter will be dealt with in the chapter on inerrancy. These issues are (1) whether inspiration involves the correction of errors that might have been present in the sources consulted and employed, and (2) whether inspiration involves God's directing the thought and writing of the author on all the subjects with which he deals, or only the more "religious" subjects.

Because the Bible has been inspired, we can be confident of having divine instruction. The fact that we did not live when the revelatory events and teachings first came does not leave us spiritually or theologically deprived. We have a sure guide. And we are motivated to study it intensively, since its message is truly God's Word to us.

9

The Dependability of God's Word: *Inerrancy*

Chapter Objectives

After you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Cite several different conceptions of inerrancy and comprehend the meaning of each perspective.
2. Appraise the value of inerrancy for developing a theology as it relates to the church.
3. Seek to resolve the problems of the actual phenomena of Scripture as they relate to inerrancy.
4. Designate principles and illustrations to define inerrancy.
5. Characterize issues that have developed around inerrancy.

Chapter Summary

Inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings. Theologians have argued over the levels to which the Bible is inerrant. If the Bible is not inerrant, then our knowledge of God may be inaccurate and unreliable. Inerrancy is a corollary to the full inspiration of the Bible. Theologians have employed a number of strategies to explain the apparent discrepancies between biblical passages. While

detailed scientific descriptions or mathematically exact statements are not possible, inerrancy means that the Bible, when judged by the usage of its time, teaches the truth without any affirmation of error.

Study Questions

- What does it mean to say absolute, full, or limited inerrancy?
- What is the epistemological importance of inerrancy?
- Considering the discrepancies between parallel passages in Scripture, can the concept of inerrancy be maintained?
- What is the harmonistic approach to biblical phenomena, and who are the representatives of this approach? How does this position differ from other approaches?
- Briefly define inerrancy.
- What are the three issues concerning inerrancy, and what is the author's response to them? How does the author support his position on inerrancy?

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The inerrancy of Scripture is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings. Since many evangelicals consider it an exceedingly important and even crucial issue, it requires careful examination. In a real sense, it is the

completion of the doctrine of Scripture. For if God has given special revelation of himself and inspired servants of his to record it, we will want assurance that the Bible is indeed a dependable source of that revelation.

Inerrancy is part of the larger issue of infallibility. While often used synonymously in the past, the term "infallibility" has in recent years been used as an alternative to "inerrancy," meaning in some usages that the Bible was not necessarily accurate in all of its factual references, but that it accomplished the divine purpose.

Speech-act theory, however, as we noted in the chapter on theological language, has emphasized the variety of types of utterances in Scripture, or, to put it differently, the different grammatical moods, in addition to the indicative. There are commands, wishes, questions, and other types of speech-acts, in addition to affirmations. As Kevin Vanhoozer indicates, infallibility means that "in whatever mood Scripture is functioning, it adequately expresses" God's command or question or whatever speech-act is involved.[386] This follows from the doctrine of inspiration developed above. These types of utterances, however, are not ordinarily capable of being assessed by the use of sources other than the intention of the one making the speech-act. Thus, the subclass of speech-acts referred to here as affirmations or assertions has especially come under scrutiny, and it is with respect to them that the issue of infallibility takes the form of inerrancy. It should be noted, however, that the term "inerrancy" can also be applied to such forms of speech as questions and commands, where it means that the question or the command is exactly, not simply approximately or roughly, the question or the command that God is uttering, which speech-act theory, to the extent that it contains an implicit pragmatism, could suggest. For example, inerrancy with respect to a command of God means that this is genuinely a command of God. Thus, not having a referent other than the divine intention, it is appropriate to consider whether commands are inerrant. Put in affirmative form, an example of the inerrant proposition would be, "God commands humans not to murder." It is the report of the command, rather than the command, that could be termed inerrant.

A broader question is the issue of truth value. A statement having truth value need not be true. A false statement may have truth value. By truth value is meant simply the ability to be either true or false. The issue has arisen in recent years with respect to prophecy. Some open theists, most notably Gregory Boyd and John Sanders, have contended that statements about the future do not have truth value, because there is no reality for them to refer to. The future does not exist.[387] Therefore, statements referring to future events do not currently have truth value: they are neither true nor false. So Sanders contends that the Bible

contains “predictions that either do not come to pass at all (2 Kings 20:1; Jon. 3:4) or do not come to pass exactly as foretold.”[388] Yet, this does not count against inerrancy, because such statements are neither true nor false. Since the future has no reality, statements about it are neither true nor false. The charge that open theists reject inerrancy is unjustified, they contend, because such statements cannot be considered either true or false. Thus, whereas “inerrancy” has customarily been understood as a negative way of saying that a statement is true, this redefines it.

This view, however, projects an ontological conception that may be a false issue. In one sense, neither the past nor the future exists; only the present exists. “Existence” is not usually a term introduced into truth-value discussions. It appears that an epistemological issue is being mischaracterized as an ontological issue. Predictions are ordinarily considered to be true or false. Whether they are true or false, however, is not determinable at the time they are made. When they either come to pass or fail to do so, it is adjudged that they were true or false when uttered, or that it has now been demonstrated that they were true or false, not that they have now become true or false. In ordinary language discussions, predictions that do not come to pass are ordinarily judged to have been erroneous, and thus not inerrant.

Various Conceptions of Inerrancy

The term “inerrancy” means different things to different people, who contend over which position properly deserves to be called by that name. It is therefore important to summarize briefly the current positions on the matter of inerrancy.[389]

1. Absolute inerrancy holds that the Bible, which includes rather detailed treatment of matters both scientific and historical, is fully true. The impression is conveyed that the biblical writers intended to give a considerable number of exact scientific and historical data. Thus, apparent discrepancies can and must be explained. For example, the description of the molten sea in 2 Chronicles 4:2 indicates that its diameter was 10 cubits while the circumference was 30 cubits. However, as we all know, the circumference of a circle is π (3.14159) times the diameter. If, as the biblical text says, the molten sea was circular, there is a discrepancy here, and an explanation must be given.[390]

2. Full inerrancy also holds that the Bible is completely true. While the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true. There is no essential

difference between this position and absolute inerrancy in terms of their view of the religious/theological/spiritual message. The understanding of the scientific and historical references is quite different, however. Full inerrancy regards these references as phenomenal; that is, they are reported the way they appear to the human eye. They are not necessarily exact; rather, they are popular descriptions, often involving general references or approximations. Yet they are correct. What they teach is essentially correct in the way they teach it.[391]

3. Limited inerrancy also regards the Bible as inerrant and infallible in its salvific doctrinal references. A distinction is drawn, however, between nonempirical, revealed matters on the one hand, and empirical, natural references on the other. The Bible's scientific and historical references reflect the understanding current at the time it was written. The Bible writers were subject to the limitations of their time. Revelation and inspiration did not raise the writers above ordinary knowledge. God did not reveal science or history to them. Consequently, the Bible may well contain what we would term errors in these areas. This, however, is of no great consequence, since the Bible does not purport to teach science and history. For the purposes for which the Bible was given, it is fully truthful and inerrant.[392]

4. Inerrancy of purpose holds that the Bible faithfully accomplishes its purpose, which is to bring people into personal fellowship with Christ, not to communicate truths. It accomplishes this purpose effectively. It is improper, however, to relate inerrancy with factuality. Thus, "factual inerrancy" is an inappropriate term. Truth is thought of not as a quality of propositions, but as a means to accomplish an end. Implicit in this position is a pragmatic view of truth.[393] Some varieties of speech-act theory, with their categories of the illocutionary, or what God intends to accomplish, may also tend toward this view of inerrancy, to the extent that they assume this functional view of truth.

5. All of the above positions desire to retain the term and the idea of inerrancy in one sense or another. Advocates of the theory of accommodated revelation, however, do not claim or desire to use the term. This position emphasizes the idea that the Bible came through human channels, and thus participates in the shortcomings of human nature. This is true not only of historical and scientific matters, but also the religious and theological. Paul, for instance, in his doctrinal teachings, occasionally expressed common rabbinical views. This is not surprising, since Paul was educated as a rabbi. So, even on doctrinal matters, the Bible contains a mixture of revelational and nonrevelational elements. Paul revised and contradicted his teachings on such subjects as the resurrection. W. D. Davies, for example, holds that Paul changed his view on the resurrection between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. His teaching on this

subject in 1 Corinthians 15 cannot be harmonized with that in 2 Corinthians 5, nor is there any need to do so.[394] Similarly, Paul Jewett finds a mixture of divinely revealed and human ideas in Paul's writings about the status of women.[395] The basic rabbinic view is clearly present in what he wrote. However, at points God's revelation of something new in this area also shines through. Paul struggled to balance his attempt to grasp the Word of God and his training as a rabbinic Jew. Some even feel that Jesus was wrong, not merely unaware, regarding the time of his return. He believed and taught that it would take place during the lifetime of his hearers, and of course it did not.

6. Those who hold that revelation is nonpropositional maintain that the Bible in itself is not revelation. Its function is to point us to the person-to-person encounter that is revelation, rather than to convey propositions. Generally, in epistemology "true" is predicated only of propositions. Persons or experiences are referred to as genuine or "veridical." Thus, the whole question of truth or falsity does not apply. The Bible contains errors, but these are not the Word of God; they are merely the words of Isaiah, Matthew, or Paul. The presence of errors in no way militates against the Bible's functional usefulness.[396]

7. Finally, there is the position that inerrancy is an irrelevant issue. This position has much in common with the preceding one (although it does not necessarily hold that revelation is nonpropositional). For various reasons, the whole issue of inerrancy is regarded as false or distracting. For one thing, "inerrant" is a negative term. It would be far better to use a positive term to describe the Bible. Further, inerrancy is not a biblical concept. In the Bible, erring is a spiritual or moral matter rather than intellectual. Inerrancy distracts us from the proper issues, of what the Bible is really trying to tell us about our relationship to God. It also inhibits biblical research. If bound to the view that the Bible is totally free from error, the exegete is not completely at liberty to investigate the Scriptures. Inerrancy is an unnecessary and unhelpful a priori, which becomes a burden to impartial exegesis. It also is artificial and externally imposed. It not only asks questions that the biblical authors did not ask; it demands answers that display an exactness appropriate only in our scientific age. Further, it represents a position that is of rather recent history within the Christian church. It arose because of the imposition of a particular philosophical viewpoint upon study of the Bible. Finally, this issue is harmful to the church. It creates disunity among those who otherwise have a great deal in common. It makes a major issue out of what should be a minor matter at most.[397]

The Importance of Inerrancy

Why should the church be concerned about inerrancy at all? Especially in view of the considerations raised by the final position above, would it not be better merely to disregard this issue and "get on with the matters at hand"? In answer, we note that there is a very practical concern at the root of much of the discussion about inerrancy. A student pastor of a small rural church summarized well the concern of his congregation when he said, "My people ask me, 'If the Bible says it, can I believe it?'" This concern about the dependability or reliability of the Scriptures is an instance of what Helmut Thielicke has called "the spiritual instinct of the children of God."[398] Indeed, whether the Bible is fully truthful is important theologically, historically, and epistemologically.

Theological Importance

As we noted in the chapter on inspiration, Jesus, Paul, and others regarded and employed details of Scripture as authoritative. This argues for a view of the Bible as completely inspired by God, even to the selection of details within the text. If this is the case, certain implications follow. If God is omniscient, he must know all things. He cannot be ignorant of or in error on any matter. Further, if he is omnipotent, he is able to so affect the biblical author's writing that nothing erroneous enters into the final product. And being a truthful or veracious being, he will certainly desire to utilize these abilities in such a way that humans will not be misled by the Scriptures. Thus, our view of inspiration logically entails the inerrancy of the Bible. Inerrancy is a corollary of the doctrine of full inspiration. If, then, it should be shown that the Bible is not fully truthful, our view of inspiration would also be in jeopardy.

Historical Importance

The church has historically held to the inerrancy of the Bible. While there has not been a fully enunciated theory until modern times, nonetheless there was, down through the years of church history, a general belief in the complete dependability of the Bible. Augustine, for example, wrote:

> I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.[399]

Similarly, in opposing the authority of tradition and of reason, Martin Luther made statements indicating belief in the inerrancy of Scripture:

> But if you would not err and be deceived, you must come to God's Word, that you may not fancy but hear and know what God says is right, good and pleasing to him,"[400]

> But when the heart clings to the Word of God, it may say without any wavering: This is the Word of God, which can not lie nor err, of this I am certain.[401]

> Natural reason produces error and heresy; faith teaches and maintains the truth; for it clings to the Scriptures, which do not deceive or lie.[402]

> Nevertheless, it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself except at the hands of senseless and hardened hypocrites; at the hands of those who are godly and understanding it gives testimony to its Lord.[403]

Calvin did not address specifically the question of error in the Scriptures. He did, however, speak of the human tendency to fall into error, and indicated that Scripture is the only sure guard against this. He wrote, "We may perceive how necessary was such written proof of the heavenly doctrine, that it should neither perish through forgetfulness nor vanish through error nor be corrupted by the audacity of men. . . . For errors can never be uprooted from human hearts until true knowledge of God is planted therein."[404] The implication is that the Bible, if it is to preserve from error, must not contain any of its own.

Certain qualifications of these statements are in order. While Augustine affirmed the complete truthfulness and reliability of the Bible, he also took a rather allegorical approach to its interpretation; he removed apparent difficulties in the surface meaning of the text by allegorization. And Luther was not always a model of consistency. In addition, John Calvin, not only in his *Institutes*, a treatise in systematic theology, but also in his commentaries on the Bible, noted a certain amount of freedom by New Testament writers in their quotation of the Old Testament.[405] Nonetheless, it does appear that the church throughout its history has believed in the freedom of the Bible from any untruths. Whether it has meant by this precisely what contemporary inerrantists mean by the term "inerrancy" is not immediately apparent. Whatever the case, we do know that the general idea of inerrancy is not a recent development.

We should also note briefly the impact inerrancy has had historically. The best way to proceed is to observe what tend to be the implications for other areas of doctrine when biblical inerrancy is abandoned. There is evidence that where a theologian, a school, or a movement begins by regarding biblical inerrancy as a peripheral or optional matter and abandons this doctrine, it frequently then goes on to abandon or alter other doctrines that the church has ordinarily considered

quite major, such as the deity of Christ or the Trinity. Since, as we argued in the opening chapter of this book, history is the laboratory in which theology tests its ideas, we must conclude that the departure from belief in complete trustworthiness of the Bible is a very serious step, not only in terms of what it does to this one doctrine, but even more in terms of what happens to other doctrines as a result.[406]

Epistemological Importance

The epistemological question is simply, how do we know? Some assertions in the Bible are at least potentially independently verified or falsified. That is to say, the references to historical and scientific matters can, within the limitations of the historical and scientific methods and of the data available, be found to be true or false. Certain other matters, such as doctrinal statements about the nature of God and the atonement, transcend the realm of our sensory experience. We cannot test their truth or validity empirically. Now if the Bible should prove to be in error in those realms where its claims can be checked, on what possible basis would we logically continue to hold to its dependability in areas where we cannot verify what it says?

Let us put this another way. Our basis for holding to the truth of any theological proposition is that the Bible teaches it. If, however, we should conclude that certain propositions (historical or scientific) taught by the Bible are not true, the implications are far-reaching. We cannot then continue to hold to other propositions simply on the grounds that the Bible teaches them. It is not that these other statements have been proved false, but that we cannot be certain they are true. We must either profess agnosticism regarding them or find some other basis for holding them. Since the principle has been abrogated that whatever the Bible teaches is necessarily true, the mere fact that the Bible teaches these other propositions is an insufficient basis in itself for holding them. One may continue to hold these other propositions, of course, but not because of the authority of the Bible.

This point is sometimes characterized as a domino theory—"false in one, false in all."[407] That is a rather superficial analysis, however. For those who make the point are not suggesting that all the other propositions are false; they are simply requesting a basis for holding these other propositions. A more accurate summary of their position might be "false in one, uncertain in all." To be sure, it could be that all the statements of the Bible that are subject to empirical assessment are true, but that some of the transcendent statements are not. In that case, however, there would be at least a presumption in favor of the truth of the

latter. But if some of the former prove false, on what possible basis would we continue to hold to the latter?

It is as if we were to hear a lecture on some rather esoteric subject on which we are quite ignorant. The speaker might make many statements that fall outside our experience. We have no way of assessing their truth. What he or she is saying sounds very profound, but it might simply be just so much high-flown gibberish. But suppose that for a few minutes the speaker develops one area with which we are well acquainted. Here we detect several erroneous statements. What will we then think about the other statements, whose veracity we cannot check? We will doubtless conclude that there may well be inaccuracies there as well. Credibility, once compromised, is not easily regained or preserved in other matters.

One can, of course, continue to hold to the theological statements by an ad hoc distinction, maintaining that biblical authority applies only to transcendent or doctrinal truths. In so doing, one will have delivered such propositions from possible refutation. But perhaps faith has become nothing more than, to paraphrase Mark Twain, "believing what you don't know ain't so." Immunity from disproof may then have been secured at the cost of the meaningfulness of the statement that biblical teachings are true. For if nothing is allowed to count against the truth of biblical teachings, does anything count for them either? (A cognitive statement is capable of being true or false, and therefore it must be possible to specify what would count for or against it.) While this may superficially resemble the verifiability principle of logical positivism, there is a significant difference, for in this case the means of verification (and thus the measure of meaning) is not necessarily and exclusively sense data.

One may give up the statement "whatever the Bible teaches is true" and still logically take a purely fideist position, namely, "I believe these things not because they are in the Bible, but because I choose to," or "I choose to believe all the statements in the Bible that have not been (or cannot be) disproved." Or one may find an independent way of establishing these tenets. In the past, this has followed several channels. Some liberal theologians proceeded to develop the grounds for their doctrines on a philosophy of religion. Although Karl Barth and the neo-orthodox found verification of doctrines in a direct personal presence of God, Barth entitled the reconstituted form of his magnum opus *Church Dogmatics*, which suggests that he was beginning to rest his views in part on the authority of the church. Wolfhart Pannenberg has sought to base theology on history, utilizing sophisticated methods of historiography. To the extent that evangelicals abandon the position that everything taught or affirmed by Scripture is true, other bases for doctrine will be sought. This might well be

through the resurgence of a philosophy of religion, or what is more likely, given the current "relational" orientation, through basing theology on behavioral sciences, such as psychology of religion. But whatever form such an alternative grounding takes, the list of tenets will probably shrink, for it is difficult to establish the Trinity or the virgin birth of Christ on either philosophical argument or the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

Inerrancy and Phenomena

Belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures is not an inductive conclusion arrived at by examining all the passages of the Bible. By its very nature, such a conclusion would be only probable at best. Nor is the doctrine of biblical inerrancy explicitly affirmed or taught in the Bible. Rather, it is a corollary of the doctrine of full inspiration of the Bible. The view of the Bible held and taught by the writers of Scripture implies the full truthfulness of the Bible. But this does not spell out for us the nature of biblical inerrancy. Just as the knowledge that God has revealed himself cannot tell us the content of his message, so the Bible's implication that it is free from error does not tell us just what such errorlessness would entail.

We must look now to the actual phenomena of Scripture. And here we find potential difficulties. Some of these are apparent discrepancies between parallel passages in the Gospels, or in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. Mark 6:8 reports that Jesus told his disciples to take a staff, while according to Matthew 10:9–10 and Luke 9:3 he prohibited it. In the account of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Luke reports that the crowd cried out, "Glory in the highest," whereas the other Gospels record the words as "Hosanna in the highest." All four Gospels report differently the wording of the inscription above Jesus's cross. A related issue is the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament, in which they seem to find a meaning in the latter's words that is not identical with the meaning one would ordinarily take from them if studying them by the usual methods of historical-grammatical interpretation.[408] There even seem to some to be differences in the doctrinal views found among different biblical authors.

There is a problem with the Bible's chronology at several points as well. The reigns of the kings of Israel, for example, are dated in terms of the reigns of the kings of Judah, but here some real discrepancies occur. Stephen's chronology of the Israelites' stay in Egypt (they were enslaved for four hundred years—Acts 7:6) does not coincide with the account in Exodus. There are severe problems with numbers as well. In parallel passages, 2 Samuel 10:18 speaks of 700

chariots where 1 Chronicles 19:18 has 7,000; 2 Samuel 8:4 refers to 1,700 horsemen where 1 Chronicles 18:4 has 7,000 horsemen; 2 Samuel 24:9 speaks of 800,000 men of Israel and 500,000 men of Judah, while 1 Chronicles 21:5 states that there were 1,100,000 men of Israel and 470,000 men of Judah. There also are apparent ethical discrepancies. According to 2 Samuel 24:1, the Lord was angry against Israel, and he incited David to commit the sin of numbering the people; but according to 1 Chronicles 21:1, Satan rose up against Israel, inciting David to number Israel. And God, who neither tempts nor can be tempted (James 1:13), is said to have sent an evil spirit upon Saul (1 Sam. 18:10) so that Saul attempted to murder David.

Another problem relates to the resemblances between some biblical writings and extant writings from elsewhere. This is often referred to as ancient Near Eastern literature. Some have even suggested that the biblical writers incorporate mythical material.[409] Such difficulties suggest that there is some work to be done in reconciling the actual data of the Bible with the claim that it is fully inerrant. How are these phenomena to be handled? Several strategies have been employed by conservative theologians in the past and are being actively used today.

1. The abstract approach of B. B. Warfield tended to focus primarily on the doctrinal consideration of Scripture's inspiration. While he was aware of the problems and offered resolutions for some of them, he tended to feel that they did not all have to be explained. They are merely difficulties. The weight of evidence for the inspiration and consequent inerrancy of the Bible is so great that no number of data of this type can overthrow it.[410]

2. The harmonistic approach is represented by Edward J. Young's *Thy Word Is Truth*,[411] as well as Louis Gaussen's *Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*. Once again, belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is based on the doctrinal teaching of inspiration. Advocates of this approach assert that the difficulties presented by various phenomena can be resolved, and they attempt to do so using currently available information.

One example found in Gaussen involves the manner of Judas's death. As is well known, there is an apparent discrepancy between Matthew 27:5, according to which Judas committed suicide by hanging himself, and Acts 1:18, which states that "he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out." Gaussen offers a story of a man in Lyons who committed suicide. In order to make certain of the results, he seated himself on a ledge outside a fourth story window and fired a pistol into his mouth. Gaussen observes that three accounts might be given of his death, one of which attributes it to the pistol shot, one to the fall, and one to both factors. All these accounts would be correct, he maintains. Similarly, he speculates that Judas hanged himself and fell headlong.

Presumably, although Gaussen does not say so explicitly, the rope broke and Judas flipped head over heels in the fall. We are lacking this one particular piece of information that would make all the details of the story explicable.[412] There is no contradiction here. Other passages are given similar treatment. Harold Lindsell's explanation of the apparent discrepancy between the diameter and the circumference of the molten sea in 2 Chronicles 4:2 is an example of the same species; the circumference is explained as being the measurement of the inner edge of the rim, whereas the diameter is the measurement from outer edge to outer edge.[413]

3. The approach of moderate harmonization follows the style of the harmonistic approach to a certain extent. The problems are taken seriously, and an effort is made to solve them or relieve the difficulties as far as this is reasonably possible with the data currently available. Everett Harrison, for example, notes that inerrancy, while not explicitly taught by the Bible, is nonetheless a corollary of full inspiration. He attempts to offer resolution of many of the problem passages, but will not attempt to force a premature resolution of the problems. Some of the relevant data are not currently available, but may become so in the future as archaeological and philological research advances. If we had all the data, we might resolve all the problems.[414]

4. A fourth position was presented as a possibility by Edward Carnell, although there is no evidence that he actually adopted it himself. This position is relatively simple, and is an extension of a tactic employed in a limited way by many theologians. If forced to do so, said Carnell, we could adopt the position that inspiration guarantees only accurate reproduction of the sources the Scripture writer employed, not correction of them. Thus, if the source contained an erroneous reference, the Scripture writer recorded that error just as it was in the source.[415] Even Harrison suggested that this position might at times be expedient,[416] and James Orr many years earlier proposed that where there were lacunae in the sources, the Holy Spirit did not necessarily fill them in.[417]

Carnell noted that Warfield, in his debate with Smith, had to concede that at certain points biblical statements are not without error; only the recording of them from the original source is inerrant. This is apparently the case, for instance, with the speeches of Eliphaz the Temanite and Job's other friends. There are also some obvious cases of erroneous statements reported in the Bible, such as "There is no God"—this is, of course, the statement of a fool (Pss. 14:1; 53:1). This line of reasoning can be extended to explain many of the apparent problems in the Bible. For example, the chronicler could have been relying on a fallible and erroneous source in drawing up his list of numbers of chariots and horsemen.

5. Finally, there is the view that the Bible does err. Dewey Beegle basically says that we must acknowledge that the Bible contains real and insoluble problems. We should call them what they are and acknowledge that the Bible contains errors. Instead of trying to explain them away, we should accept the fact that they are there and are genuine, and construct our doctrine of inspiration with this in mind.[418] Our doctrine of inspiration should not be developed in an abstract or a priori fashion. When we do that, we simply adopt a view and dictate what "inspiration" *must* mean. Instead, we should see what the inspiration of the Bible has produced, and then infer from that the nature of inspiration. Whatever inspiration is, it is not verbal. We cannot regard inspiration as extending to the very choice of words in the text.

In terms of the alternatives just examined regarding the phenomena, Harrison's view seems most adequate. The Warfield position, as considered here, places the emphasis properly on the teaching of Scripture rather than the phenomena. In so doing, however, it gives insufficient attention to the phenomena. To the exegete, this failure must seem to approach irresponsibility. It is too easy to label these as mere difficulties rather than problem passages such as we have noted. The harmonistic school has in many cases done a real favor to the cause of biblical scholarship by finding creative solutions to problems. To insist on reconciling all of the problems by utilizing the currently available data, however, appears to me to lead to forced handling of the material. Some of the suggestions, such as Gaussen's regarding the death of Judas, seem almost incredible. It is better to acknowledge that we do not yet have all the answers. This humble approach will probably make the Bible more believable than will asking people to accept some of the proffered explanations, and in the process suggesting that the integrity of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy depends on acceptance of such contrived solutions. Carnell's suggestion has much to commend it, especially since virtually all theologians would concede that they have adopted this expedient, at least to a certain extent.[419] The problems inherent in taking this approach as far as Carnell suggests are considerable, however. In practice, we could be confident that we have the truth only if we are certain that the passage in question does not employ sources. But to make that judgment is very difficult indeed. Consequently, the doctrine of inspiration and authority of the Bible would become merely a formal one whose application is uncertain. Beegle's view seems to move consistently to the conclusion that revelation is not propositional, a position falling outside the orthodox view of revelation. Thus, by process of elimination, we arrive at a view like that of Harrison, but with certain qualifications.[420]

Defining Inerrancy

We may now state our understanding of inerrancy: the Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms. This definition reflects the position earlier termed full inerrancy. We may elaborate and expound upon this definition, noting some principles and illustrations that will help us to define inerrancy more specifically and to remove some of the difficulties.

1. Inerrancy pertains to what is affirmed or asserted rather than what is merely reported. This incorporates the valid point of Carnell's suggestion. The Bible reports false statements made by ungodly persons. The presence of these statements in Scripture does not mean they are true; it only guarantees that they are correctly reported. The same judgment can be made about certain statements of godly men who were not speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Stephen, in his speech in Acts 7, may not have been inspired, although he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, his chronological statement in verse 6 is not necessarily free from error. It appears that even Paul and Peter may on occasion have made incorrect statements. When, however, something is taken by a biblical writer, from whatever source, and incorporated in his message as an affirmation, not merely a report, then it must be judged as truthful. This does not guarantee the canonicity of the book quoted. Nonbelievers, without special revelation or inspiration, may nonetheless be in possession of the truth. While everything within the Bible is truth, it is not necessary to hold that all truth is within the Bible. Jude's references to two noncanonical books do not necessarily create a problem, for one is not required thereby to believe either that Jude affirmed error or that *Enoch* and the *Assumption of Moses* are divinely inspired books that ought to be included within the canon of the Old Testament.[421]

The question arises, Does inerrancy have any application to moods other than the indicative? The Bible contains questions, wishes, and commands as well as assertions. These, however, are not ordinarily susceptible to being judged either true or false. Thus inerrancy seems not to apply to them. However, within Scripture there are assertions or affirmations (expressed or implied) that someone asked such a question, expressed such a wish, or uttered such a command. While the statement "Love your enemies!" cannot be said to be either true or false, the assertion, "Jesus said, 'Love your enemies!'" is susceptible to being judged true or false. And as an assertion of Scripture, it is inerrant.

Note here that we are emphasizing the assertions or affirmations, not the intention of the speaker or writer. Much is made in evangelical circles of the

intention of the writer—the message cannot and should not be turned in a direction totally different from that intended by the writer. In particular, evangelicals object to the practice of interpreting a passage, not in terms of what the author meant to express, but rather of what the reader finds in the passage, or brings to it. This is a most commendable concern.[422]

Certain problems attach to the concept of intention, however. One is that it sometimes unduly restricts the meaning of a passage to one central intention. For example, when Jesus said that not one sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's will (Matt. 10:29), his purpose was not to teach that God watches over sparrows. It was to affirm that God watches over his human children (v. 31, "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"). Nonetheless, Jesus did affirm that God protects and cares about sparrows; indeed, the truth of the statement about his care for humans depends on the truth of the statement about sparrows.

Another problem with emphasizing the concept of the author's intention is that it does not take into account the insights that have arisen from twentieth-century psychology's understanding of the unconscious. We now know that much of what we communicate is not conscious. The Freudian slip, body language, and other unconscious communication often reveal more plainly than our intended statements what we really believe. Thus, we must not restrict the revelation and inspiration of God to matters of which the Scripture writer was consciously aware. It seems quite possible that as John wrote of the great vision that he had on Patmos, he communicated more than he understood.

2. We must judge the truthfulness of Scripture in terms of its meaning in the cultural setting in which its statements were expressed. We should not employ anachronistic standards in seeking to understand what was said. For example, we should not expect that the standards of exactness in quotation to which our age of the printing press and mass distribution is accustomed would have been present in the first century. We ought also to recognize that numbers were often used symbolically in ancient times, much more so than in our culture today. The names parents chose for their children also carried a special meaning; this is rarely true today. The word "son" has basically one meaning in our language and culture. In biblical times, however, it was broader in meaning, almost tantamount to "descendant." There is a wide diversity, then, between our culture and that of biblical times. When we speak of inerrancy, we mean that what the Bible affirms is fully true in terms of the culture of its time.

3. The Bible's assertions are fully true when judged in accordance with the purpose for which they were written. Here the exactness will vary (the specificity of which we wrote earlier) according to the intended use of the

material. Suppose a hypothetical case in which the Bible reported a battle involving 9,476 men. What then would be a correct (or infallible) report? Would 10,000 be accurate? 9,000? 9,500? 9,480? 9,475? Or would only 9,476 be a correct report? The answer is that it depends on the purpose of the writing. If the report is an official military document an officer is to submit to a superior, the number must be exact. That may be the only way to ascertain whether there were any deserters. If, on the other hand, the account is simply to give some idea of the size of the battle, then a round number like 10,000 is adequate, and in this setting is correct. The same is true regarding the molten sea of 2 Chronicles 4:2. If the aim in giving the dimensions is to provide a plan from which an exact duplicate could be constructed, then it is important to know whether it is to be built with a diameter of 10 cubits or a circumference of 30 cubits. But if the purpose is merely to communicate an idea of the size of the object, then the approximation given by the chronicler is sufficient and may be judged fully true. We often find approximations in the Bible. There is no real conflict between the statement in Numbers 25:9 that 24,000 died by the plague and Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:8 that 23,000 died. Both are approximations, and for the purpose involved, both are adequate and therefore may be regarded as true.

Giving approximations is a common practice in our own culture. Suppose that my actual gross income last year was $80,154.78 (a purely hypothetical figure). And suppose you ask me what my gross income for last year was, and I reply, "Eighty thousand dollars." Have I told the truth or not? That depends on the situation and setting. If you are a friend and the question is asked in an informal social discussion of the cost of living, I have told the truth. But if you are an Internal Revenue Service agent conducting an audit, then I have not told the truth. For a statement to be adequate and hence true, greater specificity is required in the latter situation than in the former

This applies not only to the use of numbers, but also to such matters as the chronological order in historical narratives, which was occasionally modified in the Gospels. In some cases a change in words was necessary in order to communicate the same meaning to different persons. Thus Luke has "Glory in the highest" where Matthew and Mark have "Hosanna in the highest"; the former would make better sense to Luke's gentile readership than would the latter. Even expansion and compression, which are used by preachers today without their being charged with unfaithfulness to the text, were practiced by biblical writers.[423]

4. Reports of historical events and scientific matters are in phenomenal rather than technical language. That is, the writer reports how things appear to the eye. This is the ordinary practice in any kind of popular (as opposed to technical)

writing. A commonly noted instance of this practice has to do with the matter of the sun rising. The meteorologist who on the evening news says that the sun will rise the next morning at 6:37 has, from a strictly technical standpoint, made an error, since it has been known since the time of Copernicus that the sun does not move—the earth does. Yet there is no problem with this popular expression. Indeed, even in scientific circles, the term "sunrise" has become something of an idiom; though scientists regularly use the term, they do not take it literally. Similarly, biblical reports make no effort to be scientifically exact; they do not attempt to theorize over just what actually occurred when, for example, the walls of Jericho fell, or the Jordan River was stopped, or the axhead floated. The writer simply reported what was seen, how it appeared to the eye. (In a sense, this principle is simply a subpoint of the previous principle, namely, that the Bible's assertions are fully true when judged in accordance with the purpose for which they were written.)

5. Difficulties in explaining the biblical text should not be prejudged as indications of error. It is better to wait for the remainder of the data to come in, with the confidence that if we had all the data, the problems could be resolved. In some cases, the data may never come in. Once a tell has been excavated, it has been excavated, whether done carefully by a skilled team of archaeologists, or with a bulldozer, or by a thief looking for valuable artifacts. It is encouraging, however, that the trend is toward the resolution of difficulties as more data come in. Some of the severe problems of a century ago, such as the unknown Sargon mentioned by Isaiah (20:1), have been satisfactorily explained, and without artificial contortions. And even the puzzle of the death of Judas seems now to have a workable and reasonable solution.

The specific word in Acts 1:18 that caused the difficulty regarding the death of Judas is πρηνής (*prēnēs*). For a long time it was understood to mean only "falling headlong." Twentieth-century investigations of ancient papyri, however, have revealed that this word has another meaning in Koiné Greek. It also means "swelling up."[424] It is now possible to hypothesize an end of Judas's life that seems to accommodate all the data, but without the artificiality found in Gaussen's handling of the problem. Having hanged himself, Judas was not discovered for some time. In such a situation the visceral organs begin to degenerate first, causing a swelling of the abdomen characteristic of cadavers that have not been properly embalmed. And so, "swelling up [Judas] burst open in the middle and his bowels gushed out." While there is no way of knowing whether this is what actually took place, it seems to be a workable and adequate resolution of the difficulty.

We must, then, continue to work at the task of resolving whatever tensions there are in our understanding of the Bible, consulting the very best linguistic and archaeological materials. Archaeology in particular has confirmed the accuracy of the substance of the written Scriptures. Overall, there is less difficulty for the belief in the factual inerrancy of the Bible than there was a hundred years ago. At the same time, we must realize that there will never be complete confirmation of all the propositions or even resolution of all the problem issues. Rather than giving strained explanations, it is better to leave such difficulties unresolved in the confidence, based on the doctrine of Scripture, that they will be removed to the extent that additional data become available.

Having defined inerrancy positively, we must note what it does not entail. The doctrine of inerrancy does not tell us a priori what type of material the Bible will contain. Nor does it tell us how we are to interpret individual passages. (That is the province of hermeneutics.) In particular, inerrancy should not be understood to mean that the maximum amount of specificity will always be present. Rather, our doctrine of inerrancy maintains merely that whatever statements the Bible affirms are fully truthful when they are correctly interpreted in terms of their meaning in their cultural setting and the purpose for which they were written.

Postmodern Objection to Biblical Foundationalism

As part of postmodernism, there has been an objection to the idea of foundationalism, which is the view that all beliefs are justified by their relationship to certain basic beliefs. With respect to Christian beliefs, this generally means that doctrines rest upon the authority of Scripture, and are established by demonstrating that Scripture teaches them. This objection to foundationalism, whether nonfoundationalist, postfoundationalist, or antifoundationalist, is asserted both by nonevangelicals and by postconservative evangelicals. The critique is invariably directed toward classical foundationalism, according to which the basic beliefs or foundations are absolutely certain, being indubitable or incorrigible. In the case of Scripture, this means the doctrine of inerrancy. If these crucial doctrines, literally matters of spiritual life and death, are to be held with confidence, the foundation on which they depend must be absolutely dependable.[425]

Virtually all of these critiques, however, fail to distinguish between classical foundationalism and more modest varieties of foundationalism. This means that any foundationalism tends to be thought of as tied to modernism and especially the Enlightenment, particularly the foundationalisms of Descartes or Locke.

There is a more modest version of foundationalism, which has always existed but has become especially popular since about 1975. It is represented by persons like Robert Audi,[426] William Alston,[427] Roderick Chisholm,[428] and Jay Wood,[429] as well as described in a well-documented article by Timm Triplett.[430] Yet there is either no mention of any of these in the writings of those who reject foundationalism,[431] or there is a brief mention, accompanied by dismissal of the distinction. [432]

These varieties of foundationalism, variously referred to as modest foundationalism, soft foundationalism, or neofoundationalism, retain the emphasis on beliefs being justified by their relationship to basic beliefs. Where they differ from classical foundationalism, however, is that they do not insist that the basic beliefs or foundations must be indubitable. These may be subject to refutation. This means that for the Bible to be authoritative does not require its inerrancy.

The view espoused in this chapter allows for the possibility that inerrancy could be refuted. In fact, the Bible could serve as an adequate authority even without belief in its inspiration, but based on a demonstration of its reliability as a historical document. Thus inerrancy may be soft inerrancy, not hard inerrancy. This seems to be an instance of what Robert Audi is referring to in his comment that foundationalism "requires epistemic unmoved movers, but not unmovable movers. Solid ground is enough, even if bedrock is better. There are also different kinds of bedrock, and not all of them have the invulnerability apparently belonging to beliefs of luminously self-evident truths of logic."[433] We conclude, therefore, that the postmodern objection to reliance on biblical authority and to biblical inerrancy rests on a misguided objection to foundationalism.[434]

Ancillary Issues

1. Is "inerrancy" a good term, or should it be avoided? There are certain problems that attach to it. One is that it tends to carry the implication of extreme specificity, which words like "correctness," "truthfulness," "trustworthiness," "dependability," and, to a lesser extent, "accuracy" do not connote. As long as "inerrancy" is not understood in the sense of scientific exactness, it can be a useful term. When we are listing the characteristics of Scripture, however, inerrancy should be the last in the series; the earlier ones should be positive. While the Bible does not err, the really important fact about the Bible is that it does teach truth. Furthermore, inerrancy should not be understood as meaning

that the Bible tells us everything possible on a given subject. The treatment is not exhaustive, only sufficient to accomplish the intended ends.

Because the term "inerrancy" has become common, it probably is wise to use it. On the other hand, it is not sufficient simply to use the term, since, as we have seen, radically different meanings are attached to it by different persons. William Hordern's statement is appropriate here as a warning: "To both the fundamentalist and the nonconservative, it often seems that the new conservative is trying to say, 'The Bible is inerrant, but of course this does not mean that it is without error.'"[435] We must carefully explain what we mean when we use the term so there is no misunderstanding.

2. We must also define what we mean by "error." If we do not have some fixed limits that clearly separate truthful statements from false propositions, the meaning of inerrancy will be lost. If there is an "infinite coefficient of elasticity of language," so that the word "truthful" can simply be stretched a bit more, and a bit more, and a bit more, eventually it comes to include everything, and therefore nothing. For a belief to have any meaning, we must be prepared to state what would cause us to give it up, in this case, to indicate what would be considered an error. Statements in Scripture that plainly contradict the facts must be considered errors. If Jesus did not die on the cross, if he did not still the storm on the sea, if the walls of Jericho did not fall, if the people of Israel did not leave their bondage in Egypt and depart for the promised land, then the Bible is in error. In all of this we see a modified form of the verifiability principle at work, but without the extreme dimensions that proved to be the undoing of that criterion as it was applied by logical positivism, for in the present case the means of verification are not limited to sense data.

3. The doctrine of inerrancy applies in the strict sense only to the originals, but in a derivative sense to copies and translations, that is, to the extent that they reflect the original. This view is often ridiculed as a subterfuge, and it is pointed out that no one has seen the inerrant autographs.[436] Yet, as Carl Henry has pointed out, no one has seen the errant originals either.[437] To be sure, the concept that only the originals are inerrant can be used as an evasion, suggesting that all seeming errors are merely copying errors; they were not present in the originals but subsequently crept in. Actually, the concept that inerrancy applies only to the originals is seldom put to this use. Textual criticism is a sufficiently developed science that the number of passages in the Bible where the reading is in doubt is relatively small; in many of the problem passages there really is no question of the reading. Rather, what is being affirmed by the assertion that only the originals are inerrant is that inspiration did not extend to copyists and translators.

While divine providence was doubtless operative, there was not the same type of action of the Holy Spirit as was involved in the original writing of the text.

Nonetheless, we must reaffirm that the copies and the translations are also the Word of God, to the degree that they preserve the original message. When we say they are the Word of God, we do not have in mind, of course, the original process of the inspiration of the biblical writer. Rather, they are the Word of God in a derivative sense that attaches to the product. So it was possible for Paul to write to Timothy that all Scripture is inspired, although undoubtedly the Scripture that he was referring to was a copy and probably also a translation (the Septuagint) as well.

In a world in which there are so many erroneous conceptions and so many opinions, the Bible is a sure source of guidance. For when correctly interpreted, it can be fully relied on in all that it teaches. It is a sure, dependable, and trustworthy authority.

10

The Power of God's Word: *Authority*

Chapter Objectives

After completing the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define the word "authority," identify the range of its application, and restate the definition of authority under the parameters of religion.
2. Identify and evaluate the ways in which the meaning of Scripture is established and in which the belief in divine origin and authorship through the personal working of the Holy Spirit arises.
3. Distinguish between the objective and subjective components of authority, how they both influence meaning, and between the two types of authority concerning the Bible, both historical and normative.
4. Compare and contrast three specific historical views of illumination through history from Augustine, Daniel Fuller, and John Calvin.
5. Explain the relationship among the Bible, reason, and the Holy Spirit in reference to meaning.
6. Judge how much influence tradition, such as the works of the church fathers, has on authority in the church.

Chapter Summary

As creator and source of all truth, God has the right to command belief and obedience from all human beings. Although in some cases God exercises authority directly, he normally uses other means. One way he accomplishes this is through other human beings. God communicates his message to human beings. He has the right to command human actions and speech. When appropriately interpreted, this occurs through the Bible. Some persons have attempted to separate the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and the objective content of Scripture. Rightly understood, the Holy Spirit illuminates, convicts, and applies the teaching of the Bible to both the human understanding and the heart. All Scripture is historically authoritative; that is, it tells us correctly what God expected or required from specific persons at particular times and places. Some of Scripture is also normatively authoritative. That means that those parts of Scripture are to be applied and obeyed in the same fashion in which they were originally applied and obeyed when given.

Study Questions

- Define authority in an evangelical Christian context.
- What is the Roman Catholic view of the delegation of divine authority, and how does it differ from the Protestant view?
- What are the three views of divine origin and authorship of Scripture, and how would you explain each view?
- What is the importance of 1 Corinthians 2:14 in relation to the Holy Spirit?
- Compare and contrast the objective and subjective components of authority.
- How are biblical hermeneutics and apologetics influenced by the relationship between Scripture and reason?

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By the authority of the Bible we mean that the Bible, as the expression of God's will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to live.

Authority is a subject arousing considerable controversy in our society today. This is true not only within the sphere of biblical and religious authority, but in broader areas as well. Even in societies that are still formally structured on an authoritarian basis, there is the recognition that the old pyramid model, in which authority generated from the top downward, no longer pertains, at least in its traditional form. People are resistant to dictatorial or arbitrary forms of exercise of authority. External authority is often refused recognition and obedience in favor of accepting one's own judgment as final. This takes an extreme form in some varieties of postmodernism, where every opinion is of equal value to every other, and suggesting that one is objectively more adequate than another is considered intolerant. There is even a strong antiestablishmentarian mood in the area of religion, where individual judgment is often insisted on. For example, many Roman Catholics are questioning the traditional view of papal authority as being infallible. Added to this is the plethora of competing claimants to authority.

Definition of Authority

By authority we mean the right to command belief and/or action. The term has a wide range of application. We may think of authority as a governmental,

jurisdictional matter. Here an example would be a king or emperor who has the right to enforce action. This may take less imperial forms, however. The police officer directing traffic and the property owner demanding that people stay off his land are exercising a power that is rightfully theirs.

What we have described could be termed imperial authority. There is also what we might call "veracious authority."[438] Someone may by virtue of her knowledge be recognized by others as an " authority" on a particular subject. Her fund of knowledge in that field exceeds that of most others. As a result, she is capable of prescribing proper belief and/or action. (A document may also, by virtue of the information it contains, be capable of prescribing belief and/or action.) This type of authority is not usually asserted or exerted. It is possessed. It is then recognized and accepted by others. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that such a person *is* an authority rather than that she *has* authority. Veracious authority is a function of the knowledge one possesses and hence is intrinsic, whereas imperial authority is a function of the position one occupies and hence is extrinsic.[439]

Authority must be distinguished from force. While ideally the right to prescribe and the ability to enforce belief and action should coincide, in practice they do not always do so. For example, the rightful heir to a throne or a duly elected official may be deposed in a coup. An impostor or a usurper may function in the place of another. In the case of veracious authority, there is really no force except an implicit ultimatum: "Follow what I tell you, and you will be led into truth; disregard it, and confusion and error will result." The physician who prescribes a course of action to a patient really has no power to enforce that prescription. He or she is in effect saying, "If you wish to be healthy, then do this."

In this connection, the distinction between authoritativeness and authoritarianism is also important to maintain. An authoritative person, document, or institution is one that possesses authority and consequently has the right to define belief or prescribe practice. An authoritarian person, on the other hand, is one who attempts to instill his or her opinions or enforce his or her commands in an emphatic, dogmatic, or even intolerant fashion. The uninitiated or impressionable are often easily induced to follow an authoritarian person, sometimes more easily than they can be persuaded to follow a more authoritative person.

It is also important to distinguish possession of authority and recognition of it. If they are too closely associated, or the former is measured by the latter, the matter of authority becomes quite subjective. There are persons who do not accept rightful authority, who do not heed traffic laws, or who reject the

viewpoint of experts. For whatever reason, they prefer their own opinion. But their failure to recognize authority does not abrogate it.

Authority may be directly exercised by the one possessing it. It may be delegated, however, and frequently is. Often the rightful possessor of authority cannot directly exercise it. Thus it is necessary to delegate that authority to some person or agency that can exercise it. For instance, the citizens of the United States elect officials to represent them, and these officials pass laws and create agencies to administer those laws. The actions of duly authorized employees of such agencies carry the same weight and authority as the citizens themselves possess. A scholar may not be able to present her ideas in a direct fashion to everyone who has an interest in them. She can, however, put her knowledge into a book. The content of the book, since it consists of her actual teachings, will carry the same weight as would her ideas if presented in person.

Lack of effectiveness or success on a short-term basis should not cause us to doubt the genuineness of an authority. Frequently ideas, particularly if novel, are not readily accepted. Nor do they always prove workable immediately. In the long run, however, true authority will prove itself. Galileo's ideas were initially thought bizarre and even dangerous. Einstein's theory of relativity seemed strange and its workability questionable. Time has proven the worth of both, however. Jesus initially had relatively few converts, was not respected by the leaders (the authorities) of his day, and was eventually executed. Ultimately, however, every knee will bow and every tongue confess who and what he is (Phil. 2:10–11).

Religious Authority

In the area of religious authority, the crucial question becomes, Is there some person, institution, or document possessing the right to prescribe belief and action in religious matters? In the ultimate sense, if there is a supreme being higher than humans or anything else in the created order, such a person has the right to determine what we are to believe and how we are to live. From the Christian standpoint, God is the authority in these matters because of who he is. He is the highest being, the one who always has been, who existed before we or any other being came into existence. He is the only being having the power of his own existence within himself, not dependent on anyone or anything else for it. Furthermore, he is the authority because of what he has done. He has created us as well as everything else in the entire world, and he has redeemed us. He is also rightfully the authority, the one who has a right to prescribe what we are to

believe and how we are to act, because of his continuing activity in the world and in our lives. He maintains his creation in existence. He continues to give us life, cares for us, and provides for our needs.

Another question arises at this point: How does God exercise this authority? Does he exercise it directly or indirectly? Some would maintain that he does so directly. Here we find the neo-orthodox. To them, the authority of God is exercised in a direct act of revelation, a self-manifestation that is actually an immediate encounter between God and humanity. The Bible is not God's Word per se. There has been no delegation of the authority.

There are others who understand the authority of God to be exercised in some direct fashion. Among them are various types of "spiritists," both ancient and modern, who expect some direct word or guidance from God. In their view, God speaks to individuals. This may be apart from or very much supplementary to the Bible. Some extreme charismatics believe in a direct special revelation from God. It is not simply charismatics, however, who are found here. One of the questions posed in a 1979 Gallup Poll was, "If you, yourself, were testing your own religious beliefs, which ONE of these four religious authorities would you turn to first?" The options were as follows: what the church says, what respected religious leaders say, what the Holy Spirit says to me personally, and what the Bible says. Of all those polled, 27 percent indicated they would turn first to the Holy Spirit; 40 percent indicated the Bible. Among persons between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age, however, a greater percentage chose the Holy Spirit (36 percent) than chose the Bible (31 percent).[440] While a considerable number of Christians would certainly regard the direct work of the Holy Spirit as a means of guidance, 27 percent of the general public and 36 percent of young adults in that poll regarded it as the major criterion by which to evaluate religious beliefs.

Still others view divine authority as having been delegated to some person(s) or institution. The Roman Catholic Church claims to be God's representative on earth. When it speaks, it speaks with the same authority as if the Lord himself were speaking. According to this view, the right to control the means of grace and to define truth in doctrinal matters has been delegated to the apostles and their successors. It is from the church, then, that we can learn God's intention for humanity. While the church does not discover new truth, it does make explicit what is implicit within the revelatory tradition received from the original apostles.[441]

An interesting contemporary view is that religious authority resides in prophets present in the church. Throughout history various movements have had such prophetic leaders. Muhammad believed that he was a special prophet sent

from God. Among the sixteenth-century Anabaptists were prophets who declared messages allegedly received from God.[442] There seems to have been a special outbreak of such persons and movements in recent years. Various cults have arisen, led by charismatic leaders claiming to have a special message from God. Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church are a major example, but others such as David Koresh of the Branch Davidian group and Jim Jones of Jonestown come to mind as well. Even within evangelicalism, many people regard the word of certain "big name" speakers as almost equal in value with the Bible.

This volume proposes that God himself is the ultimate authority in religious matters. He has the right, both by virtue of who he is and what he does, to establish the standard for belief and practice. With respect to major issues he does not ordinarily exercise authority in a direct fashion, however. Rather, he has delegated that authority by creating a book, the Bible. Because it conveys his message, the Bible carries the same weight God himself would command if he were speaking to us personally.

Establishing the Meaning and Divine Origin of the Bible

Revelation is God's making his truth known to humankind. Inspiration preserves it, making it more widely accessible. Inspiration guarantees that what the Bible says is just what God would say if he were to speak directly. One other element is needed in this chain, however. For the Bible to function as if it is God speaking to us, the Bible reader needs to understand the meaning of the Scriptures and be convinced of their divine origin and authorship. There are various ideas as to how this is accomplished.

1. The traditional Roman Catholic position is that it is through the church that we come to understand the Bible and be convinced of its divine authorship. As we noted earlier, Thomas claimed to be able to establish by rational proofs the divine origin of the Catholic Church. Its divine origin established, the church can then certify to us the divinity of the Scriptures. The church, which was present before the Bible, gave us the Bible. It decided what books should be canonized (i.e., included within the Bible). It testifies that these particular books originated from God, and therefore embody his message to us. Further, the church supplies the correct interpretation of the Bible. This is particularly important. Of what value is it for us to have an infallible, inerrant revelation from God, if we do not have an inerrant understanding of that revelation? Since all human understanding is limited and therefore subject to error, something more is needed. The church

and ultimately the pope give us the true meaning of the Bible. The infallibility of the pope is the logical complement to the infallibility of the Bible.

2. Another group emphasizes that human reason is the means of establishing the Bible's meaning and divine origin. Assurance that the Bible is divinely inspired comes from examining the evidences. The Bible is alleged to possess certain characteristics that will convince anyone who examines it of its divine inspiration. One of the major evidences is fulfilled prophecy—rather unlikely occurrences predicted in the distant past eventually came to pass. These events, says the argument, could not have been predicted on the basis of unaided human insight or foresight. Consequently, God must have revealed them and directed the writing of this book. Other evidences include the supernatural character of Jesus and miracles.[443] Interpretation is also a function of human reason. The Bible's meaning is determined by examining grammars, lexicons, historical background, and so on. Scholarly critical study is the means of ascertaining the meaning of the Bible.

3. The third position is the one we will adopt. This view contends that there is an internal working of the Holy Spirit, illumining the understanding of the hearer or reader of the Bible, bringing about comprehension of its meaning, and creating certainty concerning its truth and divine origin. This is not to say that the testimony of the church regarding the effect of the Bible in individual human lives and in the community over the centuries is unimportant. Nor are the evidences of its supernatural origin insignificant. While we do utilize the best of exegetical methodology, in the final analysis the internal witness of the Spirit is what brings conviction and elicits action.

The Internal Working of the Holy Spirit

There are a number of reasons why the illumination or witness of the Holy Spirit is needed if the human is to understand the meaning of the Bible and be certain of its truth. First there is the ontological difference between God and humanity. God is transcendent; he goes beyond our categories of understanding. He can never be fully grasped within our finite concepts or by our human vocabulary. He can be understood, but not comprehensively. Correlated with God's transcendence is human finiteness. Humans are limited beings in terms of both their point of origin in time and the extent to which they can grasp information. Consequently, they cannot formulate concepts that are commensurate with the nature of God. These limitations are inherent in being human. They are not a

result of the fall or of individual human sin, but of the Creator-creature relationship. No moral connotation or stigma is attached to them.

Beyond these limitations, however, are limitations that do result from human sinfulness, individually and as a race. The latter are not inherent in human nature but rather result from the detrimental effects of sin on our noetic powers. The Bible witnesses in numerous and emphatic ways to this encumbrance of human understanding, particularly with regard to spiritual matters.

The final reason the special working of the Holy Spirit is needed is that human beings require certainty with respect to divine matters. Because we are concerned here with matters of (spiritual and eternal) life and death, it is necessary to have more than mere probability. Our need for certainty is in direct proportion to the importance of what is at stake; in matters of eternal consequence, we need a certainty that human reasoning cannot provide. If one is deciding what automobile to purchase, or what kind of paint to apply to one's home, listing the advantages of each of the options will usually suffice. If, however, the question is whom or what to believe with respect to one's eternal destiny, the need to be certain is far greater.

To understand what the Holy Spirit does, we now need to examine more closely what the Bible has to say about the human condition, particularly the inability to recognize and understand the truth without the aid of the Spirit. In Matthew 13:13–15 and Mark 8:18 Jesus speaks of those who hear but never understand and see but never perceive. Their condition is depicted in vivid images throughout the New Testament. Their hearts have grown dull, their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed (Matt. 13:15). They know God but do not honor him as God, and so they have become futile in their thinking and their senseless minds are darkened (Rom. 1:21). Romans 11:8 attributes their condition to God, who "gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear." Consequently, "their eyes [are] darkened" (v. 10). In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul attributes their condition to the god of this world, who "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." All of these references, as well as numerous other allusions, argue for the need of some special work of the Spirit to enhance human perception and understanding.

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul tells us that the natural person (the one who neither perceives nor understands) has not received the gifts of the Spirit of God. In the original we find the word δέχομαι (*dechomai*), which signifies not merely to "receive" something passively, but rather to "accept" something, to welcome it, whether a gift or an idea.[444] Natural humans do not accept the gifts of the Spirit because they find the wisdom of God foolish. They are unable to understand

(γνῶναι—*gnōnai*) it because it must be spiritually (πνευματικῶς—*pneumatikōs*) discerned or investigated (ἀνακρίνεται—*anakrinetai*). The problem, then, is not merely that people in their natural state are unwilling to accept the gifts and wisdom of God, but that, without the help of the Holy Spirit, they are unable to understand them.

The context of 1 Corinthians 2:14 contains corroborating evidence that humans cannot understand without the Spirit's aid. In verse 11 we read that only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. Paul also indicates in 1:20–21 that the world cannot know God through its wisdom, for God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. Indeed, the wisdom of the world is folly to God (3:19). The gifts of the Spirit are imparted in words taught (διδακτοῖς—*didaktois*) not by human wisdom but by the Spirit (2:13). From all of these considerations, it appears that Paul is not saying that unspiritual persons understand but do not accept. Rather, they do not accept, at least in part, because they do not understand.

But this condition is overcome when the Holy Spirit begins to work within us. Paul speaks of having the eyes of the heart enlightened (πεφωτισμένους—*pephōtismenous*), a perfect passive participle, suggesting that something has been done and remains in effect (Eph. 1:18). In 2 Corinthians 3, he speaks of the removal of the veil placed on the mind (v. 16) so that one may behold the glory of the Lord (v. 18). While the original reference was to the Israelites (v. 13), Paul has now broadened it to refer to all people (v. 16), for in the remainder of the chapter and the first six verses of the next chapter the orientation is quite universal. The New Testament refers to this enlightenment of humans in various other ways: circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29), being filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9), the gift of understanding to know Jesus Christ (1 John 5:20), hearing the voice of the Son of God (John 10:3). What previously had seemed to be foolish (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14) and a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23) now appears to the believer as the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18), as secret and hidden wisdom of God (1:24; 2:7), and as the mind of the Lord (2:16).

What we have been describing here is a one-time work of the Spirit—regeneration. It introduces a categorical difference between the believer and the unbeliever. There is also, however, a continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, a work particularly described and elaborated by Jesus in his message to his followers in John 14–16. Here Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13). In some references, Jesus says that he himself will send the Spirit from the Father (John 15:26; 16:7). In the earlier part of the message he spoke of the Father's sending the Spirit in Jesus's name

(14:16, 26). In the final statement, he simply speaks of the Holy Spirit's coming (16:13). It therefore appears that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son, and that it was necessary for Jesus first to go away to the Father (note the redundant and hence emphatic use of ἐγώ [*egō*] in 16:7 and 14:12—"I am going to the Father").[445] The Holy Spirit was to take Jesus's place and to perform his own peculiar functions as well.

What are these functions the Holy Spirit performs?

1. The Holy Spirit will teach the believers all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus has taught them (14:26).

2. The Holy Spirit will witness to Jesus. The disciples will also be witnesses to Jesus, because they have been with him from the beginning (15:26–27).

3. The Holy Spirit will convict (ἐλέγχω—*elenchō*) the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). This particular word implies rebuking in such a way as to bring about conviction, as contrasted with ἐπιτιμάω (*epitimaō*), which may suggest simply an undeserved (Matt. 16:22) or ineffectual (Luke 23:40) rebuke.[446]

4. The Holy Spirit will guide believers into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but will speak whatever he hears (John 16:13). In the process, he will also glorify Jesus (16:14).

Note in particular the designation of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (14:17). John's account of what Jesus said does not refer to the Holy Spirit as the true Spirit (ἀληθές—*alēthes*, or ἀληθινόν—*alēthinon*), but the Spirit of truth (τῆς ἀληθείας—*tēs alētheias*). This may represent nothing more than the literal translation of an Aramaic expression into Greek, but more likely signifies that the very nature of the Spirit is truth. He is the one who communicates truth. The world is not able to receive (λαμβάνω—*lambanō*, simple reception, as opposed to δεχομαι—*dechomai*, accept) him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. Believers, on the other hand, know him (γινώσκω—*ginōskō*), because he abides with them and will be in them. (There is some dispute as to whether the tense of the final verb of v. 17 is to be understood as future or present. Ἔσται [*estai*] ["will be"] seems to have somewhat better textual basis than does ἐστιν [*estin*] ["is"]. It appears likely that ἔσται was altered to ἐστιν in an attempt to harmonize this verb form with the present tense of μένω—*menō*.)

Let us summarize the role of the Spirit as depicted in John 14–16. He guides into truth, calling to remembrance the words of Jesus, not speaking on his own, but speaking what he hears, bringing about conviction, witnessing to Christ. Thus his ministry is definitely involved with divine truth. But just what is meant by that? It seems to be not so much a new ministry, or the addition of new truth

not previously made known, but rather an action of the Holy Spirit in relationship to truth already revealed. Therefore the Holy Spirit's ministry involves elucidating the truth, bringing belief and persuasion and conviction, but not new revelation.

But is this passage to be understood of the whole church throughout all periods of its life, or do these teachings about the work of the Holy Spirit apply only to the disciples of Jesus's day? If the latter view is adopted, the Spirit's guidance of the disciples into truth has reference only to their role in the production of the Bible, and not to any continuing ministry. Obviously the message was originally given to the group that physically surrounded Jesus. There are certain references that clearly localize it (e.g., 14:8–11). There is, however, for the most part, an absence of elements that would demand a restrictive interpretation. Indeed, several teachings here (e.g., 14:1–7; 15:1–17) are also communicated elsewhere in the Bible. Obviously they were not restricted to merely the first hearers, for they involve promises claimed and commands accepted by the whole church throughout all time. It is reasonable to conclude that the teachings regarding the Spirit's ministry are for us as well.

As a matter of fact, what is taught in John 14–16 regarding the Spirit's guidance of believers into truth is also found elsewhere in the Bible. In particular, Paul mentions that the message of the gospel originally came to the Thessalonians by way of the Holy Spirit. Paul says that it "came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). When the Thessalonians received (παραλαβόντες—*paralabontes*) the word, they accepted it (ἐδέξασθε—*edexasthe*) not as the word of human beings, but as what it really is, the word of God (2:13). The difference between mere indifferent reception of the message and an active, effectual acceptance is understood as a work of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Paul prays that the Ephesians (3:14–19) may be strengthened with might through the Spirit in the inner man, and may have the strength to comprehend (καταλαβέσθαι—*katalabesthai*) and to know (γνῶναι—*gnōnai*) the love of Christ, which exceeds (ὑπερβάλλουσαν—*huperballousan*) knowledge (γνώσεως—*gnōseōs*). The implication is that the Holy Spirit will communicate to the Ephesians a knowledge of the love of Christ that exceeds ordinary knowledge.

Objective and Subjective Components of Authority

There is, then, what Bernard Ramm has called a pattern of authority. The objective word, the written Scripture, together with the subjective word, the

inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the authority for the Christian.

Scholastic orthodoxy of the seventeenth century virtually maintained that the authority is the Bible alone. In some cases this also has been the position of American fundamentalism of the twentieth century. Those who hold this position see an objective quality in the Bible that automatically brings one in contact with God; a virtually sacramental view of the Bible can result. The Bible as a revelation and an inspired preservation of that revelation is also regarded as having an intrinsic efficacy. A mere presentation of the Bible or exposure to the Bible is per se of value, for the words of the Bible have a power in themselves. Reading the Bible daily is thought to confer a value, in and of itself. The old adage "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" has a theological parallel: "a chapter a day keeps the devil away." A potential danger here is that the Bible may become almost a fetish.[447]

On the other hand, there are some groups that regard the Holy Spirit as the chief authority for the Christian. Certain charismatic groups, for example, believe that special prophecy is occurring today. New messages from God are being given by the Holy Spirit. In most cases, these messages are regarded as explaining the true meaning of certain biblical passages. Thus, the contention is that while the Bible is authoritative, in practice its meaning would often not be found without special action by the Holy Spirit.[448]

Actually, it is the combination of these two factors that constitutes authority. Both are needed. The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority. The inward illuminating and persuading work of the Holy Spirit is the subjective dimension. This dual dimension prevents sterile, cold, dry truth on one hand, and overexcitability and ill-advised fervor on the other. Together, the two yield a maturity that is necessary in the Christian life—a cool head and warm heart (not a cold heart and hot head). As one pastor put it in a rather crude fashion: "If you have the Bible without the Spirit, you will dry up. If you have the Spirit without the Bible, you will blow up. But if you have both the Bible and the Spirit together, you will grow up."

How does this view of the Bible compare with neo-orthodoxy's view of the Bible? On the surface, at least to those of a scholastic orthodox position, the two appear very similar. The experience that the neo-orthodox term revelation is in effect what we mean by illumination. At the moment in which one becomes convinced of the truth, illumination is taking place. To be sure, illumination will not always occur in a dramatic fashion. Sometimes conviction rises more gradually and calmly. Apart from the drama that may attach to the situation,

however, there are other significant differences between the neo-orthodox view of revelation and our view of illumination.

First, the content of the Bible is, from our orthodox perspective, objectively the Word of God. What these writings say is actually what God says to us, whether or not anyone reads, understands, or accepts them. The neo-orthodox, on the other hand, do not see revelation as primarily communication of information, but rather the presence of God himself. Consequently, the Bible is not the Word of God in some objective fashion. In the view here presented, however, the Bible is God's message; what it says is what he says to us, irrespective of whether anyone is reading it, hearing it, understanding it, or responding to it. Its status as revelation is not dependent on anyone's response to it. It is what it is.

This means, further, that the Bible has a definite and objective meaning that is (or at least should be) the same for everyone. In the neo-orthodox view, since there are no revealed truths, only truths of revelation, how one person interprets an encounter with God may be different from another person's understanding. Indeed, even the interpretations given to events by the authors of Scripture were not divinely inspired. What they wrote was merely their own attempt to give some accounting of what they had experienced. Therefore, it is not possible to settle differences of understanding by quoting the words of the Bible. At best, the words of Scripture can simply point to the actual event of revelation. In the view presented here, however, since the words of Scripture are objectively God's revelation, one person can point to the content of the Bible in seeking to demonstrate to another what the correct understanding is. The essential meaning of a passage will be the same for everyone, although the application might be different for one person than for another.

Further, since the Bible does have an objective meaning that we come to understand through the process of illumination, illumination must have some permanent effect. Once the meaning is learned, then (barring forgetfulness) we have that meaning more or less permanently. This is not to say that there cannot be a deepened illumination giving us a more profound understanding of a particular passage, but rather that there need not be a renewal of the illumination, since the meaning (as well as the revelation) is of such a nature that it persists and can be retained.

Various Views of Illumination

The View of Augustine

In the history of the church there have been differing views of illumination. For Augustine, illumination was part of the general process of gaining knowledge. Augustine was a Platonist, or at least a Neoplatonist. Plato had taught that reality consists in the Forms or Ideas. All existent empirical particulars take their reality from them. Thus, all white things are white because they participate in the Form or Idea of whiteness. This Form of whiteness is not itself white, but is the formula for whiteness, as it were. Similarly, all occurrences of salt are salt only because they participate in the Idea of saltness or are instances of NaCl, the formula for salt. The only reason we are able to know anything is that we recognize Ideas or Forms (some would say universals) in the particulars. Without knowledge of the Ideas we would be unable to abstract from what is experienced and formulate any understanding. In Plato's view, the soul knows the Forms because it was in contact with them before entering this world of sense experience and particulars. Augustine, since he did not accept the preexistence of the soul, took a different approach. God impresses the Forms on the mind of the individual, thus making it possible to recognize these qualities in particulars and giving the mind criteria for abstracting and for evaluating. Whereas Plato believed that we recognize the Forms because of a onetime experience in the past, Augustine believed that God is constantly impressing these concepts on the mind.[449]

Augustine notes that, contrary to popular opinion, there are three, not two, components in the process of gaining knowledge. There must, of course, be the knower and the object known. In addition, there must be the medium of knowledge. If we are to hear, there must be a medium (e.g., air) to conduct the sound waves. Sound cannot be transmitted in a vacuum. In the same fashion, we cannot see without the medium of light. In total darkness there is no sight, even though a person capable of seeing and an object capable of being seen may be present. And so it is with respect to all knowledge: in addition to the knower and the object of knowledge there must be some means of access to the Ideas or Forms, or there will be no knowledge. This holds true for sense perception, reflection, and every other kind of knowing. Thus, God is the third party in the process of gaining knowledge, for he constantly illumines the mind by impressing the Forms or Ideas on it. Knowledge of Scripture is of this same fashion. Illumination as to the Bible's meaning and truth is simply a special instance of God's activity in the general process of human acquisition of knowledge.[450]

While Augustine has given account of the process by which we gain knowledge, he has not differentiated here between the Christian and the non-Christian. Two brief observations will point up the problems in this approach:

(1) Augustine's epistemology is not consistent with his anthropology, according to which humankind is radically sinful; and (2) he fails to take into account the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit performs a special work in relationship to believers.

The View of Daniel Fuller

Daniel Fuller propounded a novel view of what precisely is involved in the Holy Spirit's work of illumination. This view appears to be based exclusively on 1 Corinthians 2:13–14, and in particular the clause, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God." Fuller maintains that what is involved here is not understanding of the biblical text, but acceptance of its teachings. He regards δέχομαι (*dechomai*) as the crucial word, for it denotes not merely reception of God's teachings, but willing, positive acceptance. Thus, the unspiritual human's problem is not lack of understanding of what the Bible says, but unwillingness to follow its teachings. Illumination, then, is the process by which the Holy Spirit turns the human will around to accept God' s teachings.

Proceeding on his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:14 as signifying that the unbeliever's basic problem is unwillingness to accept God's teaching, Fuller draws the conclusion that sin has seriously affected human will, but not human reason. This means, says Fuller, that an objective, descriptive biblical theologian will be better able to get at the meaning of a text than will a theologian who regards the Bible as in some way authoritative. The former will not be as affected by subjective factors, since he is concerned only to ascertain what Jesus or Paul taught. He is not in any sense obligated to follow or obey those teachings. The believer, on the other hand, may find a collision between the teaching of the Bible and his or her own presuppositions, and will be tempted, unknowingly perhaps, to read back into the text a meaning that he or she expects to find there. His or her very commitment to Scripture makes misunderstanding it more likely.[451]

Fuller has described a very real problem that Christians have. Being imperfectly sanctified, Christians still have varying degrees of self-centeredness, resulting in a tendency to find a meaning for the biblical text that favors what they personally want. Since conservative or orthodox Christians hold the Bible in high regard, there is a natural tendency toward selectivity in following it, and toward weighting more heavily those interpretations of it that support their inclinations. It is notable that in the recent instances of departure from biblical belief and practice among some leaders of prominence, the moral deviations

often occurred first, and then biblical and doctrinal views were formulated to justify the behavior.

There are, however, severe difficulties with Fuller's view that illumination is the Holy Spirit's working with the human will (and only the will). Apart from the fact that Fuller bases his view on but a single portion of Scripture, he has assumed that only human will, not human reason, is affected by sin. Because unbelievers' understanding is not corrupted by sin, and, unlike believers, has no personal stake in what Scripture says, they can be dispassionate and get at the real meaning of the biblical text. But is this really so? How many unbelievers are really this dispassionate or uninvolved? Those who examine the teachings of Jesus must have some interest in them. May not that interest in itself incline them to find a meaning there that they find more acceptable than the actual meaning? On the other hand, the very commitment of believers gives them a more serious interest in and concern for the Bible. This commitment may involve a willingness to follow Scripture wherever it leads. The seriousness of Christians' belief that the Bible is God's Word should make them all the more diligent in seeking faithfully to determine its true meaning. If one has accepted Christ as Lord, will not he or she desire to ascertain precisely what the Lord has declared? Finally, the biblical texts (cited on pp. 217–18) that indicate that unbelievers do not accept, at least in part, because they do not understand, and that the Holy Spirit opens up both heart and mind, seem difficult to square with Fuller's view that sin has not seriously affected human reason, only the will.

The View of John Calvin

John Calvin's view of illumination is more adequate than that of either Augustine or Fuller. Calvin, of course, believed in and taught total depravity. This means that the whole of human nature, including reason, has been adversely affected by the fall. Humans in the natural state are unable to recognize and respond to divine truth. When regeneration takes place, however, the "spectacles of faith" vastly improve one's spiritual eyesight. Yet even after regeneration there is need for continuing progressive growth, which we usually call sanctification. In addition, the Holy Spirit works internally in the life of the believer, witnessing to the truth and countering the effects of sin so the inherent meaning of the Bible can be seen. Because this view of illumination seems most in harmony with the biblical teachings, it is therefore advocated here.[452]

The Bible, Reason, and the Spirit

In recent years, a number of evangelical theologians have emphasized the Wesleyan quadrilateral: reason, experience, tradition, and Scripture.[453] At this point it is important to raise the question concerning the relationship between biblical authority and reason. Is not some conflict possible here? Ostensibly the authority is the Bible, but various means of interpretation are brought to bear on the Bible to elicit its meaning. If reason is the means of interpretation, is not reason, rather than the Bible, the real authority, since it in effect comes to the Bible from a position of superiority?

Here a distinction must be drawn between legislative authority and judicial authority. In the US federal government, the houses of Congress produce legislation, but the judiciary (ultimately the Supreme Court) decides what the legislation means. They are separate branches of government, each with its own appropriate authority. Parallel structures are found in other democracies.

This seems to be a good way to think of the relationship between Scripture and reason. Scripture is our supreme legislative authority. It gives us the content of our belief and of our code of behavior and practice. Reason does not tell us the content of our belief. It does not discover truth. Even what we learn from the general revelation is still a matter of revelation rather than a logical deduction through natural theology. Of course, content obtained from the general revelation is necessarily quite broad in scope and merely supplements the special revelation.[454]

When we come to determine the message's meaning, however, and, at a later stage, assess its truth, we must utilize the power of reasoning. We must employ the best methods of interpretation, or hermeneutics. And then we must decide whether the Christian belief system is true by rationally examining and evaluating the evidences. This we term apologetics. While there is a dimension of the self-explanatory within Scripture, Scripture alone will not give us the meaning of Scripture. There is therefore no inconsistency in regarding Scripture as our supreme authority in the sense that it tells us what to do and believe, and employing various hermeneutical and exegetical methods to determine its meaning.

We have noted that illumination by the Holy Spirit helps the Scripture reader or hearer understand the Bible and creates the conviction that it is true and is the Word of God. This, however, should not be regarded as a substitute for the use of hermeneutical methods. These methods play a complementary, not a competitive role. A view of authority emphasizing the subjective component relies almost exclusively on the inner witness of the Spirit. A view emphasizing the objective component regards the Bible alone as the authority; it relies on methods of interpretation to the neglect of the inner witness of the Spirit. The Spirit of God,

however, frequently works through means rather than directly. He creates certainty of the divine nature of Scripture by providing evidences that reason can evaluate. He also gives understanding of the text through the exegete's work of interpretation. Even Calvin, with his strong emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, called attention to the *indicia* of the credibility of Scripture,[455] and in his commentaries used the best of classical scholarship to get at the meaning of the Bible. Thus, the exegete and the apologist will use the very best methods and data, but will do so with a reiterated prayer for the Holy Spirit to work through these means.

Tradition and Authority

We must also ask how tradition relates to the matter of authority. Here we find a wide spectrum of estimations. Traditional Roman Catholicism has seen tradition as a separate and equal authority to that of Scripture. This usually means that revelation continued in the history of the church, so that the opinions of the church fathers carry a considerable authoritative weight. An opposite extreme is represented by some in the free church tradition that reject any positive role for tradition. Between these is the Wesleyan quadrilateral, according to which Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are complementary elements of authority. In recent years, a number of evangelicals have begun to accord a legislative role to tradition, including it as one of the sources of doctrinal belief.[456]

It should be noted that tradition is simply that which has been passed on by others, which even Paul acknowledged (e.g., 1 Cor. 11): even those who disavow tradition are frequently affected by tradition, albeit in a somewhat different form. The president of a Baptist seminary once said with tongue in cheek: "We Baptists do not follow tradition. But we are bound by our historic Baptist position!" Tradition need not necessarily be old, although it must at least be old enough to be retained and transmitted. A tradition may be of recent origin. Indeed, at some point all traditions were of recent origin. Some of the popular speakers and leaders in Christian circles create their own tradition. As a matter of fact, certain key expressions of theirs may be virtually canonized among their followers. It is not a matter of being able to exclude tradition entirely, but of utilizing it wisely and discriminately.

What are the positive contributions that tradition can make to our theological formulation? There are several. The first is in giving us insight into the Scriptures. Those who have gone before us have wrestled with the same issues

that we are dealing with. In the case of the church fathers, they were often functioning within a cultural situation much more similar to that of the Scripture writers than are we. Thus, their insights can be helpful to us. Because they did not have the influence of a long period of development as we do, their understandings may be truer to the biblical teaching.[457]

Second, tradition may enable us to detect the essence of doctrines. Each doctrine is formulated somewhat differently at different periods. Yet within these fluctuations there is a common core. Tradition may assist us in separating that common core or essence from particular permutations of it. It can therefore help in contextualization of doctrine.

A third value of tradition is in putting our beliefs in cultural and historical perspective. We often tend to believe that we are seeing things, including our understanding of the Bible, in an absolute fashion. We read the Bible just as it is. Studying the tradition helps us to understand why we see things as we do. It helps us to see the influences that bear on us, to see that our understanding is indeed conditioned. While some postmodernists have been quick to point out the conditioned nature of earlier views, they do not similarly apply such insights to their own beliefs. Real understanding of tradition will help divest us of such myopia.

On the one hand, this means that knowledge of the tradition can save us unnecessary effort. Some Christians are surprised to discover that issues they are dealing with have been dealt with by the church centuries earlier, and that their own insights are not as unique as they thought. There is no virtue in reinventing a theological wheel. On the other hand, tradition can help spare us from falling into error. Truth and falsity are often tested by pragmatic effects, but those effects may not be apparent for several generations. The churches that followed in the tradition of Horace Bushnell, Shailer Matthews, and Harry Emerson Fosdick have declined severely in both membership and influence in recent years, while those churches that took their inspiration from Charles Hodge, B. B.Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen have prospered.

Finally, tradition can help us relate to those of differing viewpoints. To the extent that we see how differing traditions affect current beliefs, we will be able to put ourselves into the situation and see why the views of others make as good sense to them as ours do to us.

One of the problems with tradition is its varying forms. It is therefore necessary to have an arbiter to assist us in choosing which of the competing or even conflicting traditions to follow. To the extent that we can decontextualize ourselves in interpreting Scripture, it can serve as this arbiter.

It is noticeable that none of these values of tradition is in contributing substantively to our beliefs. Rather, they play secondary or supportive roles. In other words, in terms of the distinction we have drawn earlier, tradition is a judicial, rather than a legislative, authority. The fathers' authority comes from their utilization and elucidation of Scripture. They must never be allowed to displace Scripture. Whenever a tradition, whether it is a teaching of ancient origin or of a recent popular leader, comes into conflict with the meaning of the Bible, either we must find a way in which the two are harmonious, or the tradition must give way to Scripture.

Authority and Culture

Christians have always lived and expressed their faith within the culture of their time and place, and have often wrestled with the question of what their relationship should be to that culture. H. Richard Niebuhr described five possible stances with regard to this relationship.[458] Evangelicals have often found themselves to some extent in the stance of Christ against culture. Especially as culture became more diverse, Christians have sought to understand culture, so that they could best express the Christian message in such a way as to be understood by those who stand outside Christian culture. This has been the emphasis on contextualization that we discussed in chapter 4. More recently, some postconservative evangelicals have contended that culture should actually contribute to the Christian message.[459]

In general, the biblical writers and speakers often contrast the two: Christianity and popular culture. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 1 is an obvious opposition of the two, as was his statement in Romans 12:2: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (Phillips). Jesus himself frequently drew such contrast as well (e.g., John 8:23–27). The incorporation of cultural contributions into our theology should therefore be attempted only with caution. While there is a genuine general revelation and a common grace, human sinfulness tends to distort this. It may be best to say that the role of culture should be primarily in the form of expression of the message, rather than in the substance, and that any cultural components should be evaluated by their degree of coherence with the core of the Christian message.

Historical and Normative Authoritativeness

One other distinction needs to be drawn and elaborated. It concerns the way in which the Bible is authoritative for us. The Bible is certainly authoritative in telling us what God's will was for certain individuals and groups within the biblical period. The question being considered here is, Is what was binding on those people also binding on us?

It is necessary to distinguish between two types of authority: historical and normative. The Bible informs us as to what God commanded the people in the biblical situation and what he expects of us. Insofar as the Bible teaches us what occurred and what the people were commanded in biblical times, it is historically authoritative. But is it also normatively authoritative? Are we bound to carry out the same actions as were expected of those people? Here one must be careful not to identify too quickly God's will for those people with his will for us. It will be necessary to distinguish the permanent essence of the message from the temporary form of its expression. Some guidelines for doing this were given in our chapter on contemporizing the faith (chap. 4; see esp. pp. 77–89). It is quite possible for something to be historically authoritative without being normatively authoritative.

PART 3
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11

The Greatness of God

Chapter Objectives

After completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Clearly differentiate the attributes of God from the acts of God.
2. Identify several different classifications of the attributes of God.
3. Classify the attributes of God into his greatness and his goodness and explain the uniqueness and importance of each set of attributes.
4. List the attributes of God's greatness—spirituality, personality, life, infinity, and constancy—and express the essence of each.
5. Foster confidence in the almighty God.

Chapter Summary

We must make a distinction between the acts of God and the attributes of God. Several methods have been employed to classify the attributes or qualities of God. We have chosen to follow the classification that differentiates his greatness and his goodness. Sometimes these attributes have been called his natural attributes and his moral attributes, respectively. We concentrate in this chapter on his greatness, that is, that God is personal, all-powerful, eternal, spirit, present everywhere within his creation, and unchanging in his perfection.

Study Questions

- How does our own view of God affect our understanding of God? How do we keep from limiting God to our own perspective of him?
- How do we confuse God's attributes with the acts of God? Give some examples.
- How would you describe each of the attributes of God's greatness?
- What does it mean when we say God is free?

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Life

Infinity

Constancy

The Problems of Conceiving of God's Nature

The doctrine of God is the central point for much of the rest of theology. One's view of God might even be thought of as supplying the whole framework within which one's theology is constructed, life is lived, and ministry is conducted.

Problems or difficulties on two levels make it evident that there is a need for a correct understanding of God. First is the popular or practical level. In his book *Your God Is Too Small*, J. B. Phillips points out some common distorted understandings of God.[460] Some people think of God as a kind of celestial police officer who looks for opportunities to pounce upon erring and straying persons. A country song enunciated this view: "God's gonna get 'cha for that; God's gonna get 'cha for that. Ain't no use to run and hide, 'cuz he knows where you're at!" Insurance companies, with their references to "acts of God"—always catastrophic occurrences—seem to have a powerful, malevolent being in mind.

The opposite view, that God is grandfatherly, is also prevalent. Here God is conceived of as an indulgent, kindly old gentleman who would never want to detract from humans' enjoyment of life. These and many other false conceptions of God need to be corrected if our spiritual lives are to have any real meaning and depth.

Problems on a more sophisticated level also point out the need for a correct view of God. The biblical understanding of God has often been problematic. In the early church, the doctrine of the Trinity created special tension and debate. While that particular topic has not ceased to present difficulty, other issues have become prominent in our day. One of these concerns God's relationship to the creation. Is he so separate and removed from the creation (transcendent) that he does not work through it, and hence nothing can be known of him from it? Or is he to be found within human society and the processes of nature? Specific questions that have arisen in connection with this issue are as follows: Does God work through the process of evolution? Must God's transcendence be thought of primarily in spatial categories? Another major issue pertains to the nature of God. Is he fixed and unchanging in essence? Or does he grow and develop like the rest of the universe, as process theology contends? And then there are the matters raised by the theology of hope, which has suggested that God is to be thought of primarily in relationship to the future rather than the past. These and other issues call for clear thinking and careful enunciation of the understanding of God.

Many errors have been made in attempts to understand God, some of them opposite in nature. One is an excessive analysis, in which God is submitted to a virtual autopsy. The attributes of God are laid out and classified in a fashion similar to the approach taken in an anatomy textbook.[461] It is possible to make the study of God an excessively speculative matter; and in that case the speculative conclusion itself, instead of a closer relationship with him, becomes the end. This should not be so. Rather, the study of God's nature should be seen as a means to a more accurate understanding of him and hence a closer personal relationship with him. Then there need not be an avoidance of inquiry into, and reflection upon, what God is like. And then there will be no temptation to slip into the opposite error: so generalizing the conception of God that our response becomes merely a warm feeling toward what Phillips called the "oblong blur" (God unfocused),[462] or what some have called "belief in the great whatever." Inquiry into the nature of God, then, should be neither a speculative pressing beyond what God has revealed, nor a mystical leap toward a hazy, undefined something.

In recent years, increasing numbers of evangelical theologians have emphasized the importance of defining the attributes biblically. It appears that some versions of the classical view of God have been affected by the influence of Greek philosophy, distorting the true biblical witness in these matters. Although in general I have reservations about many of the charges of "Greek" influence, in this case, there is considerable substance to the charges.[463] It appears that much of what has been regarded as the classic view derives from Thomas Aquinas's adoption of Aristotle's view of God as the Unmoved Mover.

One of the attributes that consequently have been restated is divine impassibility, understood as the idea that God is unaffected by and unresponsive to anything external to him. In some cases, this has been stated virtually as if God were devoid of any emotions. Almost none of the several evangelical systematic theology textbooks published in the past quarter-century endorses the traditional view of God as impassible, or even uses that term. Restatement is also taking place with respect to divine immutability, where the idea of God as virtually immobile has been replaced by a concept of God as constant but dynamic in nature, with an emphasis on God as active.[464]

This suggests that a correct understanding of biblical teaching on the attributes of God will fall somewhere between the Thomistic and the process views of God. As John Feinberg, who advocates a redefinition of some of the classical understanding of the attributes, points out, however, the proper midpoint is not that of open theism, either.[465] Like Feinberg, we will strive to identify as closely as possible the biblical teaching, but because of our respect for biblical teaching, not because of a desire to attain some balance between competing views.

The Nature of Attributes

When we speak of the attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God that constitute what he is, the very characteristics of his nature. We are not referring here to his acts, such as creating, guiding, and preserving, nor to his corresponding roles of Creator, Guide, Preserver.

The attributes are qualities of the entire Godhead. They should not be confused with properties, which, technically speaking, are the distinctive characteristics of the various persons of the Trinity.[466] Properties are functions (general), activities (more specific), or acts (most specific) of the individual members of the Godhead.

The attributes are permanent and intrinsic qualities, which cannot be gained or lost. Thus, holiness is not in this sense an attribute (a permanent, inseparable

characteristic) of Adam, but it is of God. God's attributes are essential and inherent dimensions of his very nature.

Although our understanding of God is undoubtedly filtered through our own mental framework, his attributes are not our conceptions projected upon him. They are objective characteristics of his nature. While the biblical author often expresses his reaction or response to these attributes, the attributes and the response are quite clearly distinguished from one another.

The attributes are inseparable from God's being or essence. Some earlier theologies thought of the attributes as somehow adhering to or at least in some way distinguishable from the underlying substance or being or essence.[467] In many cases, this idea was based on the Aristotelian conception of substance and attribute. Some other theologies have gone to the opposite extreme, virtually denying that God has an essence. Here the attributes are pictured as a sort of collection of qualities, as fragmentary parts or segments of God.[468] It is better to conceive of God's attributes as his nature, not a collection of separate parts or an addition to his essence. Thus, God *is* his love, holiness, and power. These are simply different ways of viewing the unified being, God. God is richly complex, and these conceptions are merely attempts to grasp different objective aspects or facets of his being.

When we speak of the incomprehensibility of God, then, we do not mean that there is an unknown being or essence beyond or behind his attributes. Rather, we mean that we do not know his qualities or his nature completely and exhaustively. We know God only as he has revealed himself. While his self-revelation is undoubtedly consistent with his full nature and accurate, it is not an exhaustive revelation. Further, we do not totally understand or know comprehensively that which he has revealed to us of himself. Thus, there is, and always will be, an element of mystery regarding God.

Classifications of Attributes

1. In attempts to better understand God, various systems of classifying his attributes have been devised. One system found especially in the writings of Reformed theologians speaks of communicable and incommunicable attributes.[469] The communicable attributes are those qualities of God for which at least a partial counterpart can be found in his human creations. Here there are love, which, while infinite in God, is found at least in partial form in humans, and even omnipotence, for humans have at least a degree of power. The incommunicable attributes, on the other hand, are those unique qualities for

which no counterpart can be found in humans. One example of this is omnipresence. God is everywhere simultaneously. Even with jet and rocket travel, no human can be everywhere simultaneously.

2. A second pair of categories is the immanent or intransitive and the emanant or transitive qualities. The former remain within God's own nature, such as spirituality. The latter go out from and operate outside the nature of God, affecting the creation, such as mercy, which requires an object.[470]

3. Closely related to the immediately preceding classification and sometimes combined with it is the distinction between absolute and relative qualities. The former are those God has in himself, and has always possessed, independently of the objects of his creation. The relative attributes, on the other hand, are those manifested through his relationship to other subjects and inanimate objects. Infinity is an absolute attribute; eternity and omnipresence are relative attributes representing the relationship of his unlimited nature to the finite objects of the creation. The relative attributes are the absolute attributes applied to situations involving created objects.[471]

4. A final classification is that of natural and moral attributes. The moral attributes are those that in the human context would relate to the concept of rightness (as opposed to wrongness). Holiness, love, mercy, and faithfulness are examples. Natural attributes are the nonmoral superlatives of God, such as his knowledge and power.[472] Some object to this classification on the basis that the moral attributes are just as natural as the natural attributes, being an integral part of the nature of God.[473]

With some modifications, we will use this last system of classification in this study, terming them, however, attributes of *greatness* and attributes of *goodness.* We turn first to the qualities of greatness, which include spirituality, personality, life, infinity, and constancy.

Attributes of Greatness

Spirituality

God is spirit; that is, he is not composed of matter and does not possess a physical nature. This is most clearly stated by Jesus in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth," and is also implied in various references to his invisibility (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15–16).

One consequence of God's spirituality is that he does not have the limitations involved with a physical body. For one thing, he is not limited to a particular

geographical or spatial location. This is implicit in Jesus's statement, "A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21). Consider also Paul's statement in Acts 17:24: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands." Furthermore, he is not destructible, as is material nature.

There are, of course, numerous passages that suggest that God has physical features such as hands or feet. It seems most helpful to treat these as anthropomorphisms, attempts to express the truth about God through human analogies. There also are cases where God appeared in physical form, particularly in the Old Testament, in theophanies, or temporary self-manifestations. It seems best to take the clear statements about God's spirituality and invisibility at face value and interpret the anthropomorphisms and theophanies in the light of them. Indeed, Jesus himself clearly indicated that a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39).

In biblical times, the doctrine of God's spirituality was a counter to the practice of idolatry and of nature worship. God, being spirit, could not be represented by any physical object or likeness. That he is not restricted by geographical location also countered the idea that God could be contained and controlled. In our day, Mormons maintain that not only God the Son but also the Father has a physical body, although the Holy Spirit does not. Indeed, Mormonism contends that an immaterial body cannot exist.[474]

One evangelical theologian, Clark Pinnock, has suggested that we consider the possibility that God may have a body. He attempts to apply consistently the literal hermeneutic employed by his fellow open theists in understanding passages that seem to say that God lacked information about what was to happen or changed his mind. While not clearly endorsing the concept of divine corporeality, Pinnock offers several considerations as to why the concept makes sense.[475] This proposal has not led to acceptance by other theologians, however, including other open theists.

Another group of theologians who in a different way has advocated a form of teaching regarding God's body are panentheists, who hold a radical form of divine immanence, that is, the idea that God is in everything. In some cases, their view verges on pantheism, the doctrine that God is everything, or everything is God. Some of these panentheists speak of the world, or more generally, the universe, as God's body.[476] None of these views of divine corporeality can be reconciled, however, with the biblical teaching of his spirituality.

Personality

Although spirituality might seem to imply personality, this does not necessarily follow. Georg Hegel, whose philosophy influenced much of nineteenth-century theology, believed in the Absolute, a great spirit or mind that encompasses all things within itself. In Hegel's metaphysics, reality as a whole is one great thinking mind, and all of what most people consider to be finite objects and persons are simply thoughts in the mind of the Absolute. There really is no personal self-consciousness about this being, however, no personality to which one can relate.[477] Some other Christian theologians have followed a somewhat similar idea. One was Paul Tillich, who maintained that God was not a being, but Being-itself, the ground or basis of all beings. Similarly, for Tillich, God was not a person, but the basis or cause of personality.[478] Nor is there any personal deity in a number of Eastern religions. In Hinduism, reality is Brahma, the whole, of which we are individual parts, or Atman. One does not relate to reality by turning outward, as to an individual person, but rather by withdrawing inward through a process of contemplation. The aim of this process is to lose one's own individual identity and self-consciousness, to be in effect absorbed into the whole. Nirvana is the stage at which all individual striving ceases, and one becomes simply at rest.[479] Some contemporaries who think of themselves as spiritual but not religious reflect something of this generalized view of spirit as impersonal.

The biblical view is quite different. Here God is personal. He is an individual being, with self-consciousness and will, capable of feeling, choosing, and having a reciprocal relationship with other personal and social beings.[480]

Scripture indicates God's personality in several ways. One is the fact that God has a name, which he assigns to himself and by which he reveals himself. When Moses wonders how he should respond when the Israelites will ask the name of the God who has sent him, God identifies himself as "I AM" or "I WILL BE" (Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord—Exod. 3:14). By this he demonstrates that he is not an abstract, unknowable being or a nameless force. This name is not used merely to refer to God or describe him, but also to address him. Genesis 4:26 indicates that people began to call on the name of the Lord, and Genesis 12:8 refers to Abraham's building an altar and calling on his name. Psalm 20 speaks of boasting in the name of the Lord (v. 7) and calling upon him (v. 9). The name is to be spoken and treated respectfully, according to Exodus 20:7. Today, a name is seldom chosen for its meaning, but because parents happen to like it or it is currently popular. The Hebrew approach was quite different, however. A name was chosen very carefully, and with attention to its significance. Whereas in our

society a number might serve as effectively as a name and perhaps even better, the Hebrews considered the name an embodiment of the person bearing it.[481]

The particular names that the personal God assumes refer primarily to his relationship with persons rather than with nature. Even the Psalms do not contain the kind of emphasis on nature found in many of the religions surrounding Israel. The emphasis, rather, is on his concern with directing and shaping the lives of his worshipers, both individually and socially.

A further indication of God's personal nature is his activity. He is depicted in the Bible as knowing and communing with human persons. In the earliest picture of his relationship with humankind (Gen. 3), God comes to and talks with Adam and Eve, apparently as a regular practice. Although this representation of God is undoubtedly anthropomorphic, it nonetheless teaches that he is a person who relates to persons as such. He has all the capacities associated with personality: knowing, feeling, willing, acting.

Several implications follow. Because God is a person (indeed, he is pictured as our Father), our relationship with him has a dimension of warmth and understanding. God is not a bureau or a department, a machine or a computer that automatically supplies the needs of people. He is a knowing, loving, good Father. He can be approached. He can be spoken to, and he in turn speaks. God does not simply receive and accept what we offer. He is a living, reciprocating being. He is not merely one of whom we hear, but one whom we meet and know.

God is to be treated as a being, not an object or force to be used or manipulated. While our thinking and practice may at times betray such a view, it is not consistent with the biblical picture. The idea that God is simply something to be used or to solve our problems and meet our needs is not religion. Such attempts to harness him belong rather to the realm of magic or technology.

God is an end in himself, not a means to an end. He is of value to us for what he is in himself, not merely for what he *does*. The rationale for the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3), is given in the preceding verse: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt." We misread the passage if we interpret it as meaning that the Israelites were to put God first because of what he had done—that out of gratitude they were to make him their only God. Rather, what he had done was the proof of what he is; it is because of what he is that he is to be loved and served, not only supremely but exclusively.

Life

God is characterized by life. This is affirmed in Scripture in several different ways. It is found in the assertion that he *is.* His very name "I AM" (Exod. 3:14) indicates that he is a living God. Scripture does not argue for his existence. It simply affirms it or, more often, merely assumes it. Hebrews 11:6 says that anyone who "comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Thus, existence is considered a most basic aspect of his nature.[482]

The living God is frequently contrasted with the other gods, inanimate objects of metal or stone. Jeremiah 10:10 refers to him as the true God, the living God, who controls nature. "These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth," on the other hand, "will perish from the earth and from under the heavens" (v. 11). John 5:26 speaks of God as having life in himself, and 1 Thessalonians 1:9 draws a contrast between the idols from which the Thessalonians had turned and the "living and true God."

God's life is different from that of every other living being. While all other beings have their life in God, he does not derive his life from any external source. He is never depicted as having been brought into being. As noted earlier, John 5:26 says that he has life in himself. The adjective "eternal" is applied to him frequently, implying that there never was a time when he did not exist. Further, we are told that "in the beginning," before anything else came to be, God was already in existence (Gen. 1:1). Thus, he could not have derived his existence from anything else.

Moreover, God's continued existence does not depend on anything outside himself. All other creatures, insofar as they are alive, need something to sustain that life. Nourishment, warmth, protection, are all necessary. In Matthew 6:25–33, Jesus notes that the birds and the flowers depend on the Father's provision. God, however, has no such need. On the contrary, Paul denies that God needs anything or is served by human hands (Acts 17:25). He is, regardless of whether anything else is. Just as he existed before anything else came into being, so he also can continue to exist independent of everything else.

While God is independent in the sense of not needing anything else for his existence, this is not to say that he is aloof, indifferent, or unconcerned. God relates to us, but by his choice, not because he is compelled by some need. That he does so relate to us is therefore an even greater cause for glorifying him. He has acted and continues to act out of *agapē*, unselfish love, rather than out of need.

It is preferable to refer to God as the uncaused one, rather than self-caused. His very nature is to exist. It is not necessary for him to will his own existence.[483] For God not to exist would be logically contradictory. We are not

here reintroducing the so-called ontological argument for the existence of God. Rather, we are saying merely that if God is as he is described in Scripture, he must exist.

A proper understanding of this aspect of God's nature should free us from the idea that God needs us. God has chosen to use us to accomplish his purposes, and in that sense he now needs us. He could, however, if he so chose, have bypassed us. He could simply have been—without us; and he can, if he chooses, accomplish his purposes without us. It is to our gain that he permits us to know and serve him, and it is our loss if we reject that opportunity. Sometimes we hear expressions of what might be referred to as the "poor God" syndrome: if God does not alter his ways and treat us differently, he will lose us, to his great deprivation. But God does not need us. He is not fortunate to have us; it is we who are the fortunate and favored ones.

We live in a world of contingency. So much of what we know and believe is conditioned by the word *if.* We will live another ten years, if our health does not fail. We will retire in comfort, if our investments and pension program do not fail. We will be safe, if the defenses of our government do not fail. We will enjoy the fellowship of our friends, if something does not happen to them. We will get to our next appointment, if our automobile does not break down. But with God there is no need to say, "God will be, if." God is and will be, period! There is one sure thing, and that is that there is a God and there always will be.

Infinity

God is infinite. This means not only that God is unlimited but that he is illimitable. In this respect, God is unlike anything we experience. Even those things that common sense once told us are infinite or boundless are now seen to have limits. Energy at an earlier time seemed inexhaustible. We have in recent years become aware that our usual sources of energy have rather sharp limitations, and we are approaching those limits considerably more rapidly than we imagined. So also the ocean once seemed to be an endless source of food and a dumping place so vast that it could not be contaminated. Yet we are becoming aware that its resources and its ability to absorb pollution are both finite. Similarly, we are becoming increasingly aware that the atmosphere is limited in its ability to absorb the products of human activity. The infinity of God, however, speaks of a limitless being.

The infinity of God may be thought of in several respects. We think first in terms of space. Here we have what have traditionally been referred to as immensity and omnipresence. God is not subject to limitations of space. By this

we do not mean merely the limitation of being in a particular place—if an object is in one place it cannot be in another. Rather, it is improper to think of God as confined to space at all. All finite objects have a location. They are somewhere. This necessarily prevents their being somewhere else. The magnitude of finite objects is measured by how much space they occupy. With God, however, the question of whereness or location is not applicable. God is the one who brought space (and time) into being. He was before there was space. He cannot be localized at a particular point. There can be no plotting of his location on a set of coordinates. This is because he has no physical body to be located at a particular place. Consider here Paul's statement that God does not dwell in human-made shrines, because he is the Lord of heaven and earth; he made the world and everything in it (Acts 17:24–25).

Another aspect of God's infinity in terms of space is that there is no place where he cannot be found. We are here facing the tension between the immanence of God (he is everywhere) and his transcendence (he is not anywhere). The point here is that nowhere within the creation is God inaccessible. Jeremiah quotes God as saying, "Am I only a God nearby, . . . and not a God far away?" (Jer. 23:23). The implication seems to be that being a God at hand does not preclude his being afar off as well. He fills the whole heaven and earth (v. 24). Thus, we cannot hide "in secret places" where we cannot be seen. God speaks of heaven as his throne and the earth as his footstool (Isa. 66:1); the idea that humans can confine God by building him a dwelling place is, then, sheer folly. The psalmist found that he could not flee from the presence of God—wherever the psalmist went, God would be there (Ps. 139:7–12). Whether the psalmist ascended to heaven or made his bed in Sheol, God would be there. Jesus carried this concept a step further. In giving the Great Commission, he commanded his disciples to go as witnesses everywhere, even to the end of the earth, and he would be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). Thus, he in effect indicated that he is not limited either by space or by time.

Here, as in so many other respects, there is a sharp contrast between God and the false gods. It is clearly seen in the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–40). One of the taunts Elijah hurled at his opponents when Baal failed to answer was that perhaps he was on a journey (v. 27). If Baal was off somewhere else, he could not also be there to send down fire. Jehovah, however, does not have this problem. He can be in countless places and involved with many different situations simultaneously.

For many of us, certain places have sacred connotations. We may have received special blessing from God when we were in a particular geographical location. If, upon moving to another location, things do not go as well, we may

be tempted to think that God is not there. Or a particular house of worship or a special place within a building may have taken on extra significance because of God's past working. We may find it difficult to adjust to a change, but the problem is psychological, not theological. God is not localized. He has not been left behind. He is available to us wherever we may be. It is good to assemble with other believers in a regular place of worship, but God is not prevented from meeting with us because we have been unable to come to this special place. Nor does God have any difficulty dealing with needs and problems that arise in widely differing locations at the same time. He does not, however, move from one place to another as a sort of divine superman who flies at infinite speed. Rather, he simply has access to the whole of the creation at all times.[484]

God is also infinite in relation to time. He was before time began, and will have no end. The question "how old is God?" simply is inappropriate. He is no older now than a year ago, for infinity plus one is no more than infinity. He simply is not bound by the usual restrictions of time.

God is the one who always is. He was, he is, he will be. Psalm 90:1–2 says, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." Jude 25 says, "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore." A similar thought is found in Ephesians 3:21. The use of expressions such as "the first and the last" and the "Alpha and Omega" serve to convey the same idea (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

God is timeless in the sense that he does not grow or develop. There are no variations in his nature at different points within his existence. The interests, knowledge, activities, and even personalities of humans change from childhood to youth to adulthood to old age. With God there is no such change, however. He has always been what he is.

The fact that God is not bound by time does not mean that he is not conscious of the succession of points of time. He knows what is now occurring in human experience. He is aware that events occur in a particular order, and in the biblical accounts, he knows what has already transpired, what is now the case, and what is yet in the future.[485] There have been and continue to be strong debates over whether God is eternal (outside of time) or everlasting (extended endlessly within time). This issue will also be addressed in the chapter on God's transcendence and immanence, but at this point it is sufficient to say that in the biblical witness, God seems not to be limited to time as ordinarily conceived, yet is aware of the point of succession of events within time.

While there is a successive order to God's acts and a logical order to his decisions, there is no temporal order to his willing. His deliberation and willing take no time. From all eternity he has determined what he is now doing. Thus his actions are not reactions to unforeseen developments. He does not get taken by surprise or have to formulate contingency plans. The theology of hope has stressed the transcendence of God over time by thinking of him primarily as the God of the future, whereas traditional theology has tended to think of him in terms of past events.[486]

God's infinity may also be considered with respect to objects of knowledge. His understanding is immeasurable (Ps. 147:5). The writer of Proverbs says that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3). Jesus said that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without the Father's will (Matt. 10:29), and that even the hairs of the disciples' heads are all numbered (v. 30). Hebrews 4:13 says that "nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." We are all completely transparent before God. He sees and knows us totally. He knows every truth, even those not yet discovered by humankind, for it was he who built them into the creation. And he therefore knows every genuine possibility, even when the possibilities seem limitless in number.

One aspect of divine knowledge that has been debated extensively is his foreknowledge. That God knows the future, as well as the past and present, is taught in Scripture in at least two ways. One is the direct claims to knowing the future, a feature which Jehovah declares distinguishes him from other claimed deities. In Isaiah 44:8, for example, he states, "Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one." This theme is repeated several times in Isaiah 42–48. It was the test of a genuine prophet: if what he foretold did not come to pass, it was not from God, because Jehovah and he alone knows the future. Further, this foreknowledge was demonstrated repeatedly by the prophecies that were given and came to pass. Over against this are passages in which God seems to discover something he did not know ("Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" [Gen. 22:12]) or passages in which he changes his mind ("The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" [Gen. 6:6]). These are probably best understood as depictions of God as being like a human (anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms), rather than literal descriptions. If the principle of taking these literally is applied more generally to descriptions of God, he is also seen as not knowing all of the past

(Gen. 3:11) or the present (Gen. 3:9), as being forgetful (Gen. 9:12–16), fatigued (Exod. 20:11), and even hateful (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13).[487]

A further factor, in the light of this knowledge, is God's wisdom. By this is meant that God acts in the light of all of the facts and of correct values. Knowing all things, God knows what is good. In Romans 11:33 Paul eloquently assesses God's knowledge and wisdom: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" The psalmist describes God's works as having all been made in wisdom (Ps. 104:24).

We humans sometimes act unwisely simply because we do not have all the facts. Later developments may prove our actions unwise. Had we known certain relevant facts, we would undoubtedly have acted differently. We may choose to drive on a road that appears to be in excellent condition, unaware that it deteriorates farther ahead. Sometimes our perspective is distorted or limited. Optical illusions are an example, as is a photograph taken of someone whose feet were nearer the camera than was the rest of the body. The photograph makes the person appear to have gigantic feet. In addition, lack of experience may cause erroneous actions or decisions. A child, for example, if given the choice of a nickel or a dime, will often take the nickel, simply because it is larger.

God, however, has access to all information. So his judgments are made wisely. He never has to revise his estimation of something because of additional information. He sees all things in their proper perspective; thus he does not give anything a higher or lower value than it ought to have. One can therefore pray confidently, knowing that God will not grant something that is not good. Even though we are not wise enough to see all of the facts, or the results to which our ideas or planned actions may lead, we can trust God to know what is best.[488]

Finally, God's infinity may also be considered in relationship to what is traditionally referred to as the omnipotence of God. By this we mean that God is able to do all things that are proper objects of his power. This is taught in Scripture in several ways. There is evidence of God's unlimited power in one of his names, אֵל שַׁדַּי (*'el Shaddai*): when God appeared to Abraham to reaffirm his covenant, he identified himself by saying, "I am God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1). We also see God's omnipotence in his overcoming apparently insurmountable problems. In Genesis 18:10–14, for example, we read of God's promise that Sarah would have a son, even though she was past the age of childbirth and the promise given twenty-five years earlier had not yet been fulfilled. When Sarah heard the promise again, she laughed. The Lord responded, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Similarly, the promise in Jeremiah 32:15 that fields will

once again be bought and sold in Judah seems incredible in view of the impending fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Jeremiah's faith, however, is strong: "Ah, Sovereign LORD! . . . Nothing is too hard for you" (v. 17). And after speaking of how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus responds to his disciples' question as to who can then be saved: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

This power of God is manifested in several different ways. References to the power of God over nature are common, especially in the Psalms, often with an accompanying statement about God's having created the whole universe. In biblical times this power over nature was frequently demonstrated in miracles—from the birth of Isaac, the plagues in Egypt, and the floating axhead in the time of Elisha (2 Kings 6:5–7), to the nature miracles of Jesus, such as stilling the storm (Mark 4:35–41) and walking on the water (Matt. 14:22–33). God's power is also evident in his control of the course of history. Paul says of God: "He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" for all peoples (Acts 17:26). Perhaps most amazing in many ways is God's power in human life and personality. The real measure of divine power is not the ability of God to create or to lift a large stone. In many ways, changing human personality is more difficult. Whereas heavy machinery can accomplish extraordinary types of physical work, it is not so easy to alter human nature. Yet with respect to salvation Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). We never need despair out of a belief that human nature cannot be changed, whether our own or that of others, because God can work effectively in even this area.

What all of this means is that God's will is never frustrated. What he chooses to do, he accomplishes, for he has the ability to do it. Psalm 115:3 says to the unbelievers, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." Three elements must be present if we are to accomplish an ethical action: knowledge of what should be done, the will to do it, and ability to do what we have purposed. We may fail at any of these points. Three factors of God's nature always come together to produce correct action, however: he is wise, so that he knows what to do; he is good, and thus he chooses to do the right; he is powerful, and therefore is capable of doing what he wills to do.

There are, however, certain qualifications of this all-powerful character of God. He cannot arbitrarily do anything whatsoever that we may conceive of. He can do only those things that are proper objects of his power. Thus, he cannot do the logically absurd or contradictory. He cannot make square circles or triangles with four corners. He cannot undo what happened in the past, although he may wipe out its effects or even the memory of it. He cannot act contrary to his nature

—he cannot be cruel or unconcerned. He cannot fail to do what he has promised. In reference to God's having made a promise and having confirmed it with an oath, the writer to the Hebrews says: "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we . . . may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:18). All of these "inabilities," however, are not weaknesses, but strengths. The inability to do evil or to lie or to fail is a mark of positive strength rather than of failure.

Philosophers have long debated such questions as to whether God can make a stone so large he cannot lift it. The dilemma is that either an affirmative or a negative answer seems to indicate some limitation on his power. The correct answer is that there is no limitation on how large a stone God could create, or how large a stone he could lift. The problem stems from an inadequate formulation of the question. It seems to be asking whether God is able to contradict himself, or to frustrate himself, both of which are inappropriate to the nature of God. In this respect, they are not unlike the questions of whether God has the power to sin or to lie.[489]

Another aspect of God's power is that he is free. While God is bound to keep his promises, he was not initially under any compulsion to make those promises. Nothing in Scripture suggests that God's will is determined or bound by any external factors. On the contrary, Scripture, and Paul in particular, frequently attributes God's decisions and actions to the good pleasure of his will (εὐδοκία —*eudokia*) (Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13). God's decisions and actions are not determined by consideration of any factors outside himself, but are simply a matter of his own free choice.

Constancy

In several places in Scripture, God is described as unchanging. In Psalm 102, the psalmist contrasts God's nature with the heavens and the earth: "They will perish, but you remain; . . . and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (vv. 26–27). Psalm 33:11 stresses the permanence of God's thoughts: "But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." And God himself says that although his people have turned aside from his statutes, "I the LORD do not change" (Mal. 3:6). James says that God "does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

This divine constancy involves several aspects. There is first no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything, because he is already perfection. Nor can he decrease, for if he were to, he would cease to be God. There also is no qualitative change. God's nature does not undergo modification. Therefore, God

does not change his mind, plans, or actions, for these rest on his nature, which remains unchanged no matter what occurs. Indeed, in Numbers 23:19 the argument is that since God is not human, his actions must be unalterable. Further, God's intentions as well as his plans are always consistent, simply because his will does not change. Thus, God is ever faithful to his covenant with Abraham, for example. He had chosen Abraham and given him his word, and he would not change his mind or go back on his promise.

What, then, are we to make of those passages where God seems to change his mind or to repent over what he has done? These passages can be explained in several ways:

1. Some of them are to be understood as anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. They are simply descriptions of God's actions and feelings in human terms, and from a human perspective. Included here are representations of God as experiencing pain or regret.

2. What may seem to be changes of mind may actually be new stages in the working out of God's plan. An example of this is the offering of salvation to the gentiles. While a part of God's original plan, it represented a rather sharp break with what had preceded.

3. Some apparent changes of mind are changes of orientation resulting from humans' move into a different relationship with God. God did not change when Adam sinned; rather, humanity had moved into God's disfavor. This also works in reverse. Take the case of Nineveh. God in effect said, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed, *unless they repent*." Nineveh repented and was spared. It was humans who had changed, not God's plan.

Some interpretations of the doctrine of divine constancy, expressed as immutability, have actually drawn heavily on the Greek idea of immobility and sterility. This makes God inactive. But the biblical view is not that God is static but that he is stable. He is active and dynamic, but in a way that is stable and consistent with his nature. What we are dealing with here is the dependability of God. He will be the same tomorrow as he is today. He will act as he has promised. He will fulfill his commitments. The believer can rely on that (Lam. 3:22–23; 1 John 1:9).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the movement known as process theology challenged the idea of an unchanging God. Its fundamental thesis is that reality is processive. This is not to say that everything is in process. There are unchanging principles of process and unchanging abstract forms, but to be real is to be in process.[490]

Further, reality is organic or interrelated. Rather than thinking of concrete events and entities in terms of what they are in and of themselves, they must be

understood in relationship to all that precedes. Whereas independence has often been thought of as desirable, process theology stresses interdependence. It is not merely that interdependence is given primacy or priority as an ideal; it is an ontological characteristic. It is an inescapable fact of reality.[491]

According to process theology, interdependence applies to God as well. God must not be seen as a being of impassive, detached immutability. Rather, he is related to the world and involved with it. God's primary quality or attribute is love; it is the fullest expression of his relatedness to the world. According to the process theologians, God has traditionally been regarded as impassive: he does not really feel passion; he loves without passion.[492] Rather, God should be viewed as having a genuinely sympathetic response to those he loves.

This is sometimes called dipolar theism.[493] The two poles or aspects of God are, according to Charles Hartshorne, his unchanging, abstract essence and his concrete actuality, or in Alfred North Whitehead's terms, his primordial nature and his consequent nature. In his concrete actuality (consequent nature) God responds to and is affected by the processes of the world.[494] This places limitations on God's absoluteness. Divine omniscience means that at every moment of the divine life God knows all that is knowable at that given moment. However, in every moment of God's life there are new unforeseen happenings in the world that have become knowable only at that moment. God's knowledge processes with every new decision and action in the world. As a result, other traditional conceptions about God must also be modified. Divine sovereignty, for instance, is no longer to be regarded as absolute. Humans are now to be viewed as taking a part in determining the future.[495]

How shall we respond to this challenge? We may note that there is an element of validity in process theology's criticism of some classical orthodoxy. To be sure, God has sometimes been pictured as static, isolated from involvement with the world. That, we would maintain, is not the biblical view.

But in seeking to correct this error, the process theologians have overreacted. Dependence on the processes of the world compromises quite seriously the absolute or unqualified dimensions of God. While the Bible does picture God as involved with the world, it also pictures him as antedating the creation and having an independent status. Genuine transcendence, as taught in the Bible, excludes the type of limitations that process theology imposes. Further evaluation of the view that God is dependent on the processes of the world would entail an analysis of the process philosophy on which it rests, and would go beyond the scope of our interest here. Suffice it to say that, whatever the merits of this view, it cannot be considered the biblical view.[496]

There are additional problems. The process theologians have recognized that there must be aspects of reality that do not change. If that were not the case, their view would be contradictory and hence false, for the very theory of process would be displaced eventually. It would become relativized. But this matter of unchanging principles is never fully developed. What is their status? How do they relate to God? If there are principles of reality that do not change, may not something of the nature of God be similarly timeless and absolute?

Although process theology purports to view God as a personal being, unlike the impersonal unmoved mover of Greek metaphysics, it is questionable whether this is really the case in this theology. God seems to be little more than an aspect of reality. In what sense he is a personal, acting being is not made clear. Thus, while there is a valid point in process theology's objection to the adoption of some Greek metaphysical models by some elements within classical orthodoxy, the legitimate insight contained in that objection can be better presented by a faithful rendition of the biblical picture of God. This will avoid the accompanying drawbacks of process theology.

More recently a group of evangelical theologians calling themselves free-will theists or open theists has challenged a number of the traditional divine attributes, such as immutability, timelessness, and foreknowledge, which they believe come from Greek philosophy rather than from the Bible.[497] They see their view as midway between classical orthodoxy and process theology.[498] God, on this view, is genuinely affected by and responds to human actions. The passages stating that God repented are to be taken literally, rather than treated as anthropopathisms; he actually changes his mind.[499] And although God is omniscient, this means that he knows all things that are proper objects of knowledge. Free human actions are not of this character. If God knew what we were going to do, that would mean that those actions were certain and we would not be free to do otherwise.[500] The indubitability of freedom of a "noncompatibilist" type means that God cannot have such foreknowledge. He is not a closed God; he is an open God.

A number of difficulties attach to this view. For one thing, if God does not coerce human action, then there is no certainty that his will finally will be realized.[501] Further, the attempts to account for the phenomenon of biblical prophecy are rather inadequate in light of the very detailed nature of some of the prophecies. Significantly, many orthodox theists reject the view of God attributed to them, arguing that the view described is actually Thomism.[502] It appears that this is a rather anthropocentric view, in which if God's sovereignty and foreknowledge conflict with human freedom, the former must be redefined.

A preferable solution to the problem would be to reconsider the meaning of human freedom.[503]

God is a great God. The realization of this fact stirred biblical writers such as the psalmists. And this realization stirs believers today, causing them to join with the songwriter in proclaiming:

> O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
> Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
> I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
> Thy power throughout the universe displayed!
>
> Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee:
> How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
> Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee:
> How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

12

The Goodness of God

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recall and describe each of the attributes of God that make up his moral purity, integrity, and love.
2. Understand the relationship among the moral qualities of God and the harmony that exists among these qualities.
3. Accurately assess the relation between God's love and justice and show how both attributes are in harmony with each other.
4. Foster understanding that will lead to increased trust, love, and commitment toward a benevolent and loving God.
5. Identify some methods that are used to understand the attributes of God.
6. Develop an understanding of God's nature that will provide a basis for personal practice in the Christian life.

Chapter Summary

The goodness of God may be discovered in all of his relationships with his creatures. It is most effectively demonstrated in his moral attributes of purity, integrity, and the entire complex of characteristics that are identified as his love. Sometimes these attributes are viewed as conflicting with each other, as in the case of justice and love. When they

are correctly viewed, however, this is not the case. Some have suggested other methods for understanding the nature of God. But the method of drawing inferences from biblical statements about God is the most satisfactory method.

Study Questions

- What is the importance of the holiness of God, and why is it so difficult for humans to understand this aspect of God's nature?
- What are the moral attributes of God, and why are they necessary to an adequate understanding of his true nature?
- What does the author mean when he states that "genuineness is the most basic dimension of truthfulness"?
- How does our understanding of Jesus help us to especially understand the love of God?
- Some have contended that there is tension between God's justice and his love. How would you respond to such a charge?
- What problems are associated with speculative attempts to investigate the attributes of God? How would you seek to discover his attributes?

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Moral Qualities

If the qualities of greatness described in the preceding chapter were God's only attributes, he might conceivably be an immoral or amoral being, exercising his power and knowledge in a capricious or even cruel fashion. But because he is good as well as great, he can be trusted and loved. In this chapter we will consider his moral qualities, that is, the characteristics of God as a moral being. For convenient study, we will classify his basic moral attributes as purity, integrity, and love.

Moral Purity

By moral purity we are referring to God's absolute freedom from anything wicked or evil. His moral purity includes the dimensions of (1) holiness, (2) righteousness, and (3) justice.

HOLINESS

There are two basic aspects to God's holiness. The first is his uniqueness. He is totally separate from all of creation. This is what Louis Berkhof called the "majesty-holiness" of God.[504] The uniqueness of God is affirmed in Exodus 15:11: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" Similar expressions of the loftiness, the exaltedness, the splendor of God, are found in 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 57:15. Isaiah saw the Lord "seated on a throne, high and exalted." The foundations of the thresholds shook, and the house was filled with smoke. The seraphim cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty" (Isa. 6:1–4). The Hebrew word for "holy" (קָדוֹשׁ—*qadosh*) means "marked off" or "withdrawn from common, ordinary use." The verb from which it is derived suggests to "cut off" or "to separate." Whereas in the religions of the peoples around Israel the adjective "holy" was freely applied to objects, actions, and personnel involved in

the worship, in Israel's covenant worship it was very freely used of the Deity himself.[505]

The sacredness of God is often conveyed to objects and places associated with him. For example, in the incident of the burning bush, Moses was told to take off his sandals since the ground on which he stood was holy (Exod. 3:5). Similarly, when God came down on Mount Sinai, it was separated from the Israelite encampment. No one but Moses was to go up into the mountain or even touch the border of it (Exod. 19). Similar restrictions applied to the tabernacle and later the temple. The Most Holy Place was veiled off from the Holy Place (Exod. 26:33; 1 Kings 6:16). Access was barred to all but the high priest, and he entered only once a year. Proper reaction to God's holiness, his separateness, is one of awe, reverence, and silence. "Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy" (Ps. 99:3).

The other aspect of God's holiness is his absolute purity or goodness. This means that he is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world. He does not in any sense participate in it. Note the way Habakkuk 1:13 addresses God: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." James 1:13 says that God cannot be tempted with evil. In this respect God is totally unlike the gods of other religions. Those gods frequently engaged in the same type of sinful acts as did their followers. Jehovah, however, is free from such acts. Job 34:12 says, "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice."

God's perfection is the standard for our moral character and the motivation for religious practice. The whole moral code follows from his holiness. The people of Israel were told, "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44–45). The same thought is expressed in Leviticus 19:2 and Matthew 5:48. Because of God's flawlessness, the same quality is expected of those objects or persons set apart unto him. Priests are to be without any physical blemish. Worshipers are not to sacrifice defective animals, but rather perfect ones without any blemish (Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3).

We have here a very basic and important dimension of God's nature. God's holiness is emphasized throughout the whole Bible, but especially in the Old Testament depictions. Its importance is seen in both the number of times it is referred to and the emphasis with which it is taught. Some have suggested that it is the most important single attribute of God.[506] Whether or not this is a

legitimate or desirable deduction, holiness is at least a very important attribute of God, with far-reaching implications.

The biblical writers repeatedly emphasize that believers are to be like God. Thus, because God is holy, his followers are also to be holy. We have already noted the references in Leviticus 11:44–45 and Matthew 5:48. God not only is personally free from any moral wickedness or evil. He is unable to tolerate its presence. He is, as it were, allergic to sin and evil. Those who are his must therefore seek the same holiness that is so basic to his own nature. Isaiah, upon seeing God, became very much aware of his own impurity. He despaired, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isa. 6:5). Similarly, Peter, on the occasion of the miraculous catch of fish, realizing who and what Jesus was, said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). When one measures one's holiness, not against the standard of oneself or of other humans, but against God, the need for a complete change of moral and spiritual condition becomes apparent.

Paul stresses that those whom God has called to be his people are therefore to separate themselves from unclean things and be perfectly holy (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1). The same idea is found in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 4:7. In an evident reference to the Old Testament requirement of spotlessness and freedom from any blemish, Paul notes that the church is also to be completely holy: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25–27). In addition to personal holiness, worship and reverence are also natural consequences of seeing God in his spotlessness and holiness. Psalm 99:9 says, "Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy." A very similar thought is found in Revelation 15:4: "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?"

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The second dimension of God's moral purity is his righteousness. This is, as it were, God's holiness applied to his relationships to other beings. The righteousness of God means, first of all, that the law of God, being a true expression of his nature, is as perfect as he is. Psalm 19:7–9 puts it this way: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are

sure and altogether righteous." In other words, God commands only what is right, and what will therefore have a positive effect on the believer who obeys.

The righteousness of God also means that his actions are in accord with the law he himself has established. He is the expression in action of what he requires of others. For example, Abraham says to Jehovah, "Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The Lord himself says, "I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" (Jer. 9:24). Because God is righteous, measuring up to the standard of his law, we can trust him.

A question that has been a topic of debate down through the history of Christian thought is, What makes certain actions right and others wrong? In medieval times one school of thought, the realists, maintained that God chooses the right because it is right.[507] What he calls good could not have been designated otherwise, for there is an intrinsic good in kindness and an inherent evil in cruelty. Another school of thought, the nominalists, asserted that it is God's choice that makes an action right. He could have chosen otherwise; if he had done so, the good would be quite different from what it is.[508] A more correct position falls between realism and nominalism. The right is not something arbitrary, so that cruelty and murder would have been good if God had so declared. In making decisions, God does follow an objective standard of right and wrong, a standard that is part of the very structure of reality. But that standard to which God adheres is not external to God—it is his own nature.

This raises a further question, however: Is God selfish? One grievous form of sin is selfishness—seeking one's own welfare and comfort to the disregard and even the detriment of others. Some even claim that selfishness is the root principle, the very basis, of sin.[509] Yet here God seems to violate his own command against selfishness, for his highest goal is apparently his own glory.

We need to look more closely at the human sin of self-centeredness. The essence of the sin lies not in preferring ourselves to others, but in preferring some finite thing to the supreme value, God. Thus, even an unselfish preference of some other person rather than God is wrong. The first great commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27). The second command is to love our neighbor as ourselves. To put the second commandment in the place of the first is wrong and sinful.

Thus, for God to make his own glory the supreme objective is not in conflict with his command against self-centeredness. Indeed, making his glory the supreme objective actually fulfills the command. So then, God has not said in essence, "Do as I say, not as I do." As the highest value in the universe, the

source from which all else derives, God must choose his own glory ahead of all else. To do anything else would in effect be a case of idolatry.

JUSTICE

Not only does God himself act in conformity with his law, but he also administers his kingdom in accordance with it. That is, he requires that others conform to the law. The righteousness described in the preceding section is God's personal or individual righteousness. His justice is his official righteousness, his requirement that other moral agents adhere to the standards as well. God is, in other words, like a judge who as a private individual adheres to the law of society, and in his official capacity administers that same law, applying it to others.

Scripture makes clear that sin has definite consequences, which must eventually come to pass, whether sooner or later. In Genesis 2:17 we read God's warning to Adam and Eve: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Similar warnings recur throughout Scripture, including Paul's statement that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Deuteronomy 7:10, Psalm 58:11, and Romans 12:19 all indicate that God will punish sin, for sin intrinsically deserves to be punished. It disrupts the very structure of the divine spiritual economy, and this disruption or imbalance must necessarily be set right. Not only evil, but good as well will ultimately receive its rewards. Deuteronomy 7:9 expresses this very clearly: "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

God's justice means that he administers his law fairly, not showing favoritism or partiality. Only a person's acts, not his or her station in life, are considered in the assignment of consequences or rewards. So God condemned those judges in biblical times who, while charged to serve as his representatives, accepted bribes to alter their judgments (e.g., 1 Sam. 8:3; Amos 5:12). The reason for their condemnation was that God himself, being just, expected the same sort of behavior from those who were to administer his law.

At times, however, the rule of God does not appear to be just. Those who lead sinful lives are not always punished, and the righteous frequently seem to go unrewarded. Psalm 73 reflects on the apparent prosperity of the wicked, their health and freedom from troubles. This observation is frequently ours as well. In the past we often heard the slogan "crime does not pay." Crime, however, frequently does pay, and sometimes quite handsomely! Leaders in organized

crime often accumulate huge amounts of earthly wealth, and may be healthy as well, while some very virtuous believers may experience poverty, ill health, or the tragic death of loved ones. And this apparent inequity may go on for years. How can a just God allow this?

This problem is part of the larger problem of evil, which will receive extensive treatment in chapter 18. At this point, however, it will be helpful for us to note what the psalmist discovered. When he went into the sanctuary of God, he perceived the end of the wicked. He saw that they would ultimately be destroyed (Ps. 73:17–20, 27). He himself, on the other hand, would be guided by God's counsel and would eventually be received to glory (v. 24). God's justice must not be evaluated on a short-term basis. Within this life it will often be incomplete or imperfect, but there is a life beyond, in which God's justice will be complete.[510]

As was the case regarding holiness, God expects his followers to emulate his righteousness and justice. We are to adopt as our standard his law and precepts. We are to treat others fairly and justly (Amos 5:15, 24; James 2:9) because that is what God himself does.

Integrity

The cluster of attributes we are here classifying as integrity relates to the matter of truth. There are three dimensions of truthfulness: (1) genuineness—being true; (2) veracity—telling the truth; and (3) faithfulness—proving true. Although we think of truthfulness primarily as telling the truth, genuineness is the most basic dimension of truthfulness.

GENUINENESS

God's genuineness means that he is a real God. Many of the considerations adduced in connection with the attribute of life apply here as well. In contrast to the many false or spurious gods that Israel encountered, their Lord is the "true" God, as designated by the Hebrew word אֱמֶת (*'emeth*), which corresponds to the Greek adjective ἀληθινός (*alēthinos*).

In Jeremiah 10, the prophet describes with considerable satire the objects some humans worship. They construct idols with their own hands, and then proceed to worship them, although these objects cannot speak or walk (v. 5). Of the Lord, however, it is said, "But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King" (v. 10). In John 17:3, Jesus addresses the Father as the only

true (ἀληθινός) God. There are similar references in 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20; and Revelation 3:7 and 6:10.

God is real; he is not fabricated or constructed, as are all the other claimants to deity. In a world in which so much is artificial, our God is real. He is what he appears to be. This is a large part of his truthfulness. The vice president for public affairs at a Christian college used to say, "Public relations is nine-tenths being what you say you are, and one-tenth modestly saying it." God does not simply seem to embody the qualities of greatness and goodness that we are examining. He actually *is* those attributes.

Veracity

Divine veracity means that God represents things as they really are. Whether speaking of himself or part of his creation, what God says is accurate. Samuel said to Saul, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind" (1 Sam. 15:29). Paul speaks of the God "who does not lie" (Titus 1:2). And in Hebrews 6:18 we read that when God added his oath to his promise, there were "two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie." Jesus spoke of the Word of God as being the truth (John 17:17). Note that these passages affirm more than that God does not and will not lie. God *cannot* lie, for lying is contrary to his very nature.

Does veracity mean that what God says can always be trusted? Or does it mean simply that he does not knowingly tell an untruth? The omniscience of God combines with his veracity to guarantee the truth of everything he tells us.

God has appealed to his people to be honest in all situations, both in what they formally assert and in what they imply. Thus, for example, the Israelites were to have only one set of weights in their bag, not one for buying and another for selling (Deut. 25:13–15). God's people are to be thoroughly honest in the presentation of the gospel message as well. While some might rationalize that the significance of the end justifies use of the means of misrepresentation, Paul clearly affirms, "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). A God of truth is best served by presentation of the truth.

Faithfulness

If God's genuineness is a matter of his being true and veracity is his telling of the truth, then his faithfulness means that he proves true. God keeps all his promises. Because of his unlimited power and capability, he could never commit

himself to do something of which he would eventually prove incapable. As Balaam said to Balak, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19). Paul is more concise: “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24). Similar descriptions of God as faithful are to be found in 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:18–22; 2 Timothy 2:13; and 1 Peter 4:19.

God’s faithfulness is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the pages of Scripture. His promise to Abraham of a son came when Abraham and Sarah were seventy-five and sixty-five years of age, respectively. Sarah was already past the age of childbearing and had proved to be barren. The promise was repeated over a period of twenty-five years; but without sign of the expected heir, even Abraham despaired of the promise’s being fulfilled and took steps on his own to provide a son for himself (Ishmael). Yet God proved faithful—the son whom God had promised was born (Isaac). Years later, God commanded Abraham to put this son to death. Again God proved faithful by providing a substitute sacrifice. Likewise, it seemed unlikely that the people of Israel would one day possess the promised land in view of their bondage in Egypt. The future blessings promised to the nation appeared in doubt when later they were in captivity. And the first promise (Gen. 3:15) of a Redeemer seemed a long time in coming to fulfillment. Yet in all of these situations, the Lord proved that he is faithful to his promises.

As is the case with his other moral attributes, the Lord expects believers to emulate his truthfulness. God’s people are not to give their word thoughtlessly. And when they do give their word, they are to remain faithful to it (Eccles. 5:4–5). They must keep not only the promises made to God (Pss. 61:5, 8; 66:13) but those made to their fellow humans as well (Josh. 9:16–21).

Love

When we think in terms of God’s moral attributes, perhaps what comes first to mind is the cluster of attributes we are here classifying as love. Many regard it as the basic attribute, the very nature or definition of God.[511] There is some scriptural basis for this. For example, in 1 John 4:8 and 16 we read: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” Second Corinthians 13:11 speaks of “the God of love and peace.” In general, God’s love may be thought of as his eternal giving or sharing of himself. As such, love has always been present among the members of the

Trinity, even before there were any created beings. Jesus said, “the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). Matthew 3:17 reports that a voice from heaven said of Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” The basic dimensions of God’s love to us are (1) benevolence, (2) grace, (3) mercy, and (4) persistence.

Benevolence

By benevolence we mean God’s concern for the welfare of those whom he loves. He unselfishly seeks our ultimate welfare. Of numerous biblical references, John 3:16 is probably the best known: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Statements of God’s benevolence are not restricted to the New Testament. For example, in Deuteronomy 7:7–8 we read, “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand.”

God’s love is an unselfish interest in us for our sake. It is *agapē*, not *erōs.* In John 15 Jesus draws a contrast between a master-servant (or employer-employee) relationship and a friend-to-friend relationship. It is the latter type of relationship that is to characterize the believer and the Savior. It is clear that Jesus regards love as the basis of this relationship, for in describing it he uses the word “love” in either noun or verb form nine times in the span of nine verses (vv. 9–17). His vital interest in the believers is evident in verse 11: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” He goes on to state, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). Yet Jesus laid down his life not only for his friends, those who loved him and appreciated what he was doing for them, but also for his enemies, who despised and rejected him. Our relationship with God is on a friend-to-friend rather than employee-to-employer basis. He died for his enemies, although he would get nothing from them in return. An employer may be interested in the welfare of an employee for what the employee can do for her. Jesus, however, is a friend. He is concerned with our good for our own sake, not for what he can get from us. God does not need us. He can accomplish what he wishes without us, although he has chosen to work through us. Thus, his love for us and for his other creatures is unselfish.

This self-giving, unselfish quality of the divine love is seen in what God has done. God's love in sending his Son to die for us was not motivated by our prior love for him. The apostle John says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The whole of Romans 5:6–10 elaborates on the same theme. Note especially verse 8 ("But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us") and verse 10 ("When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son"). Since God is love, the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is also a description of him. Love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude; it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. It bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.

This divine love not only took the initiative in creating the basis of salvation by sending Jesus Christ, but also continuously seeks us out. Jesus's three parables in Luke 15 emphasize this strongly. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes to seek the missing one, even though nothing in the description indicates anything especially attractive or desirable about it. The woman who had lost one coin searched diligently for it. And although the father of the prodigal son did not go into the far country to look for him, he kept constant watch for the son's return, and took the initiative in welcoming him back as his son.

When we think of God's love, a dilemma arises, related to the problem posed earlier regarding the seeming self-centeredness of God. Does he love us for his own sake, thus apparently jeopardizing the unselfish, giving character of his love; or does he love us for our own sake, thus apparently jeopardizing his status as the highest value? The former would seem to compromise the love of God; the latter, his glory. There is, however, a third possibility. God loves us on the basis of that likeness of himself that he has placed within us, in creating us (Gen. 1:27). He therefore in effect loves himself in us. This likeness to him, however, is not our own doing, but is present in us because of his unselfish, giving nature. God loves us for what he can give to us or make of us, both in the original creative act and in his continued relationship with us. His love is a disposition of affection toward us, a feeling of unselfish concern, and a resolve to act toward us in such a way as to promote our welfare.

God's benevolence, the actual caring and providing for those he loves, is seen in numerous ways. God even cares for and provides for the subhuman creation. The psalmist wrote, "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16). Jesus taught that the Father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:26, 28). Not a sparrow can fall to the earth

without the Father's will (Matt. 10:29). The principle that God is benevolent in his provision and protection is extended in the latter two passages to his human children as well (Matt. 6:25, 30–33; 10:30–31). While we may tend to take these promises somewhat exclusively to ourselves as believers, the Bible indicates that God is benevolent to the whole human race. He "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). Paul told the Lystrans that God "has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). God inherently not only feels in a particular positive way toward the objects of his love, but acts for their welfare. Love is an active matter.

Some have raised the question of whether love should even be considered an attribute of God at all. Perhaps it is rather a definition of God, since John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Perhaps we should think of love, not as something that God *ha*s, but as what he *is*. If this is the case, then everything said about God should be interpreted in terms of love. It is, as some would term it, the control belief that colors all interpretation.[512]

We should note, however, that love is not the only quality that is expressed grammatically in this seemingly equivalent fashion. For example, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "God is spirit" (John 4:24), and John says that "God is light" (1 John 1:5). It appears that this should be understood as an attribution of a quality, rather than a definition. Thus, this should be understood as a statement that God is loving, rather than an equation of God with love.

Grace

Grace is another attribute that is part of the manifold of God's love. By this we mean that God deals with his people not on the basis of their merit or worthiness, what they deserve, but simply according to their need; in other words, he deals with them on the basis of his goodness and generosity. This grace is to be distinguished from the benevolence (unselfishness) that we just described. Benevolence is simply the idea that God does not seek his own good, but rather that of others. It would be possible for God to love unselfishly, with a concern for others, but still to insist that this love be deserved, thus requiring each person to do something or offer something that would earn the favors received or to be received. Grace, however, means that God supplies us with undeserved favors.

Although, of course, God's graciousness is prominent in the New Testament, some have suggested that the Old Testament picture of God is quite different. Marcion went so far as to contend that we are dealing with two different Gods in

the two Testaments: the Old Testament God of creation and strict justice, and the New Testament God (Christ) of love.[513] Yet numerous passages in the Old Testament speak of the graciousness of God. In Exodus 34:6, for example, God says of himself: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." And in the New Testament Paul attributes our salvation to the grace of God: "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given to us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph. 1:4–8). Note the idea of abundance in both of these passages.

Some New Testament passages are even more explicit in relating salvation to the extravagant gift of God's grace. For example, Paul says in Ephesians 2:6–9: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him . . . in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." In Titus, Paul again emphasizes this gracious work of God: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Then, after describing the depths of the sinfulness of humankind (3:3), he says, "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . . so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (3:4–7). Salvation is indeed the gift of God. Sometimes the justice of God is impugned on the grounds that some receive this grace of God and others do not. That any are saved at all is, however, the amazing thing, for if God gave to all what they deserve, none would be saved.

MERCY

God's mercy is his tenderhearted, loving compassion for his people. It is his tenderness of heart toward the needy. If grace contemplates humans as sinful, guilty, and condemned, mercy sees them as miserable and needy. Words like חֶסֶד (*chesed*), רָחַם (*racham*), and ἔλεος (*eleos*) give expression to this dimension of God's love. The psalmist said, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13). Similar ideas are found in Deuteronomy 5:10; Psalm 57:10; and Psalm 86:5. The attribute of

mercy is seen in Jehovah's pitying concern for the people of Israel who were in bondage to the Egyptians. He heard their cry and knew their sufferings (Exod. 3:7). It is also seen in the compassion Jesus felt when people suffering from physical ailments came to him (Mark 1:41). Their spiritual condition also moved him (Matt. 9:36). Sometimes both kinds of needs are involved. Thus, in describing the same incident, Matthew speaks of Jesus's having compassion and healing the sick (Matt. 14:14), while Mark speaks of his having compassion and teaching many things (Mark 6:34). Matthew elsewhere combines the two ideas. When Jesus saw the crowds were helpless like sheep without a shepherd, he had compassion on them. So he went about "teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Matt. 9:35).

PERSISTENCE

A final dimension of the love of God is persistence. The Hebrew here is אֶ֣רֶךְ אַפַּ֔יִם (*'erek 'appayim*—Exod. 34:6), and the Greek is μακροθυμία (*makrothumia,* slowness to anger). We read of God's persistence in Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4; 9:22; 1 Peter 3:20; and 2 Peter 3:15. In all of these verses God is pictured as withholding judgment and continuing to offer salvation and grace over long periods of time.

God's long-suffering was particularly apparent with Israel, as an outflow of his faithfulness to them. The people of Israel repeatedly rebelled against Jehovah, desiring to return to Egypt, rejecting Moses's leadership, setting up idols for worship, falling into the practices of the people about them, and intermarrying with them. There must have been times when the Lord could have been inclined to abandon his people. Even the Hittites or the Moabites might have seemed a better risk about then. A large-scale destruction of Israel in the fashion of the flood would have been most appropriate, yet the Lord did not cut them off.

But God's patience was not limited to his dealings with Israel. Peter (1 Peter 3:20) even suggests that the flood was delayed as long as it was in order to provide opportunity of salvation to those who ultimately were destroyed. In speaking of the future day of great destruction, Peter also suggests that the second coming is delayed because of God's forbearance. He does not wish "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

On one occasion Peter came to Jesus (on behalf of the disciples, no doubt) and asked how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him: as many as seven times? Jesus's reply to Peter, which is best rendered "seventy-seven

times," indicates the persistent, relentless nature of the love that is to characterize a follower of the Lord (Matt. 18:21–22). Jesus himself demonstrated such persistent love with Peter. When Peter denied Jesus not once but three times, just as Jesus had predicted, Jesus forgave him, just as he had with so many other shortcomings. As a matter of fact, the angel at the tomb instructed the three women to go tell the disciples *and Peter* that Jesus was going to Galilee, where they would see him (Mark 16:7). God's faithfulness and forbearance were also manifested in his not casting off other believers who had sinned and failed him: Moses, David, Solomon, and many more.

As with the other attributes of God, so love is also to characterize the believer. Jesus made this clear. He said that by keeping his commandment, his disciples would abide in his love. And that commandment is, "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Further, when he sent out his disciples, he instructed them, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). He taught them to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). And he told them with disapproval the parable of the servant who was forgiven a large amount of money, but then refused to forgive a fellow servant a small amount of money (Matt. 18:23–35). John insisted that the absence of practical acts of concern is an indication that one's supposed Christian experience is not genuine and that God's love does not abide in that person (1 John 2:7–11; 3:11–18).

God's Love and Justice—A Point of Tension?

We have looked at many characteristics of God, without exhausting them by any means. But what of the interrelationships among them? Presumably, God is a unified, integrated being whose personality is a harmonious whole. There should be, then, no tension among any of these attributes. But is this really so?

The one point of potential tension usually singled out is the relationship between God's love and his justice. On one hand, God's justice seems so severe, requiring the death of those who sin. This is a fierce, harsh God. On the other hand, God is merciful, gracious, forgiving, long-suffering. Are not these two sets of traits in conflict with one another? Is there, then, internal tension in God's nature?[514]

If we begin with the assumptions that God is an integrated being and the divine attributes are harmonious, we will define the attributes in the light of one another. Thus, justice is loving justice and love is love that is just. The idea that they conflict may have resulted from defining these attributes in isolation from

one another. While the conception of love apart from justice, for example, may be derived from outside sources, it is not a biblical teaching.

What we are saying is that love is not fully understood unless seen as including justice. Otherwise, it is mere sentimentality. The approach that would define love as merely granting what someone else desires is not biblical. It runs into two difficulties: (1) Giving someone what would make him or her comfortable for the moment may be nothing more than indulging that person's whim—such action may not necessarily be right. (2) This is usually an emotional reaction to an individual or situation that is immediately at hand. But love is much wider in scope—it necessarily entails justice, a sense of right and wrong, and all humankind. As Joseph Fletcher has correctly asserted, justice is simply love distributed.[515] It is love to all one's neighbors, those immediately at hand and those removed in space and time. Justice means that love must always be shown, whether or not a situation of immediate need presents itself in pressing and vivid fashion. Love in the biblical sense, then, is not merely indulging someone near at hand. Rather, it inherently involves justice as well. This means there will be a concern for the ultimate welfare of all humanity, a passion to do what is right, and enforcement of appropriate consequences for wrong action.[516]

Actually, love and justice have worked together in God's dealing with the human race. God's justice requires that there be payment of the penalty for sin. God's love, however, desires humans to be restored to fellowship with him. The offer of Jesus Christ as the atonement for sin means that both the justice and the love of God have been maintained. And there really is no tension between the two. There is tension only if one's view of love requires that God forgive sin without any payment being made. But that is to think of God as different from what he really is. Moreover, the offer of Christ as atonement shows a greater love on God's part than would simply indulgently releasing people from the consequences of sin. To fulfill his just administration of the law, God's love was so great that he gave his Son for us. Love and justice are not two separate attributes competing with one another. God is both righteous and loving, and has himself given what he demands.[517]

The Strange Idea of Divine Simplicity

Older theologies discussed the doctrine of divine simplicity. By this was meant in part that God does not have parts, simply because he has no physical nature to be divisible. Beyond that, however, it was generally taken to mean that God is

metaphysically simple, so that his attributes are, in the final analysis, equal to each other. This led to the strange conclusion that love and justice are the same thing, and that God really has only one attribute, himself, a very general attribute. William Mann has argued that there are different concepts that nonetheless are not different properties, such as triangularity and trilaterality.[518] He also contends that although qualities such as love and power are distinguishable along their continuum, at their extremes they coincide, so that all-lovingness and omnipotence are the same.[519] Part of what Mann is struggling with is that in the Anselmian form of the argument, based on Platonism, the dilemma of how the abstract concepts that a given instance instantiates (such as a dog with animality, mammality, brownness, four-leggedness, etc.) relate to one another has never been resolved. The problems that attach to even his reformulation of the doctrine of simplicity have been pointed out by Alvin Plantinga[520] and Thomas Morris,[521] among others.

It appears that simplicity, in its classical formulation, is at best a problematic attribute, and perhaps not an attribute at all. The values that theologians and philosophers sought to preserve need to be maintained: God is a unitary, not a composite being; his nature is not something external to him or added to his being or substance; there is no fundamental tension among the attributes, and they are ultimately aspects of the one divine nature; God is not dependent for his existence on any independently existing attributes or universals. Since we cannot in an introductory treatment of this type attempt to work out all of the implications of these points, it may be sufficient here simply to retain them and the values they preserve.[522]

The Best Mode of Investigating God's Attributes

In discussing the attributes of God, we have sought to avoid the speculative mode that sometimes characterized theology in the past. The attributes of God were analyzed in very abstract ways. But the Bible does not speak of God as some sort of infinite computer. Rather, the images used are very concrete and warm. God is pictured as a father, a shepherd, a friend. It is particularly enlightening to examine the way God is pictured in the Psalms. There the various attributes of God are described as he manifests them in the actual circumstances of the believer's life.

The best mode of investigating the attributes of God, then, is what we have attempted to follow here: to examine the scriptural statements carefully and make reasonable inferences from them. The Scholastics in developing their

natural theology, on the other hand, used three speculative methods to deduce the attributes of God.[523] The first method (causality) involved investigating the nature of the world and imputing to God the qualities necessary to bring about the effects observed. The second method (negation) was a matter of removing from the idea of God all the imperfections found in humans and ascribing in their place the opposite perfection to God. The third method (eminence) was to take the positive qualities found in humans and apply the superlative form to God, on the assumption that God is the source of those positive qualities and, being infinite, must possess in unlimited fashion what is found only partially in humans. But these approaches involve assumptions that may lead to the abstract or isolated treatment of individual attributes warned against earlier, and hence to conflicting conceptions.

Biblical revelation treats God's attributes not in a speculative but rather a practical manner. There is a vital connection between what God is and what he does, between his attributes and his acts. The attributes of God are frequently revealed in his actions, so that what he does is a clue to what he is. Further, the attributes revealed in the Bible are an indication of how he will act. God's actions are not spontaneous, erratic, or arbitrary. They are outflows of his nature. Thus they are constant and dependable. We can correctly relate to God by governing our actions in accordance with what the Scriptures say God is like. Moreover, knowledge of God's nature becomes a means to realistic self-knowledge. One's holiness is fully and correctly assessed only when measured by the standard of perfect holiness, that of God. We have already noted this in connection with Peter's encounter with Jesus in Luke 5. Finally, the qualities of God, insofar as they are also qualities of humans (i.e., not omnipresence, etc.), are the motivation and stimulus to us to live in an appropriate way. They are the model of godliness for the Christian.

A Special Issue: The God of Islam and the God of Christianity

One issue that has grown in importance recently is how Christians are to regard Islam's God, Allah. Do the Muslim and the Christian worship the same god, but under different names? Should Christians, in dialogue with Muslims, use the word "Allah" in referring to the God of Jesus Christ? While these have long been issues for Christians in countries with large Muslim populations, they become globalized with the spread of Islam.

On one level, we may observe that in Arabic, *allah* is simply the general word for a supreme being. In that sense, it is usable as a bridge in seeking to explain that the God known as Jehovah to Old Testament believers and as the Lord to Christians is the one true God. In practice, however, this generic use of the term has been converted into a proper name by Muslims, so that using it would seem to concede that the deity identified in Islam is the true deity. Great care and judgment need to be exercised in deciding whether to use the term in each individual case.[524]

It should be noted that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic religion. The Father of Jesus is the only God there is. Thus, ontologically, it cannot be the case that each worships a different, actually existent being.[525]

The further question regards the nature of the being described as the object of belief and worship by Christians and Muslims. Are they similar in character, so that they may be the same being, given different labels by each set of believers? Here it is important to observe that although Allah and the Christian God share some attributes, such as self-existence and omnipotence, there are also radical differences between them, especially with respect to the moral attributes. Most significantly, however, Christians believe that the true God is triune, and that the Second Person of the Trinity entered the human race as Jesus of Nazareth, something that Islam emphatically denies. Thus the task of the Christian becomes one of carefully pointing out that the Muslim conception of God is inadequate, much as Paul did to the worshipers of the "unknown god" in Acts 17.

If we have fully understood who and what God is, we will see him as the Supreme Being. We will make him the Lord, the one to be pleased and whose will is to be done. This reminder is needed in our day, for we have a tendency to slip from a theocentric to an anthropocentric ordering of our religious lives. This leads to what might be called "inverted theology." Instead of regarding God as our Lord, whose glory is the supreme value and whose will is to be done, we regard him as our servant. He is expected to meet all of our perceived needs and to answer to our standards of what is right and wrong. We need to learn from Samuel, whose response when the Lord called him was, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). He did not see this as an opportunity to pour out his concerns to the Lord, saying, "Listen, LORD, your servant speaks." When we adopt the latter stance, we in effect make ourselves God. We presume to know what is right and what is best. In so doing, we take upon ourselves a great responsibility: to guide our own lives. But it is God who knows what is best in the long run. He is the almighty and loving Lord. He has created us, not we him,

and we exist for his glory, not he for ours. We will stand before him in the last judgment, not he before us. If we have truly understood God's nature, then, with Jesus, our first concern in prayer will not be for the granting of our desires. It will rather be, "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

13

God's Nearness and Distance: *Immanence and Transcendence*

Chapter Objectives

After completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Outline the biblical basis for God's immanence and transcendence.
2. Compare and contrast the modern versions of immanentism with the biblical view.
3. Identify at least five implications of the biblical view of immanence that affect our understanding and practice.
4. List and describe the historical models of transcendence.
5. Compare and contrast the implications of immanence and transcendence, and demonstrate that overemphasis on one or the other of these doctrines leads to problems.
6. Identify six implications from the biblical view of transcendence that affect our belief and practice.

Chapter Summary

The Bible teaches that God is both immanent and transcendent. God is present and active within his creation, but superior to and independent of anything that he has created. These biblical ideas must be kept in

balance. The tendency to emphasize one or the other will lead to a faulty conception of God. While they are not attributes of God as such, they both affect his greatness and his goodness. There are significant practical implications that follow an understanding of these doctrines.

Study Questions

- What difficulties arise when we overemphasize either immanence or transcendence?
- How would you describe and critique twentieth-century views of immanence from a biblical perspective?
- How do the biblical passages about immanence help us avoid a pantheistic view of God?
- How prevalent is the classical liberal view of immanence in society today, especially in Christian circles?
- How would you distinguish among the traditional model of transcendence, Karl Barth's model, and the model of Søren Kierkegaard?
- How would you evaluate the historical model of the theology of hope?

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This chapter addresses one additional general consideration regarding the nature of God: the pair of concepts traditionally designated transcendence and immanence. These refer to God's relationship to the created world, not in terms of specific actions with respect to the universe, but rather the degree to which he is present and active within the universe (immanence) as opposed to being distinct from and even removed from it (transcendence).

These two biblical ideas must be kept in balance. This can best be achieved by treating them together. In this respect they are like God's love and justice, in that a correct understanding of each requires its being seen in the light of the other.[526] Where either is overemphasized at the expense of the other, the orthodox theistic conception is lost. Where immanence is overemphasized, we lose the conception of a personal God. Where transcendence is overemphasized, we lose the conception of an active God. The position we take with respect to immanence and transcendence has definite practical implications, for both the Christian's lifestyle and the conduct of the church's ministry.

Immanence and transcendence should not be regarded as attributes of God. Rather, these concepts cut across the various attributes of God's greatness and goodness. Some of the attributes are, to be sure, inherently more expressive of God's transcendence and others more expressive of his immanence; but, in general, transcendence and immanence should be regarded as indications of how God, in all of his attributes, relates to his world.

Immanence

The Biblical Basis

By immanence we mean God's presence and activity within nature, human nature, and history. There are a large number of pertinent biblical references of various types. Jeremiah 23:24 emphasizes God's presence throughout the whole of the universe. "Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" asks the LORD rhetorically. "'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD." Paul told the philosophers on Mars Hill: "He is not far from each one of us. 'For

in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:27–28).

There are also passages that note that God's Spirit originates and/or sustains all things; everything depends on him. The book of Job includes several references to the indwelling and sustaining Spirit or breath of God: "as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils" (27:3); "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (33:4); "If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and his breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust" (34:14–15). Psalm 104:29–30 similarly emphasizes nature's dependence on God: "When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." The creation accounts in Genesis, of course, give special emphasis to God's involvement in the creative act. In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God is pictured as moving or brooding upon the face of the waters. In 2:7, we read that God breathed into the man, and he became a living being. Isaiah 63:11, Micah 3:8, and Haggai 2:5 note that God's Spirit dwells within or among his people. There are also references suggesting that whatever happens within nature is God's doing and is under his control. The sending of sunshine and rain, the feeding and protecting of the birds of the air, and the clothing of the flowers are all credited to the Father (Matt. 5:45; 6:25–30; 10:29–30).

These passages emphasize God's activity within the regular patterns of nature. He is the God of nature, of natural law. Even what are ordinarily considered natural events should be seen as God's doing, for nature and God are not as separate as we usually think. God is present everywhere, not just in the spectacular or unusual occurrences. He is at work within human individuals and thus within human institutions and movements. Disjunctions are not to be sharply drawn between either God and humans or God and the world.

The more the concept of God's immanence is developed and emphasized, the more the view moves toward pantheism, as contrasted with theism. God becomes less personal, less someone with whom we may have a personal relationship. Although immanence in an extreme form closely resembles pantheism, there is still a difference between the two views. In the view that God is immanent, nature has no independent status. As one theologian put it, nature is not transcendent to God.[527] Thus, nature minus God equals nothing. God, however, does have status independent of nature. So, God minus nature does equal something. In pantheism, nature minus God equals nothing, but God minus nature also equals nothing. He has no independent status. Creation in the

traditional sense has no place in the pantheistic scheme, since, according to pantheism, God could not have existed before the creation of the natural order.

Modern Versions of Immanentism

Classical Liberalism

Several movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries placed heavy emphasis on divine immanence. Classical liberalism, to varying degrees, has seen God as immanent within the world. To a large extent, the difference between fundamentalism and liberalism was a difference in worldview. The conservative operates with a definite supernaturalism—God resides outside the world and intervenes periodically within the natural processes through miracles. The conservative sees reality as occupying more than one level. The liberal, on the other hand, tends to have a single-story view of reality. There is no supernatural realm outside the natural realm. God is within nature rather than beyond or outside it.[528]

Although liberalism is not naturalism, it has similar tendencies to view God as working primarily through natural processes rather than through radical discontinuities with nature (miracles).[529] According to liberalism, nothing is secular, for God is at work everywhere and through everything that occurs. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for instance, saw miracles everywhere. “Miracle,” he said, “is simply the religious name for event. Every event, even the most natural and usual, becomes a miracle as soon as the religious view of it can be the dominant.”[530]

Whereas the conservative sees God’s work particularly in special, extraordinary acts, the liberal sees God at work everywhere. The virgin birth is important to conservatives as an evidence of God’s special work. The liberal, on the other hand, retorts, “The virgin birth a miracle? Every birth is a miracle.” Conservatives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries vigorously resisted the Darwinian theory of evolution, for it seemed to render theistic creation superfluous.[531] To the liberal, however, this was not the case. Evolution does not preclude divine activity; it presupposes it. The conservative held that the universe must have a single cause: either God caused it (more or less directly) or natural forces of evolution caused it. To the liberal, however, the statements “God created the universe” and “the universe came about through development” were not in any sense incompatible.[532] The underlying assumption was that nature and God are not as discrete as has sometimes been thought.

This concept, applied in varying degrees, had an interesting impact on several areas of doctrine. The definition of revelation, for instance, became more generalized. In an extreme form, that of Schleiermacher, revelation is any instance of conscious insight.[533] Thus, the Bible is a book recording God's revelations to humanity. As such, however, it is not unique; that is, it is not qualitatively different from other pieces of religious literature, or even literature that does not claim to be religious. Isaiah, the Sermon on the Mount, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Carlyle, Goethe: all are vehicles of divine revelation. Any truth, no matter where you find it, is divine truth.[534] This position virtually obliterates the traditional distinction between special revelation and general revelation. Others have maintained that there is a distinction between the Bible and other literature, but have emphasized that it is a quantitative rather than qualitative difference. God works through many channels of truth, but to a greater degree, perhaps a much greater degree, through the writers of Scripture.

Liberalism also reduced the gap between God and humanity. The traditional orthodox view is that God created humans in his own image, yet they were totally distinct from God. Humanity then fell and became sinful. Liberalism, on the other hand, pictured human nature as in itself containing God, a spark of the divine. Liberals do not believe that humans' original nature has been corrupted; rather, they view human nature as intrinsically good and capable of developing further. What is needed is not some radical transformation by grace from without, but development of humans' potential divinity, amplification of the divine presence within. Nurturing of the strengths, ideals, and aspirations of the human race is what is called for, not a supernaturalistic alteration. Humans do not need a conversion, a radical change of direction. Rather, they need inspiration, a vision of what they can become. The old nature is not some radically corrupted humanity. It is simply an affinity with the animal kingdom and a self-orientation, which need to be transcended.[535]

Consequently, divine action was seen as taking place to a large extent through movements within society. The whole world can be Christianized through transformation of the structures of society. God may be as active within a particular political party or a social service organization as he is within a Christian denomination.[536] Even aggressive policies leading to war have been seen as means by which God accomplishes his purposes.

Liberalism also modified the traditional view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy or conservative Christianity had insisted that Jesus was qualitatively different from all other human beings. He possessed two natures, the divine and the human. With the movement toward synthesizing divine and human into one, this distinctiveness of Jesus became relativized. Jesus was

different from other human beings in degree only, not in kind. He was the human with the greatest God-consciousness,[537] or the one who most fully discovered God, or the person in whom God most fully dwelt.[538] When, in a series of ecumenical radio dialogues in which I participated, someone emphasized that Jesus was unique, a process theologian exclaimed: "Jesus unique? Every human being who has ever lived is unique!" If God is immanent within humanity, he is immanent within all persons in the same sense. While there may be a quantitative difference in the extent to which God is present in various individuals, there is no qualitative difference in the manner of his presence, not even in Christ.

PAUL TILLICH

Another version of immanentism is that of Paul Tillich. Although there are few who would today identify themselves as followers of Tillich, his general view is quite popular today. Tillich saw himself as in many ways standing on the boundary between different groups and movements, particularly liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. His most distinctive idea was his doctrine of God. God is not *a* being, not even the highest of all beings; he is being itself, or the ground of being, the internal power or force that causes everything to exist. Thus, whereas all finite beings exist, God does not exist. While this may sound like a derogatory statement about God, it is not, but was intended as a compliment. When he said that God does not exist, Tillich meant that God does not *merely* exist—God *is*! Finite beings exist; God is, and is the basis of the existence of everything that exists.[539]

While God is present within everything that is, he is not to be equated with everything that is. Thus, Tillich's view is not pantheism, but more accurately, panentheism. The relationship of God to all the finite objects within the world is something like the relationship of sap to a tree. It is not the tree, but is the vital force within the tree, the basis of its life. So God is the principle of being of everything that exists.

But although God is the basis of the existence of every object, he cannot be known by superficial knowledge of any object or set of objects. He is the depth within everything that is, the deep internal force causing things to be rather than not be. Thus there is a type of transcendence here, quite unconventional in its nature. God is not outside objects. He is deep down within them. In experiencing something in depth, one is experiencing God's transcendence. A very deep relationship with another person is an experience of the transcendent God. In such a situation one is aware that the ground of one's own being is the same as

the ground of the other person's being. One can have a similar experience with beings other than humans: animals, plants, inanimate nature. In getting beyond a surface acquaintance with these objects, one is relating to God.[540]

God is not a person, any more than he is a being. But he is the ground of personality. He is the basis or cause of human personality. He is what makes us personal. And in that sense he is personal. Wherever one experiences or encounters personality, one is encountering God, for he is the cause of all personality.[541] But he is not an entity with which one can have a personal relationship. One cannot know God as God. One can know him only in conjunction with knowing some other being. God cannot be known on a person-to-person basis. For Tillich, prayer and meditation tend to blend. There is not the kind of person-to-person communion that lies at the heart of Christianity and that Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as practicing and advocating. As one reads Tillich's writings, the feeling grows that it is not Christian piety or the Christian God that is being discussed. Indeed, in many ways a book like Tillich's *Courage to Be* appears to have more in common with Hinduism than it does with historic Christianity.[542]

Further, it is questionable whether Tillich's view necessarily follows from his method. He works with what is termed the method of correlation. After analyzing the cultural situation, one formulates a philosophical question to which theology then gives an answer. In other words, the answers offered by theology are correlated with the questions being asked by the culture. A basic question raised in virtually every cultural situation is the question of being, namely, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" As his answer, Tillich offers the ground of being. There is something because there is within everything the power of being that causes it to be what it is. But need the answer come in this particular form? The orthodox answer is that God is the power of being, but he is also *a* being, although the supreme and unlimited being, to be sure. To the question of why there is something, the traditional view of God as Creator is at least as effective an answer as is Tillich's ground of being.

Process Theology

A third variety of immanentist theology arising in the twentieth century is process theology. Building on the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, this theology emphasizes that reality should be thought of as fundamentally dynamic and developing, rather than static and fixed. Everything is growing and processing. Change, rather than fixed essences, characterizes reality. The fundamental units of reality are not substances but events, occasions,

happenings, or occurrences. From an analysis of human experience, the process thinkers observe that from that perspective, each occasion has two elements, a fixed element, which Whitehead termed the mental pole, and a variable element, what he termed the physical pole, composed of sense experience.[543] There are what he termed "eternal objects," which are forms, qualities, and relations, but which are not existing realities in the fashion that Plato thought of the Forms.[544] Every occasion, then, involves a seizing or grasping or "prehending" the mental pole or the eternal objects, and the physical pole, or the sensory experience. As Norman Pittenger puts it, reality is to be thought of as a process, from the past, through the present, into the future.[545] For every event or occasion, there is both what is and what can be. There is what Whitehead called an initial aim or given possibility for each event, but there is genuine freedom or spontaneity in whether the event actualizes that possibility, by making the initial aim its "subjective aim."[546] Reality is also organic, in the sense that every event is related to every other (or prehends every other event).

For our purposes here, what is important to note is that in process philosophy and theology, God also is to be understood in terms of the same categories as the rest of reality. He has a fixed element and a changing element.[547] He is not complete and final, as traditional theology had thought. He attempts to influence what is occurring within the process, not by predetermining everything that happens or by coercing, but by "luring," influencing what happens.[548] He is not, however, omnipotent in the sense of determining what happens. He is not omniscient in the sense of knowing what will occur. He must await the outcome of the process of the actual events.[549] He not only affects what happens, but is himself affected by the rest of reality. He himself, given his changing and unchanging dipolar elements, is also growing and developing. He does not have permanent, fixed attributes. He is immanent in the sense that he is one with reality, and growing and processing with it. All of the absolute attributes traditionally associated with God are to be reconceived by analogy with ourselves.[550]

We should note at this point that the Bible does affirm the immanence of God, but within definite limits. When these limits are exceeded, certain problems appear. For one thing, it becomes difficult to distinguish the work of God from anything else, including demonic activity within the world and human society. This was observed by Karl Barth at two different times. During World War 1, certain German Christians identified the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm as the working of God to accomplish his purposes. Then in the 1930s, some Christians regarded the policies of Adolf Hitler and Nazism as God's activity in the

world.[551] In each case, the assumption that whatever occurs is God's will led sincere believers to endorse and support what was actually evil and anti-Christian. This is one of the dangers of overstating God's immanence. If God is totally immanent within the creation and history, there is no outside objective standard for making ethical evaluations. When we overemphasize immanence at the expense of transcendence, "God" becomes virtually a label for the highest human values, ideals, and aspirations. Edward Scribner Ames said that God is like Alma Mater or Uncle Sam.[552] Surely this is not what has traditionally been called Christianity.

Moreover, as we noted earlier, the personal dimension of God becomes lost. It is not possible to have communion, a reciprocal relation, with a totally immanent god. Religious activity becomes merely a version of various types of social activity. Although Jesus did say, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40), he did not say that this is the *only* means by which love can be shown to him. While the second great command is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," that does not substitute for or exhaustively fulfill the first command, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Implications of Immanence

Divine immanence of the limited degree taught in Scripture carries several implications:

1. God is not limited to working directly to accomplish his purposes. While it is obviously a work of God when his people pray and a miraculous healing occurs, it is also God's work when through the application of medical knowledge and skill a physician is successful in preventing illness or bringing a patient back to health. Medicine is part of God's general revelation, and the work of the doctor is a channel of God's activity. It is a dramatic answer to prayer when a Christian in financial need receives an anonymous gift of money in the mail, but it is just as much God's doing when such a person receives an opportunity to work for the needed money.

2. God may use persons and organizations that are not avowedly Christian. In biblical times, God did not limit himself to working through the covenant nation of Israel or through the church. He even used Assyria, a pagan nation, to bring chastening upon Israel. Thus he said of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please" (Isa. 44:28). God is able to use secular or nominally Christian organizations. Even non-Christians do some genuinely good and commendable things, which contribute to God's purposes in the world, even if

these works do not qualify for salvation the people who do them. Thus, when no compromise of biblical truth is involved, the Christian and the church may at times cooperate with non-Christian organizations to accomplish part of God's plan.

3. We should have an appreciation for all that God has created. Nature is not something that is there as a brute fact, something that may be plundered for our purposes. It is God's, and he is present and active within it. While nature is given to humans to satisfy their legitimate needs, they ought not to exploit it for their own pleasure or out of greed. The doctrine of divine immanence therefore has ecological application. It also has implications regarding our attitudes to fellow humans. God is genuinely present within everyone (although not in the special sense in which he indwells Christians). Therefore, people are not to be despised or treated disrespectfully. A way to show our love for God is to treat lovingly the various members of the creation within which he dwells and works. Jesus's teaching in the great eschatological discourse of Matthew 25 particularly applies here.

4. We can learn something about God from his creation. All that is has been brought into being by God and, further, is actively indwelt by him. We may therefore detect clues about what God is like by observing the behavior of the created universe. For example, a definite pattern of logic seems to apply within the creation. There is an orderliness, a regularity, about it. Moreover, it has been found that we can come to understand nature better through rational methods of inquiry. While there will be differences to be sure, there is a strong basis here for assuming that God also is orderly and that we may come to understand him better through a judicious use of logic. Those who believe that God is sporadic, arbitrary, or whimsical by nature and that his actions are characterized by paradox and even contradiction either have not taken a close look at the behavior of the world or have assumed that God is in no sense operating there.

5. God's immanence means that there are points at which the gospel can make contact with the unbeliever. If God is to some extent present and active within the whole of the created world, he is present and active within humans who have not made a personal commitment of their lives to him. Thus, there are points at which they will be sensitive to the truth of the gospel message, places where they are in touch with God's working. Evangelism aims to find those points and direct the message of the gospel to them.

Transcendence

The other aspect of the relationship of God to the world is his transcendence. By this we mean that God is separate from and independent of nature and humanity. God is not simply attached to, or involved in, his creation. He is also superior to it in several significant ways.

The Biblical Basis

A number of Scripture passages affirm the concept of divine transcendence. It is a particular theme of the book of Isaiah. In 55:8–9 we read that God's thoughts transcend ours: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" In 6:1–5 the Lord is depicted as "seated on a throne, high and exalted." The seraphim call out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty," an indication of his transcendence, and add, "the whole earth is full of his glory," a reference to his immanence. Isaiah responds with an expression of his own uncleanness. Thus, God's transcendence over us must be seen not only in terms of his greatness, his power and knowledge, but also in terms of his goodness, his holiness and purity. Isaiah 57:15 also expresses both the transcendence and immanence of God: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

We read of God's transcendence in other books of the Bible as well. Psalm 113:5–6 says, "Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?" He is described as the one "whose throne is in heaven" in Psalm 123:1. In John 8:23, Jesus draws a contrast between himself and his hearers: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

Models of Transcendence

The motif of God's transcendence—the idea that God is a being independent of and superior to the rest of the universe—is found, then, throughout the Bible. We must now ask what model, what form of expression, can best represent and communicate this truth.

THE TRADITIONAL MODEL

It is obvious from the texts we have already cited that the biblical expression depends heavily on spatial imagery. God is thought of as "higher," "above," "high and lifted up." This is not surprising, for in a world where human flight had not yet been achieved, and would not be for a long time, it was natural to express superiority in terms of elevation. These terms, however, should be seen as metaphorical.

Today, however, it is difficult if not impossible for sophisticated persons to conceive of God's transcendence in this fashion. There are two reasons for this difficulty, one deriving from general culture, and the other theological in character. On one hand, simple references to "up" and "down" are inadequate today. Our knowledge that the earth is not a flat surface and is actually part of a heliocentric system that is in turn part of a much larger universe has made this assumption untenable. Further, what an American terms "up" is "down" to an Australian, and vice versa. It will not do, then, to try to explain transcendence in terms of a vertical dimension. Speaking of God as "out there" rather than "up there" deals with this problem, but still does not come to grips with the theological problem.[553]

The theological problem pertains to God's nature. As we observed earlier (p. 243), the question of whereness does not apply to God. He is not a physical being; hence he does not have spatial dimensions of location and extension. It does not make sense to talk about God as if his location could be plotted on astronomical coordinates, or as if he could be reached by traveling long enough and far enough in a space ship. He is a spirit, not a physical object.

Karl Barth's Model

In the twentieth century, a new major emphasis on God's transcendence appeared in the thought and writing of Karl Barth, particularly in his early work and most notably in his *Römerbrief*. In that work he emphasized the Unknown God.[554] God is the altogether other, immensely above the rest of the deities of the world of Paul's day and all the deities that modern thought creates.

God is not an aspect of human beings or the best of human nature. He is separated from humanity by an *infinite*, qualitative distinction.[555] There is within humans no spark of affinity with the divine, no ability to produce divine revelation, no remainder in them of a likeness to God. Moreover, God is not involved in nature or conditioned by it. He is free from all such limitations.[556] Nor is he really known by us. He is the hidden one; he cannot be discovered by our effort, verified by our intellectual proofs, or understood in terms of our concepts. Barth's vigorous attack on all forms of natural theology was an

expression of his belief in divine transcendence. Revelation comes only on God's own initiative; and when it does come, it is not mediated through general culture. It comes, in Barth's language, vertically from above. Humans are never able in any way to make God their possession.[557]

In the judgment of many theologians, including even the later Barth himself, Barth's early view of transcendence was extreme. Taken in its most literal form, it seemed to virtually cut off any real possibility of communication between God and humankind. There was too severe a distinction between God and humanity, too sharp a rejection of culture. But this was a much-needed corrective to the anthropocentric thrust of much nineteenth-century immanentism. The question for us here is whether we can express the transcendence of God in a less extreme way that makes sense in twenty-first-century terms. We need not necessarily attempt to make the doctrine acceptable to twenty-first-century secularists, but we must at least provide contemporary Christians with a mode of thought that will make it clear that God is spiritually and metaphysically other than humans and nature.

Søren Kierkegaard's Nonspatial Model

Søren Kierkegaard' s conception of divine transcendence was in many ways influential on Karl Barth. While there are a few extreme elements in Kierkegaard's thought, he offers some genuinely creative ways of expressing the idea of transcendence. Two of them are what Martin Heinecken has expounded under the labels of qualitative distinction and dimensional beyondness.

By qualitative distinction is meant that the difference between God and humans is not merely one of degree. God is not merely like us but more so. We are of a fundamentally different kind. Thus God cannot be known by taking the highest and the best elements within humanity and amplifying them. Being qualitatively distinct, God cannot be extrapolated from human ideas, personality, or character.[558]

Underlying this position is the belief that qualities cannot be reduced to quantities. No accumulation of additional quantity can give a new quality. There is a difference here that cannot be bridged simply by increments. Thus, even if one took cotton and refined it further and further, it would never become silk. Silk simply is something different. Instances where simple addition seems to result in new qualities are actually illusions. As an example of an intellectual illusion, take the case of the nis balls. Imagine one nis ball, a small, hard, white spherical object not greatly unlike a golf ball, but without the little dimples characteristic of a golf ball. If we add another, we have two nis balls, then three,

four, and so on, until we come to nine nis balls. If we then add one more nis ball, something amazing occurs: a new quality appears, for we now have *tennis* balls. But this is only an intellectual illusion, a trick on the mind. We do not have a new kind of ball, fuzzy and larger; we merely have one more of the same type of ball we had before. Nothing has changed qualitatively. And so it is with attempts to reach God intellectually (proofs for the existence of God) or morally (salvation by works). We may on occasion think we have succeeded, but our success is apparent rather than real. We cannot reach God by adding more information or more works, for God is God, not simply a superlative form of humanity.

If, like Barth, we were to regard Kierkegaard's concept of the qualitative distinction between God and humans as infinite in scope, religion and theology would be impossible, for not even God could bridge such a gap and reach us.[559] But one need not make the distinction infinite in order to preserve the idea that the difference between God and us is one of kind and not merely of degree.

The other fruitful aspect of Kierkegaard's model of transcendence is dimensional beyondness.[560] It is not merely the case that when measured in terms of the human dimensions, God is infinite; he is also in a different dimension altogether. It is somewhat like the difference between a two-dimensional figure (a horizontal plane) and a three-dimensional figure. In the latter instance, the added dimension (the vertical) not only intersects the horizontal plane, but also transcends it.

The concept of dimensional beyondness should be broadened, however. God is dimensionally beyond us not in the sense of another spatial measurement, but of qualitative difference. This is the broad sense of dimension. Consider, as an example, that sound is a different dimension than sight. The question "What color is middle C?" is an unanswerable question (although one "correct" answer would of course be that it is white, at least on the piano). Color and sound are two different dimensions; a totally different sense is involved.

The concept of dimensional beyondness enables us to think of transcendence and immanence together. God is in the same place we are, yet he is not accessible to us in a simple way, for he is in a different dimension. He is on a different level or in a different realm of reality. The many sounds within a given room can serve here as an example. Most of them are inaudible to the normal sense of hearing. If, however, we introduce a radio receiver and tune it across the frequencies of the dial, we will discover a vast variety of sounds. All of those radio waves were immanent within the room, but as modulations of radio frequencies undetectable by the unaided human ear. Similarly, God is near us; his presence and influence are everywhere. Yet because he is in a spiritual realm

of reality, we cannot get from ourselves to him by mere geographical locomotion. It requires a change of state to make that transition, a change that usually involves death. Thus, God can be near, so very near, and yet be afar off as well, as several Scripture references indicate (e.g., Jer. 23:23; Eph. 4:6).

It is interesting to note that in the late twentieth century, some physicists began discussing space in ways that fit well with this conception of transcendence. While we should not assume the accuracy of this view and certainly not its finality, it does offer a possible model for thinking of God's transcendence. Physicists had come to think of space in terms of the three dimensions of length, breadth, and height, and since Einstein, the fourth dimension of time. Because we humans are limited to these three spatial dimensions, it is impossible for us to conceive of more than those. Physicists, however, have speculated that there may be more than three spatial dimensions, perhaps as many as ten. Although we cannot formulate an image of this, the mathematics works out, and several problems that create paradoxes on a three-dimensional scheme can be resolved.[561]

On this model, a three-dimensional being would transcend the world of a two-dimensional being. The same could be said for the relationship to a three-dimensional world of a being who inhabited more than three spatial dimensions. Thus, we could speak of God as dimensionally beyond, in a rather literal sense. This, however, is also to be understood as a metaphor, since God transcends space, in however many dimensions that involves. It does, however, suggest that the dimensions in which he exerts his primary activity may not be merely the three we customarily think of.

The Historical Model of the Theology of Hope

A recent theological development that also adds to our understanding of transcendence is the theology of hope. Instead of thinking of God's relationship to the world in cosmological terms, the theology of hope uses instead a historical model. God's transcendence is eschatological, not spatial.[562] He does not simply live in the past and work from past events. Nor is he simply immanent within present occurrences. Rather, he appears on the frontier of life with its openness to the future. While some aspects of this theology suggest that God is not yet as complete as the Bible describes him, nonetheless here is a God who is transcendent in the sense of living and functioning where we have not yet been. The move from humans to God is not a change of place (from here to there), but of state (from now to then, from present to future). While this theology is correct

in emphasizing God's historical transcendence, his cosmological or metaphysical transcendence should not be ignored.

Other Views

There may also be help here for us in understanding the difficult problem of God's relationship to time. As we have noted earlier, there have been sharp philosophical disputes over whether God is temporal (infinitely extended within time, or everlasting) or atemporal (outside of time, or eternal). One of the standard criticisms of the atemporal position by the temporalists is that a God outside of time would have no succession of moments or events within his nature, and thus would not know what was going on at any point in earthly time, because he would not know what time it was on earth. This argument, of course, assumes that God must be either within time or outside of it. Some, such as William Craig[563] and Alan Padgett,[564] have developed a somewhat mediating position of relative time. Science may, however, currently offer us some insight into the problem.

Albert Einstein insisted that, instead of viewing reality as three dimensions of space plus time, we should view it as a four-dimensional, space-time universe, in which time and space are conjointly relative.[565] If this is the case, then God's relationship to time, at least as we experience it, should be understood as parallel to his relationship to space. Since God is not simply infinitely far away within space, but in a totally different dimension of reality, so he would be understood as "outside" (admittedly, a spatial metaphor) time. As noted above, one objection to this view is that a God who is outside time cannot act within time, or even know what time it is (i.e., what is now occurring). Yet God's transcendence of space does not prevent his acting within space or knowing where something is happening. It would appear that the parallelism calls for us to see God as nontemporal ontologically, but influentially present within time. It appears that some of the philosophical discussions of time have assumed a pre-Einsteinian understanding of space and time.

In Newton's thought, time and space were absolute. In Einstein's relativity theory, however, both space and time are relative, and the only constant is the speed of light. This has led, among other things, to the paradox of simultaneity. When does an event actually occur? That depends on the location of the reference point. When does the sun rise—when we see its light begin to come over the horizon, or some minutes earlier, when those rays of light first originate at the sun? In theory, since light radiates outward indefinitely, if one were located a light year out in space and had a sufficiently powerful telescope, one

could observe the events of one year ago occurring. Farther out, the American Revolutionary War is still occurring.

Beyond that, however, more recent theories in physics conjecture the possibility of traveling back in time, just as space travel is now possible. With a sufficient amount of energy, which is immense in quantity, a black hole could be dragged, not just through space, but through time to form a "worm hole," and one could travel through it to another time. For a God who is not limited by the speed of light and who possesses infinite energy, even a physical version of transcendence of time would not be impossible.

Some would argue that time travel, under the scenario of light traveling outward from the present in an expanding cone, would only be possible backward, not forward, so that the transcendence to time would be unidirectional. Stephen Hawking, however, has suggested that just as there is a cone extending into the past from the present, there also is such a cone extending forward from the present, of that which at a given reference point in time and space has not yet occurred. If this is correct, and if God is infinitely extended in time (or more correctly not limited to any point in time), then what we would call God's foreknowledge of the future is actually a matter of recalling the future, and just as he can act upon any point in space, he can also act at any point in time.[566]

There are a number of other difficult problems in theology, such as the relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will, the relationship between the human and divine natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, and the three persons of the Trinity who are yet one God, that we cannot fully comprehend currently and will not do so within this earthly life. The same is likely true for the issues of transcendence and immanence that we have considered. The considerations that have come to light recently from physics may, however, alleviate the problems somewhat.

Implications of Transcendence

The doctrine of transcendence has several implications that will affect our other beliefs and practices.

1. There is something higher than humans. Humanity is not the highest good in the universe or the highest measure of truth and value. Good, truth, and value are not determined by the shifting flux of this world and human opinion. There is something that gives us value from above. The value of humans is not that they are the highest products of the evolutionary process thus far but that the supreme

eternal being has made them in his own image. It is not our estimation of ourselves, but the judgment of the holy God, that gives us value.

2. God can never be completely captured in human concepts. This means that all of our doctrinal ideas, helpful and basically correct though they may be, cannot fully exhaust God's nature. He is not limited to our understanding of him. Nor can our forms of worship or styles of church architecture give full expression to what God is. There is no way we humans can adequately represent or approach God.

3. Our salvation is not our achievement. Fellowship with God is not attained by our making our way to God. That is impossible. We are not able to raise ourselves to God's level by fulfilling his standards for us. Even if we were able to do so, it still would not be our accomplishment. The very fact that we know what he expects of us is a matter of his self-revelation, not our discovery. Even apart from the additional problem of sin, then, fellowship with God would be strictly a matter of his gift to us.

4. There will always be a difference between God and humans. The gap between us is not merely a moral and spiritual disparity that originated with the fall. It is metaphysical, stemming from creation. Even when redeemed and glorified, we will still be renewed human beings. We will never become God. He will always be God and we will always be humans, so that there will always be a divine transcendence. Salvation consists in God's restoring us to what he intended us to be, not elevating us to what he is.

5. Reverence is appropriate in our relationship with God. Some worship, rightfully stressing the joy and confidence that the believer has in relationship to a loving heavenly Father, goes beyond that point to an excessive familiarity treating him as an equal, or even worse, as a servant. If we have grasped the fact of the divine transcendence, however, this will not happen. While there are room and need for enthusiasm of expression, and perhaps even an exuberance, that should never lead to a loss of respect. There will always be a sense of awe and wonder, of what Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*.[567] Although there are love and trust and openness between God and us, we are not equals. He is the almighty sovereign Lord. We are his servants and followers. This means that we will submit our wills to God; we will not try to make his will conform to ours. Our prayers will also be influenced accordingly. Rather than making demands in our prayers, we will pray as Jesus did, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

6. We will look for genuinely transcendent working by God. Thus we will not expect only those things that can be accomplished by natural means. While we will use every available technique of modern learning to accomplish God's ends, we will never cease to be dependent on his working. We will not neglect prayer

for his guidance or special intervention. Thus, for example, Christian counseling will not differ from other types of counseling (naturalistic or humanistic) only in being preceded by brief prayer. There will be the anticipation that God, in response to faith and prayer, will work in ways not humanly predictable or achievable.

As with God's immanence, so also with his transcendence we must guard against excessive emphasis. We will not look for God merely in the religious or devotional; we will also look for him in the "secular" aspects of life. We will not look for miracles exclusively, but we will not disregard them either. Some attributes, such as holiness, eternity, omnipotence, emphasize more God's transcendent character. Others, such as omnipresence, accentuate his immanence. But if all aspects of God's nature are given the emphasis and attention that the Bible assigns to them, a fully rounded understanding of God will be the result. While God is never fully within our grasp, since he goes far beyond our ideas and forms, yet he is always available to us when we turn to him.

14

God's Three-in-Oneness: *The Trinity*

Chapter Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Understand and explain the biblical teaching on the Trinity in three aspects: the oneness of God, the deity of three, and three-in-oneness.
2. List and explain the historical constructions of the Trinity, such as the "economic" view, dynamic monarchianism, modalistic monarchianism, and the orthodox view.
3. Describe the debate regarding the relative authority of the three persons of the Trinity.
4. Describe the essential elements of the doctrine of the Trinity and explain why they are so vital to the Christian faith.
5. Articulate the various analogies used in describing or clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter Summary

The Bible does not explicitly teach the trinitarian view of God, but the teachings that God is one and that three persons are God clearly imply this view. Christianity is the only major religion that makes this claim about God. Numerous attempts have been made to understand this

profound truth. Some have led to distortions of this very important doctrine. While we may never fully comprehend this difficult doctrine, there are analogies that can help us understand it more fully. Several evangelicals have contended that the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally and inherently subordinate to the Father in authority. Others, however, maintain the eternal equal authority of the three persons, but temporary subordination of the Son and the Spirit. Properly understood, this doctrine has profound practical implications for the Christian life.

Study Questions

- Why is the doctrine of the Trinity unique among the various religions of the world?
- Why does forming a position on the Trinity require all the skills involved in systematic theology?
- How would you explain the biblical evidence for the deity of three?
- How do the various historical views of the Trinity influence society today? How may they be disputed?
- On what points regarding the Trinity do the gradationists and the equivalentists agree? About what do they disagree?
- What are the essential elements of the doctrine of the Trinity? How do they help our understanding and deepen our faith?
- What do analogies contribute to our understanding?

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In the doctrine of the Trinity, we encounter one of the truly distinctive doctrines of Christianity. Among the religions of the world, the Christian faith is unique in making the claim that God is one and yet there are three who are God. Although it seems on the surface to be a self-contradictory doctrine and is not overtly or explicitly stated in Scripture, nevertheless, devout minds have been led to it as they sought to do justice to the witness of Scripture.

The doctrine of the Trinity is crucial for Christianity. It is concerned with who God is, what he is like, how he works, and how he is to be approached. Moreover, the question of the deity of Jesus Christ, which has historically been a point of great tension, is very much wrapped up with our understanding of the Trinity.

Historically, this doctrine was the first to be thoroughly worked out, in response to a series of views that seemed to challenge the biblical teaching. It has proven to be an important bulwark of orthodox Christianity against various challenges over the centuries. Currently, it distinguishes Christianity over against the radical monotheism of an increasingly aggressive Islam and the polytheistic and pantheistic Eastern religions that influence popular "New Age" religion.

The position we take on the Trinity will also answer several questions of a practical nature. Whom are we to worship—Father only, Son, Holy Spirit, or the Triune God? To whom should we pray? Is the work of each to be considered in isolation from the work of the others, or may we think of the atoning death of Jesus as somehow the work of the Father as well? Should the Son be thought of as the Father's equal in essence, or should he be relegated to a somewhat lesser status?

In practice, we may find ourselves to be practicing unitarians, emphasizing one of the persons of the Trinity over the others. Ricardo de Sousa feels that those who emphasize the Father are often from the Reformed tradition, while Pietists tend to relate especially to the Son, and Pentecostals and charismatics make much of the Holy Spirit.[568]

Formulating a position on the Trinity is a genuine exercise in *systematic* theology, calling for all the skills discussed in the opening chapters of this book.

Since the Trinity is not explicitly taught in Scripture, we will have to put together complementary themes, draw inferences from biblical teachings, and decide on a particular type of conceptual vehicle to express our understanding. In addition, because the formulation of the doctrine has had a long and complex history, we will have to evaluate past constructions against the background of their period and culture, and to enunciate the doctrine in a way that will be similarly appropriate for our age.

We will begin our study of the Trinity by examining the biblical basis of the doctrine, since this is fundamental to all else that we do here. Then we will examine various historical statements of the doctrine, noting particular emphases, strengths, and weaknesses. Finally, we will formulate our own statement for today, attempting to illustrate and clarify its tenets in such a way as to make it meaningful for our time.

The Biblical Teaching

There are three separate but interrelated types of evidence: evidence for the unity of God—that God is one; evidence that there are three persons who are God; and, finally, indications or at least intimations of the three-in-oneness.

The Oneness of God

The religion of the ancient Hebrews was a rigorously monotheistic faith, as indeed the Jewish religion is to this day. The unity of God was revealed to Israel at several different times and in various ways. The Ten Commandments, for example, begin with the statement, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me [or besides me]" (Exod. 20:2–3). The Hebrew translated here as "before me" or "besides me" is עַל־פָּנָי (*'al-panai*), which means literally "to my face." God had demonstrated his unique reality by what he had done, and thus was entitled to Israel's exclusive worship, devotion, and obedience. No others had so proven their claim to deity.

The prohibition of idolatry, the second commandment (v. 4), also rests on the uniqueness of Jehovah. He will not tolerate any worship of humanly constructed objects, for he alone is God. The rejection of polytheism runs throughout the Old Testament. God repeatedly demonstrates his superiority to other claimants to deity. It could, of course, be maintained that this does not conclusively prove that the Old Testament requires monotheism. It might simply be the case that it is the

gods of other nations who are rejected by the Old Testament, but that there is more than one true God of the Israelites. In answer, we need point out only that it is clearly assumed throughout the Old Testament that there is but one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not many (e.g., Exod. 3:13–15).

A clearer indication of the oneness of God is the Shema of Deuteronomy 6, the great truths of which the people of Israel were commanded to absorb themselves and to inculcate into their children. They were to meditate on these teachings ("These commandments . . . are to be on your hearts," v. 6). They were to talk about them—at home and on the road, when lying down, and when arising (v. 7). They were to use visual aids to call attention to them—wearing them on their hands and foreheads, and writing them on the doorframes of their houses and on their gates (vv. 8–9). One is an indicative, a declarative statement; the other an imperative or command. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (v. 4). While there are various legitimate translations of the Hebrew here, all alike emphasize the unique, unmatched deity of Jehovah. The second great truth God wanted Israel to learn and teach is a command based on his uniqueness: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (v. 5). Because he is one, there was to be no division of Israel's commitment. After the Shema (Deut. 6:4–5), the commands of Exodus 20 are virtually repeated. In positive terms God's people are told: "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name" (Deut. 6:13). In negative terms they are told: "Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you" (v. 14). Since God is clearly one God, none of the gods of the surrounding peoples could be real and thereby worthy of service and devotion (cf. Exod. 15:11; Zech. 14:9).

God's oneness is not only taught in the Old Testament. James 2:19 commends belief in one God, though noting its insufficiency for justification. Paul also underscores God's uniqueness. The apostle writes as he discusses the eating of meat that has been offered to idols: "We know that 'an idol is nothing at all in the world' and that 'there is no God but one' . . . the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:4, 6). Here Paul, like the Mosaic Law, excludes idolatry on the grounds that there is only one God. Similarly, Paul writes to Timothy: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tim. 2:5–6). While on the surface these verses seem to distinguish Jesus from the only God, the Father, the primary thrust of the former reference is that God alone is truly God (idols are nothing); and the

primary thrust of the latter is that there is but one God, and that there is only one mediator between God and humans.

The Deity of Three

All this evidence, if taken by itself, would no doubt lead us to a basically monotheistic belief. What, then, moved the church beyond this evidence? It was the additional biblical witness to the effect that three persons are God. The deity of the first, the Father, is scarcely in dispute. In addition to the references in Paul's writings just cited (1 Cor. 8:4, 6; 1 Tim. 2:5–6), we may note the cases where Jesus refers to the Father as God. In Matthew 6:26, he indicates, "Your heavenly Father feeds [the birds of the air]." In a parallel statement that follows shortly thereafter, he indicates that "God clothes the grass of the field" (v. 30). And in verses 31–32 he states that we need not ask about what we shall eat or drink or wear because "[our] heavenly Father knows that [we] need them." It is apparent that, for Jesus, "God" and "your heavenly Father" are interchangeable expressions. And in numerous other references to God, Jesus obviously has the Father in mind (e.g., Matt. 19:23–26; 27:46; Mark 12:17, 24–27).

Somewhat more problematic is the status of Jesus as deity, yet Scripture also identifies him as God. (Since the topic of Jesus's divinity will be developed in the section on Christology [chap. 31], we will not go into great detail here.) A key reference to the deity of Christ Jesus is found in Philippians 2. In verses 5–11 Paul has taken what was probably a hymn of the early church and used it as the basis of an appeal to his readers to practice humility. He speaks of Christ Jesus, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (v. 6 NIV 1984). The word here often translated "form" is μορφή (*morphē*). This term in classical Greek as well as in biblical Greek means "the set of characteristics that constitutes a thing what it is." It denotes the genuine nature of a thing.

For Paul, an orthodox Jew trained in the rabbinic teaching of strict Judaism, verse 6 is indeed an astonishing statement. Reflecting the faith of the early church, it suggests a deep commitment to Christ's full deity. This commitment is indicated not only by the use of *morphē*, but by the expression "equality [ἴσα —*isa*] with God." It is generally held that the thrust of verse 6 is that Jesus possessed equality with God, but did not attempt to hold on to it. Some have argued, however, that Jesus did not possess equality with God; the thrust of this verse is, then, that Jesus neither coveted nor aspired to equality with God. Thus, ἁρπαγμόν (*harpagmon*—"a thing to be grasped") should not be interpreted as "a thing to cling to," but "a thing to seize." On the contrary, however, verse 7

indicates that he "emptied himself" (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν—*heauton ekenōsen*). While Paul does not specify of what Jesus emptied himself, it is apparent that this was an active step of self-abnegation, not a passive declining to take action. Hence equality with God is something he antecedently possessed. And one who is equal with God must be God.[569]

Another significant passage is Hebrews 1. The author, whose identity is unknown to us, is writing to a group of Hebrew Christians. He (or she) makes several statements that strongly imply the full deity of the Son. In the opening verses, as the writer (hereafter referred to with the masculine personal pronoun) argues that the Son is superior to the angels, he notes that God has spoken through the Son, appointed him heir of all things, and made the universe through him (v. 2). He then in verse 3 describes the Son as the "radiance [ἀπαύγασμα—*apaugasma*] of God's glory" and the "exact representation of his being" (χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως—*charaktēr tēs hupostaseōs*). While it could perhaps be maintained that this affirms only that God revealed himself through the Son, rather than that the Son *is God*, the context suggests otherwise. In addition to identifying himself as the Father of the one whom he here calls Son (v. 5), God is quoted in verse 8 (from Ps. 45:6) as addressing the Son as "God" and in verse 10 as "Lord" (from Ps. 102:25). The writer concludes by noting that God said to the Son, "Sit at my right hand" (v. 13, from Ps. 110:1). It is significant that the Scripture writer addresses Hebrew Christians, who certainly would be steeped in monotheism, in ways that undeniably affirm the deity of Jesus and his equality with the Father.

A final consideration is Jesus's own self-consciousness. We should note that Jesus never directly asserted his deity. Yet several threads of evidence suggest that this is indeed how he understood himself. He claimed to possess what properly belongs only to God. He spoke of the angels of God (Luke 12:8–9; 15:10) as his angels (Matt. 13:41). He regarded the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:28; 19:14, 24; 21:31, 43) and the elect of God (Mark 13:20) as his own. Further, he claimed to forgive sins (Mark 2:8–10). The Jews recognized that only God can forgive sins, and they consequently accused Jesus of blasphemy (βλασφημία—*blasphēmia*). He also claimed the power to judge the world (Matt. 25:31–33) and to reign over it (Matt. 24:30; Mark 14:62).

Further, we may note how Jesus responded both to those who accused him of claiming deity and to those who sincerely attributed divinity to him. At his trial, the accusation brought against him was that he claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7; Matt. 26:63–65). If Jesus did not regard himself as God, here was a splendid opportunity for him to correct a mistaken impression. Yet this he did

not do. In fact, at his trial before Caiaphas he came as close as he ever did to affirming his own deity. For he responded to the charge, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God,” by stating, “Yes, it is as you say. . . . But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:63–64 NIV 1984). Either he desired to be put to death on a false charge, or he did understand himself to be the Son of God. Moreover, when Thomas addressed Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28), Jesus did not disavow the appellation.

There also are biblical references that identify the Holy Spirit as God. Here we may note passages where references to the Holy Spirit occur interchangeably with references to God. One example is Acts 5:3–4. Ananias and Sapphira held back a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their property, misrepresenting what they laid at the apostles’ feet as the entirety. Here, lying to the Holy Spirit (v. 3) is equated with lying to God (v. 4). The Holy Spirit is also described as having the qualities and performing the works of God. The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11) and regenerates or gives new life (John 3:8). In 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, we read that it is the Spirit who conveys gifts to the church and who exercises sovereignty over who receives those gifts. In addition, he receives the honor and glory reserved for God. Blasphemy against him is an extremely serious offence (Mark 3:29).

In 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, Paul reminds believers that they are God’s temple and his Spirit dwells within them. In chapter 6, he says that their bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit within them (vv. 19–20). “God” and “Holy Spirit” seem to be interchangeable expressions. Also in several places the Holy Spirit is put on an equal footing with God. One is the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19; a second is the Pauline benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14; finally, in 1 Peter 1:2, Peter addresses his readers as “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.”

Three-in-Oneness

On the surface, these two lines of evidence—God’s oneness and threeness—seem contradictory. In the earliest years of its existence the church did not have much opportunity to study the relationship between these two sets of data. The process of organizing itself and propagating the faith and even the struggle for survival in a hostile world precluded much serious doctrinal reflection. As the church became more secure, however, it began attempting to fit together these two types of material. It concluded that God must be understood as three-in-one,

or in other words, triune. At this point we must pose the question whether this doctrine is explicitly taught in the Bible, is suggested by the Scripture, or is merely an inference drawn from other teachings of the Bible.

One text that has traditionally been appealed to as documenting the triunity is 1 John 5:7, that is, as it is found in earlier versions such as the King James: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Here is, apparently, a clear and succinct statement of the three-in-oneness. Unfortunately, however, the textual basis is so weak that some recent translations (e.g., NIV) include this statement only in an italicized footnote (for v. 8), and others omit it altogether (e.g., RSV). If there is a biblical basis for the three-in-oneness, it must be sought elsewhere.

The plural form of the noun for the God of Israel, אֱלֹהִים (*'elohim*), is sometimes regarded as an intimation of a trinitarian view. This is a generic name used to refer to other gods as well. When used with reference to Israel's God, it is generally, but not always, found in the plural. Some would argue that here is a hint of the plural nature of God. The plural form is commonly interpreted, however, as an indication of majesty or intensity rather than of multiplicity within God's nature. Theodorus Vriezen thinks that the plural form is intended to elevate the referent to the status of a general representative of the class and accordingly rejects the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is implied in Genesis 1:26.[570] Walter Eichrodt believes that in using the plural of majesty, the writer of Genesis intended to preserve his cosmogony from any trace of polytheistic thought and at the same time to represent the Creator God as the absolute ruler and the only being whose will carries any weight.[571]

The interpretation of *'elohim* as a plural of majesty is by no means unanimously held by recent Old Testament scholarship, however. G. A. F. Knight argues against it in a monograph entitled *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity*. He maintains that to make *'elohim* a plural of majesty is to read into ancient Hebrew a modern way of thinking, since the kings of Israel and Judah are all addressed in the singular in our biblical records.[572] While rejecting the plural of majesty, Knight points out that there is, nonetheless, a peculiarity in Hebrew that will help us understand the term in question. The words for water and heaven (among others) are both plural. Grammarians have termed this phenomenon the quantitative plural. Water may be thought of in terms of individual raindrops or of a mass of water such as is found in the ocean. Knight asserts that this quantitative diversity in unity is a fitting way of understanding the plural *'elohim.* He also believes that this explains why the singular noun אֲדֹנָי (*'adonai*) is written as a plural.[573]

There are other plural forms as well. In Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let us make mankind in our image.” Here the plural appears both in the verb “let us make” and in the possessive suffix “our.” In Genesis 11:7 there is also a plural verb form: “Let us go down and confuse their language.” When Isaiah was called, he heard the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). The objection has been raised that these are plurals of majesty. What is significant, however, from the standpoint of logical analysis, is the shift from singular to plural in the first and third of these examples. Genesis 1:26 actually says, “Then God said [singular], ‘Let us make [plural] mankind in our [plural] image.’” The Scripture writer does not use a plural verb with *‘elohim*, but God is quoted as using a plural verb with reference to himself. Similarly, Isaiah 6:8 reads: “Whom shall I send [singular]? And who will go for us [plural]?”

The teaching regarding the image of God in humankind has also been viewed as an intimation of the Trinity. Genesis 1:27 (NIV 1984) reads:

> So God created man in his own image,
> in the image of God he created him;
> male and female he created them.

Some would argue that what we have here is a parallelism not merely in the first two, but in all three lines. Thus, “male and female he created them” is equivalent to “So God created man in his own image” and to “in the image of God he created him.” On this basis, the image of God in man (generic) is to be found in the fact that man has been created male and female (i.e., plural).[574] This means that the image of God must consist in a unity in plurality, a characteristic of both the ectype and the archetype. According to Genesis 2:24, man and woman are to become one (אֶחָד—‘*echad*); a union of two separate entities is entailed. It is significant that the same word is used of God in the Shema*:* “The LORD our God, the LORD is one [אֶחָד]” (Deut. 6:4). It seems that something is being affirmed here about the nature of God—he is an organism, that is, a unity of distinct parts.

In several places in Scripture the three persons are linked together in unity and apparent equality. One of these is the baptismal formula as prescribed in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20): baptizing in (or into) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Note that “name” is singular, although three persons are included. Note also that there is no suggestion of inferiority or subordination. This formula became part of a very early tradition in the church—it is found in the *Didache* (7.1–4) and in Justin’s *Apology* (1.61). Yet another direct linking of the three names in unity and apparent equality is the Pauline benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14—“May the grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Both the Gospels and the Epistles contain linkages of the three persons that are not quite as direct and explicit. The angel tells Mary that her child will be called holy, the Son of God, because the Holy Spirit will come upon her (Luke 1:35). At the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17), all three persons of the Trinity are present. The Son is baptized, the Spirit of God descends like a dove, and the Father speaks words of commendation of the Son. Jesus relates his doing of miracles to the power of the Spirit of God, and indicates that this is evidence that the kingdom of God has come (Matt. 12:28). The threefold pattern can also be seen in Jesus's statement that he will send the promise of the Father upon the disciples (Luke 24:49). Peter's message at Pentecost also links all three: "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . . Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33, 38).

In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 Paul speaks of the conferring of special endowments upon believers within the body of Christ: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." In a soteriological context he says: "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, '*Abba*, Father'" (Gal. 4:6). Paul speaks of his own ministry in terms of "the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:15–16). And Paul relates the several steps in the process of salvation to the various persons of the Trinity: "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit" (2 Cor. 1:21–22). Similarly, Paul addresses the Thessalonians as "brothers and sisters loved by the Lord," and indicates that he always gives thanks for them because God chose them "as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). We might also mention here the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–19.

It is clear that Paul saw a very close relationship among the three persons. And so did the writers of other epistles. Peter begins his first letter by addressing his readers as the exiles of the dispersion "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to

be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood" (1 Pet. 1:2). Jude urges his readers: "By building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (vv. 20–21).

A more subtle indication of Paul's trinitarian view is the way in which he organizes some of his books. Thus the form as well as the content of his writings communicates his belief in the Trinity. Arthur Wainwright has developed this at some length.[575] He outlines Romans in part as follows:

The judgment of God upon all (1:18–3:20)
Justification through faith in Christ (3:21–8:1)
Life in the Spirit (8:2–30)

Part of Galatians follows a similar pattern:

Justification through faith in Christ (3:1–29)
Adoption into sonship through the redemption wrought by Christ and the sending of the Spirit (4:1–7)
The bondage of the law and the freedom given by Christ (4:8–5:15)
Life in the Spirit (5:16–6:10)

The same is true of 1 Corinthians. It is apparent that the Trinity was a very significant part of Paul's conception of the gospel and the Christian life.

The Fourth Gospel contains the strongest evidence of a coequal Trinity. The threefold formula appears again and again: 1:33–34; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13–15; 20:21–22 (cf. 1 John 4:2, 13–14). The interdynamics among the three persons comes through repeatedly.[576] The Son is sent by the Father (14:24) and comes forth from him (16:28). The Spirit is given by the Father (14:16), is sent from the Father (14:26), and proceeds from the Father (15:26). Yet the Son is closely involved in the coming of the Spirit: he prays for his coming (14:16); the Father sends the Spirit in the Son's name (14:26); the Son will send the Spirit from the Father (15:26); the Son must go away so that he can send the Spirit (16:7). The Spirit's ministry is understood as a continuation and elaboration of that of the Son. He will bring to remembrance what the Son has said (14:26); he will bear witness to the Son (15:26); he will declare what he hears from the Son, thus glorifying the Son (16:13–l4).

The prologue of the Gospel also contains material rich in significance for the doctrine of the Trinity. John says in the first verse of the book: "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ

λόγος—*ho logos ēn pros ton theon, kai theos ēn ho logos*). Here is an indication of the divinity of the Word; note how the difference in word order between the first and second clauses serves to accentuate "God" (or "divine"). Here also we find the idea that while the Son is distinct from the Father, yet there is fellowship between them, for the preposition πρός does not connote merely physical proximity to the Father, but an intimacy of fellowship as well.

This Gospel stresses the closeness and unity between the Father and the Son in other ways. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (10:30), and, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). He prays that his disciples may be one as he and the Father are one (17:21).

Our conclusion from the data we have just examined is this: Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not expressly asserted, Scripture, particularly the New Testament, contains so many suggestions of the deity and unity of the three persons that we can understand why the church formulated the doctrine, and conclude that they were right in so doing.

Historical Constructions

History reveals to us the extent to which persons, sometimes with some variations and sometimes in almost identical form, reexpress the earlier attempted solutions. This is the theological equivalent of reinventing the wheel. We may learn much about the doctrine by examining the contributions of those who have gone before.

As we have observed earlier, during the first two centuries AD there was relatively little conscious attempt to wrestle with the theological and philosophical issues of what we now term the doctrine of the Trinity. We find the use of the triadic formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but relatively little attempt to expound or explain it. Such thinkers as Justin and Tatian stressed the unity of essence between the Word and the Father and used the imagery of the impossibility of separating light from its source, the sun. In this way they illustrated that, while the Word and the Father are distinct, they are not divisible or separable.[577]

The "Economic" View of the Trinity

Hippolytus and Tertullian made little attempt to explore the eternal relations among the three; rather, they concentrated on the ways in which the Triad were manifested in creation and redemption. This is sometimes referred to as the

"economic" Trinity (how God appears in revelation), versus the "immanent" Trinity (how he is in himself). While creation and redemption showed the Son and the Spirit to be other than the Father, they were also regarded as inseparably one with him in his eternal being. Like the mental functions of a human being, God's reason, that is, the Word, was regarded as being immanently and indivisibly with him.

In Tertullian's view, there are three manifestations of the one God. Although they are numerically distinct, so that they can be counted, they are nonetheless manifestations of a single indivisible power. There is a distinction (*distinctio*) or distribution (*dispositio*), not a division or separation (*separatio*). As illustrations of the unity within the Godhead, Tertullian points to the unity between a root and its shoot, a source and its river, the sun and its light. The Father, Son, and Spirit are one identical substance, extended into three manifestations, but not divided.[578]

By way of a quick evaluation, we note that there is something of a vagueness about this view of the Trinity. Any effort to come up with a more exact understanding of just what it means will prove disappointing.

Dynamic Monarchianism

In the late second and third centuries, two attempts were made to formulate a precise definition of the relationship between Christ and God. Both views have been referred to as monarchianism (literally, "sole sovereignty"), since they stress the uniqueness and unity of God, but only the latter claimed the designation for itself. An examination of these two theologies will help us better understand the view on which orthodox Christianity finally settled.

The originator of dynamic monarchianism was a Byzantine leather merchant named Theodotus, who introduced it to Rome around AD 190. In many areas of doctrine, such as divine omnipotence, the creation of the world, and even the virgin birth of Jesus, Theodotus was fully orthodox. He maintained, however, that prior to baptism Jesus was an ordinary man, although a completely virtuous one. At Jesus's baptism, the Spirit, or Christ, descended on him, and from that time on he performed miraculous works of God. Some of Theodotus's followers maintained that Jesus actually became divine at this point or after the resurrection, but Theodotus himself denied this. Jesus was an ordinary man, inspired but not indwelt by the Spirit.[579]

A later representative of this type of teaching was Paul of Samosata, who propounded his views early in the second half of the third century and was condemned at the synod of Antioch in 268. He claimed that the Word (the

Logos) was not a personal, self-subsistent entity; that is, Jesus Christ was not the Word. Rather, the term refers to God's commandment and ordinance. God ordered and accomplished what he willed through the man Jesus. This is the meaning of "Logos." The common element between the views of Theodotus and Paul of Samosata is that God was dynamically present in the life of the man Jesus. There was a working or force of God on or in or through the man Jesus, but there was no real substantive presence of God within him. Dynamic monarchianism was never a widespread, popular movement. It had a rationalist appeal and tended to be a rather isolated phenomenon.[580]

Modalistic Monarchianism

By contrast, modalistic monarchianism was a more influential teaching. Whereas dynamic monarchianism seemed to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, modalism appeared to affirm it. Both varieties of monarchianism desired to preserve the doctrine of the unity of God. Modalism, however, was also strongly committed to the full deity of Jesus. Since the term "Father" was generally regarded as signifying the Godhead itself, any suggestion that the Word or Son was somehow other than the Father appeared to the modalists to be a case of bitheism.

Among the names associated with modalism are Noetus of Smyrna, who was active in the latter part of the second century; Praxeas (this may actually be a nickname meaning "busybody" for an unidentified churchman), whom Tertullian combated early in the third century;[581] and Sabellius, who early in the third century developed this doctrinal conception in its most complete and sophisticated form.

The essential idea of this school of thought is that there is one Godhead that may be variously designated as Father, Son, or Spirit. The terms do not stand for real distinctions, but are merely names that are appropriate and applicable at different times. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identical—they are successive revelations of the same person. The modalistic solution to the paradox of threeness and oneness was, then, not three persons, but one person with three different names, roles, or activities.[582]

Another basic idea expressed by modalism was that the Father suffered along with Christ, since he was actually present in and personally identical with the Son. This idea, labeled "patripassianism," was considered heretical and was one of the factors leading to the rejection of modalism. (A major reason for the repudiation of patripassianism may have been its conflict with the Greek

philosophical conception of impassibility, rather than with the biblical revelation.[583])

Modalistic monarchianism was a genuinely unique, original, and creative conception, and is in some ways a brilliant breakthrough. Both the unity of the Godhead and the deity of all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are preserved. Yet the church in assessing this theology deemed it lacking in some significant respects. In particular, the fact that the three occasionally appear simultaneously on the stage of biblical revelation proved to be a major stumbling block to this view. Some of the trinitarian texts noted earlier proved troublesome. The baptismal scene, where the Father speaks to the Son, and the Spirit descends on the Son, is an example, together with all those passages where Jesus speaks of the coming of the Spirit, or speaks of or to the Father. If modalism is accepted, Jesus's words and actions in these passages must be regarded as misleading. Consequently, the church, although some of its officials and even Popes Zephyrinus and Callistus I toyed with the ideas of modalism for a time, came eventually to reject it as insufficient to account for the full range of biblical data.

The Orthodox Formulation

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was enunciated in a series of debates and councils that were in large part prompted by the controversies sparked by such movements as monarchianism and Arianism. The Council of Constantinople (381) formulated a definitive statement in which the church made explicit the beliefs previously held implicitly. The view that prevailed was basically that of Athanasius (293–373), as elaborated and refined by the Cappadocian theologians —Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.

The formula that expresses the position of Constantinople is "one οὐσία (*ousia*) in three ὑποστάσεις (*hupostaseis*)." The emphasis often seems to be more on the latter part of the formula, that is, the separate existence of the three persons, rather than on the one indivisible Godhead. The one Godhead exists simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostases. The idea of "coinherence" or, as later termed, "perichoresis," of the persons is emphasized. The Godhead exists "undivided in divided persons." There is an "identity of nature" in the three hypostases. Basil says:

> For all things that are the Father's are beheld in the Son, and all things that are the Son's are the Father's; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the hypostasis of the Son becomes as it were form and face of the knowledge of the Father, and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the form of the Son, while the proper quality which is contemplated therein remains for the plain distinction of the hypostases.[584]

The Cappadocians attempted to expound the concepts of common substance and multiple separate persons by the analogy of a universal and its particulars—the individual persons of the Trinity are related to the divine substance in the same fashion as individual humans are related to the universal human (or humanity). Each of the individual hypostases is the ousia of the Godhead distinguished by the characteristics or properties peculiar to him, just as individual humans have unique characteristics that distinguish them from other individual human persons. These respective properties of the divine persons are, according to Basil, paternity, sonship, and sanctifying power or sanctification.[585]

It is clear that the orthodox formula protects the doctrine of the Trinity against the danger of modalism. Has it done so, however, at the expense of falling into the opposite error—tritheism? On the surface, the danger seems considerable. Two points were made, however, to safeguard the doctrine of the Trinity against tritheism.

First, it was noted that if we can find a single activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that is in no way different in any of the three persons, we must conclude that there is but one identical substance involved. And such unity was found in the divine activity of revelation. Revelation originates in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is completed in the Spirit. It is not three actions, but one action in which all three are involved.

Second, there was an insistence on the concreteness and indivisibility of the divine substance. Much criticism of the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity focused on the analogy of a universal manifesting itself in particulars. To avoid the conclusion that there is a multiplicity of Gods within the Godhead just as there is a multiplicity of humans within humanity, Gregory of Nyssa suggested that, strictly speaking, we ought not to talk about a multiplicity of humans, but a multiplicity of the one universal human being. Thus the Cappadocians continued to emphasize that, while the three members of the Trinity can be distinguished numerically as persons, they are indistinguishable and inseparable in their essence or substance or being.

It should be reiterated here that ousia is not abstract, but a concrete reality. Further, this divine essence is simple and indivisible. Following the Aristotelian doctrine that only what is material is quantitatively divisible, the Cappadocians at times virtually denied that the category of number can be applied to the Godhead at all. God is simple and incomposite. Thus, while each of the persons is one, they cannot be added together to make three entities.

Relative Authority of the Three Persons

One issue that has received considerable debate among evangelicals in the early twenty-first century is the relative authority of the three persons of the Trinity. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that the Father is the supreme member of the Trinity, and that the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally and inherently subordinate to him. This position, which I term the view of *gradational authority*, contends that in essence or being, what they *are*, the three persons are completely equal, thus rejecting the ontological subordination of Arius, who considered the Son a lesser god, or a created being. The persons differ, however, in the roles they play, and these roles are in turn based on differences of relationship among the three. With respect to authority, there are degrees, and this differentiation is eternal and inherent in the Trinity.

The gradationists offer several lines of argument in support of their position. There are a number of Scriptures that suggest that the Father is the one who exercises choice, such as predestination (Rom. 8:29); the Father sent the Son to the earth (John 3:16; 8:29); the Father is the giver of gifts (James 1:17); the Father sits on the throne and the Son is at his right hand (Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33). This authority and subordination not only was present in eternity past, but will also continue into eternity to come (1 Cor. 15:24–28). Further, the very names "Father" and "Son" indicate a differentiation of status, in which, just as in human relationships, the Father commands and the Son obeys.[586] Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that the Father is the "head" of the Son, meaning the authority over him. Gradationists also believe that the history of theology offers extensive support for the idea that this structure of command and obedience is present within the Trinity. Finally, although not identified as such by the gradationists, important philosophical principles require it. Without this differentiation of roles and thus of authority, there would be no basis of differentiating the persons from one another, and the very Trinity would collapse into simply person A, person A, and person A.[587] Some gradationists also contend that a correct understanding of these relationships implies a certain way of praying: to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Spirit.[588]

The other view, that of *equivalent authority*, agrees that there has been a functional subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Holy Spirit to both Father and Son, but contends that this was only temporary, for the purpose of accomplishing the special tasks that the Son took on during his earthly ministry, and that the Spirit fulfills in relationship to salvation. They argue for this position on the basis of texts like Philippians 2:5–11 and Hebrews 5:8, which assert that in becoming incarnate, Jesus gave up his equality with the Father and became obedient, or learned obedience. They also challenge the significance of the terms "Father" and "Son," contending that Sonship was used in Scripture to

denote likeness, not subordination, and note that these are not the only names used of the persons of the Trinity, and that the order in which they are listed is not invariable. The Greek word *kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11 should be rendered "source," rather than "authority over." Like the gradationists, the equivalentists claim that the history of the church supports their view of equal authority of the three.[589] Beyond that, they maintain that the gradationists' distinction between function and being cannot be maintained: if one is always and necessarily the authoritative over the other, then the difference must extend from function to being.[590]

It is likely that this discussion will continue. By way of differentiation, we may note first that while many early church theologians did hold to a subordination of the Son to the Father, this was almost invariably tied to a conception of eternal generation of the Son by the Father, a conception that most gradationists today reject as either meaningless or based on a misreading of the Greek *monogenēs* as meaning "only-begotten," rather than "one-and-only." It is also interesting to observe that many of the functions of the Father that the gradationists consider an indication of his superiority are also attributed to the Son and in some cases to the Holy Spirit as well. The Son chooses persons to salvation (John 5:21; Matt. 11:27) as well as service (John 6:70), and the Spirit chooses to whom to give which gifts (1 Cor. 12:11). Both the Father (John 14:16, 26) and the Son (John 15:26; 16:7) send the Holy Spirit. The judgment will take place at the judgment seat of the Son (2 Cor. 5:10) and the Father (Rom. 14:10). The love from which nothing can separate the believer is both that of the Son (Rom. 8:35) and of the Father (v. 39), and no one can pluck the believer out of the hand of Jesus (John 10:28) or the hand of the Father (v. 29). The believer is indwelt by the Spirit (John 14:27), the Son (2 Cor. 13:5), and possibly even the Father (John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16). Both the Son and the Father give life (John 5:21), as does the Spirit (John 6:63).

Thus the position advocated by both Augustine[591] and Calvin[592] seems the most helpful: the actions of any one of the persons of the Trinity are actually actions in which all three persons participate. This would mean that the will of the Father that the Son came to do was actually the will of the three persons, and that the Son participated in the decision that he should be the one to come.

In addition to the biblical and historical considerations, enough difficulties attend the gradational view to render it less adequate than the equivalent authority view. One is the practical problem of prayer. The reality is that there are prayers in the New Testament directed to the Son (Acts 7:59–60; 2 Cor. 1:28–29; Rev. 22:20). These appear to be genuine prayers, and God did not disapprove of them in any way. If prayer to the Father alone is indeed implied by

the gradationist view, then, by implication, the legitimacy of these prayers implies the falsehood of the gradationist view. While some gradationists do not so restrict prayer, they may be inconsistent, because if the Son came the first time in obedience to the Father's exclusive will, then it seems inconsistent to pray to the Son to come a second time.

More serious is the philosophical problem of the distinction between equal essence and unequal roles. If the Father's authority over the Son and Spirit and the Son's and Spirit's subordination to the Father is a part of the very structure of the Trinity, so that it could not be otherwise, then this superiority and subordination are not contingent, but necessary, characteristics of each of the persons. That means that they are not accidental but essential qualities, and the essence of the Son is different from and inferior to that of the Father. In other words, invariable and inevitable differences in authority imply ontological, as well as functional, subordination. The danger is that later generations of evangelicals will draw the logical conclusions and move to some variety of Arianism. It seems best, therefore, both on rational and on practical grounds, to maintain the eternal equal authority of the three persons.[593]

Essential Elements of a Doctrine of the Trinity

Before attempting a contemporary construction of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is important to pause to note the salient elements that must be included.

1. The unity of God is basic. Monotheism is deeply implanted within the Hebrew-Christian tradition. God is one, not several. The unity of God may be compared to the unity of husband and wife, but we must keep in mind that we are dealing with one God, not a joining of separate entities.

2. The deity of each of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, must be affirmed. Each is qualitatively the same. The Son is divine in the same way and to the same extent as is the Father, and this is true of the Holy Spirit as well.

3. The threeness and the oneness of God are not in the same respect. Although the orthodox interpretation of the Trinity seems contradictory (God is one and yet three), the contradiction is not real, but only apparent. A contradiction exists if something is A and not A at the same time and in the same respect. Unlike modalism, orthodoxy insists that God is three persons at every moment of time. Maintaining his unity as well, orthodoxy deals with the problem by suggesting that the way in which God is three is in some respect different from the way in which he is one. The fourth-century thinkers spoke of one ousia and three hypostases. The problem is determining what these two terms mean, or, more

broadly, what the difference is between the nature or locus of God's oneness and that of his threeness.

4. The Trinity is eternal. There have always been three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all of them have always been divine. None of them came into being at some point in time, or at some point became divine. There has never been any alteration in the nature of the Triune God. He is and will be what he has always been.

5. The function of one member of the Trinity may for a time be subordinate to one or both of the other members, but that does not mean he is in any way inferior in essence. Each of the three persons of the Trinity has had, for a period of time, a particular function unique to himself. This is to be understood as a temporary role for the purpose of accomplishing a given end, not a change in status or essence. In human experience, there is functional subordination as well. Several equals in a business or enterprise may choose one of their number to serve as the captain of a task force or the chairperson of a committee for a given time, but without any change in rank. The same is true in military circles. In the days of multimember aircraft crews, although the pilot was the ranking officer on the ship, the bombardier, a lower-ranking officer, controlled the plane during the bombing run. In like fashion, the Son did not become less than the Father during his earthly incarnation, but he did subordinate himself functionally to the Father's will. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is now subordinated to the ministry of the Son (see John 14–16) as well as to the will of the Father, but this does not imply that he is less than they are.

6. In the final analysis, the Trinity is incomprehensible. We cannot fully understand its mystery. When someday we see God, we shall see him as he is, and understand him better than we do now. Yet even then we will not totally comprehend him. Because he is the unlimited God and we are limited in our capacity to know and understand, he will always exceed our knowledge and understanding. We will always be human beings, even though perfected human beings. We will never become God. Those aspects of God that we will never fully comprehend should be regarded as mysteries exceeding our reason rather than as paradoxes that conflict with reason.

The Search for Analogies

The problem in constructing a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity is not merely to understand the terminology. That is in itself hard enough; for example, it is difficult to know what "person" means in this context. More difficult yet is

to understand the interrelationships among the members of the Trinity. The human mind seeks analogies that will help in this effort.

On a popular level, analogies drawn from physical nature have often been utilized. A widely used analogy, for example, is the egg: it consists of yolk, white, and shell, all of which together form one whole egg. Another favorite analogy is water. It can be found in solid, liquid, and vaporous forms. At times other material objects have been used as illustrations. One pastor, in instructing young catechumens, attempted to clarify the threeness yet oneness by posing the question, "Is (or are) trousers singular or plural?" His answer was that trousers is singular at the top, and they are plural at the bottom.

Most analogies drawn from the physical realm tend to be either tritheistic or modalistic in their implications. The analogies involving the egg and the trousers seem to suggest that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are separate parts of the divine nature. The analogy involving the various forms of water has modalistic overtones, since ice, liquid water, and steam are modes of existence. A given quantity of water does not simultaneously exist in all three states.

In recent years, some theologians, drawing on the insights of analytical philosophy, have intentionally utilized grammatical "category transgressions" or "logically odd qualifiers" to point out the tension between the oneness and the threeness. Examples of their attempts at clarification are statements like "God are one" and "they is three." Yet these odd sentences serve better to state the issue than to clarify it.

One of the most creative minds in the history of Christian theology was Augustine. In *De Trinitate*, possibly his greatest work, he turned his prodigious intellect to the problem of the nature of the Trinity. He reflected on this doctrine throughout his entire Christian life and wrote his treatise on the subject over a twenty-year period (399–419). In keeping with the Western or Latin tradition, his view emphasizes the unity of God more than the threeness. The three members of the Trinity are not separate individuals in the way in which three members of the human race are separate individuals. Each member of the Trinity is in his essence identical with the others or with the divine substance itself. They are distinguished in terms of their relations within the Godhead.

Augustine utilizes analogies drawn from the realm of human personality. He argues that since the human is made in the image of the triune God, it is therefore reasonable to expect to find, through an analysis of human nature, a reflection, however faint, of God's triunity. Beginning with the biblical statement that God is love, Augustine notes there are three necessary elements in love: the lover, the object loved, and the love that unites them, or at least tends to do so.[594] While this analogy has received a great deal of attention, it is for Augustine

merely a starting point, a stepping-stone to a more significant analogy based on the inner person and, in particular, on the mind's activity in relationship to itself or to God. Already in the *Confessions*, we see the analogy based on the inner person in the triad of being, knowing, and willing.[595] In *De Trinitate* the analogy based on the mind's activity is presented in three stages or three trinities: (1) the mind, its knowledge of itself, and its love of itself;[596] (2) memory, understanding, and the will;[597] (3) the mind remembering God, knowing God, and loving God.[598] While all of these stages of the analogy give us insight into the mutual relations among the persons of the Trinity, Augustine feels that the last of the three is the most helpful, reasoning that when we consciously focus upon God, we most fully bear the image of our Maker.

In practice even orthodox Christians have difficulty clinging simultaneously to the several components of the doctrine. Our use of these several analogies suggests that perhaps in practice we tend to alternate between tendencies toward tritheism, a belief in three equal, closely related Gods, and modalism, a belief in one God who plays three different roles or reveals himself in three different fashions.

Augustine's suggestion that analogies can be drawn between the Trinity and the realm of human personality is a helpful one. In seeking for thought forms or for a conceptual basis on which to develop a doctrine of the Trinity, we have found the realm of individual and social relationships to be a more fruitful source than is the realm of physical objects. This is true for two reasons. The first is that God himself is spirit; the social and personal domain is, then, closer to God's basic nature than is the realm of material objects. The second is that there is greater interest today in human and social subjects than in the physical universe. Accordingly, we will examine two analogies drawn from the realm of human relationships.

The first analogy is from the realm of individual human psychology. As a self-conscious person, I may engage in internal dialogue with myself. I may take different positions and interact with myself. I may even engage in a debate with myself. Furthermore, I am a complex human person with multiple roles and responsibilities in dynamic interplay with one another. As I consider what I should do in a given situation, the husband, the father, the theologian, and the United States citizen that together constitute me may mutually inform one another.

One problem with this analogy is that in human experience it is most clearly seen in situations where there is tension or competition, rather than harmony, between the individual's various positions and roles. The discipline of abnormal psychology affords us extreme examples of virtual warfare between the

constituent elements of the human personality. But in God, by contrast, there are always perfect harmony, communication, and love.

The other analogy is from the sphere of interpersonal human relations. Take the case of identical twins. In one sense, they are of the same essence, for their genetic makeup is identical. An organ transplant from one to the other can be accomplished with relative ease, for the recipient's body will not reject the donor's organ as foreign; it will accept it as its very own. Identical twins are very close in other ways as well. They have similar interests and tastes. Although they have different spouses and different employers, a close bond unites them. And yet they are not the same person. They are two, not one.

One idea in the history of the doctrine, the conception of "perichoresis," is especially helpful. This is the teaching that the life of each of the persons flows through each of the others, so each sustains each of the others and each has direct access to the consciousness of the others. Thus, the human organism serves as a good illustration of the Triune God. For example, the brain, heart, and lungs of a given individual all sustain and supply each other, and each is dependent on the other. Conjoined twins, sharing one heart and liver, also illustrate this intercommunion. These, however, like all analogies, fall short of full explication of the Trinity. We will need to use several, some of which emphasize the oneness and others the threeness.

Although we cannot fully see how these two contrasting conceptions relate to each other, theologians are not the only ones who must retain two polarities as they function. In order to account for the phenomena of light, physicists have to hold both that it is waves and that it is quanta, little bundles of energy as it were; yet logically it cannot be both. As one physicist put it: "On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we think of light as waves; on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, we think of it as particles of energy." Presumably, on Sundays physicists do not concern themselves with the nature of light. One cannot explain a mystery, but can only acknowledge its presence.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a crucial ingredient of our faith. Each of the three persons is to be worshiped, as is the Triune God. And, keeping in mind their distinctive work, it is appropriate to direct prayers of thanks and petition to each of the members of the Trinity, as well as to all of them collectively. Furthermore, the perfect love and unity within the Godhead model for us the oneness and affection that should characterize relationships within the body of Christ.

It appears that Tertullian was right in affirming that the doctrine of the Trinity must be divinely revealed, not humanly constructed. It is so absurd from a

human standpoint that no one would have invented it. We do not hold the doctrine of the Trinity because it is self-evident or logically cogent. We hold it because God has revealed that this is what he is like. As someone has said of this doctrine:

> Try to explain it, and you'll lose your mind;
> But try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul.

PART 4
WHAT GOD DOES

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15
God's Plan

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the key terminology in God's plan and how to define these terms.
2. Explain the biblical teaching about God's plan from both the Old and New Testaments.
3. Identify and describe some general characteristics of God's plan.
4. Develop a logical priority for God's plan or human action by examining the historical views of Calvinism and Arminianism.
5. Describe a moderately Calvinistic model of God's plan and tell why it is more biblically based than an Arminian view.
6. Identify and evaluate several views of history, to tell where history is going and what dynamic is moving it.
7. Inspire in others confidence in God's work in history and its effect on all those who believe in Christ.

Chapter Summary

God has a definite plan for history. This is supported in both the Old and New Testaments. A distinction needs to be made between the term "foreordain," which is the broader term, and the term "predestinate," which is the narrower term having to do with election or reprobation or

both. There are at least nine conclusions that may be drawn from the biblical references to God's plan. Calvinism and Arminianism pose different solutions to the problem of whether God's plan or human action is logically prior. From our analysis, we conclude that a moderately Calvinist position is the most biblically based. Finally, there are a variety of views of history, but the biblical view posits that God is guiding history to his goal and that we can have assurance that if we align ourselves with his purpose, we will be moving to an assured outcome of history.

Study Questions

- What is the difference between the plan of God and the decrees of God?
- How would you explain the terms "foreordain" and "predestinate"?
- What can be learned from both the Old and New Testament teachings about the plan of God?
- What are the general characteristics of God's plan?
- What is the argument of Gottfried von Leibniz concerning God's involvement in human decisions, and how does it affect the conception of God?
- What is the difference between external compulsion and internal compulsion, and how do they relate to the way in which God exercises sovereignty?

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Where is history going, and why? What, if anything, is causing the pattern of history to develop as it is? These questions confront us as thinking persons and crucially affect our way of life. Christianity's answer is that God has a plan that includes everything that occurs, and that he is now at work carrying out that plan.

Key Definitions

We sometimes refer to the plan of God as the decrees of God. There are several reasons, however, why we will use the term "plan" rather than "decrees." First, "plan" stresses the unity of God's intention together with the resultant consistency and coherence of his actions. Second, it emphasizes what God does, that is, what he wills, rather than what humans must do or what happens to us as a consequence of God's will. Third, it emphasizes the intelligent dimension of God's decisions. They are not arbitrary or haphazard.

We may define the plan of God as his eternal decision rendering certain all things that will come to pass. An analogy, although necessarily insufficient, may help us understand this concept. The plan of God is like the architect's plans, first drawn mentally and then on paper according to an intention and design, and only afterward executed in an actual structure.

It is necessary at this point to clarify certain terminology. Many theologians use the terms "predestinate" and "foreordain" virtually synonymously. For our purposes, however, we shall use them somewhat differently. "Predestinate" carries a somewhat narrower connotation than does "foreordain." Since it literally suggests the destiny of someone or something, it is best used of God's plan as it relates in particular to the eternal condition of moral agents. We will use the term "foreordain" in a broader sense, to refer to God's decisions with respect to any matters within the realm of cosmic history. "Predestination" will be reserved for the matter of eternal salvation or condemnation. Within predestination, "election" will be used of God's positive choice of individuals, nations, or groups to eternal life and fellowship with him. "Election" will refer to positive predestination, while "reprobation" will refer to negative predestination or God's choice of some to suffer eternal damnation or lostness. Thus

foreordination is here used with a broader range of meaning than predestination. In this I am adopting basically the usage of Louis Berkhof,[599] as over against that of B. B. Warfield, who said, "'Foreordain' and 'predestinate' are exact synonyms, the choice between which can be determined only by taste."[600]

The Biblical Teaching

The Terminology

The Bible contains a rich set of teachings regarding the divine plan. Several terms in both Hebrew and Greek are used to refer to God's design. יָצַר (*yatsar*), which is probably the most explicit of the Hebrew terms, appears in Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 22:11; 37:26; and 46:11. It carries the idea of purpose and prior determination. Another common Hebrew term, יָעַץ (*ya'ats*), is used by Isaiah several times (14:24, 26, 27; 19:12, 17; 23:9) and by Jeremiah (49:20; 50:45). Its substantive derivative, עֵצָה (*'etsah*), is both common and precise (Job 38:2; 42:3; Pss. 33:11; 106:13; 107:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 5:19; 14:26; 19:17; 46:10, 11; Jer. 32:19; 49:20; 50:45; Mic. 4:12). עֵצָה frequently occurs together with מַחֲשָׁבָה (*machashabah*) (Jer. 50:45; Mic. 4:12—for independent occurrences of the latter term, see Ps. 92:5 [6]; Isa. 55:8; Jer. 29:11; 51:29), which is derived from the verb חָשַׁב (*chashab*) (Gen. 50:20; Jer. 18:11; 26:3; 29:11; 36:3; 49:20; 50:45; Lam. 2:8; Mic. 2:3). There are several other less frequent terms, and some that refer to particular decrees regarding salvation and fellowship with God.

In the New Testament, the most explicit term used with reference to God's plan is προορίζω (*proorizō*) (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11). Similar words are προτάσσω (*protassō*) (Acts 17:26), προτίθημι (*protithēmi*) (Eph. 1:9) and its substantive πρόθεσις (*prothesis*) (Rom. 8:28; 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9), and προετοιμάζω (*proetoimazō*) (Rom. 9:23; Eph. 2:10). Other terms stressing advance knowledge of one sort or another are προβλέπω (*problepō*), προοράω (*prooraō*) (προεῖδον—*proeidon*), προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*), and its substantive πρόγνωσις (*prognōsis*). The idea of appointing is found in προχειρίζω (*procheirizō*) and προχειροτονέω (*procheirotoneō*), as well as sometimes in the simple ὁρίζω (*horizō*) (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 17:26, 31; Heb. 4:7). The idea of willing and wishing is conveyed by βουλή (*boulē*), βούλημα (*boulēma*), βούλομαι (*boulomai*), θέλημα (*thelēma*), θέλησις (*thelēsis*), and θέλω (*thelō*), while the good pleasure of the Father is designated by εὐδοκία (*eudokia*) and εὐδοκέω (*eudokeō*).

The Old Testament Teaching

In the Old Testament presentation, God's planning and ordaining work is very much tied up with the covenant that the Lord made with his people. As we read about all that God did in choosing and taking personal care of his people, two truths about him stand out. On one hand, God is supremely powerful, the creator and sustainer of all that is. On the other hand is the loving, caring, personal nature of the Lord. He is not mere abstract power, but is a loving person.[601]

For the Old Testament writers, it was virtually inconceivable that anything could happen independently of God's will and working. As evidence of this, consider that common impersonal expressions like "it rained" are not found in the Old Testament. For the Hebrews, rain did not simply happen; God sent the rain. They saw him as the all-powerful determiner of everything that occurs. What is happening now was planned long ago. God himself comments, for example, concerning the destruction wreaked by the king of Assyria: "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone" (Isa. 37:26). Even something as seemingly trivial as the building of reservoirs is described as having been planned long before (Isa. 22:11). There is a sense that every day has been designed and ordered by the Lord. Thus the psalmist writes, "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:16). A similar thought is expressed by Job (14:5). There is in God's plan a concern for the welfare of the nation of Israel, and of every one of God's children (Pss. 27:10–11; 37; 65:3; 91; 121; 139:16; Dan. 12:1; Jon. 4:11). We find in Psalms 91 and 121 a confidence in God's goodness, provision, and protection that in many ways reminds us of Jesus's teaching about the birds and the flowers (Matt. 6:25–29).

The Old Testament also enunciates belief that God will most assuredly bring to actual occurrence everything in his plan. Isaiah 46:10–11 puts it this way: "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do." Similar statements are found in Isaiah 14:24–27: "For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" (v. 27; cf. Job 42:2; Jer. 23:20; Zech. 1:6).

Particularly in the wisdom literature and the prophets, the idea of an all-inclusive divine purpose is most prominent.[602] "The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Prov. 16:4; cf. 3:19–

20; Job 38, especially v. 4; Isa. 40:12; Jer. 10:12–13). Even what is ordinarily thought of as an occurrence of chance, such as the casting of lots, is represented as the Lord's doing (Prov. 16:33). Nothing can deter or frustrate the accomplishment of his purpose. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails" (cf. 21:30–31; Jer. 10:23–24). We humans, like Job, may not always understand as God works out his purpose in our lives: "'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:3).

Thus, in the view of the Old Testament believer, God had created the world, and he was directing history, which was the unfolding of a plan prepared in eternity and related to his intention of fellowship with his people. Creation in its vast extent and the details of individual lives were included in this plan and would surely come to pass as God designed. As a result, the prophets could speak of coming events with certainty.

The New Testament Teaching

God's plan and purpose are also prominent in the New Testament. Jesus saw the events of his life and events in the future as necessarily coming to pass because of God's plan. Jesus affirmed that God had planned not only the large, complex events, such as the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20–22), but details as well, such as the apostasy of and betrayal by Judas, and the faithfulness of the remaining disciples (Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22; John 17:12; 18:9). The fulfillment of God's plan and Old Testament prophecy is a prominent theme in the writing of Matthew (1:22; 2:15, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56) and of John (12:38; 19:24, 28, 36). While critics may object that some of these prophecies were fulfilled by people who knew about them and may have had a vested interest in seeing them fulfilled (e.g., Jesus fulfilled Ps. 69:21 by saying, "I am thirsty" [John 19:28]), it is notable that other prophecies were fulfilled by persons who had no desire to fulfill them and probably had no knowledge of them, such as the Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus's garment or not breaking any of his bones.[603]

Even where there was no specific prophecy to be fulfilled, Jesus conveyed a sense of necessity (δεῖ—*dei*) concerning future events. For example, he said to his disciples, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. . . . And the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:7, 10). He also had a profound sense of necessity concerning what he must do; the Father's plan needed to be completed.

Thus, he said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43), and “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14–15). He had this consciousness already at the age of twelve, for when his worried parents found him in the temple, he responded, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (literally, “in the things of my Father”—Luke 2:49).

The apostles also emphasized the divine purpose. Peter said in his speech at Pentecost, “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23). After Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin, the disciples lifted their voices to God, noting that Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, had been gathered in Jerusalem. “They did [against Jesus] what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:28). Peter also pointed out that various events that had occurred were fulfillments of the predictions of Scripture—the apostasy of Judas (Acts 1:16), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:16–21), and the resurrection of Jesus (2:24–28). The book of Revelation, written by the apostle John, gives us a particularly striking example of belief in the efficacy of the divine plan.

It is in Paul’s writings that the divine plan, according to which everything comes to pass, is made most explicit (1 Cor. 12:18; 15:38; Col. 1:19). The very fortunes of nations are determined by him (Acts 17:26). This includes God’s redemptive work (Gal. 3:8; 4:4–5), the choice of individuals and nations (Rom. 9–11), and Paul’s selection even before his birth (Gal. 1:15). The image of the potter and the clay, used in a specific and somewhat narrow reference (Rom. 9:20–23), expresses Paul’s whole philosophy of history. He regards “everything” that happens as part of God’s intention for his children (Eph. 1:11–12), so that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28), his purpose being that we might be “conformed to the image of his Son” (v. 29).

The Nature of the Divine Plan

We now need to draw together from these numerous and varied biblical references some general characteristics of God’s plan, enabling us to understand more completely what we can expect from God.

1. God's plan is from all eternity. We have noted that the psalmist spoke of God's having planned all of our days before there were any of them (Ps. 139:16), and that Isaiah spoke of God's having "planned it long ago" (22:11). Paul in Ephesians indicates that God "chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world" (1:4), and later in the same letter Paul speaks of "his [God's] eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:11). The apostle also writes to Timothy that God has "saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9). These decisions are not made as history unfolds and events occur. God manifests his purpose within history (2 Tim. 1:10), but the decisions have always been God's plan, from all eternity, from before the beginning of time.

Being eternal, God's plan does not have any chronological sequence. This is one reason for referring to the plan of God rather than the decrees. There is no before and after within eternity. There is, of course, a logical sequence (e.g., the decision to let Jesus die on the cross logically follows the decision to send him to the earth), and there is a temporal sequence in the enacting of the events that have been decreed; but there is no temporal sequence to God's willing. It is one coherent, simultaneous decision.

2. God's plan and the decisions contained therein are free on God's part. This is implied in expressions like "the good pleasure of his will" (εὐδοκία—*eudokia*, e.g., Eph. 1:5). It is also implicit in the fact that no one has advised him (for that matter, there is no one who *could* advise him). Isaiah 40:13–14 says, "Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD, or instruct the LORD as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?" Paul quotes this very passage as he concludes his great statement on the sovereignty and inscrutability of God's workings (Rom. 11:34). After adding a word from Job 35:7 to the effect that God is indebted to no one, he closes with, "For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:36). Paul also quotes Isaiah 40:13 in 1 Corinthians. After speaking of the wisdom of God as having been decreed before the ages (1 Cor. 2:7), he asks, "For 'who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?'" (v. 16). That humans have had no input into what God has planned might at first seem to be something of a disadvantage. But on reflection we see that it is instead a source of comfort. For being without human input, God's plan is not subject to the incompleteness of knowledge and the errors of judgment so characteristic of human plans.

Not only do God's decisions not stem from any sort of external determination; they are not a matter of internal compulsion either. That is to say, although God's decisions and actions are quite consistent with his nature, they are not constrained by his nature. He is not like the gods of pantheism, which are virtually determined by their own nature to will what they will and do what they do. God did not have to create. He had to act in a loving and holy fashion in whatever he did, but he was not required to create. He freely chose to create, for reasons not known to us. While his love requires him to act lovingly toward any creatures he might bring into existence, it did not require that he create in order to have objects to love. There had been eternally an expression of love among the several members of the Trinity (see, e.g., John 17:24).

3. In the ultimate sense, the purpose of God's plan is his glory. This is the highest of all values, and the one great motivating factor in all that God has chosen and done. Paul indicates that "in him all things were created: . . . through him [Christ] and for him" (Col. 1:16). God chose us in Christ and destined us "in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5–6). The twenty-four elders in Revelation who fall down and worship the Lord God Almighty sing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). What God does, he does for his own name's sake (Isa. 48:11; Ezek. 20:9). The purpose of the whole plan of salvation is the glory of God through the good works God has prepared for his people to do (Eph. 2:8–10). Jesus said that his followers were to let their lights so shine that fellow humans would see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16; cf. John 15:8). We have been appointed to live for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:12). We have been sealed with the Spirit to the praise of his glory (vv. 13–14).

This is not to say that there are no secondary motivations behind God's plan and resultant actions. He has provided the means of salvation in order to fulfill his love for the human race and his concern for their welfare. This, however, is not an ultimate end, but only a means to the greater end, God's own glory. We must bear in mind that God is truly the Lord. We exist for his sake, for his glory and pleasure, rather than he for ours.

4. God's plan is all-inclusive. This is implicit in the great variety of items mentioned in the Bible as parts of God's plan. Beyond that, however, are explicit statements of the extent of God's plan. Paul speaks of God as the one who "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). The psalmist says that "all things serve you" (Ps. 119:91). While all ends are part of God's plan, all means are as well. Thus the comprehensiveness of the divine

decisions goes beyond what we might expect. No division of sacred and secular areas of life exists from God's standpoint. No areas fall outside the purview of his concern and decision.

5. God's plan is efficacious. What he has purposed from eternity will surely come to pass. The Lord says, "'Surely, as I have planned, so will it be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen.' . . . For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" (Isa. 14:24, 27). He will not change his mind, nor will he discover previously unknown considerations that will cause him to alter his intentions. "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please," says the Lord in Isaiah 46:10. Because the counsel of the Lord is from all eternity and is perfect, it will never fade nor be replaced; it endures forever: "But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Ps. 33:11).

6. God's plan relates to his actions rather than his nature, his decisions regarding what he shall do, not his personal attributes. God does not decide to be loving and powerful, for example. He is loving and powerful simply by virtue of being God.[604]

7. God's plan relates primarily to what God himself does in terms of creating, preserving, directing, and redeeming. It also involves human willing and acting, but only secondarily, that is, as means to the ends he purposes, or as results of actions that he takes. Note that God's role here is to decide that certain things will take place in our lives, not to lay down commands to act in a certain way. To be sure, what God has decided will come to pass does involve an element of necessity. The particulars of God's plan, however, should be thought of less as imperatives than as descriptions of what will occur. The plan of God does not force humans to act in particular ways, but renders it certain that they will *freely* act in those ways.

8. Thus, while God's plan relates primarily to what he does, the actions of humans are also included. Jesus noted, for example, that the responses of individuals to his message were a result of the Father's decision: "All that the Father gives me will come to me. . . . No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them" (John 6:37, 44; cf. 17:2, 6, 9). Luke said in Acts 13:48 that "all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

God's plan includes what we ordinarily call good acts. Cyrus, who did not personally know or acknowledge Jehovah, was foreordained to help fulfill God's purpose of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (Isa. 44:28). Paul says that we believers "are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). On the other hand, the evil actions of humans, contrary to God's law and moral intentions, are also seen in

Scripture as part of God's plan, foreordained by him. The betrayal, conviction, and crucifixion of Jesus are a prominent instance of this (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28).

9. God's plan is unchangeable in terms of its specifics. Here we wish to emphasize that God does not change his mind or alter his decisions regarding specific determinations. This may seem strange in light of the seeming alteration of his intentions with regard to Nineveh (Jonah), and his apparent repentance for having made humankind (Gen. 6:6). The statement in Genesis 6, however, should be regarded as an anthropomorphism or an anthropopathism, and Jonah's announcement of impending destruction should be viewed as a warning used to effect God's actual plan for Nineveh. We must keep in mind here that constancy is one of the attributes of God's greatness (pp. 249–53).

Logical Priority: God's Plan or Human Action?

We must now consider whether God's plan or human action is logically prior. While Calvinists and Arminians are agreed that human actions are included in God's plan, they disagree as to which is cause and which is result. Do people do what they do because God has decided that this is exactly how they are going to act, or does God first foresee what they will do and then on that basis make his decision regarding what is going to happen?

1. Calvinists believe that God's plan is logically prior and that human decisions and actions are a consequence. With respect to the particular matter of the acceptance or rejection of salvation, God in his plan has chosen that some shall believe and thus receive the offer of eternal life. He foreknows what will happen because he has decided what is to happen. This is true with respect to all other human decisions and actions as well. God is not dependent on what humans decide. It is not the case, then, that God determines that what humans will do will come to pass, nor does he choose to eternal life those who he foresees will believe. Rather, God's decision has rendered it certain that every individual will act in a particular way.[605]

2. Arminians, on the other hand, place a stronger emphasis on human freedom. God allows and expects humans to exercise the will they have been given. If this were not so, we would not find the biblical invitations to choose God, the "whosoever will" passages, such as "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The very offering of such invitations implies that the hearer has the genuine possibility of either accepting or rejecting them. This, however, seems inconsistent with the position

that God's decisions have rendered the future certain. If they had, there would be no point in issuing invitations to humans, for God's decisions as to what would happen would come to pass regardless of what humans do. The Arminians therefore look for some other way of regarding the decisions of God.

The key lies in understanding the role of God's foreknowledge in the formation and execution of the divine plan. In Romans 8:29 Paul says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined." From this verse the Arminian draws the conclusion that God's choice or determination of each individual's destiny is a result of foreknowledge. Thus, those whom God foreknew would believe are those he decided would be saved. A similar statement can be made of all human actions, and of all other aspects of life for that matter. God knows what all of us are going to do. He therefore wills what he foresees will happen.[606] Note that human action and its effects are not a result of God's decision. The human action is logically prior. On this basis, the concept of human freedom is preserved. Every individual has genuine options. It is humans who render their actions certain; God simply acquiesces. One might therefore say that in the Arminian view, this aspect of God's plan is conditional on human decision; in the Calvinistic view, on the other hand, God's plan is unconditional.

A Moderately Calvinistic Model

Despite difficulties in relating divine sovereignty to human freedom, we nonetheless come to the conclusion on biblical grounds that the plan of God is unconditional rather than conditional on human choice. There simply is nothing in the Bible to suggest that God chooses humans because of what they are going to do on their own. The Arminian concept of foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις—*prognōsis*), appealing though it is, is not borne out by Scripture. The word means more than simply having advance knowledge or precognition of what is to come. It appears to have in its background the Hebrew concept of יָדַע (*yada'*), which often meant more than simple awareness. It suggested a kind of intimate knowledge—it was even used of sexual intercourse.[607] When Paul says that God foreknew the people of Israel, he is not referring merely to an advance knowledge that God had. Indeed, it is clear that God's choice of Israel was not on the basis of advance knowledge of a favorable response on their part. Had God anticipated such a response, he would certainly have been wrong. Note that in Romans 11:2 Paul says, "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew" and that a discussion of the faithlessness of Israel follows. Certainly in this passage foreknowledge must mean something more than advance knowledge. In

Acts 2:23, foreknowledge is linked with the will (βουλῇ—*boulē*) of God. Moreover, in 1 Peter 1 we read that the elect are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God (v. 2) and that Christ was foreknown from before the foundation of the world (v. 20). To suggest that foreknowledge here means nothing more than previous knowledge or acquaintance is to virtually deprive these verses of any real meaning. We must conclude that foreknowledge as used in Romans 8:29 carries with it the idea of favorable disposition or selection as well as advance knowledge.

Furthermore, there are passages where the unconditional nature of God's selecting plan is made quite explicit. This is seen in Paul's statement regarding the choice of Jacob over Esau: "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls [ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος—*ek tou kalountos*]—she [Rebecca] was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11–13). Paul seems to be taking great pains to emphasize the unmerited or unconditional nature of God's choice of Jacob. Later in the same chapter Paul comments, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (v. 18). The import of the subsequent image of the potter and the clay is very difficult to escape (vv. 20–24). Similarly, Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16). Because of these and similar considerations, we must conclude that the plan of God is unconditional rather than conditional on foreseen human actions.

At this point we must raise the question of whether God can create genuinely free beings and yet render certain all things that are to come to pass, including the free decisions and actions of those beings.[608] One means of alleviating the tension is the distinction between rendering something certain and rendering it necessary. The former is a matter of God's decision that something *will* happen; the latter is a matter of his decreeing that it *must* happen. In the former case, the human being will not act in a way contrary to the course of action God has chosen; in the latter case, the human being cannot act in a way contrary to what God has chosen. What we are saying is that God renders it certain that a person who could act (or could have acted) differently does in fact act in a particular way (the way that God wills).[609]

What does it mean to say that I am free? It means that I am not under constraint. Thus, I am free to do whatever I please to do. But am I free with respect to what pleases me and what does not? To put it differently, I may choose one action over another because it holds more appeal for me. But I may not be

fully in control of the appeal each of those actions holds for me. That is quite a different matter. I make all my decisions, but those decisions are in large measure influenced by certain characteristics of mine that I am not capable of altering by my own choice. If, for example, I am offered for dinner a choice between liver and *any* other entree, I am quite free to take the liver but I do not desire to do so. I have no conscious control over my dislike of liver. That is a given that goes with my being the person I am. In that respect my freedom is limited. I do not know whether my genes or environmental conditioning has caused my dislike of liver, but it is apparent that I cannot by mere force of will alter this characteristic of mine. Am I free to do as I wish? Yes, most certainly. Am I free to wish as I wish, however? That is a rather different question.

There are, then, limitations on who I am and what I desire and will. I certainly did not choose the genes that I have; I did not select my parents or the exact geographical location and cultural setting of my birth. My freedom, therefore, is within these limitations. And here arises the question: "Who set up these factors?" The theistic answer is, "God did."

I am free to choose among various options. But my choice will be influenced by who I am. Therefore, my freedom must be understood as my ability to choose among options in light of who I am. And who I am is a result of God's decision and activity. God is in control of all the circumstances that bear on my situation in life. He may bring to bear (or permit to be brought to bear) factors that will make a particular option appealing, even powerfully appealing, to me. Through all the factors that have come into my experience in time past, he has influenced the type of person I now am. Indeed, he has affected what has come to pass by willing that it was I who was brought into being.

Whenever a child is conceived, there are an infinite number of possibilities. A countless variety of genetic combinations may emerge out of the union of sperm and ovum. We do not know why a particular combination actually results. But now, for the sake of argument, let us consider the possibility of a hypothetical individual whose genetic combination differs infinitesimally from my own. He is identical to me in every respect; in every situation of life he responds as I do. In a crucial situation, however, he would respond to a particular stimulus in a different way than I do. The world that God chooses to bring into being is one in which it is I, not my counterpart, who exists.

This is in many ways similar to the argument of Gottfried von Leibniz in his *Theodicy*.[610] God knows all of the infinite possibilities. He chooses which of these he will actualize. And by meticulously selecting the very individuals he brings into existence, individuals who will respond to specific stimuli exactly as he intends, and by making sure these specific factors are present, he renders

certain the free decisions and actions of those individuals. Where my view differs from Leibniz's is that I see God's decisions as completely free in this matter, not in any sense determined. Furthermore, in rendering human action certain, God does not merely choose to bring a being into existence and then leave that person to function in a mechanistic, determined world. God is actively at work within this world, influencing what takes place. Thus, the deistic overtones of Leibniz's view are avoided.

Another way of putting the same idea is advanced by John Feinberg, who emphasizes that God's plan should be referred to as his decree, rather than his decrees.[611] What God does is not to make a series of relatively independent decisions. Rather, out of all the possible worlds he could bring into existence, he chooses to actualize just this one, with all the interrelated factors that are involved in it. It is the kind of world in which my mother and my father married each other, rather than someone else. It is the kind of world in which the weather at this spot on the earth at this time is exactly what it is. There is human freedom, but it is freedom within this exact set of circumstances.

The position being advocated here is what B. B. Warfield regarded as the mildest form of Calvinism (there are, in fact, some Calvinists who would deny that it deserves to be called Calvinistic at all). Warfield termed this position "congruism," for it holds that God works congruously with the will of the individual; that is, God works in such a suasive way with the will of the individual that the person freely makes the choice that God intends.[612] With respect to the offer of salvation, this means that God does not begin by regenerating those he has chosen, transforming their souls so that they believe; rather, he works in an appealing, persuading fashion so that they freely choose to believe, and then he regenerates them. What we are adding to this position is the idea that God is operative in the life of the individual long before his work of suasion and regeneration: by choosing to actualize this possible world, God has from eternity decided that the potential individual who comes into actual existence is the one who will respond to this set of circumstances precisely as God intends.

Added to this is the idea of God's work in a noncoercive fashion to bring about our decision. He does not compel us by force, that is, external compulsion. Nor does he compel us by threats and manipulation, that is, internal compulsion. Rather, he makes the choice so appealing to us that we choose it, rather than an alternative. Feinberg uses an illustration of a student in his class, who he, as the instructor, decides should leave the room, perhaps because the student is disturbing the class unduly. The instructor, if he is strong enough, could pick up the student, carry him outside the door, deposit him there, then lock the door.

That would be external compulsion. Alternatively, he could threaten the student, perhaps even using a firearm to threaten his life. That would be internal compulsion. The third option would be to reason with the student, pointing out to him certain advantages to his leaving the room, and the disadvantages of his remaining. This would be the student's own decision.[613]

This third idea comes the closest to the model of divine sovereignty that we are advocating. Sometimes one hears the caricature of Calvinism (which occasionally is deserved) that God drags people kicking and screaming into his kingdom, with them objecting all the while. There were, to be sure, times when God compelled persons to obey him. Most of the time, however, the picture is more like God making his will so persuasive and attractive that persons willingly and even joyfully accept it and carry it out. As an old song put it, "He didn't compel them against their will; he just made them willing to go." We have all known human persons who were so persuasive, so charming, that we found their suggestions compelling. This is true of persons, especially leaders, who possess what is referred to as (in the nontheological sense of the word) "charisma." Yet those who follow such leadership do not consider themselves unfree. God is, then, the person with unlimited charisma.

As we noted earlier, the conception of human freedom here is one known as compatibilistic freedom, or what is sometimes termed "soft determinism." This kind of freedom is not inconsistent with the outcome of a decision being certain. It is contrasted with incompatibilistic or libertarian freedom, according to which at any point a person must have the power to act or to refrain from acting in a certain way. It is this latter conception that often is unconsciously assumed when people speak of human freedom. When pressed as to why people decide as they do, the answer is often, "They simply do." Yet we should note that the Bible does not directly address the issue of whether freedom is compatibilistic or incompatibilistic. A conclusion on that must be inferred from other teachings, such as God's plan. I have adopted the compatibilistic view, not because Scripture explicitly teaches it, but because it fits better with the teaching regarding God's plan than does incompatibilistic or libertarian freedom.

Is God's having rendered human decisions and actions certain compatible with human freedom? How we respond depends on our understanding of freedom. According to the position we are espousing, the answer to the question, "Could the individual have chosen differently?" is yes, while the answer to the question, "But would she have?" is no. In our understanding, for human freedom to exist, only the first question need be answered in the affirmative. But others would argue that human freedom exists only if both questions can be answered in the affirmative; that is, if the individual not only could have chosen differently, but

could also have desired to choose differently. In their view, freedom means spontaneity, or even random choice. We would point out to them that when it comes to human decisions and actions, nothing is completely spontaneous or random. There is a measure of predictability with respect to human behavior; the better we know an individual, the better we can anticipate his responses. For example, a good friend or close relative might say, "I knew you were going to say that." Television networks can project the outcome of elections by analyzing returns from a few bellwether precincts. We conclude that if by freedom is meant random choice, human freedom is a practical impossibility. But if by freedom is meant ability to choose between options, human freedom exists and is compatible with God's having rendered our decisions and actions certain.[614]

All analogies to human persuasion of other humans break down, however, because they assume two basically equal parties. Suppose that one party has infinite knowledge, including knowledge of what the other person is thinking at any given moment. Would that not make easier the first person's persuasion of the second, without any sort of coercion, either external or internal? God is the infinite person in the relationship. We may have a parallel here to the type of conception we advanced in the discussion of divine transcendence (pp. 284–86). If God is not bound by some of the spatial dimensional restrictions we have, then his action in relationship to the world may involve what is impossible for humans. This may mean that what would involve restriction of freedom of one individual human by another is not that when God is the partner to the relationship.

It should also be observed that the biblical writers did not necessarily see the antithesis between the divine will and working and the human will and action that we sometimes do. Paul, for example, spoke of Christ as living in him (Gal. 2:20), as did Jesus of his relationship to believers (John 15:1–7). And Paul spoke of God as willing and doing, even as the believer does so (Phil. 2:12–13). Perhaps we have been guilty of defining our terms and concepts abstractly, and then finding an incompatibility that Scripture does not presuppose.

Arminians, in order to preserve the idea of God accomplishing his will, at some point have to compromise their idea of human freedom. This means that God acts unilaterally, superseding human freedom. If this is the case, however, then the charge of coercion brought against the Calvinistic conception of God does not attach only to that view but also to their own. It is a question of the frequency of divine unilateral action, rather than its occurrence, that distinguishes the two views.[615] From the compatibilist view of human freedom, however, this is not coercion but persuasion.

It should be noted that if certainty of outcome is inconsistent with freedom, that is, if libertarian freedom is true, divine foreknowledge, as the Arminian understands that term, presents as much difficulty for human freedom as does divine foreordination. For if God knows what I will do, it must be certain that I am going to do it. If it were not certain, God could not know it; he might be mistaken (I might act differently from what he expects). But if what I will do is certain, then surely I will do it, whether or not I know what I will do. It will happen! But am I then free? In the view of those whose definition of freedom entails the implication that it cannot be certain that a particular event will occur, presumably I am not free. In their view, divine foreknowledge is just as incompatible with human freedom as is divine foreordination.[616]

It might seem that the divine choice we have argued for is in part the same as the Arminian idea of foreknowledge.[617] There is a significant difference, however. In the Arminian understanding, there is a foreknowledge of actual existing entities. God simply chooses to confirm, as it were, what he foresees real individuals will decide and do. In our scheme, however, God has a foreknowledge of possibilities. God foresees what possible beings will do if placed in a particular situation with all the influences that will be present at that point in time and space.[618] On this basis he chooses which of the possible individuals will become actualities and which circumstances and influences will be present. He foreknows what these individuals will freely do, for he in effect made that decision by choosing to bring them into existence. With respect to salvation, this means that, in logical order, God decided that he would create humans, that they would be allowed to fall, and then that among this group who would be brought into existence, all of whom would come under the curse of sin, some individuals would, acting as he intends, freely choose to respond to him.[619]

Our position that God has rendered certain everything that occurs raises another question: Is there not a contradiction at certain points between what God commands and says he desires and what he actually wills? For example, sin is universally prohibited, yet apparently God wills for it to occur. Certainly murder is prohibited in Scripture, and yet the death of Jesus by execution was apparently willed by God (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23). Further, we are told that God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), yet apparently he does not actually will for all to be saved, since not everyone is. How are we to reconcile these seemingly contradictory considerations?

We must distinguish between two different senses of God's will, which we will refer to as God's "wish" ($will_1$) and God's "will" ($will_2$). The former is God's general intention, the values with which he is pleased. The latter is God's specific intention in a given situation, what he decides will actually occur. There

are times, many of them, when God wills to permit, and thus to have occur, what he really does not wish. This is the case with sin. God does not desire sin to occur. There are occasions, however, when he simply says, in effect, "So be it," allowing a human to choose freely a sinful course of action. Joseph's treatment at the hands of his brothers did not please God; it was not consistent with what he is like. God did, however, will to permit it; he did not intervene to prevent it. And, interestingly enough, God used their action to produce the very thing it was intended to prevent—Joseph's ascendancy.

God does not enjoy the destruction of the ungodly. It brings him sorrow. Yet he chooses to permit them, by their own volition, to reject and disbelieve. Why he does this we do not know. But what we are talking about here is not as unique and foreign to us as we might at first think. It is not unlike the way parents sometimes treat their children. A mother may wish for her son to avoid a particular type of behavior, and may tell him so. Yet there are situations in which she may, unobserved by her son, see him about to engage in the forbidden action, yet choose not to intervene to prevent it. Here is a case in which the parent's wish is clearly that the child not engage in certain behavior, yet her will is that he do what he has willed to do. By choosing not to intervene to prevent the act, the mother is actually willing that it take place.[620]

We must understand that the will of God permits rather than causes sin. God never says, "Commit this sin!" But by his permitting the conditions that lead a person to commit a sin and by his not preventing the sin, God in effect wills the sin. If one maintains that failure to prevent something constitutes causation or responsibility, then God would have to be regarded, in this secondary sense, as causing evil. But, we should note, this is not the way that responsibility is usually assigned.

Another issue that must be examined concerns whether our view of God's all-encompassing plan removes incentives for activity on our part. If God has already rendered certain what is to occur, is there any point in our seeking to accomplish his will? Does what we do really make any difference in what happens? This issue relates particularly to evangelism. If God has already chosen (elected) who will be saved and who will not, what difference does it make whether we (or anyone else for that matter) seek to propagate the gospel? Nothing can change the fact that the elect will be saved and the non-elect will not.

Two points should be made by way of response. One is that if God has rendered certain the end, his plan also includes the means to that end. His plan may well include that our witness is the means by which an elect person will come to saving faith. The other consideration is that we do not know in detail

what God's plan is. So we must proceed on the basis of what God has revealed of his wish. Accordingly, we must witness. This may mean that some of our time is spent on someone who will not ultimately enter the kingdom of heaven. But that does not mean that our time has been wasted. It may well have been the means to fulfilling another part of God's plan. And, ultimately, faithfulness, not success, is God's measure of our service.

Various Understandings of History

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Christianity's doctrine of the divine plan responds specifically to the questions of where history is going and what is moving it. Some understandings of the movement of history are quite negative. This is particularly true of cyclical views, which do not see history as progressing, but as simply repeating the same pattern, albeit in somewhat different fashion. The Eastern religions tend to be of this type, particularly Hinduism, with its emphasis on reincarnation. One goes through cycles of death and rebirth, with the status of one's life in each new incarnation largely determined by his or her conduct in the previous life. Salvation, if one may term it that, consists in Nirvana, escape from the repeated process.

Doomsday philosophies abound in our time. It is believed that history will soon come to a disastrous end as a result of either an economic collapse, an ecological crisis involving massive pollution of the environment, or an outbreak of nuclear warfare.[621] The human race is doomed because it has failed to manage the world wisely.

Another prominent twentieth-century pessimistic philosophy was existentialism. The idea of the absurdity of the world, of the paradoxical and the ironic in reality, of the blind randomness of much that occurs, leads to despair. Lacking any discernible pattern in the events of history, one must create one's own meaning by a conscious act of free will.

On the other hand, there have been a number of quite optimistic views, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Darwinism was extended from the biological realm to other areas, particularly to society. In the thought of Herbert Spencer, it became an all-inclusive philosophy entailing the growth, progress, and development of the whole of reality. Although this view proved rather unrealistic, it had considerable influence in its time. In more recent years, utopianisms employing the methods of the behavioral sciences have sought to restructure society or at least individual lives.[622]

Until recently, the most militant philosophy of history on a global scale has been dialectical materialism, the philosophy on which communism is based. Adapting Georg Hegel's philosophy, Karl Marx replaced its idealistic metaphysic with a materialistic view. The forces of material reality are impelling history to its end. Through a series of steps, the economic order is being changed. Each stage of the process is characterized by a conflict between two antithetical groups or movements. The prevailing means of production is changing from feudalism to capitalism to a final socialistic stage where there will be no private ownership. In the classless society, the dialectic that has moved history through the rhythmical process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis will cease, and all evil will wither away. Because this trust is in an impersonal force, many people under communism found it neither personally satisfying nor societally effective.

Finally, there is the Christian doctrine of the divine plan, which affirms that an all-wise, all-powerful, good God has from all eternity planned what is to occur and that history is carrying out his intention. There is a definite goal toward which history is progressing. History, then, is not moved merely by chance happenings, impersonal atoms, or blind fate. The force behind it is, rather, a loving God with whom we can have a personal relationship. We may look forward with assurance, then, toward the attainment of the telos of the universe. And we may align our lives with the assured outcome of history.

16

God's Originating Work: *Creation*

Chapter Objectives

After completing the reading of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Understand reasons for studying the doctrine of creation.
2. Identify and define the elements of the biblical teaching on creation.
3. Explain how God carried out his creative work in the forming of plant life, animal life, and humans.
4. Discuss the theological meaning of the doctrine of creation by comparing and contrasting various historical views of this doctrine.
5. Understand and explain the relationship between the doctrine of creation and science.
6. Recognize and perceive the uniqueness of God's creative work.
7. Identify and describe the implications of the doctrine of creation.

Chapter Summary

God created all things without the use of preexisting materials. There are at least five elements to the biblical teaching on creation, from which we may deduce at least seven theological conclusions. Several theories have been proposed to harmonize the age of creation and development

within creation. The age-day theory seems to be the most plausible answer to the age of creation. The more adequate position of progressive creationism helps explain development within creation. The Christian can have confidence in the greatness of God in his creation of the universe and all that is within it.

Study Questions

- In light of society's rejection of creation, why should the doctrine of creation be studied?
- What are the elements of a biblical understanding of creation?
- What significance do the Hebrew term *bara'* and the Latin term *ex nihilo* hold?
- In what way does the biblical teaching on creation reject the idea of dualism?
- What is the theological meaning of the doctrine of creation?
- How does the doctrine of creation relate to modern science?
- What attempts have been made to reconcile the apparent age of the earth with the biblical material, and what do they suggest?

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The Age of Creation

Development within the Creation

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Implications of the Doctrine of Creation [356]

The plan of God may be thought of as being like the architect's plans and drawings for a building that is to be constructed. But the plan was not merely a scheme in the mind of God. It has been translated into reality by God's actions. In this part we will concentrate on those works that are attributed especially, although not exclusively, to the work of God the Father. The first of these is creation. By creation we mean the work of God in bringing into being, without the use of any preexisting materials, everything that is.

Reasons for Studying the Doctrine of Creation

1. There are several reasons for giving careful study to the doctrine of creation. First, the Bible places great significance on it. The very first statement of the Bible is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). While order of treatment is not an infallible indicator of relative importance, in this case it is apparent that God thought the fact of creation significant enough to put it first. It is one of the first assertions in the Gospel of John, the most theologically oriented of the New Testament Gospels. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1–3). The doctrine of creation is found in the faith chapter of Hebrews: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (11:3). And in the great vision of the future in the book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders praise the Lord God Almighty in part because he is the Creator: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). God's creative work plays a prominent role in the biblical presentation of God.

2. The doctrine of creation has been a significant part of the church's faith, a highly important aspect of its teaching and preaching. The first article of the Apostles' Creed says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven

and earth." Although this particular element (i.e., the phrase dealing with creation) was not in the earliest form of the creed, but was added somewhat later, nonetheless, it is significant that in a formulation as brief as the Apostles' Creed, creation was, rather early, thought important enough to be included.

3. Our understanding of the doctrine of creation is important because of its effect on our understanding of other doctrines. Humans were created by God as separate beings, rather than emanating from him. Since the whole of nature was created by God and pronounced good by him, there is no inherent evil in being material rather than spiritual. These various facets of the doctrine of creation tell us a great deal about the human status. Moreover, since the universe is God's doing rather than a mere chance happening, we are able to discern something about the nature and the will of God from an examination of creation. Alter the doctrine of creation at any point, and you have also altered these other aspects of Christian doctrine.

4. The doctrine of creation helps differentiate Christianity from other religions and worldviews. While some might think that at root there are similarities between Christianity and Hinduism, for example, a close examination reveals that the Christian doctrine of God and creation is quite different from Hinduism's Brahma-Atman teaching.

5. The study of the doctrine of creation is one point of potential dialogue between Christianity and natural science. At times the dialogue has been quite furious. The great evolution debate of the early twentieth century makes it clear that while theology and science run in parallel courses most of the time, not intersecting in a common topic, the issue of the origin of the world is one point where they do encounter one another. It is important to understand just what the encounter may be between Christianity and biological science (Darwin's theory of evolution), but also between Christianity and Henri Bergson's view of creative evolution or the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.

6. There sometimes have been sharp disagreements within Christian circles. In the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the early twentieth century, the struggle was on a large scale—evolution versus creation. Today, by contrast, there seem to be internal disputes within evangelicalism between the theory of progressive creationism and the view that the earth is only a few thousand years old. A careful look must be taken at precisely what the Bible does teach on this subject.

Elements of the Biblical Teaching on Creation

Creation out of Nothing

We begin our examination of the doctrine of creation by noting that it is creation out of nothing, or without the use of preexisting materials. This does not mean that all of God's creative work was direct and immediate, occurring at the very beginning of time. There has also been mediate or derivative creation, God's subsequent work of developing and fashioning what he had originally brought into existence. We are here affirming that the whole of what now exists was begun by God's act of bringing it into existence—he did not fashion and adapt something that already existed independently of him.

At times an effort has been made to derive from the Hebrew verb בָּרָא (*bara'*) this truth that creation occurred without the use of previously existent materials. The word appears in the Old Testament thirty-eight times in the Qal stem and ten times in the Niphal. The nominal form, בְּרִיאָה (*beri'ah*—creation), occurs just once (Num. 16:30). The Qal and Niphal stems are used only of God, not of humans. Used theologically, the verb expresses the uniqueness of God's work as contrasted with human fashioning and making various objects out of already existing materials. In poetic texts, however, it is used in parallelism with a number of terms for making or fashioning: עָשָׂה (*'asah*)—to make or do (Isa. 41:20; 43:7; 45:7, 12, 18; Amos 4:13); יָצַר (*yatsar*)—to form (Isa. 43:1, 7; 45:7, 18; Amos 4:13); כּוּן (*kun*)—to establish (Isa. 45:18); יָסַד (*yasad*)—to found (Ps. 89:11–12 [12–13]); and חָדַשׁ (*chadash*)—to renew (Ps. 51:10 [12]). Karl-Heinz Bernhardt notes that "to a certain extent this results in a leveling of its meaning."[623] It should be noted, however, that בָּרָא never appears with an accusative that denotes an object on which the Creator works to form something new. Thus, the idea of creation out of nothing is not excluded as the meaning of this word, although it has not been conclusively proved to be its meaning either.

The idea of *ex nihilo* creation can, however, be found in a number of New Testament passages where the aim is not primarily to make a statement about the nature of creation. In particular, there are numerous references to the beginning of the world or the beginning of creation:

"from [since, before] the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8)
"from the beginning" (Matt. 19:4, 8; John 8:44; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 John 1:1; 2:13–14; 3:8)
"from the beginning of the world" (Matt. 24:21)
"from the beginning of the creation" (Mark 10:6; 2 Pet. 3:4)

"from the beginning of creation which God created" (Mark 13:19)
"since the creation of the world" (Rom. 1:20)
"Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning" (Heb. 1:10)
"the beginning of God's creation" (Rev. 3:14)

Regarding these several expressions Werner Foerster says, "These phrases show that creation involves the beginning of the existence of the world, so that there is no pre-existent matter."[624] While the verb κτίζω (*ktizō*) in itself does not establish *ex nihilo* creation, even as בָּרָא does not, nonetheless, these usages argue for a more specific meaning than merely making or fashioning.

Other usages of κτίζω indicate that it is suited to bear the meaning of originating from nothing. For instance, it is used of the founding of cities, games, houses, and sects. It is "the basic *intellectual* and volitional act by which something comes into being."[625] Thus, while it does have meanings other than *ex nihilo* creation, that particular meaning is certainly not excluded.

Nor should the Hebrew word בָּרָא be totally discarded as not significant for our purposes. While the etymology of this verb suggests "to cut" or "to cleave," it is never paired with a direct object denoting material on which God works to make something new, nor is it ever used in the Qal and Niphal stems with a human subject.[626] Moreover, the expression "in the beginning" in Genesis 1:1, which is used without any further qualification, seems in many ways to parallel the usages of κτίζω noted above.

In the New Testament we can find several more explicit expressions of the idea of creating out of nothing. God calls things into being by his word. Paul says that God "calls into being things that were not" (Rom. 4:17). God said, "Let light shine out of darkness" (2 Cor. 4:6). This suggests the effect occurred without the use of any antecedent material cause. God created the world by his word "so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:3). While it might be argued that what God did was use invisible or spiritual reality as the raw material from which he fashioned visible matter, this seems an artificial and strained idea.

If our emphasis on God's *ex nihilo* creation seems a bit superfluous and obvious, it should be observed that *ex nihilo* creation is not obvious from the perspective of process theology. John B. Cobb Jr. and David Griffin make quite clear that God does not create out of absolute nothingness. Rather, "process theology affirms instead a doctrine of creation out of chaos."[627] They assert that this view is supported by more Old Testament passages than is the doctrine of creation out of nothingness. In a state of absolute chaos there would be only very

low-grade actual occasions occurring at random; they would, of course, not be ordered into "enduring individuals." But because God is constantly creating, there is a moment-by-moment emergence of an infinite variety of occasions of experience. God contributes to the emergence of each actual occasion.

The expression *ex nihilo* or "out of nothing" has sometimes given rise to misunderstanding. "Nothing" has come to be regarded by some thinkers as virtually a something out of which everything has been made, a kind of substance. For some existentialists, such as Martin Heidegger, nonbeing has a virtual metaphysical reality all its own, with a capability of resisting being, reminiscent of certain elements in Greek philosophy.[628] When we speak of creation out of nothing, however, we are not thinking of nothing as a something out of which everything was made. Nothing, rather, is the absence of reality. Thus, the expression "without the use of preexisting materials" is preferable.

In bringing the whole of reality into being, God created merely by his word. In Genesis 1, for instance, we read that God spoke and his statement became immediate reality (vv. 3, 6–7, 9). The mere statement, "Let there be light," was sufficient for light to come into existence. We can draw several conclusions. For one, God has the power simply to will situations to be, and they immediately come to pass as he has willed. Second, creation is an act of his will, not coerced by any force or consideration outside himself. Further, God does not involve himself, his own being, in the process. Creation is not a part of him or an emanation from his reality.

Its All-Inclusive Nature

God did not create merely a certain part of reality, with the remainder attributable to some other origin; he has made all of reality. In the opening statement of Genesis ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"), the expression "the heavens and the earth" is not intended to designate those items alone. It is an idiom referring to everything that is.

The universal extent of God's creative work is also affirmed through the use of the term τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*), "all things" (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11). In addition, several enumerations or specifications of the various parts of creation make clear that everything is included: "heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it" (Rev. 10:6); "the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them" (Acts 4:24; 14:15); "the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). (Cf. Rev. 5:13, where "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them" are described as praising and glorifying God.)

While all of these are positive affirmations of the extent of God's creative work, John 1:3 makes the same point most emphatically and explicitly in both positive and negative terms: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Here is an affirmation of the creaturehood of all that is and a rejection of the notion that something might have been made by someone or something other than God.

Rejection of Dualism

The biblical teaching on creation disallows any type of dualism. The Creator is unique: he is the only one who has brought reality into being. Thus, the idea of an inherently evil segment of creation, which takes its origin from some powerful evil being, such as the devil, is rejected. While the devil may be able to modify or corrupt the created material, he cannot truly create. Further, because God is responsible for the origin of everything, there is no neutral segment of the creation devoid of spiritual significance, no division of reality into the inherently good and the evil, or sacred and secular.

The Work of the Triune God

Creation is the work of the Triune God. A large number of Old Testament references to the creative act attribute it simply to God, rather than to the Father, Son, or Spirit, for the distinctions of the Trinity had not yet been fully revealed (e.g., Gen. 1:1; Ps. 96:5; Isa. 37:16; 44:24; 45:12; Jer. 10:11–12). In the New Testament, however, we find differentiation. First Corinthians 8:6, which appears in a passage where Paul discusses the propriety of eating food that has been offered to idols, is particularly instructive. In contrasting God with idols, Paul follows the argument of several Old Testament passages—Psalm 96:5; Isaiah 37:16; Jeremiah 10:11–12. The crux of those Old Testament passages is that the true God has created all that is, whereas idols are incapable of creating anything. Paul says, "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." Paul is including both the Father and the Son in the act of creation and yet also distinguishing them from one another. The Father apparently has the more prominent part; he is the source from whom all things come. The Son is the means or the agent of the existence of all things. While creation was primarily the work of the Father, the Son is the one through whom it was carried out. There is a similar affirmation in John 1:3—it is through the Son that all things were made. Hebrews 1:10 refers to the Son

as the Lord who founded the earth in the beginning. There also are references that seem to indicate the Spirit of God was active in creating as well—Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalm 104:30; and Isaiah 40:12–13. In some of these cases, however, it is difficult to determine whether the reference is to the Holy Spirit or to God's working by means of his breath, since the word רוּחַ (*ruach*) can be used for either.

There may seem to be a conflict between attributing creation to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and maintaining that each member of the Trinity has his own distinctive work. Yet this is not a problem, unless we think that there is but one form of causation. When a house is built, who actually builds it? In one sense, it is the architect who designs it and creates the plans from which it is constructed. In another sense, it is the contractor who actually carries out the plan. Yet the contractor himself probably does none of the actual construction. It is the construction workers who build the house. But without the materials that go into the making of the house there would be no structure. Thus, the building-material suppliers may be said to be the cause of the house's construction. Or the lending agency that supplies the money for the construction and holds the mortgage might be said to have built the house. Finally, the owners, although they may not drive a single nail, are in a sense the ones who build the house, since they sign the legal papers authorizing its construction and will make the monthly mortgage payments. Each one, in a unique way, is the cause of the house. A similar statement can be made about creation. It appears from Scripture that it was the Father who brought the created universe into existence. But it was the Spirit and the Son who fashioned it, who carried out the details of the design. Although the creation is from the Father, it is through the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Its Purpose: God's Glory

While God did not *have* to create, he did so for good and sufficient reasons, and the creation fulfills that purpose. In particular, the creation glorifies God by carrying out his will. Both the inanimate (Ps. 19:1) and the animate creation glorify him. In the story of Jonah, we see this in rather vivid fashion. Everyone and everything (except Jonah initially) obeyed God's will and plan: the storm, the pebbles (lots), the sailors, the great fish, the Ninevites, the east wind, the gourd, and the worm. Each part of creation is capable of fulfilling God's purposes for it, but each obeys in a different way. The inanimate creation does so mechanically, obeying natural laws that govern the physical world. The animate creation does so instinctively, responding to impulses within. Only humans and

angels are capable of obeying God consciously and willingly and thus glorifying God most fully.

God's Later Creative Work

While creation in the proper sense refers to bringing into existence all of physical reality as well as all spiritual beings other than God himself, the term also covers the subsequent origination of new entities fashioned from this previously created material. There are hints of this even within the Genesis 1 account: God says, "Let the water teem with living creatures" (v. 20), and, "Let the land produce living creatures" (v. 24). The description of the forming of the first man suggests the use of some type of material—"dust of the ground" (2:7). Eve is described as being formed from a part of the body of Adam (2:21). So also God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air from the ground (2:19). It may well be that what God did originally was merely create matter from nothing, and then in his subsequent creative activity, he fashioned everything from the atoms he had created. The various species produced at that later time would be just as much God's doing as was the origin of matter. Then, too, if God does at least part of his work through immanent means, the origination of the various later species through the laws of genetics—even recent varieties of roses, hybrid corn, cattle, dogs—is God's creative work. In these latter cases humans are partners with God in producing what comes to be. Note, however, that humans are simply working with what God has already established. Thus, even the most recent species are God's work as well, for the material from which they came to be was created by him and the laws of genetics by which they developed are also his doing.

The Theological Meaning of the Doctrine

We turn now to examine the theological meaning of the doctrine of creation. What really is being affirmed by this teaching? And, perhaps just as important for our purposes, what is being rejected or contradicted?

1. The doctrine of creation is first and rather obviously a statement that there is no ultimate reality other than God. There is no room for dualism. In a dualism there are two ultimate principles. In one form of dualism there is the Lord, the Creator, the Maker. And there is what the Creator utilizes, or what he works on, the material that he employs in creating. Much Greek thought was dualistic in

one way or another. Typical was a matter-form dualism: There is the order or structure or pattern of things, the Forms or Ideas, and there is that which needs to be ordered or structured or organized, the matter. Creation then consists in someone or something uniting these two, or impressing the Forms upon the matter.[629]

But this is not what the Christian doctrine affirms. God did not work with something already in existence. He brought into existence the very raw material he employed. If this were not the case, God would not really be infinite. There would be something else that also was, and presumably had always been. Consequently, God would have been limited by having to work with the intrinsic characteristics of the raw material he employed. The Christian doctrine holds that, on the contrary, God brought the raw material into being and endowed it from the beginning with the characteristics he wanted it to have.

2. The original act of divine creation is unique. It is unlike human "creative" acts, which involve fashioning, using the materials at hand. In producing a work of art, the artist must work within the limitations of the medium employed, whether that be the malleability of the metal, the reflective characteristics of the oil paint, the nature of the language used, or the speed and resolution characteristics of the digital medium. Moreover, even the concepts the artist expresses are dependent on previous experience. The work will be either an expression of an idea directly experienced or a combination of elements previously experienced into some new whole; a genuinely novel idea, totally new and fresh, is very rare indeed. Even if a writer were to create a new language to express these ideas, the limitations of language in general would still govern what could be done. God, however, is not bound by anything external to himself. His only limitations are those of his own nature and the choices he has made. Therefore, his creative work is qualitatively different from that of humans.

3. The doctrine of creation also means that nothing made is intrinsically evil. Everything has come from God, and the creation narrative says five times that he saw that it was good (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then, when he completed his creation of the human, we are told that God saw everything he had made, and it was very good (v. 31). There was nothing evil within God's original creation.

In any type of dualism, there tends to be a moral distinction between the higher and the lower principles or elements.[630] Since the higher realm is divine and the lower is not, the former is thought of as more real than the other. Eventually this metaphysical difference tends to be regarded as a moral difference as well—the higher is good and the lower is evil. Such a distinction came to be made in the later history of Platonism. Plato had taught that the Ideas or Forms, the intelligible or invisible concepts, are more real than perceptible or

empirical objects, which are mere shadows cast by the Forms. In Neoplatonism, there came to be a moral distinction as well. The material or perceivable realm was thought of as evil, the spiritual or invisible realm as good. Influenced by Neoplatonism and other varieties of dualism such as Manichaeism, some Christians began to regard the material world as inherently evil.

If, however, the whole of reality owes its existence to God, and if what God made was " good" throughout, we cannot think of matter as inherently evil.[631] This raises a problem: Christianity, like every system of thought that is in any sense alert to the universe, must come to grips with the presence of evil in the world. Dualisms can resolve this difficulty quite easily. Since God is good, he cannot be the source of evil. Therefore, whatever is not God, that is, the matter with which he had to work, must be the locus of evil. But this expedient cannot and will not be adopted by a thoroughgoing creationism, for it holds that nature has no such independent status. Yet according to the biblical account, God, who created everything, cannot be blamed for evil and sin in the world. The reason he cannot be blamed is that while he created the world, he created it good, and even very good![632] We will return to the question of the origin of evil in chapter 18.

4. The doctrine of creation also thrusts a responsibility on the human race. Humans cannot justify their evil behavior by blaming the evil realm of the material world, for it is not inherently evil. Human sin must be an exercise of human freedom. Nor can humans blame society. Sometimes the sin of individual humans is attributed to society's influence. The reasoning is that individual humans are moral, but an immoral society leads them into sin. But human society was also part of what God made, and it was very good. To regard society as the cause of sin is therefore an inaccurate and misleading ploy.

5. The doctrine of creation also guards against depreciating the incarnation of Christ. If the material world were somehow inherently evil, it would be very difficult to accept the fact that the Second Person of the Trinity took on human form, including a physical body. Indeed, some, holding the view that matter is evil, consequently denied the reality of Jesus's physical body. He merely "seemed" to possess human flesh. They were called Docetists, from the Greek word δοκέω (*dokeō*—"appear"). On the other hand, a correct understanding of the doctrine of creation—what God made was good—enables us to affirm the full meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his taking of full human nature upon himself.

The doctrine of creation also restrains us from asceticism. Believing that the physical nature is evil has led some, including Christians, to shun the human body and any type of physical satisfaction. Spirit, being more divine, is the proper realm of the good and the godly. Thus, meditation is pursued, and an

austere diet and abstinence from sex are regarded as conditions of spirituality. But the doctrine of creation affirms that since God has made all that is and has made it good, it is redeemable. Salvation and spirituality are to be found, not by fleeing from or avoiding the material realm, but by sanctifying it.

6. If all of creation has been made by God, there are a connection and an affinity among its various parts. I am a sibling to all other humans, for the same God created us and watches over us. Since inanimate material also comes from God, I am, at base, one with nature, for we are members of the same family. We may be in conflict, but this is a case of familial quarreling rather than warfare against a foreign enemy. The whole creation belongs to God and matters to him. We have a tendency as humans to think of ourselves as God's only children, and thus as the sole objects of his paternal love. Yet Jesus indicated in an explicit statement that God loves and cares for all of his creation (Matt. 6:26–30; 10:29). The Christian, of all persons, should be most concerned to practice a responsible ecological stewardship of God's creation.[633]

7. While the doctrine of creation excludes any dualism, it also excludes the type of monism that regards the world as an emanation from God. According to the doctrine of creation, God simply wills things into existence out of nothing. The various objects and beings that are part of the creation are clearly other than God. In the view of emanation, on the other hand, what we have is an outflow from God's nature, a part of him separated from his essence as it were. There is a tendency to regard this emanation as still divine; hence the end result of this view is usually pantheism. "Creation" is a change of status rather than a beginning of being.

One might think that the effect of an emanation view would be to enhance greatly the status of the individual elements of the world, since they are in actuality part of the divine nature. In practice, however, the opposite has tended historically to be the case. The effect has been to deemphasize the independent status of specific objects, even to view independent existence as illusory. Since all objects and beings are part of God, it is important to reduce as much as possible any distance between God and them. Individuality is to be minimized. The aim is absorption into the one. Instead of being real substantives, entities with their own status, the individual elements of the world have virtually become adjectives attaching to the ultimate reality, God.

Christianity's doctrine of creation out of nothing rejects all of this. The individual elements of the world are genuine creatures dependent on God their Creator. Sin does not consist in finiteness and separateness, but in misuse of one's finite freedom, in seeking to be independent of (and thus equal to) God. Further, this finiteness is not eliminated in the process of salvation. Rather than

being the negation of creaturely humanness, salvation is the fulfillment, the restoration, of creaturely humanness.

Further, the doctrine of creation points out the inherent limitations of creaturehood. No creature or combination of creatures can ever be equated with God and never will be God. Thus there is no basis whatsoever for idolatry—for worshiping nature or for revering humans. God has a unique status, so that he alone is to be worshiped (Exod. 20:2–3).

We sometimes think of the great metaphysical gap in the universe as a quantitative gap falling between the human race and the rest of the creation. In reality, however, the greater metaphysical gap, both quantitative and qualitative, falls between God on one side and all else on the other.[634] He is to be the object of worship, praise, and obedience. All other existents are to be subjects who offer these acts of submission to him.

The Creation Doctrine and Its Relation to Science

There has been a rather long history of conflict between science and Christianity.[635] The tension has occurred at various points. Astronomy probably provided the first real encounter, with the Copernican Revolution challenging the prevailing geocentric conception. Progressively the conflict moved from astronomy to geology (the age of the earth) to biology (the issue of evolution) to anthropology (the origin of humanity). Today the conflict focuses especially on the behavioral sciences and such issues as freedom versus determinism and essential human goodness or depravity. As the conflict has shifted from one science to another, so it has also moved from one doctrine to another. Thus, while the prime area of tension was at one time the doctrine of creation, today it is the doctrine of humanity.

To some, the question of the relationship between science and theology has been settled; there is no longer any possibility of conflict. Past conflict resulted from failing to understand the differing kinds of explanations offered by the two disciplines. Science attempts to explain what has happened and how it came to pass in terms of efficient causation. When theology was thought of as offering the same kind of explanation, the two disciplines were seen as providing conflicting alternatives. This view of theology as a quasi-science must be rejected, says Langdon Gilkey. Theology's explanations are teleological, that is, in terms of the end or purpose for which something is done. Scientific explanations take the form, "This event occurred because of . . ."; theological explanations take the form, "This event occurred in order that . . ." Thus, there

really is no conflict with science. Christian theology does not tell us how the universe came into being, but why God made it.[636]

The second misconception regards the nature of the Bible. The view of the Bible as giving scientific explanations stems from a period of belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Thus, all affirmations in the Bible, whether of religious or seemingly scientific character, were considered true. But then alternative views of the Bible arose that did not consider all of its affirmations true. Some people thought of the Bible as a witness to a revelation that is not primarily the communication of information, but the self-presentation of a personal God; others thought of it as a mixture of divine revelation on one hand and human speculation and myth on the other.[637] With these alternative views of the Bible in mind, Gilkey and others assert that its value and authority lie strictly within the area of religion, serving merely to bring us into the proper relationship with God.

The solution just described is not an option for someone holding the view of the Bible expounded in part 2 of this volume. While the Bible puts its major emphasis on God's purposes in creating, it is also concerned with what God did and even, to some extent, how he did it. And there is indeed a statement about origins that, general though it may be, nonetheless has implications for the proposals of natural science. We must now examine more closely two points at which theology and science do conflict: (1) the age of the universe and (2) the sequence in which the components of the creation appeared and the relationships among them.

The Age of Creation

On one hand, the biblical statement seems quite straightforward. God created the earth in six days. Since the word used in Genesis is the common term יום (*yom*), it is presumed that these were twenty-four-hour periods of time. Attempts have been made to calculate the time of creation by using the ages given in the biblical genealogies. Archbishop James Ussher arrived at a date of 4004 BC for the creation. On these terms the creation is no more than about six thousand years old.

Ussher's conclusion was satisfactory before the development of modern geology, which is only a rather recent development. William Smith, the founder of stratigraphical geology, died in 1839; and Charles Lyell, the systematizer of geological learning, died in 1875. Thus, geology of the type that we know today came of age only in the nineteenth century. When it did, however, serious problems arose for the traditional dating of creation. A number of methods have been developed for dating the earth, many of them relating to the characteristics

of radioactive materials. Out of these methods came a consensus that the earth is perhaps five or six billion years old or even more. There have been several attempts to reconcile the apparent age of the earth with the biblical material: (1) the gap theory, (2) the flood theory, (3) the ideal-time theory, (4) the age-day theory, (5) the pictorial-day theory, and (6) the revelatory-day theory.

1. The gap theory holds that there was an original, quite complete creation of the earth perhaps billions of years ago (the creation mentioned in Gen. 1:1). Some sort of catastrophe occurred, however, so that the creation became empty and unformed (1:2). God then re-created the earth a few thousand years ago in a period of six days, populating it with all the species. This creation is described in Genesis 1:3–27. The apparent age of the earth and the fossil records showing development over long periods of time are to be attributed to the first creation. The catastrophe is often linked to the fall of Satan (Lucifer). Creation then lay in ruins for a long period of time before God rehabilitated or restored it.[638]

2. The flood theory views the earth as only a few thousand years old. At the time of Noah, the earth was covered by a tremendous flood, with huge waves with a velocity of a thousand miles an hour. These waves picked up various forms of life; the mud in which these forms were eventually deposited was solidified into rock under the tremendous pressure of the waves. The various rock strata represent various waves of the flood. These unusual forces accomplished in a short period what geologists believe would ordinarily require three billion years to accomplish.[639]

3. The ideal-time theory says that God created the world in a six-day period a relatively short time ago, but that he made it as if it were billions of years old. This is a genuinely novel and ingenious view. Adam, of course, did not begin his life as a newborn baby. At any point in his life he must have had an apparent (or ideal) age many years older than his actual age (i.e., the number of years since his creation). The ideal-time theory extends this principle. If God created trees, rather than merely tree seeds, they presumably had rings indicating an ideal age rather than their real age. Thus, each element of creation must have begun somewhere in the life cycle.[640]

4. The age-day theory is based upon the fact that the Hebrew word יום (*yom*), while it most frequently means a twenty-four-hour period, is not limited to that meaning. It can also mean epochs or long periods of time, and that is how it should be understood in this context. This view holds that God created in a series of acts over long periods of time. The geological and fossil records correspond to the days of his creative acts.[641]

5. The pictorial-day (or literary-framework) theory regards the days of creation as more a matter of logical structuring than of chronological order. The

author arranged the material in a logical grouping that took the form of six periods. While there may be some chronological dimension to the ordering, it is to be thought of as primarily logical. The account is arranged in two groups of three—days one through three and days four through six. Parallels can be seen between the first and fourth, the second and fifth, and the third and sixth days of creation.[642]

6. The revelatory-day theory. The days were not successive days on which God did the creation, but days on which the story of creation was revealed. So the truth of the account took place in six twenty-four-hour periods, but the actual creation may have taken much longer than that.[643]

All of these views have points of strength, and each has some difficulties as well.[644] We must find the one that has more strengths and fewer difficulties than do the alternative views. At present, the view that I find most satisfactory is a variation of the age-day theory. There are too many exegetical difficulties attached to the gap theory,[645] and the flood theory involves too great a strain upon the geological evidence.[646] The ideal-time theory is ingenious and in many ways irrefutable both scientifically and exegetically, but presents the theological problem that it makes God an apparent deceiver (and deception, as we saw in chapter 13, is contrary to his nature). The pictorial-day (or literary-framework) theory resolves the problems of chronological sequence, but it does not quite match the examples from the other literature of the time, where creation accounts are arranged in three groups of two, not two groups of three.[647] The pictorial-day theory also has difficulties with the fourth commandment: God's enjoining rest on the seventh day because he rested on the seventh day seems to presuppose some sort of chronological sequence.[648] The revelatory-day view suffers from the fact that nothing in the account indicates that these were days of revelation. The straightforward reading of the account sounds much more like this was the grouping of God's creative work. The age-day theory fits quite well with the geological record, especially if one sees some topical groupings as well. For example, while the sun, moon, and stars were created on the first day, they did not become clearly visible (as if the earth were covered with a cloud envelope) until the fourth day. Similarly, green plants were created on the third day, but were given to humans for food only on the sixth day. Interpreting יוֹם as a period of indefinite length is not a forced understanding of the word, although it is not the most common meaning. While the age-day theory seems the most plausible conclusion at present, we cannot be dogmatic. The age of the universe is a topic that needs continued study and thought.

Development within the Creation

The other major point of conflict with science is the matter of development. To what extent are the present-day forms like the forms that came directly from the hand of God, and to what extent may development have taken place, resulting in modification of the existing forms and the production of new varieties? The theory of evolution maintains that from the beginning of life, all forms have developed by a gradual process. Through a series of mutations or spontaneous variations, new types of living beings have come into existence. Those possessing variations that enabled them to compete better in an environment of danger and shortage have survived. Through this process of the survival of the fittest, higher, more complex beings have appeared. Thus, over a long period of time the lowest, simplest living organism developed into humanity merely through the functioning of immanent natural laws. There was no direct intervention by God. Evolution alone was responsible.

In contrast, some Christians have maintained that every species was directly created by God. The statement that God brought forth each animal and plant after its kind is regarded as requiring this interpretation. The assumption here, of course, is that the word translated "kind" is to be understood as biological species. But does the word require that? The Hebrew word is מִין (*min*), which is simply a general term for kind or variety of some type. Thus, while it could mean species, the word simply is not sufficiently specific for us to conclude that it does in fact mean species. It is merely "kind," plain and simple.[649] At the same time, the word מִין does seem to place some limit upon the amount of development that can be accepted. The biblical data do not require the sort of entirely direct creation that some have believed it taught.

Some Christian theologians, even a few quite conservative ones, have adopted a view termed "theistic evolution." According to this view, God created in a direct fashion at the beginning of the process, and ever since has worked from within through evolution. There may at some point have been a direct creative act modifying some living creature by giving it a soul or a spiritual nature; thus the first human came to be. Other than such an exception, however, theistic evolution views God's later creative work as occurring through immanent means.[650] While this view is able to handle quite well the scientific data, it has some difficulty with the biblical account of creation. And any view that is to be acceptable, given the understanding of the Bible and of general revelation adopted earlier in this volume, must be in accord with both the biblical data and the scientific data.

More adequate is the position termed “progressive creationism.” According to this view, God created in a series of acts over a long period of time. He created the first member of each “kind.” That grouping may have been as broad as the order or as narrow as the genus. In some cases it may have extended to the creation of individual species. From that first member of the group, the others developed by evolution. So, for example, God may have created the first member of the cat family. From it developed lions, tigers, leopards, and just plain domesticated cats. Then God created another kind. There may well have been overlaps between the periods of development, so that new species within one kind were continuing to arise after God created the first member of the next kind. Note that between the various kinds there are gaps not bridged by the evolutionary development.[651]

This view fits well the biblical data. But what of the scientific data? Here we must note that the fossil record indicates gaps at several points, or an absence of what scientists call transitional forms. The assumption of the scientists is that these forms have been lost. But another very reasonable possibility is that they never existed, that these are the gaps between the biblical “kinds.” Thus, there has been microevolution (or “intrakind” development), but not macroevolution (or “interkind” development).

Intelligent Design

In the late twentieth century a new and quite vigorous challenge to naturalistic evolution began to develop. The first voice and the organizing force of this new movement, known as intelligent design, was law professor Philip Johnson, of the University of California, Berkeley. As an authority on law and argument, Johnson approached the case generally advanced for Darwinism as he would a legal argument. He found the case to be wanting in several respects. It should be noted that his argument was not about empirical data, but about the inferences drawn from that data.[652]

Soon a circle of intelligent design theorists began to form. Perhaps the leading spokesperson to emerge has been William Dembski, who holds PhDs both in mathematics and philosophy. His largest contribution to the discussion is in terms of application of statistical evaluation to the evolutionary argument. Basically his contention is that the possibility of the complexity of nature as we find it having arisen purely by chance is very low.[653] Rather, the state of development of the universe, and of certain elements of it in particular, displays the sort of characteristics that would ordinarily lead us to recognize the presence of some intelligent activity. Michael Behe developed the idea of irreducible

complexity. Whereas standard evolutionary theory has argued for a series of small changes, Behe argues that what we have is a very complex system, in which any part, if not present, would make the functioning of the whole impossible.[654]

The reaction from the majority in the field of biology has been that this is not proper science, but rather religion masquerading as science. It does not exhibit the characteristics of a science.[655] The effort to require that this alternative movement be acknowledged in teaching science is a thinly veiled attempt to introduce the teaching of religion into public school curricula.[656] Intelligent design scholars, on the other hand, insist that this is not the doctrine of creation. Although many of them are evangelical Christians, they contend that they are not arguing for a creator. They do not attempt to specify the nature of the intelligence that they find in nature. They also claim to have received positive reaction from those of other religions than Christianity.[657] They are simply trying to point up the inadequacy of the Darwinian theory. Dembski also contends that what he is advancing is not simply a variation of the standard design *argument*; it should rather be referred to as a design *inference*. What emerges from the discussion is not a conclusion of a definite designer, but rather the presence of intelligence per se.[658]

It appears that this is, at least in part, a dispute over the philosophy of science and the logic of scientific method. The Christian doctrine of creation does not depend upon the establishment of intelligent design. The type of argument offered by proponents of intelligent design does indeed support and render more probable the position of creation, but the presence of intelligence does not require the Christian God. On the other hand, should this theory prove inadequate, the doctrine of creation is not thereby undercut.

The Uniqueness of God’s Creative Work

How unique is God’s creative work? Do humans also engage in such activity, or in something similar? In particular, what if humans succeed in producing life from previously nonliving material? Will this reduce the uniqueness of God’s work and, accordingly, his deity? Some scientists, working with one definition of life, claim that humanity has already succeeded in producing it, while others, working with another definition, maintain that it is merely a matter of time until humans will indeed be successful in this endeavor. But what then? Will this show that God was not necessary for life to begin? Will this give us an alternative explanation of the origin of life?

At this point we need to carefully define what will be the precise nature of the first human production of life from nonliving material. First, it will not be a chance occurrence like the accidental collision of atoms to form a new molecule, and then the combination of molecules over a period of time to produce the first living being. It will not follow the formula of atoms plus motion plus chance. Rather, humans' first production of life will be the result of intensive planning and effort by very intelligent beings working in a well-equipped laboratory under highly controlled conditions. In short, it will be more analogous to creation by a wise, powerful God than to the chance results of random movements of matter.

Further, the scientists involved will have begun with matter. This matter will not have been created by them out of nothing, but will simply have been found and used by them. The raw material that they will use will have been produced by God. So, even in the act of "creating," they will be proving themselves dependent on some higher force. The production of life from nonliving matter by humans will not undercut the greatness of God's power and knowledge; it will simply underscore and reemphasize it.

Implications of the Doctrine of Creation

What, then, are the implications of belief in creation? The doctrine has a significant impact on how we view and treat life and the world.

1. Everything that is has value, because while it is not God, it has been made by him. He made it because he was pleased to do so, and it was good in his sight. Each part has its place, which is just what God intended for it to have. God loves all of his creation, not just certain parts of it. Thus we should also have concern for all of it, to preserve and guard and develop what God has made. We are part of the creation, but only a part. While God intended us to use the creation for our own needs, we are also to have dominion over it, to govern it for its good. We therefore have a large stake in the ecological concern. In fact, Christians should be at the very forefront of the concern for the preservation and welfare of the creation, because it is what God has made.

As different as some creatures may be from us, they have integrity as part of God's plan. Although sin may well have disturbed the universe God created, the world was good when it came from his hand. There is no particular virtue, then, in fleeing the physical creation or avoiding bodily pursuits in favor of more intellectual or spiritual activities. The fact that we are intellectual and spiritual creatures does not negate the fact that we are physical beings as well.

2. God's creative activity includes not only the initial creative activity, but also his later indirect workings. Creation does not preclude development within the world; it includes it. Thus God's plan involves and utilizes the best of human skill and knowledge in the genetic refinement of the creation. Such endeavors are our partnership with God in the ongoing work of creation. Yet, of course, we must be mindful that the materials and truth we employ in those endeavors come from God.

3. There is justification for scientifically investigating the creation. Science assumes that there is within the creation some sort of order or pattern it can discover. If the universe were random and, consequently, all the facts scientists gather about it were merely a haphazard collection, no real understanding of nature would be possible. But by affirming that everything has been made in accordance with a logical pattern, the doctrine of creation substantiates science's assumption. It is significant that historically science developed earliest and most rapidly in European culture, where there was a belief in a single God who had created according to a rational plan, rather than in some other culture where there was a belief in several gods who engage in conflicting activities.[659] Knowing that there is an intelligent pattern to the universe, the Christian is motivated to seek for it.

4. Nothing other than God is self-sufficient or eternal. Everything else, every object and every being, derives its existence from him. It exists to do his will. Only God deserves our worship. Everything else exists for his sake, not he for its sake. Although we will highly respect the creation, since it has been made by him, we will always maintain a clear distinction between God and it.

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God's Continuing Work: *Providence*

Chapter Objectives

After you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize that one part of God's providence is maintaining his creation through preservation.
2. Understand that another part of providence is God's governing activity.
3. Identify and describe seven features of God's governing activity.
4. Recognize that prayer has a role in evoking an appropriate human response to providence.
5. Understand that miracles, or works that are specially supernatural, are an important aspect of providence.

Chapter Summary

The providence of God means the continuing action of God in preserving his creation and guiding it toward his intended purposes. Preservation means that God maintains the creation that he brought into existence. Government means that God is actively engaged in achieving his purposes in his creation and that sin cannot thwart those purposes. Some hold that God's providence is general, though the view that God's

sovereignty is specific fits better with the overall teaching of Scripture. There are at least seven features of God's governing activity. While prayer does not change God, it brings the Christian in line with God's purposes, thus enabling God to accomplish those purposes. God does choose on occasion to counteract the natural law to fulfill his purposes; this occurs in a miracle. For the believer, God is ever present and active in caring for him or her.

Study Questions

- Why is providence important to a theology of God?
- What two aspects of providence are important to Christian understanding, and how are they presented in Scripture?
- What is the extent of God's governing activity?
- What are the ways in which God relates to sin?
- What are the major features of God's governing activity, and what do they mean?
- Why is there concern over the role of prayer?
- How are miracles related to the providence of God?

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While creation is God's originating work with respect to the universe, providence is his continuing relationship to it. By providence, we mean the continuing action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation he has brought into being and guides it to his intended purposes for it. In terms of the daily dynamics of our lives, therefore, providence has in many ways more actual pertinence than does the doctrine of creation. The word derives from the Latin *providere*, which literally means "to foresee." But more than merely knowing about the future is involved. The word also carries the connotation of acting prudently or making preparation for the future.

Providence is in certain ways central to the conduct of the Christian life. It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in his care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance. We can pray, knowing that God hears and acts upon our prayers. We can face danger, knowing that he is not unaware and uninvolved.

The doctrine of providence often appears in discussions of general revelation and in the arguments of natural theology, for it is concerned with those aspects of God's work that to a large extent are accessible to everyone. It is at least possible to see the hand of God in the workings of history and nature. Here, then, there will be some overlap between theology and the areas of history and science. Insofar as history is not merely a chronicling of events that occur but also an attempt to interpret them or to find some sort of pattern within those events, the historian's work may support the doctrine of providence. But if historians see no pattern, their work will contradict the doctrine. Moreover, providence as described in the Bible extends to the unusual events called miracles, which seem somehow to defy science's picture of the regularity of the universe. There is therefore the potential for conflict between science and the Christian doctrine of providence as well.

Providence may be thought of as having two aspects. One aspect is God's work of preserving his creation in existence, maintaining and sustaining it; this is generally called preservation or sustenance. The other is God's activity in guiding and directing the course of events to fulfill his purposes. This is termed government or providence proper. Preservation and government should not be thought of as separate acts of God, but as distinguishable aspects of his unitary work.

Providence as Preservation

Preservation is God's maintaining his creation in existence. It involves God's protection of his creation against harm and destruction, and his provision for the needs of the elements or members of the creation.

Numerous biblical passages speak of God's preserving the creation as a whole. In Nehemiah 9:6, Ezra says, "You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." After a statement about the role of Christ in creation, Paul links him to the continuation of the creation as well: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the Son as "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (1:3).

The import of such passages is to deny that any part of the creation is self-sufficient. Some people tend to think of God's work as ending with creation. In their view, after creation all things have remained in existence simply by virtue of some innate power, but this is rejected by Scripture. Both the origination and the continuation of all things are a matter of divine will and activity.

God's presence is particularly evident in the preservation of Israel as a nation.[660] For example, the hand of God was present in providing for the needs of his people at the time of the great famine. God had brought Joseph to Egypt to make provision for feeding the people in the time of shortage. The sparing of the people in the time of Moses is also particularly noteworthy. By ordering the killing of the Israelite male children, Pharaoh attempted to prevent Israel from multiplying and gaining strength (Exod. 1). The midwives saved these children, however, and remarkable circumstances spared Moses's life. The series of plagues designed to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors culminated in the death of the firstborn of all households in Egypt. Yet the firstborn children of the Israelites were untouched. When they fled and were pursued by the Egyptians, the children of Israel were enabled to pass through the Red Sea on dry land, while the Egyptians were engulfed in the waters and drowned. In their wanderings through the wilderness, God's chosen nation received miraculous provision, primarily manna, but quails and water as well. They were given victories in battle, sometimes against great odds, as they sought to take the land promised to them from those who then occupied it.

In the book of Daniel, God's work of preservation is again very striking. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were condemned to be burned, but emerged unharmed from the furnace, while those who cast them in were destroyed by the heat. Because he prayed to his God, Daniel was thrown into a den of lions, but he also emerged unharmed.

Jesus has also given clear teaching regarding the Father's work of preservation. The disciples were concerned about the necessities of life—what they would eat and what they would wear. Jesus reassured them that the Father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the fields. He would surely do the same for them. After teaching that God provides for the lesser members of his creation, Jesus's argument moves to humans: they are of more value than birds (Matt. 6:26) and flowers (v. 30). It therefore is not necessary for humans to be anxious about food and clothing, for if they seek God's kingdom and righteousness, all these things will be added to them (vv. 31–33). This is a reference to God's provision. In Matthew 10, Jesus focuses on God's care. Once again the logic of the argument is that what God does for the lesser creatures, he will do to an even greater extent on behalf of his human children. They need not fear those who can destroy the body, but cannot kill the soul (v. 28). Even though two sparrows are sold for a penny, not one of them can fall to the ground without the Father's will (v. 29). Even the hairs of our heads are numbered—so great is the Father's knowledge of what transpires within his creation (v. 30). The familiar conclusion is: "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (v. 31).

Another important emphasis, in both Jesus's and Paul's teaching, is the inseparability of God's children from his love and keeping. In John 10, Jesus draws a contrast between his sheep and the unbelievers who have just asked for a plain statement about his messiahship. His sheep recognize and respond to his voice. They shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of his hand; no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (vv. 27–30). Paul strikes a similar note when he asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). After rehearsing the various possibilities, all of which he rejects, he summarizes by saying, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38–39). Both Jesus and Paul emphasize that neither physical nor spiritual danger need be feared, for God spares us from their effects. God's provision, protection, and deliverance will even enable us to endure temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

One salient dimension of God's preservation is that the believer is not spared from danger or trial, but is preserved within it. There is no promise that persecution and suffering will not come, but rather that they will not prevail over us. Jesus spoke of great tribulation that was to come upon the elect, but would not overcome them (Matt. 24:15–31). Peter spoke of the various trials believers would have to suffer (1 Pet. 1:6). He warned his readers not to think of these

things as strange. We are not to be surprised by the fiery trials (1 Pet. 4:12), but to rejoice in them, since such ordeals enable us to identify with Christ's sufferings (4:13) and prove the reality of our faith (1:7). Paul wrote that God would supply all of our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). Writing those words from prison, Paul indicated that he had learned to be content in any state in which he found himself (v. 11). He had learned the secret of facing either plenty and abundance or hunger and want (v. 12); he could do all things through the Lord who strengthened him (v. 13). Jesus himself, of course, asked to be spared from the cup that he was about to drink, praying that if possible it might pass from him, but that not his will, but that of the Father might be done. Jesus was not spared the death of the cross, but was enabled to overcome it.

The Scripture writers see God's preserving hand everywhere. In particular, the psalmists' hymns of praise emphasize God's preserving work throughout nature. An outstanding example is Psalm 104. God has set the earth on its foundations, so that it will never be shaken (v. 5). He sends the streams into the valleys (v. 10) and waters the mountains (v. 13). He makes the darkness so that the beasts of prey can seek their sustenance (vv. 20–21). All of God's creatures receive their food from him (vv. 24–30). Job similarly sees God as controlling the whole of creation—God sends rain (5:10) and snow (37:10). God is at work through the processes of nature to provide for the needs of his creatures.

The biblical teaching regarding the divine work of preservation excludes two opposite ideas. On the one hand is the deistic idea that God has simply made the world, established its patterns of action so that whatever is needed by each member of the creation will be automatically provided, and then allowed the world to go on its way.[661] Given this model, the creation will remain unless God acts to terminate it. In the biblical model, however, creation would cease to be, apart from God's continued willing it to persist. The creation has no resident or inherent power of existence. God is directly and personally concerned about and involved with the continuation of his creation.

The doctrine of preservation must also be seen as countering the opposite idea —continuous creation. Here we do not have in mind the sort of expression sometimes used by some Reformed writers, which aims at affirming that divine providence is no less significant a work than is creation.[662] Rather, we are referring to a view such as Karl Heim's idea that God actually creates the universe anew in each instant of time. Thus, it is continually ceasing to be, and God is continually calling it back into existence.[663] Continuous creation is something like the constantly repeated cycle of alternating current—the current rises to full voltage, then drops to zero, and then rises again to the full voltage in

the opposite polarity. What appears to be a continuous application of current is actually a constantly repeated series of changes in the flow of voltage. So, in this view, creation is constantly ceasing to be, as it were, and then being created again and again by God.

Nothing in the biblical descriptions of the divine work of preservation suggests that there is a series of atomistic and incessantly repeated "acts" of the same nature as creation. While there is no guarantee of the existence of anything, the idea that all things tend to fall back into nonbeing comes from nonbiblical sources. There is, to be sure, no Hebrew word for preservation, so that the matter cannot be finally settled on linguistic grounds.[664] It should be pointed out, however, that the idea of continuous creation does have a major flaw: it makes all God's working direct, denying that he employs means to achieve his ends.

An image to help us correctly understand God's work of preservation can be drawn from the world of power tools. We can start a manual electric drill by engaging the switch and then activate a locking device that will keep the drill running until definite action is taken to release the lock. This is like the deistic view of God's work of preservation. However, there are other tools, such as power saws, which do not have built-in locking devices. Such tools require continuous application of pressure to the switch, like the "dead man's switch" in a railroad locomotive. If the person operating the machine fails to continue to apply pressure, it comes to a halt: it cannot continue unless someone constantly wills it to function and takes the necessary action. Such machines can serve as metaphors of the biblical view of preservation.

Another illustration of deism is an automobile with cruise control. The speed, once set, will be maintained, even if the driver removes his or her foot from the accelerator. An automobile without cruise control can illustrate the biblical view of preservation. As soon as the driver's foot is removed from the accelerator, the car will begin to slow down and eventually coast to a stop. Similarly, if God did not continue to will actively the existence of his creation, it would cease to be. It has no inherent ability to persist. By contrast, the idea of continuous creation can be illustrated by a machine that continually loses power and must be switched back on or constantly restarted. But God need not again and again bring the creation into being out of nothing, for it is not constantly ceasing to be, or beginning to cease to be.

One other idea of preservation or sustenance should be avoided. This is the idea that God is like a celestial repair worker: The creation has been established and ordinarily functions as God intends. At times, however, it is necessary for God to intervene to make an adjustment before something goes amiss, or perhaps to make a repair after something has gone wrong. In this view, his task is

essentially a negative one. He is not needed when all goes well. Then, God merely observes, approvingly. However, the Bible pictures a much more active involvement by God on a continuing basis.[665] While God is not so immanent as to create continuously and repeatedly, he is, nonetheless, immanently at work in his creation, constantly willing it to remain.

The biblical writers, who understood the divine work of preservation, had a definite sense of confidence. For example, Psalm 91 describes the Lord as our refuge and fortress. The believer need not fear "the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday" (vv. 5–6). Even in the midst of battle there can be confidence, for the angels of the Lord are watching over and guarding the believer (v. 11). The psalmist had learned the lesson that Jesus later taught his disciples—not to fear the one who can destroy the body but cannot touch the soul (Matt. 10:28). This is not a belief that death cannot touch the believer, for death comes to all (Heb. 9:27). Rather, it is the confidence that physical death is not the most significant factor because not even it can separate us from God's love. Christ's resurrection is the proof that God has conquered even death. Consequently, Paul could say, "From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). The worst that can befall us is to be killed, but even that holds no terror for believers who have learned that no harm can come to them contrary to the will of God. While the doctrine of God's work of preservation is no justification for foolhardiness or imprudence, it is a guard against terror or even anxiety.

God's work of preservation also means that we can have confidence in the regularity of the created world, and can plan and carry out our lives accordingly. We take this fact for granted, yet it is essential to any sort of rational functioning in the world. We are able to sit down in a chair because we know it will not vaporize or disappear. Barring a practical joke by someone while our back is turned, it will be there. Yet from a purely empirical standpoint, there is no real basis for such an expectation. In the past, we have found that our expectations of the future proved true when that future became present. Thus, we assume that our present expectations of the future, because they resemble previous expectations of now past futures, will be fulfilled. But this argument assumes the very thing that it purports to establish, namely, that future futures will resemble past futures. That is equivalent to assuming that the future will resemble the past. There really is no empirical basis for knowing the future until we have had a chance actually to experience that future. While there may be a psychological tendency to expect a certain thing to occur, there are no logical grounds for it, apart from a belief that reality is of such a nature that it will persist in existence.

The assumption that matter persists, or that the laws of nature will continue to function, brings us into the realm of metaphysics. The Christian's belief at this point is not in a material or impersonal ground of reality, but in an intelligent, good, and purposeful being who continues to will the existence of his creation, so that ordinarily no unexpected events occur.

Providence as Government

The Extent of God's Governing Activity

By the government of God we mean his activity in the universe so that all its events fulfill his plan for it. As such, God's governing activity of course broadly includes the matter that we have referred to as preservation. Here, however, the emphasis is more fully on the purposive directing of the whole of reality and the course of history to God's ends. It is the actual execution, within time, of his plan devised in eternity.

This governing activity of God extends over a large variety of areas. God is described as controlling nature, so much so that its elements are personified as obeying his voice. In the Psalms the praise of God often takes the form of extolling his power over nature: "I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses" (Ps. 135:5–7). Jesus held the same faith: "Your Father in heaven . . . causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45).

Particularly dramatic evidence of God's power over nature can be seen in the case of Elijah, who told Ahab that it would not rain except by the Word of God, and it did not rain for three-and-a-half years, and who prayed at Mount Carmel for God to send down lightning from heaven, and it was done (1 Kings 17–18). We have already noted that God performed miracles involving nature in connection with the exodus of the people of Israel. In addition, Jesus's power over nature was part of what caused the disciples to recognize that he was God. During a severe storm, he spoke only the words, "Quiet! Be still!" and the storm abated (Mark 4:39). The disciples asked themselves, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him" (Luke 8:25). When they had fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus commanded them to take their boats out into the deep water and let down their nets. They obeyed and

were amazed to find that they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break and their boats began to sink (Luke 5:1–11). (For similar expressions of the Lord's governance of the forces of nature, see Job 9:5–9; 37; Pss. 104:14; 147:8–15; Matt. 6:25–30.)

Scripture tells us that God guides and directs the animal creation. In Psalm 104:21–29, the beasts, from the young lions to the teeming sea creatures, are depicted as carrying out his will and depending on him for their provisions. In 1 Kings 17:4, Jehovah tells Elijah that he will provide for him during the coming drought: "You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." In verse 6 we are told that the ravens brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and evening. Incapable of conscious choice, animals instinctively obey God's command.

Further, God's government involves human history and the destiny of the nations. A particularly vivid expression of this is found in Daniel 2:21: "He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others." And there is a dramatic illustration regarding Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:24–25. The Lord uses Assyria to accomplish his purposes with Israel, and then in turn brings destruction on Assyria as well (Isa. 10:5–12). This is simply part of his working among all the nations: "By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings" (v. 13). Paul, in his Mars' Hill address, said that "from one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands" (Acts 17:26). (For similar expressions of God's direction of human history, see Job 12:23; Pss. 47:7–8; 66:7.)

The Lord is also sovereign in the circumstances of the lives of individual persons. Hannah, inspired by the miraculous answer to her prayer for a son (Samuel), expressed her praise: "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts" (1 Sam. 2:6–7). Mary similarly glorified God: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble" (Luke 1:52). Paul asserts that even before he was born God had set him apart for his task (Gal. 1:15–16). Paul urges his readers to be humble since everything they have and are has been received from God. "Do not go beyond what is written," he tells them. "Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:6–7). Christians have differing gifts. That is

because God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has chosen sovereignly to give particular gifts to particular persons (Rom. 12:3–6; 1 Cor. 12:4–11).

David found comfort in the fact that God was sovereign in his life: "But I trust in you, LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me" (Ps. 31:14–15). He continued to trust in the Lord in the midst of adversity and enemies, believing that the Lord would ultimately vindicate him. Human explanations of the fortunes and misfortunes of life are shallow and mistaken: "No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt themselves. It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. . . . As for me, I will declare this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob, who says, 'I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up'" (Ps. 75:6–7, 9–10).

The Lord's sovereignty includes what are thought of as the accidental occurrences of life. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." This is illustrated in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. When the great storm came upon the ship on which Jonah was traveling to Tarshish, the sailors cast lots to determine who was responsible for the evil coming upon them; and the Lord used that system to single out Jonah (Jon. 1:7). When the early believers sought someone to replace Judas within the circle of the apostles, they in effect nominated two, and then prayed that God would show them which of the two, Barsabbas or Matthias, was his choice. They then cast lots; when the lot fell on Matthias, they enrolled him with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:23–26). Even accidental killing of a person is regarded as being directed by God. Note how the ordinance in Exodus describes unpremeditated murder: "If it [the murder] is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen," then the murderer can flee to a city of refuge (Exod. 21:13). This is a powerful indication that God is in control of all the circumstances of life, that nothing is pure chance. Although the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, it is worth noting that in proposing that Esther go to the king on behalf of her people, Mordecai asks, "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14).

God's governing activity is to be thought of in the widest possible setting. The psalmist says, "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." The psalmist then proceeds to call on all the angels, all the hosts of the Lord, the ministers that do his will, all his works, in all the places of his dominion, to bless him (Ps. 103:19–22). When Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses, he blesses the Lord: "His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of

the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'" (Dan. 4:34–35). Paul says that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). The very idea of the kingdom of God, which plays such a prominent role both in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Jesus, suggests the universal ruling power of God. His rule is universal in terms of both time (it is eternal) and extent (everyone and everything is totally subject to it).

But the sovereignty of God is not merely a matter of the circumstances of life or the behavior of the subhuman creation. The free actions of humans are also part of God's governmental working. When the people of Israel were to leave Egypt, the Lord told them that they would not depart empty-handed, for he would give them favor in the sight of the Egyptians (Exod. 3:21). This was fulfilled when the time of departure came: "The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians" (Exod. 12:35–36). While it might be argued that the Lord coerced the Egyptians in this matter through the plagues and particularly the death of their firstborn, the Bible is clear that the granting of the Israelites' requests was a free decision on the part of the Egyptians.

Another example is in 1 Samuel 24. Saul interrupted his pursuit of David to go into a cave to relieve himself. It so happened that David and his men were hiding in that very cave. David was able to cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, but did not harm him. Shortly thereafter both David and Saul interpreted the king's ostensibly free action in entering the cave as actually the Lord's doing. David said to Saul, "the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave" (v. 10); and Saul responded, "the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me" (v. 18). Psalm 33:15 says that the Lord fashions the hearts of all the earth's inhabitants. Proverbs says that human plans and actions will eventuate in the fulfillment of God's purposes: "To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue" (16:1); "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails" (19:21). When Ezra was refurbishing the temple, King Artaxerxes of Persia provided resources out of his nation's funds. Ezra comments: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way" (Ezra 7:27).

Even the sinful actions of humans are part of God's providential working. Probably the most notable instance of this is the crucifixion of Jesus, which Peter attributed to both God and sinful men: "This man was handed over to you by

God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). It might be argued that only the delivering up of Jesus (i.e., the betrayal by Judas), rather than the actual crucifixion, is here represented as part of God's plan. The point is the same, nevertheless: what sinful humans did is considered part of God's providential working.

In 2 Samuel 24:1, the Lord is said to have incited David to number the people; elsewhere Satan is said to have induced David to commit this sin (1 Chron. 21:1). Another reference sometimes cited as evidence that human sin is part of God's providential activity is 2 Samuel 16:10. David observes that Shimei is cursing him at the Lord's command. This is put in the form of a hypothetical statement ("If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David'"), but in verse 11 David says categorically, "Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to." In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul declares that Satan deceives "those who are perishing . . . because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." Then he adds, "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 10–12). Here it appears that Paul is attributing what Satan has done to the working of God as well.

Providence: General or Specific?

One issue that has been discussed throughout the history of the church is whether God's providence is general or specific. The general providence view holds that God has general goals that he intends and actually attains, but that with respect to the specific details, he permits considerable variance, allowing for human choices. The specific providence view is that God ultimately decides even the details of his plan and ensures that they eventuate as he intends.

There are various forms of each of these. Among general providence proponents, traditional Arminians hold that humans have free will, by which they mean libertarian or noncompatibilist freedom. They emphasize that God could have created a world in which all the details were determined, but instead chose to limit himself, one major illustration of which is found in the incarnation. They see numerous biblical passages that teach human freedom and responsibility as evidences that humans determine many of the details of what happens.[666] Some hold that God is indeed sovereign over everything, and that humans have libertarian free will, but regard the relationship between these two factors as ultimately paradoxical. Finally, more extreme Arminians, such as open theists, regard God as a risk taker. Although he may have a plan for how he will

bring things to pass, not knowing future actions of free moral agents, he often has to change his plans in light of unforeseen developments. Although they contend that specific sovereignty's objection to general sovereignty is a matter of Calvinism versus Arminianism, open theists differ significantly from traditional Arminians, who generally hold that God does foresee the future.

Those who hold to specific sovereignty, or, as it is sometimes called, "meticulous providence," contend that the Scriptures teach God's sovereignty over all that occurs. Some are hard determinists, who feel that human freedom would be libertarian freedom, but believe God's sovereignty precludes this. They are willing to make God responsible even for evil in the world. Others also hold to hard determinism, denying human freedom, but believe that humans are still responsible in some paradoxical fashion, since Scripture teaches this responsibility. Finally, there are soft determinists, who hold that while God is sovereign over all things, this is not inconsistent with human freedom, which is understood as compatibilistic freedom.[667]

This debate deserves a much more extensive discussion than can be given in an introductory theology book. We may, however, note the major arguments advanced by each party. General sovereignty theologians make much of biblical texts that depict people making choices or being faced with choices. The situation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is one of these, and the calls to sinners to accept Jesus Christ are another major group of them. These theologians also note the occasions on which God's intention seems to be frustrated by human actions. The specific sovereignty theologians appeal less to these narrative passages and more to didactic passages that seem to teach that God brings about all things.

In my judgment, the specific sovereignty argument is overall the stronger. Since Scripture is not sufficiently clear in its teaching about human freedom to determine whether that is compatibilistic or noncompatibilistic, we need to make that choice by which view fits better with other teachings of Scripture. There are impressive texts that speak of God's complete sovereignty. One of the most powerful is Ephesians 1:11: "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." There are texts that indicate that even seemingly minute matters are subject to his will: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29–31). The psalmist wrote, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:16).

The general sovereignty model has difficulty dealing with such passages. In some cases, they are simply ignored.[668] John Sanders, for example, does not even mention Ephesians 1:11. In other cases, the explanation is quite strained.[669] So Sanders psychologizes Joseph's statement to his brothers in Genesis 45,[670] and regards Jesus's prediction that Peter would deny him three times as a case of God manipulating circumstances to teach Peter a lesson.[671] These are indications that the exegesis may be influenced by other, extrabiblical considerations. The narrative passages are given priority over the didactic, a questionable hermeneutical tactic.

Sanders asserts that he is "not claiming that the theory of exhaustive foreknowledge fails to explain biblical predictions, just that biblical predictions do not require this theory for their explanation."[672] This is in keeping with the general thrust of open theists that if there is a possibility that a theory is true, one has a right to hold it. By contrast, I contend that one should give preference to the more strongly supported option. The specific sovereignty model seems to be able to deal with a wider scope of biblical teaching with less distortion than the other. Since the view of compatibilistic freedom is a viable option, the specific sovereignty model is tenable and preferable.[673] It is also helpful to bear in mind the distinction made earlier between God's wish and his will (see 334–35).

In fairness to more moderate Arminian views, it should be said that many of the comments on open theism do not apply to them. Jack Cottrell represents a more traditional Arminian position. He acknowledges that it is not in itself objectionable to say that God's eternal plan includes "whatsoever comes to pass." Rather, it is the Calvinists' addition of two qualifiers, "efficacious" and "unconditional," that he finds unacceptable.[674] His own view is that the basic issue is the type of creation that God has made. It is one in which there is genuine freedom, which means that God has chosen to limit himself to working with such a creation and, specifically, human beings possessing genuine free will.[675] God's governing of the world is not based on controlling and determining everything that happens, but on foreknowing all future events, even those involving free human activities. On this basis, he is able to plan his responses to these human actions, acting in such a way as to influence what humans do. This influence, however, does not infallibly produce the results he intends, and, unlike the view of some Calvinists, the special intervention and influence are the exception, rather than the rule.[676] He rejects the Calvinistic view as being deterministic. Those Calvinistic views that employ the idea of compatibilism he regards as inconsistent and denying genuine human freedom. Calvinism, in Cottrell's judgment, also frequently generalizes from specific instances to a general or overall control by God.[677]

Cottrell's view is more nuanced and more consistent with Scripture than that of Sanders. In addition, he has recognized and to a considerable extent understood the idea of compatibilism. Yet his use of expressions like "redefinition of free will" and "inconsistent Calvinism" suggests that he is still assuming that only the libertarian view of freedom is true freedom, thus begging the question. The inconsistency he finds in the Calvinist view is between it and his view of will, rather than an internal contradiction. While he rejects the compatibilist explanation of human decision making, he does not offer an explanation of his own as to why humans choose as they do; they simply do. Human freedom becomes a label, rather than an explanation, which is unfortunate in view of the large body of material from the behavioral sciences regarding human will and choice. Beyond this, he does not respond to the charge that his view also involves a conflict between freedom of choice and God's foreknowledge of such decisions, although that conflict is not as severe as between human freedom and God's determination of such actions.[678]

The Relationship between God's Governing Activity and Sin

At this point we must address the difficult problem of the relationship between God's working and sinful human acts. It is necessary to distinguish between God's normal working in relation to human actions and his working in relation to sinful acts. The Bible makes quite clear that God is not the cause of sin. James writes, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed" (James 1:14). John states: "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16). But if the sinful actions of humans are not caused by God, what do we mean when we say that they are within his governing activity? God can and does relate to sin in several ways: he can (1) prevent it, (2) permit it, (3) direct it, or (4) limit it.[679] Note that in each case God is not the cause of human sin, but acts in relationship to it. Again, the distinction between God's wish and his will should be kept in mind.

1. God can prevent sin. At times he deters or precludes people from performing certain sinful acts. When Abimelech, thinking that Sarah was Abraham's sister rather than his wife, took her to himself, the Lord came to him in a dream. He said to Abimelech, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her" (Gen. 20:6). David prayed that God would keep him from

sin: “Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me” (Ps. 19:13).

2. God does not always prevent sin. At times he simply wills to permit it. Although it is not what he would wish to happen, he acquiesces in it. By not preventing the sin we determine to do, God renders it *certain* that we will indeed commit it; but he does not cause us to sin, or render it *necessary* that we act in this fashion. At Lystra, Paul preached that “in the past, he [God] let all nations go their own way’” (Acts 14:16). And in Romans 1 he says that God gave people up to impurity, dishonorable passions, a base mind, improper conduct (vv. 24, 26, 28). Similarly, Jesus said regarding Moses’s permitting divorce: “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning” (Matt. 19:8). In 2 Chronicles 32:31 we read that “God left him [Hezekiah] to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.” These were concessions by God to let individuals perform sinful acts that were not his desire, acts that they could not have performed had he decided not to permit them to. This is probably put most clearly by the Lord in Psalm 81:12–14: “So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways . . .”

3. God can also direct sin. That is, while permitting some sins to occur, God nonetheless directs them in such a way that good comes out of them. This is what Ethelbert Stauffer has called the law of reversal.[680] Probably the most dramatic case of this in Scripture is the story of Joseph. His brothers wished to kill him, to be rid of him. This desire certainly was not good; it was neither caused nor approved by God. Yet he permitted them to accomplish their desire—but with a slight modification. Reuben urged the other brothers not to kill Joseph, but merely to throw him into a pit, thinking to free him later (Gen. 37:21–22). But then another factor entered. Midianite traders came by and the brothers (unknown to Reuben) sold Joseph as a slave. None of this was what God had wished, but he allowed it and used the evil intentions and actions of the brothers for ultimate good. The Lord was with Joseph (Gen. 39:2). Despite the scheming and lying of Potiphar’s wife and the lack of faithfulness by the chief cupbearer, Joseph became successful, and through his efforts large numbers of people, including his father’s family, were spared from starvation. Joseph was wise enough to recognize God’s hand in all this. He declared to his brothers: “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt” (Gen. 45:8). And after the death of Jacob he reiterated to them: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). Peter saw that God had in like manner used the crucifixion

of Jesus for good: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). Paul spoke of the Jews’ rejection of Christ as the means by which reconciliation came to the world (Rom. 11:13–15, 25).

God is like a martial arts expert who redirects the evil efforts of sinful human beings and Satan in such a way that they become the very means of doing good. We must recognize here the amazing nature of divine omnipotence. If God were great and powerful, but not all-powerful, he would have to originate everything directly or he would lose control of the situation and be unable to accomplish his ultimate purposes. But our omnipotent God is able to allow evil humans to do their very worst, and still accomplish his purposes, even working through them.

4. Finally, God can limit sin. There are times when he does not prevent evil deeds, but nonetheless restrains the extent or effect of what evil humans and the devil and his demons can do. A prime example is the case of Job. God permitted Satan to act, but limited what he could do: “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger” (Job 1:12). Later, the Lord said, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life” (2:6). David expressed the faith of Israel when he wrote, “If the LORD had not been on our side—let Israel say—if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us” (Ps. 124:1–3). And Paul reassured his readers that there are limits on the temptation they will encounter: “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Even when God permits sin to occur, he imposes limits beyond which it cannot go.

The Major Features of God’s Governing Activity

We need now to summarize the major features and the implications of the doctrine of divine government.

1. God’s governing activity is universal. It extends to all matters: that which is obviously good and even that which seemingly is not good. Paul wrote, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). This means there are no limits on whom God uses. He may even use seemingly “unclean” agents, such as Cyrus (Isa. 44–45), to accomplish his ends. The sensitive believer will be alert to what God is intending and attempting to do, even in unexpected or unplanned or unlikely situations. An example is Jesus’s interview with the Samaritan woman.

This was not a planned meeting. It was not on the agenda of evangelistic endeavors. It came when Jesus was "off duty"—during a rest period on a traveling day (John 4:3, 6). Yet Jesus saw this as an opportunity providentially sent by the Father and hence to be utilized. The wise Christian will be similarly alert to the opportunities that come in what seem at first glance to be accidental circumstances. That life is pregnant with divinely sent possibilities gives us a sense of expectancy and excitement.

2. God's providence does not extend merely to his own people. While there is a special concern for the believer, God does not withhold his goodness entirely from the rest of humankind. Jesus said this quite openly in Matthew 5:45: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This goes contrary to an opinion held by some Christians, an opinion that was expressed humorously a few years ago in a comic strip entitled "The Reverend." One day the Reverend, attired in his clerical garb, was leaving on vacation. His neighbor offered to water his lawn while he was gone. "Thank you for your thoughtfulness," replied the Reverend, "but I've made other arrangements." In the last panel, rain was pouring down on the Reverend's lawn, but not on the adjacent yards. That, says Jesus, is *not* how God ordinarily works. The unbeliever as well as the believer benefits from the Father's goodness. My father was a Christian; the man whose farm was next to ours was a non-Christian who worked seven days a week. But when it rained, it usually rained on both farms alike.

3. God is good in his government. He works for the good, sometimes directly bringing it about, sometimes countering or deflecting the efforts of evil human beings toward good. We have seen this in Romans 8:28. We must be careful, however, not to identify too quickly and easily the good with what is pleasant and comfortable for us. In Romans 8:28, the good is associated with God's purpose, and that in turn is identified as the conforming of his children to the image of his Son (v. 29). Being conformed to the Son's image may sometimes involve suffering trials (1 Pet. 1:6–9) or enduring discipline (Heb. 12:6–11).

That God is good in his government should produce in the believer a confidence in the ultimate outcome of the events of life. When Abraham was called on to offer his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, he was confident that Isaac would somehow be spared. Abraham said to the servants, "I and the boy [will] go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Gen. 22:5). The Hebrew word translated "come back" is clearly in the first-person plural. When Isaac asked where the lamb for the burnt offering was, Abraham responded, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (v. 8). Abraham had no prior knowledge or guarantee of what would happen on

the mountain. He may even have expected that Isaac was to die and be resurrected (cf. Heb. 11:19). But whatever would happen, Abraham knew from personal experience what kind of God he served. God had provided and cared for him when he obeyed and went out from Ur of the Chaldeans to a place he had never seen. In the knowledge that God is good and had promised that Isaac would be his heir, Abraham was confident that he and Isaac would somehow return again from the mountain. Not only is God in control; he is directing matters according to the goodness and graciousness of his character. Therefore, believers ought not to hold back from doing God's will for fear that some dreadful thing will befall them.

4. God is personally concerned about those who are his. We should not think that God handles us impersonally in a sort of bureaucratic fashion. Because of the size and complexity of the kingdom of God, we might be tempted to draw this conclusion. But various pictures Jesus gives us of the Father indicate the personal dimension of his care. He cares about the one lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7) and searches until he finds it. The good shepherd knows his sheep and calls them by name. They recognize his voice and come, whereas they would disregard the voice of a stranger (John 10:3–6, 14, 27). The shepherd watches over his sheep, protects them, even gives his life for them if necessary (v. 11). The Father knows the very hairs of the heads of those who are his (Matt. 10:30).

The personal dimension of God's government speaks significantly to the contemporary situation. With growing automation and computerization has also come increased depersonalization. We are only cogs in the machinery, faceless robots, numbers on file, digital records on computer disks, or entries on tape. The government of our nation is distant and depersonalized. The doctrine of God's providence assures us that his personal relationship to us is important. He knows each of us and each one matters to him.

5. Our activity and God's activity are not mutually exclusive. We have no basis for laxity, indifference, or resignation in the face of the fact that God is at work accomplishing his goals. As we have seen, his providence includes human actions. Sometimes humans are conscious that their actions are fulfilling divine intention, as when Jesus said that he must do the Father's will (e.g., Matt. 26:42). At other times there is an unwitting carrying out of God's plan. Little did Caesar Augustus know when he made his decree (Luke 2:1) that the census he was ordering would make possible the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but he helped fulfill it nonetheless. The certainty that God will accomplish something in no way excuses us from giving ourselves diligently to bringing about its accomplishment. God accomplishes his planned

ends, but he does so by employing means (including human actions) to those ends.

Nor should there be any loss of belief in the providence of God simply because there is now less need for spectacular divine intervention. Modern secular humanity sees little place for God in this world. In ancient times, God was the solution to mysteries. He was behind everything that happened. He was the explanation of the existence of the universe and the complexity of creation. He was the solver of problems. Yet today we have come to understand our universe much more completely. We now know what makes a person ill (at least in many cases), and medical science can prevent or cure the illness. Prayers for healing sometimes seem inappropriate (except in critical or hopeless cases). God's providence appears to be a foreign concept.[681] Yet we have seen that providence includes God's immanent working; thus, he is providentially at work as much in the cure wrought by the physician as in a miraculous healing.

We have a tendency to feel that if God does something, it must be through obviously supernatural means. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the floodwaters reached the campus of New Orleans Baptist Seminary. As the seminary security forces were preparing to evacuate the campus, potential looters were lined up, waiting their opportunity to perpetrate potentially greater damage to the campus than what the forces of nature had inflicted. At that point, a National Guard unit arrived and requested permission to bivouac on the campus, which was granted. The result was that the school sustained no vandalism damage. Is this not just as much God's preserving providence as if bands of angels had been dispatched to guard the campus?

None of what I have said here should be interpreted to mean that God does not still perform miracles today. Especially with the growth of third world Christianity, it is becoming apparent that where medicine and other forms of technology are not yet as available as in the developed world, miracles and other more dramatically supernatural works of God are more widespread.

6. God is sovereign in his government. This means that he alone determines his plan and knows the significance of each of his actions. It is not necessary for us to know where he is leading. We need to be careful, then, to avoid dictating to God what he should do to give us direction. Sometimes the Christian is tempted to tell God, "If you want me to do A, then show me by doing X." This fails to take into account the complexity of the universe and the large numbers of persons whom God must be concerned about. It would be far better, Gideon's fleece (Judg. 6:36–40) notwithstanding, if we simply allowed God to illumine us —if he so wishes and to the extent he wished—as to the significance of his working. We know that everything does have a significance within God's plan,

but we must be careful not to assume that the meaning of everything should be obvious, and that we will be able to identify that meaning. To suppose that we should be able to understand the significance of all of God's leading may lead to superstition rather than piety.

7. We need to be careful as to what we identify as God's providence. The most notable instance of a too ready identification of historical events with God's will is probably the "German Christians" who in 1934 endorsed the action of Adolf Hitler as God's working in history. The words of their statement are sobering to us who now read them: "We are full of thanks to God that He, as Lord of history, has given us Adolf Hitler our leader and savior from our difficult lot. We acknowledge that we, with body and soul, are bound and dedicated to the German state and to its Führer. This bondage and duty contains for us, as evangelical Christians, its deepest and most holy significance in its obedience to the command of God."[682] A statement a year earlier had said, "To this turn of history [i.e., Hitler's taking power] we say a thankful Yes. God has given him to us. To Him be the glory. As bound to God's Word, we recognize in the great events of our day a new commission of God to His church."[683] From our perspective, the folly of such statements seems obvious. But are we perhaps making some pronouncements today that will be seen as similarly mistaken by those who come a few decades after us? While we need not necessarily go so far as did Karl Barth in rejecting a natural theology based on the developments of history, in his condemnation of the German Christians' action there is a word of caution that is instructive to us.

Providence and Prayer

One problem that has concerned thoughtful Christians when considering the nature of providence is the role of prayer. The dilemma stems from the question of what prayer really accomplishes. On the one hand, if prayer has any effect on what happens, then it seems that God's plan was not fixed in the first place. Providence in some sense depends on or is altered by whether and how much someone prays. On the other hand, if God's plan is established and he will do what he is going to do, then does it matter whether we pray?

We should note that this is simply one particular form of the larger issue of the relationship between human effort and divine providence. Accordingly, we can approach it with the same analytical considerations that we apply to the examination of the broader issue. We need to note two facts: (1) Scripture teaches that God's plan is definite and fixed—it is not subject to revision, and

(2) we are commanded to pray and taught that prayer has value (James 5:16). But how do these two facts relate to each other?

It appears from Scripture that in many cases God works in a sort of partnership with humans. God does not act if humans do not play their part. Thus, when Jesus ministered in his hometown of Nazareth, he did not perform any major miracles. All he did was heal a few sick people. That Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:6) suggests that the people of Nazareth simply did not bring their needy ones to him for healing. It is clear that in many cases the act of faith was necessary for God to act—and such faith was lacking in Nazareth. On the other hand, when Jesus walked on the water (Matt. 14:22–33), Peter asked to be bidden to go to Jesus on the water and was enabled to do so. Presumably Jesus could have enabled all the disciples to walk on the water that day, but only Peter did because only he asked. The centurion bringing his request for the healing of a servant (Matt. 8:5–13) and the woman with the hemorrhage (Matt. 9:20–22), clinging to Jesus's garment are examples of faith which, demonstrated in petition, resulted in God's working. When God wills the end (in these cases, healing), he also wills the means (which includes a request to be healed, which in turn presupposes faith). Thus, prayer does not change what he has purposed to do. It is the means by which he accomplishes his end. It is vital, then, that a prayer be uttered, for without it the desired result will not come to pass.

This means that prayer is more than self-stimulation. It is not a method of creating a positive mental attitude in ourselves so that we are able to do what we have asked to have done. Rather, prayer is in large part a matter of creating in ourselves a right attitude with respect to God's will. Jesus taught his disciples—and us—to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done," before "Give us today our daily bread." Prayer is not so much getting God to do our will as it is demonstrating that we are as concerned as is God that his will be done. Moreover, Jesus taught us persistence in prayer (Luke 11:9–10—note that the imperatives of verse 9 and the participles in verse 10 are in the present tense: keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking). It takes little faith, commitment, and effort to pray once about something and then cease. Persistent prayer makes it apparent that our petition is important to us, as it is to God.

We do not always receive what we ask for. Jesus asked three times for the removal of the cup (death by crucifixion); Paul prayed three times for the removal of his thorn in the flesh. In each case, something more needful was granted (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:9–10). The believer can pray confidently, knowing that our wise and good God will give us, not necessarily what we ask for, but what is

best. For, as the psalmist put it, “no good thing does he [the Lord] withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Ps. 84:11).

Providence and Miracles

What we have been examining thus far are matters of ordinary or normal providence. While supernatural in origin, they are relatively common and hence not too conspicuous or spectacular. We must, however, look at one additional species of providence—miracles, those striking or unusual workings by God that are clearly supernatural. These are special supernatural works of God’s providence that are not explicable on the basis of the usual patterns of nature.

One important issue regarding miracles involves their relationship to the laws of nature. To some, miracles have been not an aid to faith but an obstacle, since they are so contrary to the usual patterns of occurrence as to appear very unlikely or even incredible. Thus, the question of how these events are to be thought of in relationship to natural law is of great importance. There have been three classic views of the relationship between miracles and natural laws.

The first conception is that miracles are actually the manifestations of little known or virtually unknown natural laws. If we fully knew and understood nature, we could understand and even predict these events. Whenever the rare circumstances that produce a miracle reappear in that particular combination, the miracle will recur.[684] Certain biblical instances seem to fit this pattern, for example, the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. According to this view, Christ did not create fish for the occasion, nor did he somehow drive them from their places in the lake to where the net was to be let down. Rather, unusual conditions were present so that the fish had gathered in a place where they would not ordinarily be expected to be. Anytime those particular circumstances were present, the fish gathered in that spot. Thus, Jesus’s miracle was not so much a matter of omnipotence as of omniscience. The miracle came in his knowing where the fish would be. Other types of miracles come to mind as well. Some of Jesus’s healings could well have been psychosomatic healings, or even cases of powerful suggestion removing hysterical symptoms. Since many illnesses involving physical symptoms are functional rather than organic in origin and character, it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus simply utilized his extraordinary knowledge of psychosomatics to accomplish these healings.

Much about this view is appealing, particularly since some of the biblical miracles fit this scheme quite well; it may well be that some of them were of this nature. There are certain problems with adopting this view as an all-inclusive

explanation, however. Some of the miracles are very difficult to explain in terms of this view. For example, was the instance of the man born blind (John 9) a case of psychosomatic congenital blindness? Now of course none of us knows what laws there may be that we do not know. That is the nature of ignorance: we often do not know what there is that we do not know. But it is reasonable to assume that we should have at least some hint of what those unknown laws might be. The very vagueness of the theory is at the same time its strength and its weakness. To say, without further argument, that there are laws of nature that we do not know, can neither be confirmed nor refuted.

A second conception is that miracles break the laws of nature. In the case of the axhead that floated, for example (2 Kings 6:6), this theory suggests that for a brief period of time, in that cubic foot or so of water, the law of gravity was suspended. It simply did not apply. In effect, God turned off the law of gravity until the axhead was retrieved, or he changed the density of the axhead or of the water. This view of miracles has the virtue of seeming considerably more supernatural than the preceding one. But certain drawbacks attach to it. For one thing, such suspending or breaking of the laws of nature usually introduces complications requiring a whole series of compensating miracles. In the story of Joshua's long day (Josh. 10:12–14), for example, numerous adjustments would have to be made, of which there is no hint in the narrative, if God actually stopped the revolution of the earth on its axis. While this is certainly possible for an almighty God, there is no indication of it in the astronomical data.[685] There are two other problems, one psychological and one theological. Psychologically, the apparent disorderliness introduced into nature by the view that miracles are violations of natural law unnecessarily predisposes scientists to be prejudiced against them. This definition makes miracles particularly difficult to defend. As a matter of fact, there are those who categorically reject miracles strictly on the basis of this definition.[686] And, theologically, this view seems to make God work against himself, thus introducing a form of self-contradiction.

A third conception is the idea that when miracles occur, natural forces are countered by supernatural force. In this view, the laws of nature are not suspended. They continue to operate, but supernatural force is introduced, negating the effect of the natural law.[687] In the case of the axhead, for instance, the law of gravity continued to function in the vicinity of the axhead, but the unseen hand of God was underneath it, bearing it up, just as if a human hand were lifting it. This view has the advantage of regarding miracles as being genuinely supernatural or extranatural, but without being antinatural, as the second view makes them to be. To be sure, in the case of the fish, it may have been the conditions in the water that caused the fish to be there, but those

conditions would not have been present if God had not influenced such factors as the water flow and temperature. And at times there may have been acts of creation as well, as in the case of the feeding of the five thousand. A problem with this view is the lack of clarity of what it means for a spiritual force to work on a material world.

Recently, a new conception has arisen, from the theorizing of quantum physics. In some ways, it straddles the first and the third views above. It is the idea that God's working is not restricted to the dimensions that we inhabit. If these physicists are correct that there may be more than the three spatial dimensions with which we are familiar, then God would be able to perform actions that could not be accounted for by the laws governing these three dimensions.[688] While we should not stake our view of miracles on this theory, it does open possibilities of understanding previously not imagined.[689]

There should really be no problem when we encounter events that run contrary to what natural law would dictate. Late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century science is more likely than was that of the nineteenth century to recognize natural laws as merely statistical reports of what has happened. From a purely empirical standpoint, one has no logical grounds, but only a psychological inclination, to predict the future on the basis of the past. Whether the course of nature is fixed and inviolable, or whether it can be successfully opposed, is a question bringing us into the realm of metaphysics. If we are open to the possibility that there are reality and force outside the system of nature, then miracles are a possibility. It then becomes a question of examining the historical evidence to determine whether they have occurred. We will do that in connection with the supreme miracle, the resurrection of Jesus, in our treatment of Christology.

At this point, however, we should mention the purposes of miracles. There are at least three. The most important is to glorify God. The beneficiaries and observers of the biblical miracles generally responded by glorifying God. This means that when miracles occur today, we should credit God, who is the source of the miracle, not the human agent, who is the channel. In biblical times, a second purpose of miracles was to establish the supernatural basis of the revelation, which often accompanied them. That the Greek word σημεῖα (*sēmeia*—"signs") frequently occurs in the New Testament as a term for miracles underscores this dimension. We note, too, that miracles often came at times of especially intensive revelation. This can be seen in our Lord's ministry (e.g., Luke 5:24–26, where he reveals his authority to forgive sins). Finally, miracles occur to meet human needs. Our Lord frequently is pictured as moved with compassion for the needy and hurting people who came to him (e.g., Matt.

14:14). He healed them to relieve the suffering caused by such maladies as blindness, leprosy, and hemorrhaging. He never performed miracles for the selfish purpose of putting on a display.

We have seen that the doctrine of providence is not an abstract conception. It is the believer's conviction that he or she is in the hands of a good, wise, and powerful God who will accomplish his purposes in the world.

> Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you;
> Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you.
>
> Through days of toil when heart doth fail, God will take care of you;
> When dangers fierce your path assail, God will take care of you.
>
> All you may need He will provide, God will take care of you;
> Nothing you ask will be denied, God will take care of you.
>
> No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you;
> Lean, weary one, upon His breast, God will take care of you.
>
> God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way;
> He will take care of you, God will take care of you.
>
> Civilla Durfee Martin, 1904

18

Evil and God's World: *A Special Problem*

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and understand the nature of the problem of evil.
2. Identify several proposed solutions to the problem.
3. Explain the theological themes that bear upon this problem and contribute to alleviating it.
4. Strengthen the faith of the believer and enable him or her to offer response to critics of the Christian faith.

Chapter Summary

Probably the most difficult intellectual challenge to the Christian faith is the problem of how there can be evil in the world. If God is all-powerful and all-loving, how can evil be present in the world? Although the problem will never be fully resolved within this earthly life, there are biblical teachings that help alleviate it.

Study Questions

- Why is it difficult to explain the problem of evil?

- What are three solutions to the problem of evil, and what is the response to these solutions?
- How does human freedom affect the problem of evil?
- How would you define the terms “good” and “evil”?
- How do general and specific sins affect evil?

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The Nature of the Problem

We have spoken of the nature of God’s providence and have noted that it is universal: God is in control of all that occurs. He has a plan for the entire universe and all of time, and is at work bringing about that good plan. But a shadow falls across this comforting doctrine: the problem of evil.

The problem may be stated in a simple or a more complex fashion. David Hume put it succinctly when he wrote of God: “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing: whence then is evil?”[690] The existence of evil can also be seen as presenting a problem for the mealtime prayer that many children have been taught to pray: “God is great, God is good. Let us thank him for our food.” For if God is great, then he is able to prevent evil from occurring. If God is good, he will not wish for evil to occur. But there is rather evident evil about

us. The problem of evil then may be thought of as a conflict involving three concepts: God's power, God's goodness, and the presence of evil in the world.

In varying degrees, the problem is a difficulty for all types of strong theism. Specifically, it is a difficulty for the theology we have been presenting in this writing. We have discussed the omnipotence of God: his ability to do all things that are proper objects of his power. We have noted that creation and providence are implementations of this omnipotence, meaning respectively that God has by his own free decision and action brought into being everything that is and that he is in control of that creation, maintaining and directing it to the ends he has chosen. Further, we have observed the goodness of God—his attributes of love, mercy, patience. Yet evil is obviously present. How can this be, in light of who and what God is?

The evil that precipitates this dilemma is of two general types. On one hand, natural evil does not involve human willing and acting, but is merely an aspect of nature that seems to work against human welfare. There are the destructive forces of nature: hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, and the like. These catastrophic occurrences produce large losses of life as well as property. And much suffering and loss of human lives are caused by a host of diseases such as cancer, cystic fibrosis, or multiple sclerosis. The other type of evil, termed moral evil, can be traced to the choice and action of free moral agents. Here we find war, crime, cruelty, class struggles, discrimination, slavery, and injustices too numerous to mention. While moral evils can to some extent be removed from our consideration here by blaming them on humans' exercise of their own free will, natural evils cannot be thus dismissed. They simply seem to be there in the creation God has made.

We have noted that the problem of evil arises to varying degrees for different theologies; in addition, it takes differing forms. Indeed, John Feinberg argues that we are not dealing with a problem, but with a set or series of problems appearing in varying combinations. Moreover, the problem of evil may occur as either a religious or a theological problem or both.[691] In terms of the distinction made in the opening chapter of this book, religion is the level of spiritual practice, experience, and belief. Theology is the secondary level of reflection on religion, involving analysis, interpretation, and construction. In general, the religious form of the problem of evil occurs when some particular aspect of one's experience calls into question the greatness or goodness of God, and hence threatens the relationship between the believer and God. The theological form of the problem is concerned with evil in general. It is not a question of how a specific concrete situation can exist in light of God's being what and who he is, but of how any such problem could possibly exist. Occurrence of the religious

form of the problem does not necessarily imply personal experience, but there a specific situation will have been at least vicariously encountered. The theological form of the problem, however, does not necessarily imply any such specific situation at all. One's focus on the problem may well move from religious to theological as a result of such an occurrence, or concentration on evil in general may devolve from much broader considerations. It is important to note these distinctions. For the person for whom some specific evil (this is perhaps more accurate than the problem of evil) is presenting a religious difficulty may need pastoral care rather than help in working out intellectual difficulties.[692] Similarly, to treat one's genuine intellectual struggle as merely a matter of feelings will not be very helpful. Failure to recognize the religious form of the problem of evil will appear insensitive; failure to deal with the theological form will appear intellectually insulting. Particularly where the two are found together it is important to recognize and distinguish the respective components.

Types of Solutions

Many different types of solutions to the problem have been attempted. These are often referred to as *theodicies*, or, literally, attempts to justify God. For the most part (our analysis here is somewhat oversimplified), these attempted solutions endeavor to reduce the tension by modifying one or more of the three elements that in combination have caused the dilemma: God's greatness, God's goodness, and the presence of evil. Thus, a theodicy may attempt to show that the conception of God as omnipotent is inaccurate in some respect. Either God is not completely unlimited, or whether God prevents or fails to prevent a particular evil is not really a question of his omnipotence. Or a theodicy may attempt to show that God is not good in the sense we have assumed. Either God is not fully good, or preventing a particular evil is not really a matter of his goodness. For example, preventing a particular evil (or, for that matter, giving someone what that person desires) might not be a case of love but of indulgence. Or a theodicy may attempt to show that God is not bound by the standards we seek to impose on him. He is completely free; whatever he wills or decrees to be good is therefore good, simply because he declares it to be so. Or a theodicy may redefine, seeking to show that what is thought to be evil is actually at least partially good. We will examine examples of each of these strategies of dealing with evil.

We should not set our expectations too high in endeavoring to deal with the problem of evil. This is a very severe problem, perhaps the most severe of all the intellectual problems facing theism. This problem has occupied the attention of some of the greatest minds of the Christian church, intellects of such stature as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. None of them was able to put the problem to rest finally and completely. We therefore should not be unduly discouraged if we cannot settle the issue in some final fashion. Although we will not be able to resolve the problem, we can perhaps alleviate it somewhat and see the directions from which final solution might come had we more complete knowledge and understanding.

Finitism: Rejection of Omnipotence

One way of solving the tension of the problem we have been describing is to abandon the idea of God's omnipotence. Often this takes the form of a dualism, such as Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism. Dualisms propose that there are actually two ultimate principles in the universe: God and the power of evil. This evil is generally thought of as uncreated, simply a force that has always been present. There is therefore a struggle between God and this evil power, with no certainty as to the ultimate outcome. God is attempting to overcome evil, and would if he could, but he is simply unable to do so.

Edgar S. Brightman, for many years professor of philosophy at Boston University, developed the concept of a finite God as the solution to the problem of evil.[693] Brightman's God is an eternal personal being, who works with the "Given." This "Given" includes "equally eternal and uncreated processes of nonrational consciousness which exhibit all the ultimate qualities of sense objects (*qualia*), disorderly impulses and desires, such experiences as pain and suffering, the forms of space and time, and whatever in God is the source of surd evil."[694] All constituent elements of the "Given" are distinguished by two characteristics: (1) they are eternal within the experience of God; (2) they are not a product of will or creative activity.[695]

The concept of surd evil needs a bit of exposition. There are intrinsic goods, which are good in and of themselves. There are also instrumental goods, which may be the means to good, but which also may become instrumental evils. Sometimes something is simultaneously both good and evil. The same train may carry a saintly person and a group of criminals to the same city, where they will do, respectively, good and evil. The train is thus, *instrumentally*, both good and evil.[696] Much of what appears evil to us may become good under God's attention and activity. But this is not true of surd evil. Surd evil is like a surd number in

mathematics, which is a quantity not expressible in rational numbers. Similarly, a surd evil "is an evil that is not expressible in terms of good, no matter what operations are performed on it."[697] There is something that in effect places a limitation on what God is able to will. Brightman says that "all theistic finitists agree that there is something in the universe not created by God and not a result of voluntary self-limitation, which God finds as either obstacle or instrument to his will."[698] Unlike theists who say that God is not limited by the human free will, but consciously and voluntarily limited himself in choosing to give this to humans, Brightman insists that God finds and must work with human free will.

Brightman is quite critical of what he calls "absolute theism," which entails the proposition that all apparent evil is actually good. He particularly objects to its effect on ethical and moral considerations. By arguing that all that seems unredeemable evil is actually good, in effect absolute theism has opened the door for someone to argue that what seems to be good is actually evil.[699] This can result in a complete skepticism about values. In addition, it cuts the nerve of moral endeavor. If everything is actually already perfect, why try to improve it? Finitism, on the other hand, is based on a realistic recognition of good and evil and the distinction between the two. And it motivates our participation in the struggle to overcome evil: "Finitism is *an inspiring challenge to eternal co-operative moral endeavor*—a cooperation between God and man."[700]

Unlike most finitists, who hold to a dualism in which something external to God limits what he can do, Brightman understands this limitation to be part of the very nature of God. He says we should speak of a God whose will is finite rather than a finite God.[701]

In some ways Brightman's finitism solves the difficulty. It accounts for the presence of evil by virtually rejecting the concept of divine omnipotence. In so doing, however, it pays a high price. It may be said that what finitism has solved is not the problem of *evil* but the problem of *the problem of evil*. That is to say, it gives an explanation as to why there is evil, but does not offer us real encouragement for believing that evil will be ultimately overcome. There is no assurance of the outcome. Presumably, from what Brightman says, God has been at work from eternity, but has not yet succeeded in overcoming evil. If this is the case, then what basis have we for assuming that sometime in the future he will succeed in doing what he has been unable to accomplish to this point?[702] And under such conditions, is there real motivation for us to enter the struggle?

The suggestion that God will gain the upper hand because he has made progress in bringing the intelligent beings, humans, into the battle on his behalf, is not convincing, for it is not at all clear that all humans or even the most capable or most intelligent of them are at work on God's side. Thus, there may

well be a resulting triumph of evil rather than good. Two World Wars, as well as more limited wars and other evidences of tragedy and cruelty, make it difficult for any twenty-first-century person to draw much encouragement from the suggestion that humanity has been joining God in the struggle against evil.[703] Furthermore, Brightman's finitism casts a question mark on the goodness of God. If the "Given" with which God struggles and which is the source of the surd evil is a part of God's own nature, how can he be referred to as good?[704] Is it not the case, as Henry Nelson Wieman claimed, that Brightman "unites under the one label of deity two diametrically opposed realities, namely, the perfect and holy will of God and the evil nature which opposes that will"?[705]

A variation of this is found in open theism. Here we have a God who can do all things, but does not know all future events. Thus, while possessing the power to do all, he may lack the knowledge of what would be good in a given situation. He may assure us that the victory will be his, but being limited in knowledge though not in power, he may be wrong.[706]

Modification of the Concept of God's Goodness

A second way of lessening the tensions of the problem is to modify the idea of God's goodness. While few if any who call themselves Christian would deny the goodness of God, some, at least by implication, suggest that the goodness must be understood in a sense somewhat different from what is usually meant. One who falls into this category is Gordon H. Clark.

As a staunch Calvinist, Clark does not hesitate to use the term *determinism* to describe God's causing of all things, including human acts. He argues that human will is not free. In describing the relationship of God to certain evil actions of human beings, he rejects the concept of the permissive will of God. He even states, "I wish very frankly and pointedly to assert that if a man gets drunk and shoots his family, it was the will of God that he should do it,"[707] comparing God's role in this particular act to his willing that Jesus should be crucified. Clark does draw a distinction between the preceptive and the decretive will of God, however. The preceptive will is what God commands, such as the Ten Commandments. This is what *ought* to be done. God's decretive will, however, causes every event. It causes what *is* done. Clark says, "It may seem strange at first that God would decree an immoral act, but the Bible shows that he did."[708]

This of course raises the question of whether God is the cause of sin. Here again, Clark does not hesitate: "Let it be unequivocally said that this view certainly makes God the cause of sin. God is the sole ultimate cause of

everything. There is absolutely nothing independent of him. He alone is the eternal being. He alone is omnipotent. He alone is sovereign."[709] This is not to say that God is the author of sin. He is the *ultimate* cause of sin, not the immediate cause of it. God does not commit sin; humans commit sin although God wills it decretively, determines that it shall happen, and is the ultimate cause of it. It was Judas, not God, who betrayed Christ. God neither sins nor is responsible for sin.[710]

The concept that God's causing a human to sin is not itself sin needs a bit of further explanation. By definition, God cannot sin. Clark offers several points in elucidating his position:

1. Whatever God does is just and right simply because he does it. There is no law superior to God that forbids him to decree sinful acts. Sin is transgression of, or want of conformity to, the law of God. But he is "Ex-lex," he is above law. He is by definition the standard of right.[711]

2. While it is true that it is sinful for one human being to cause or try to cause another to sin, it is not sinful for God to cause a human to sin. The relationship of humans to one another is different from God's relationship to them, just as their relationship to God's law differs from God's relationship to it. As the Creator of all things, God has absolute and unlimited rights over them, and no one can punish him.[712]

3. The laws God imposes on humanity literally do not apply to him. He cannot steal, for example, for everything belongs to him. There is no one to steal from.[713]

4. The Bible openly states that God has caused prophets to lie (e.g., 2 Chron. 18:20–22). Such statements are not in any sense incompatible with the biblical statements that God is free from sin.[714]

What Clark has done is to redefine the goodness of God. Clark's solution to the problem of evil takes a form somewhat like the following syllogism:

Whatever happens is caused by God
Whatever is caused by God is good.
Whatever happens is good.

The problem is in effect solved by understanding that it is good and right that God (ultimately) causes such evil acts as a drunken man's shooting his family, although God does not sin and is not responsible for this sinful act. But in this solution to the problem of evil the term *goodness* has undergone such transformation as to be quite different from what is usually meant by the goodness of God. Several observations need to be made by way of response.

1. While in some cases God indeed does not have the same obligations as do his creatures (for example, the prohibition against stealing), to emphasize this is to make these moral qualities so equivocal that they begin to lose their meaning and force. In Clark's scheme, the statements "God does good" and "a human does good" are so dissimilar that we virtually cannot know what it means to say "God is good."

2. At one point or another, Clark is in danger of holding that God's will is arbitrary, reminiscent of William of Ockham. God's preceptive will and decretive will can be and are quite dissimilar. Clark also emphatically rejects the idea that God is bound by any external law higher than himself. What, then, is the status of his preceptive law? Is it in conformity with his nature? If not, then (since there is no higher law) it must be an arbitrary willing as to what is good. But if it is, then God's decretive will, at least at those points where it is in contradiction to his precepts, must not be in conformity with his nature. Either God's decretive will or his preceptive will is arbitrary.

3. The nature of goodness itself is called in question by Clark's discussion of responsibility. He says that "man is responsible because God calls him to account; man is responsible because the supreme power can punish him for disobedience. God, on the contrary, cannot be responsible for the plain reason that there is no power superior to him; no greater being can hold him accountable; no one can punish him."[715] This appears to come perilously close to the position that right and wrong is a matter of expediency. Accountability determines morality: an action is right if it will be rewarded, wrong if it will be punished. While on a lower level such considerations may motivate humans, on a higher level they do not apply. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Part of what makes the death of Christ such a good act is that while he was not accountable to anyone, and would not (indeed could not) be punished for not submitting to the cross, he did in fact lay down his life.

Denial of Evil

A third proposed solution to the problem of evil rejects the reality of evil, rendering unnecessary any account of how it can coexist with an omnipotent and good God. We find this viewpoint in various forms of pantheism. The philosophy of Benedict Spinoza, for example, maintains that there is just one substance and all distinguishable things are modes or attributes of that substance. Everything is deterministically caused; God brings everything into being in the highest perfection.[716]

A more popularly held, but considerably less sophisticated version of this solution to the problem of evil is to be found in Christian Science. While the writings of Mary Baker Eddy lack the erudition and philosophical refinement of Spinoza's, there are notable parallels. The basic metaphysic is idealistic; the reality of matter is denied. The only reality is God, infinite mind. Spirit is real and eternal; matter is unreal and temporal.[717] Matter has no real existence even in the mind. It is an illusion held by an illusion. Not only is matter unreal, but the senses are the source of error and, ultimately, of evil: "Evil has no reality. It is neither person, place nor thing, but is simply a belief, an illusion of the material sense."[718] This conclusion follows from the Christian Science view of God, which, though it is unclear in Eddy's statement here, seems to be that God is actually everything. At other times she depicts God as the originator of everything: "If God made all that was made, and it was good, where did evil originate?" In either case, the result is the same: "It [evil] never originated or existed as an entity. It is but a false belief."[719]

One of the most serious evils, disease, is therefore an illusion; it has no reality.[720] What is experienced as disease is caused by wrong belief, failure to recognize the unreality of disease.[721] As in all other areas, the senses deceive one here as well. The cure for sickness is not to be achieved through medicine, but is to be found in knowledge of the truth that pain is imaginary. When sickness and pain are seen to be unreal, they will no longer afflict the individual. Death is also illusory: "Sin brought death, and death will disappear with the disappearance of sin. Man is immortal, and the body cannot die, because matter has no life to surrender." The promise of 1 Corinthians 15:26 is that death is the last enemy to be destroyed. It is but another phase of the dream that existence is material.[722]

What are we to say by way of assessment of this view? Three problems in particular stand out:

1. Christian Science has not fully banished evil. For while Christian Scientists assert that disease does not exist but is only an illusion, the illusion of disease is still present, and it produces the illusion of pain very genuinely. Thus, although the existence of evil is no longer a problem, the existence of the illusion of evil is. So the problem is shifted, but is no less difficult.

2. The existence of the illusion must be explained. How, in a world in which all is God, and matter is unreal, could such a widespread delusion arise and persist? Must not there be within the universe something perverse that produces it? And why does God not eliminate this false belief?

3. The theory does not work. The claim is that correct understanding will dispel evil. Yet Christian Scientists do become ill and die. Their response that

illness and death result from insufficient faith seems to founder upon the fact that even the originator and head of the movement, author of its major authority (in addition to the Bible) and presumably the epitome of its faith, died.

While some of what has been said in this critique applies only to Christian Science, much of it is applicable to all monistic and pantheistic forms of the view that evil is illusory. This is particularly true of the first two criticisms.

Some theologies, particularly those of a philosophical bent, follow a rather strict system. The more rigid or extreme the system, the more clear-cut will be the choice of solution to the problem of evil. The three views we have examined illustrate this quite well: Brightman's internal dualism led him to qualify the omnipotence of God; belief in absolute divine sovereignty led Clark to define divine goodness in such a way as to include causing (but not being responsible for) evil; and monism led Christian Science to deny the reality of evil.

A number of classifications of theodicies have been offered in recent years, based on varying criteria. In *Evil and the God of Love*, John Hick classifies theodicies as Augustinian or Irenaean.[723] The Augustinian type regards evil as actually a part of the creation that is necessary for its greater good. The Irenaean type of theodicy regards evil as part of God's process of soul making. Norman Geisler classifies theodicies as "greatest world" and "greatest way" approaches.[724] Gottfried von Leibniz, for example, tried to show that this is the best of all possible worlds; Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, attempted to show that what God is doing is the best way to achieve his ends within this world. John Feinberg speaks of theonomist and rationalist approaches. In the former, theology is prior to logic.[725] William of Ockham, for example, held that God is free to will whatever he chooses, and whatever he wills is by definition good. Rationalists, like Leibniz, make logic prior to theology. What God wills is in effect determined by the laws of logic.

Feinberg has well observed that the problem of evil must be considered within the context of a given theology and what such concepts as evil, good, and freedom mean *within that system*. It is quite unfair, for example, to criticize a given theodicy for not accounting for evil as understood by some other school of thought unless a proof is advanced that all schools of thought must necessarily regard the concept of evil in this fashion.[726]

In attempting to formulate a theodicy, we should keep a few factors in mind. Not all instances of evil are of the same fundamental type. And if they are of different types, perhaps they have different explanations. We must not overemphasize one type of evil to the neglect of others. Furthermore, it may not be wise or helpful to concentrate our attention on just one of those elements that in combination constitute the problem. In other words, perhaps we should avoid

the sharp distinction between the types of approaches we have already examined and utilize valid insights from each. While each of the approaches outlined succeeds in resolving the tension among the three factors by modifying one of them (God's greatness, God's goodness, and the existence of evil, respectively), the cost is too high. It may be that the best approach is to reduce the tension by reexamining each of the three factors. This process may reveal that the problem of evil is a result of a misunderstanding or overstatement of one or more of these factors.

Themes for Dealing with the Problem of Evil

As noted earlier, a total solution to the problem of evil is beyond human ability. So what we will do here is present several themes that in combination will help us deal with the problem. These themes will be consistent with the basic tenets of the theology espoused in this writing. This theology can be characterized as a mild Calvinism (congruism) that gives primary place to God's sovereignty, while seeking to relate it in a positive way to human freedom and individuality. This theology is a dualism in which the second element is contingent on or derived from the first. That is, there are realities distinct from God that have a genuine and good existence of their own, but ultimately received their existence from him by creation (not emanation). This theology also affirms the sin and fall of the human race and the consequent sinfulness of each human; the reality of evil and of personal demonic beings headed by the devil; the incarnation of the Second Person of the Triune God, who became a sacrificial atonement for human sin; and an eternal life beyond death. It is in the context of this theological structure that the following themes are presented as helps in dealing with the problem of evil.

Evil as a Necessary Accompaniment of the Creation of Humanity

There are some things God cannot do. God cannot be cruel, for cruelty is contrary to his nature. He cannot lie. He cannot break his promise. These moral attributes were discussed in chapter 12. There are some other things that God cannot do without certain inevitable results. For example, God cannot make a circle, a true circle, without all points on the circumference being equidistant from the center. Similarly, God cannot make a human without certain accompanying features.

Humans would not be genuinely human without free will. This has given rise to the argument that God cannot create a genuinely free being and at the same time guarantee that this being will always do exactly what God desires of him. This view of freedom has come under criticism by a number of philosophers and theologians; we have dealt with it at some length in chapter 15. Note, however, that whether humans are free in the sense assumed by Arminians (noncompatibilistic freedom)[727] or free in a sense not inconsistent with God's having rendered certain what is to happen (compatibilistic freedom), God's having made humans as he purposed means that they have certain capacities (e.g., the capacities to desire and to act) which they could not fully exercise if there were no such thing as evil. For God to prevent evil, he would have had to make humanity other than it is.[728] Genuine humanity requires the ability to desire to have and do some things contrary to God's intention. Apparently God felt, for reasons that were evident to him but that we can only partly understand, that it was better to make human beings than androids. And the possibility of evil was a necessary accompaniment of God's good plan to make people fully human.

Another dimension of this theme is that for God to make the physical world as it is required certain concomitants. Apparently, for humans to have a genuine moral choice with the possibility of genuine punishment for disobedience meant that they could die. Further, the sustenance of life required conditions that could lead to death instead. So, for example, the same water we need for life can in other circumstances cause death by drowning. Similarly, a certain degree of warmth is necessary for the maintenance of life. But under certain conditions, the very fire providing that warmth can kill us. Further, that fire requires oxygen, which is vital to our life as well. The ability of water, fire, and oxygen to sustain life means that they are also able to bring death.

If God was to have a world in which there would be genuine moral choices along with genuine punishment for disobedience and ultimately death, there would have to be warning signals of sufficient intensity to cause us to alter our behavior. And this signal, pain, is of such a nature that it can become a considerable evil under certain circumstances. But could not God have created his world in such a way that evil intentions or evil results would not occur, or could he not intervene within it to alter the course of events? For example, a hammer might be solid and firm when used for driving nails, but spongy and resilient when someone intends to use it to bludgeon another person to death. But in such a world, life would be virtually impossible. Our environment would be so unpredictable that no intelligent planning would be possible. Therefore,

God has created in such a way that the good of his world may be perverted into evil when we misuse it or something goes awry with the creation.[729]

At this point someone might raise the question, "If God could not create the world without the accompanying possibility of evil, why did he create at all, or why did he not create the world without human beings?" In a sense, we cannot answer that question since we are not God, but it is appropriate to note here that it was evidently better in terms of what God ultimately intends, that he create rather than not create. And it was better to create beings capable of fellowship with and obedience to him, even in the face of temptations to do otherwise. This was evidently a greater good than to introduce "humans" into a totally antiseptic environment from which even the logical possibility of desiring anything contrary to God's will would have been excluded.

But why does not God eradicate evil now? Perhaps, however, the only way to eradicate evil now would be to destroy every moral agent possessing a will capable of leading to evil. But who of us can claim such perfection as to say that we do not ever contribute to the evil in this world, either by commission or by omission, by word, deed, or thought? This eradication of evil might mean wiping out the entire human race, or at least the vast majority of it. It will not be sufficient to have him remove only what we perceive as evil or want removed; everything that actually is evil must be removed. God, however, has promised that he will not again wipe out virtually the entire human race (Gen. 6–9). And he cannot go back on his promise.

A Reevaluation of What Constitutes Good and Evil

Some of what we term good and evil may not actually be that. We are inclined to identify good with whatever is pleasant to us at the present and evil with what is personally unpleasant, uncomfortable, or disturbing. Yet the Bible seems to see things somewhat differently. We will briefly consider three points that indicate that the identification of evil with the unpleasant is incorrect.

First, we must consider the divine dimension. Good is not defined in terms of what brings personal pleasure to humans in a direct fashion. Good is to be defined in relationship to the will and being of God. Good is what glorifies him, fulfills his will, conforms to his nature. The promise of Romans 8:28 is sometimes quoted rather glibly by Christians: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." But what is this good? Paul gives us the answer in verse 29: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." This

then is the good: not personal wealth or health, but being conformed to the image of God's Son, not our short-range comfort, but our long-range welfare.

In considering the divine dimension we must also note God's superior knowledge and wisdom. We may not be the best judges of what is good and what is harmful to our welfare. It may seem good to me to eat sweet, sticky candy. My dentist (unless simply interested in fees) may see it quite differently, and sometime in the middle of the night I may be sharply awakened with a painful reminder of the dentist's superior knowledge of good and evil in matters of dental hygiene. Similarly, rich and fatty foods may seem good, but my doctor views them as evil. So many of our judgments of good and evil are formulated on the basis of very incomplete data, a direct result of our being human and finite; but the infinitely wise God judges the same matters quite differently. The moral precepts he gives, which seem so troublesome and tedious to me, may be what he knows will actually work for my ultimate good.

Second, we must consider the dimension of time or duration. Some experienced evils are actually very disturbing on a short-term basis, but in the long term work a much larger good. The pain of the dentist's drill and the suffering of postsurgical recovery may seem like quite severe evils, but they are actually rather small in light of the long-range effects that flow from them. Scripture encourages us to evaluate our temporary suffering *sub specie aeternitatis* (in the light of eternity). Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). He also wrote, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17; cf. Heb. 12:2 and 1 Pet. 1:6–7). A problem is often magnified by its proximity to us now, so that it becomes disproportionate to other pertinent matters. A good question to ask regarding any apparent evil is, "How important will this seem to me a year from now? five years? a million years?"

Third, there is the question of the extent of the evil. We tend to be very individualistic in our assessment of good and evil. But this is a large and complex world, and God has many persons to care for. The Saturday rainfall that spoils a family picnic or round of golf may seem like an evil to me, but be a much greater good to the farmers whose parched fields surround the golf course or park, and ultimately to a much larger number of people who depend on the farmers' crops, the price of which will be affected by the abundance or scarcity of supply. What is evil from one narrow perspective may therefore be only an inconvenience and, from a larger frame of reference, a much greater good to a much larger number. Certainly God can perform miracles so that everyone gets

just what he or she needs and wants, but that would not necessarily be the best course, since there is a need for constancy in the creation.

Part of what we are saying here is that what appears to be evil may actually in some cases be the means to a greater good. This may seem to be a case of a consequentialist view of ethics, which defines good as anything that has good consequences.[730] Note, however, that what makes something good is that God has willed and planned it. God then sees to it that his plans are fulfilled and result in good consequences. In other words, because God's plans are good (i.e., God has willed them), they have good consequences. It is not the case that God's plans and actions are made good by their consequences.

Evil in General as the Result of Sin in General

A cardinal doctrine of the theology being developed in this book is the fact of racial sin. This does not mean the sin of race against race, but rather the fact that the entire human race has sinned and is now sinful. In its head, Adam, the entire human race violated God's will and fell from the state of innocence in which God had created it. Consequently, all of us begin life with a natural tendency to sin. The Bible tells us that with the fall, the first sin, a radical change took place in the universe. Death came upon humanity (Gen. 2:17; 3:2–3, 19). God pronounced a curse on humankind, which is represented by certain specifics: anguish in childbearing (3:16), the husband's domination over the wife (v. 16), toilsome labor (v. 17), thorns and thistles (v. 18)—probably merely a sample of the actual effects on the creation. Paul in Romans 8 says that the whole creation has been affected by human sin, and is now in bondage to decay (vv. 19–23). It waits for its redemption from this bondage. Thus, it appears likely that a whole host of natural evils may also have resulted from the sin of humans. We live in the world that God created, but it is not quite as it was when God finished it; it is now a fallen and broken world.

One problem that arises in connection with this attribution of natural evil to human sin concerns those evils that, according to the geological record, seem to have been present on the earth before human beings. Some have suggested that these evils were put there anticipatively by God in light of the sin that he knew humans would commit, but this seems highly artificial. While a full-length exploration of this issue goes beyond the scope of this volume, it seems best to think of those conditions as being present from the beginning, but neutral in character. The evil effects of those phenomena may then have resulted from human sinfulness. For example, earth layers may naturally shift (earthquakes).

When people unwisely, perhaps as a result of greed, build on geological faults, the shifting of earth layers becomes an evil.

More serious and more obvious, however, is the contribution of the fall to moral evil, that is, evil that is related to human willing and acting. Certainly much of the pain and unhappiness of human beings is a result of structural evil within society. For example, power may reside in the hands of a few who use it to exploit others. Selfishness on a collective scale may keep a particular social class or racial group in painful or destitute conditions.

An important question that cannot be ignored is how sin could have happened in the first place. If humans were created good, or at least without any evil nature, made in the image of God, and if the creation God had made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), then how could sin have occurred? What could have motivated such sin? Here we have recourse to the account of the Adamic fall. In Genesis 3 we read that the serpent (presumably the devil) tempted Eve. Apparently sometime between the completion of the creation, which God pronounced "very good," and the temptation of Eve, the fall of Satan had occurred. Thus, an evil force was present within the creation, whose appeal stirred within Adam and Eve the desire that led them to sin.

But has this really solved the problem, or has it only pushed it back one step? The question now becomes, How could good angels, and particularly the one who became the devil, have sinned in the first place? Since they were in the very presence of God, what could possibly have led them to sin? Must there not have been some little bit of sin already present in the creation? Must there not have been some sinful component, even if just a speck? And if so, must not God have been the author of this sin, and is he not then responsible for it and also for the other sins that follow from it?

This type of thinking represents an incorrect understanding of the nature of sin, as some sort of substance necessary for sinful acts to occur. This could be termed the "germ theory" of sin: one has to "catch" or "be infected by" sin. But it is not necessary to come in contact with someone who has a fracture to fracture a bone; all that is needed is to twist a limb in the wrong way, and there is a broken bone! Similarly, sin results when a person's will and relationship to God are twisted the wrong way, when the wrong one of two possibilities is actualized.

For humans to be genuinely free, there has to be an option. The choice is to obey or to disobey God. In the case of Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized that choice. The serpent's temptation appealed to desires that were not evil in themselves, but could be expressed and actualized in the wrong way (by disobeying God). When that was done, a twisted or distorted

relationship to God resulted. Indeed, one word for sin carries the idea of being twisted.[731] With this twist of relationship, sin has become a reality. Humans (and presumably also the fallen angels) have been greatly affected by sin: their attitudes, values, and relationships have changed.

God, then, did not create sin. He merely provided the options necessary for human freedom, options that could result in sin. It is humans who sinned, and before that, the fallen angels, not God. Some will of course object that God should have prevented the occurrence of sin, or even its possibility. We have already dealt with this type of objection in our discussion of primary and secondary causation in chapter 15.

Specific Evil as the Result of Specific Sins

Some specific evils are the result of specific sins or at least imprudences. Some of the evil occurrences in life are caused by the sinful actions of others. The death of a police officer can be attributed to the action of the criminal who pulled the trigger. While there may be very complex reasons behind that act, the basic fact remains that the police officer is dead because of another's action. Murder, child abuse, theft, and rape are evils resulting from the exercise of sinful choices by sinful individuals. In some cases, the victim is innocent of the evil that occurs, but in other cases contributes to or provokes the evil action.

In a fair number of cases, we bring evil on ourselves by our own sinful or unwise actions. We must be very careful in the application of this principle. Job's friends tended to attribute his misfortunes solely to his sins (e.g., Job 22). But Jesus indicated that tragedy is not always the result of a specific sin. When his disciples asked concerning a man who had been born blind, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned . . . but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:2–3). Jesus was not denying that the man and his parents had sinned, but rather was refuting the idea that the blindness was the result of a specific sin. It is unwise to attribute misfortunes automatically to one's own sin. Yet there is a tendency to consider misfortunes as punishments sent from God, and either to feel guilty or to blame God for being unjust in sending a punishment we feel we do not deserve. The question "Why?" often reflects the mistaken idea that God sends each event as a direct response to our actions. If God sends his sunshine and rain on the unjust and the just alike, then in a world in which sin has brought ravages of nature and disease, misfortune may also fall on the just and unjust alike. To be sure, God has rendered certain

all of what happens, but he has not necessarily targeted every specific ill as a response to some specific sin.

But having given this caveat, we need to note that there are instances of sin bringing unfortunate results on the individual sinner. A case in point is David, whose sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah resulted in the death of the child of David and Bathsheba as well as conflict in David's own household. This perhaps should be thought of more in terms of the effects of certain acts than in terms of punishment from God. We do not know what was involved, but it may well be that certain conditions pertaining at the time of the act of adultery resulted in a genetic defect in the child. In the case of the rape of Tamar by Amnon, and Absalom's murder of Amnon and sedition against David, it may well be that the seeds were sown by the children's knowledge of their father's sin, or by the failure of David to exercise discipline with his children in view of his own sense of guilt, and the feeling that it would be hypocritical on his part to rebuke his sons for doing what he had done. In other words, David's sin may have led to indulgence with his own children, which in turn led to their sins. Much of the evil recounted in Scripture came upon people as a result of their own sin, or that of someone close to them. A prime example is Achan and his family, all of whom were stoned because of his sin at Jericho (Josh. 7:24–25).

Paul said, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7–8). While Paul was probably thinking primarily of the eternal dimension of sin's consequences, the context (the earlier part of chapter 6) seems to indicate that he had temporal effects in mind as well. There are certain cause-and-effect relationships in the spiritual realm as well as in the physical. Violating the law against adultery (Exod. 20:14) may result in the destruction of relationships of trust, not only with the spouse, but with the children as well; one may even lose one's family. God is not necessarily punishing the offender by inflicting these results, but the act of adultery may set in motion a chain of adverse effects. Habitual drinking may well destroy one's health with cirrhosis of the liver. God is not attacking the drinker; rather, the drinker's actions have brought about the disease. This is not to say, however, that God may not use the natural results of sin to chasten people.

What we have been saying about sin (violations of God's law) also holds true for unwise or imprudent behavior. Some of our problems are the result of our unwise or even foolish behavior. One traffic safety organization recently reported that 90 percent of all persons who suffered serious injuries in traffic accidents were not wearing their seat belts at the time, and the figure for those

fatally injured was even higher: 93 percent. While there is no way of calculating how many of these persons would not have died had they been wearing their seat belts, it should be apparent that the question “Why did God allow this to happen?” may not be the most significant question. As a matter of fact, it may even be inappropriate. In addition to ignoring traffic safety procedures, other major contributors to the evil we experience may include foolish financial management and poor health care practices.

God as the Victim of Evil

That God took sin and its evil effects on himself is a unique contribution by Christian doctrine to the solution of the problem of evil.[732] It is remarkable that, while knowing that he himself would become the major victim of the evil resulting from sin, God allowed sin to occur anyway. The Bible tells us that God was grieved by human sinfulness (Gen. 6:6). While there is certainly anthropomorphism here, there nonetheless is indication that human sin is painful or hurtful to God. But even more to the point is the fact of the incarnation. The Triune God knew that the Second Person would come to earth and be subject to numerous evils: hunger, fatigue, betrayal, ridicule, rejection, suffering, and death. He did this in order to negate sin and thus its evil effects. God is a fellow sufferer with us of the evil in this world, and consequently is able to deliver us from evil. What a measure of love this is! Anyone who would impugn the goodness of God for allowing sin and consequently evil must measure that charge against the teaching of Scripture that God himself became the victim of evil so that he and we might be victors over evil.

The Life Hereafter

There is no question that in this life there are rather clear instances of injustice and innocent suffering. If this life were all that there is, then surely the problem of evil would be unresolvable. But Christianity’s doctrine of the life hereafter teaches that there will be a great time of judgment—every sin will be recognized and the godly will also be revealed. Punishment for evil will be justly administered, and the final dimension of eternal life will be granted to all who have responded to God’s loving offer. Thus the complaint of the psalmist regarding how the evil prosper and the righteous suffer will be satisfied in the light of the life hereafter.

One additional problem for Christian theism relates to this matter of the life hereafter: how could a loving God send anyone to hell? While we will deal with

this question more completely in connection with eschatology, we need to note here that sin consists in the human's choosing to go his or her own way rather than follow God. Throughout life, a person says to God, in effect, "Leave me alone." Hell, the absence of God, is God's simply giving that person at last what he or she has always asked for. It is not God, but one's own choice that sends a person to hell.[733]

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God's Special Agents: *Angels*

Chapter Objectives

After you have completed the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the history of the doctrine of both good and evil angels.
2. Identify and understand good angels and their unique characteristics.
3. Identify and understand evil angels through their characteristics and deeds.
4. Create a trust in, but not excessive fascination with, God's angels.
5. Create a healthy respect for, but neither a fear of nor a fascination with, evil angels.
6. Discover the role of the doctrine of angels in carrying out God's plan.
7. Understand the limitations and the ultimate destiny of Satan and his servants.

Chapter Summary

There are superhuman, but not divine, beings who work within human history. Some of these, who remained faithful to God, carry out his work. Others, who fell from their created state of holiness, live to oppose God and his children. God's care and concern for his creation is evident in the

ministrations of good angels. By contrast, Satan and his minions seek to thwart the purposes of God. But God has limited their powers.

Study Questions

- Why is it necessary to study angels and include them in the study of theology?
- How did Dionysius classify angels, and what is the significance of each group?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of angels in the plan of God?
- How would you compare and contrast good and evil angels?
- How does one define the difficult terms “sons of God” and “the angel of the Lord”?
- What confidence in God is inspired in the Christian believer by the role of good angels in life?
- What limits are placed on Satan and his emissaries?

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The Origin of Demons

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Demon Possession

When we come to the discussion of angels, we are entering upon a subject that in some ways is the most unusual and puzzling of all of theology. Karl Barth, who has given the most extensive treatment of the subject in any recent theology textbook, described the topic of angels as the "most remarkable and difficult of all."[734] It is, therefore, a topic that it is tempting to omit or neglect. Some would say that Christian doctrine would be unaffected if we were to bypass this area, and in a sense that is true. It would be possible to maintain the doctrines of creation and providence without reference to the angels, for God most certainly created and can sustain and guide the universe by his own direct action, that is, without utilizing angels as his agents. Yet the teaching of Scripture is that he has created these spiritual beings and has chosen to carry out many of his acts through them. Therefore, if we are to be faithful students of the Bible, we have no choice but to speak of these beings.

By angels we mean those spiritual beings that God created higher than humans, some of whom have remained obedient to God and carry out his will, and others of whom disobeyed, lost their holy condition, and now oppose and hinder his work.

We have noted the difficulty of the subject. One reason is that while there are abundant references to angels in the Bible, they are not very helpful for developing an understanding of angels. Every reference to angels is incidental to some other topic. They are not treated in themselves. When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it. Since details about angels are not significant for that purpose, they tend to be omitted.

History of the Doctrine

The topic of angels has probably had a more varied history than most doctrines. At times, there has been a virtual preoccupation with the doctrine of angels and speculation of the wildest sort regarding their nature and activities. At other times, belief in angels has been regarded as a relic of a prescientific and uncritical way of thinking. Yet potential mishandling should not deter us from dealing with a topic of genuine importance. Barth acknowledges that in treating

this topic we are approaching the border of "problems alien to the task and purpose of a dogmatics grounded on the Word of God." He mentions several theologians who recognized the tangential nature of the topic—Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin—but nevertheless observes, "but there could, of course, be no question of abandoning the problem."[735]

The doctrine of angels has not always been considered so problematic. The second-century apologists seem to have given the angels a status verging on divinity. For example, in replying to a charge of atheism brought against the Christians, Justin listed the beings that Christians reverence and worship; he included not only the Son, but the host of angels that follow and resemble him.[736]

Medieval Christianity engaged in extensive discussion about angels. The major impetus was provided by the work of a pseudonymous fifth- or sixth-century writer claiming to be Dionysius the Areopagite, who had been converted by Paul in Athens (Acts 17:34). He classified angels into three groups: (1) thrones, cherubim, seraphim; (2) mights, dominions, powers; (3) principalities, archangels, angels. The first group, closest to God, enlighten the second group, who in turn enlighten the third group. Dionysius made a great deal of the concept of hierarchy, which he believes to be inherent in all of reality. Basing his argument on Paul's statement that the law was given by angels (Gal. 3:19), Dionysius maintained that humans, as a lower order, have no direct access to or manifestation of God, but only through the angels. Human orders, and particularly the church, should reflect a similar hierarchical structure.[737]

Later medieval thought had great interest in angels. In *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas seeks to demonstrate by reason the existence of angels.[738] In the *Summa theologica*, he attempts to demonstrate various points about them: their number is greater than that of all material beings combined; each has an individual nature; they are always at a particular point, but not limited to it.[739] Each person has a guardian angel assigned to him or her at birth (prior to birth each child falls under the care of the mother's guardian angel). While the angels rejoice at the good fortune and responsiveness of the persons placed in their care, they do not grieve in the face of negative occurrences, since sorrow and pain are alien to them.[740] Thomas devoted no fewer than 118 individual questions to consideration of the nature and condition of angels. This interest in angels may have been what earned him the title *Angelic Doctor*. Many of his ideas about angels were based on what we would now term natural theology, a series of rational arguments and inferences.

The effect of Thomas's arguments was a heavy emphasis on the supersensible realm of angels. After all, if their number exceeds the total number of beings bound to matter, the material or earthly realm must be secondary in importance. Thus much succeeding theology tended to attribute everything that occurred to angelic (or demonic) activity.

The attempt to prove on rational grounds the existence of angels is not limited to the work of Thomas, however. We also find it in later theologians. Johannes Quenstedt, one of the seventeenth-century Lutheran scholastics, argued that the existence of angels, or of something similar to them, is probable, because there are no gaps in nature.[741] Just as there are beings purely corporeal, such as stones, and beings partly corporeal and partly spiritual, namely humans, so we should expect in creation beings wholly spiritual, that is, angels. Even Charles Hodge argued that the idea that the human should be the only rational being is as improbable as that insects should be the only irrational animals: "There is every reason to presume that the scale of being among rational creatures is as extensive as that in the animal world."[742]

While some earlier theologies had given angels too large a place in the total scheme, some more recent thought has minimized the doctrine or even eliminated angels from theological consideration. This was especially true in Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization program. He noted that angels play a large part in the New Testament. They occupy heaven (in the case of the good angels) and hell (in the case of demons). They are not limited to heaven and hell, however. Both angels and demons are actively at work on the middle layer, earth, as well. Angels, on behalf of God, may intervene miraculously in the created order. And demons enter into humans, bringing them under their control through such means as causing sickness. Today, however, we no longer believe in such spiritual beings, says Bultmann. We now understand, through our increased knowledge of nature, that disease is caused not by demons, but by viruses and bacteria. We similarly understand what brings about recovery from illness. Bultmann asserts: "It is impossible to use electric lights and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles."[743] He maintains that there is nothing unique or distinct about the New Testament writers' belief in spirits. It is merely a reflection of the popularly held ideas of their day. In other words, it is a myth. Even many moderns who know nothing about Bultmann's finely tuned theory of hermeneutics discard belief in angels as obsolete. Among the first areas of Christian doctrine to be popularly demythologized are the beliefs in angels and hell.

A real resurgence of angelology began in the last part of the twentieth century. In society in general there has been a considerable growth of interest in the supernatural, including a fascination with the occult. Perhaps as a reaction against naturalistic scientific rationalism, explanations falling outside the realm of natural law have flourished in some circles. Christians have shown renewed interest in demonology, particularly demon possession and demonically induced illnesses. Related to that, although lagging somewhat in time, has been a popular interest in good angels.[744] In the 1990s, this emerged in several movies and even television programs related to the reality and activity of angels. Beyond this development is the rise of third world Christianity. To these Christians, strongly oriented toward a supernatural understanding of reality, angels are not foreign to their thinking, but a very vital aspect of the dynamics of God's work in the world. All of these factors require a balanced inquiry into the nature and activity of angels, both the good and the evil.

One potential value from the study of angels is in understanding the nature of the future life and activity of glorified humans, and also possibly of their resurrection bodies. When Jesus was posed a riddle about the woman who had been married successively to seven brothers and asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection, he indicated that his questioners misunderstood the resurrection: "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). While the exact meaning of this statement may be somewhat difficult to ascertain, this may be a fruitful source of insight that has not been adequately explored.

Good Angels

Terminology

The primary Hebrew term for angel is מָלְאָךְ (*mal'ak*); the corresponding Greek word is ἄγγελος (*angelos*); in each case, the basic meaning is "messenger," whether human or angelic. When used of angels, the terms emphasize their message-bearing role. Examples of humans designated by the term מַלְאָךְ or ἄγγελος are the messenger sent by Jezebel to Elijah (1 Kings 19:2) and certain disciples of John the Baptist (Luke 7:24) and of Jesus (Luke 9:52). Some have suggested that in the Old Testament the word in the singular usually refers to divine messengers (i.e., angels), and in the plural to human messengers; but the exceptions are sufficiently numerous and important to make this observation of no real significance.[745] Other Hebrew expressions thought to

refer to angels are “sons of the Elohim” (Job 1:6; 2:1) and “sons of Elim” (Pss. 29:1; 89:6). It is doubtful whether the word “Elohim” alone can represent angels, although the Septuagint so translates it in several instances, most notably Psalm 8:5. Other Old Testament terms for angels are “holy ones” (Ps. 89:5, 7) and “watchers” (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23). Collectively, they are referred to as “the council” (Ps. 89:7), “the assembly” (Ps. 89:5), and “host” or “hosts,” as in the very common expression “LORD [or LORD God] of hosts,” found more than sixty times in the book of Isaiah alone.

Frequently, when ἄγγελος appears in the New Testament, there is an accompanying phrase making clear that it is referring to angels, as, for example, “the angels in heaven” (Matt. 24:36). Other New Testament expressions believed to refer to angels are “heavenly host” (Luke 2:13), “spirits” (Heb. 1:14), and, in varying combinations, “principalities,” “powers,” “thrones,” “dominions,” and “authorities” (see especially Col. 1:16; also Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15). The term *archangel* appears in two passages, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 9. In the latter, Michael is named as an archangel.

Their Origin, Nature, and Status

Scripture does not explicitly state that angels were created, nor are they mentioned in the creation account (Gen. 1–2). That they were created is, however, clearly implied in Psalm 148:2, 5: “Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. . . . Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created.” The angels, as well as the celestial objects mentioned in verses 3 and 4, are declared to have been created by the Lord. This also seems to be asserted in Colossians 1:16: “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” Some scholars believe that Genesis 2:1 and Job 38:7 indicate that the angels were part of the original creation, but these texts are not sufficiently clear to be utilized as a foundation for that belief. Apparently the angels were all created directly at one time, since they presumably do not have the power to propagate themselves in the normal fashion (Matt. 22:30), and we are told of no new direct creations by God after the original creative effort was completed (Gen. 2:2–3).

Jews and Christians have long believed and taught that angels are immaterial or spiritual beings. On the other hand, angels have appeared in the form of human beings with material bodies. Here, as with the matter of their creation, explicit evidence is not abundant. Indeed, one might conclude that angels and spirits are being distinguished from one another in Acts 23:8–9, although angels

may be part of the genus of spirits. The clearest statement regarding the spiritual nature of angels is found in Hebrews 1:14, where the writer, obviously referring to angels (see vv. 5, 13), says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” That angels are spirits may also be inferred from the following considerations:

1. Demons (fallen angels) are described as spirits (Matt. 8:16; 12:45; Luke 7:21; 8:2; 11:26; Acts 19:12; Rev. 16:14).

2. We are told that our struggle is not against “flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).

3. Paul, in Colossians 1:16, seems to identify the heavenly forces as invisible.

4. That angels are spirits seems to follow (although not necessarily) from Jesus’s assertions that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30) and do not die (Luke 20:36).

In view of the preceding considerations, it seems safe to conclude that angels are spiritual beings; they do not have physical or material bodies. Physical manifestations recorded in Scripture must be regarded as appearances assumed for the occasion (angelophanies).

As we observed earlier in this chapter, there have at times been tendencies to exalt angels unduly, giving them worship and reverence due only to the Deity. The most extended passage on angels, Hebrews 1:5–2:9, however, makes a particular point of establishing that Christ is superior to the angels. Although he was made for a little time a little lower than the angels, he is in every way superior to them. While Jesus became for a period of time subordinate to the Father, the angels always are subordinate to and carry out the will of God; they do not act on independent initiative. Although superior to human beings in many of their abilities and qualities, they are part of the class of created and thus finite beings, but we do not know precisely when they were created. As totally spiritual beings they are unique among the creatures, but they are nonetheless creatures.

There are large numbers of angels. Scripture has various ways of indicating their numbers: “myriads” (Deut. 33:2); “tens of thousands and thousands of thousands” (Ps. 68:17); “twelve legions” (36,000 to 72,000—the size of the Roman legion varied between 3,000 and 6,000) (Matt. 26:53); “thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly” (Heb. 12:22); “thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Rev. 5:11). The last reference may be an allusion to Daniel 7:10. Job 25:3 and 2 Kings 6:17 also indicate a large number of angelic beings. While there is no reason to take any of these

figures as exact numbers, particularly in view of the symbolic significance of the numbers used (12 and 1,000), it is clear that the angels are a very large group.

Their Appearance

In most cases angels are not seen. The Lord had to open the eyes of Balaam before he could see the angel standing in his way (Num. 22:31). Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant; then the young man saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). When angels are seen, they ordinarily have a humanlike appearance, so that they may well be mistaken for humans (Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 16; Judg. 13:6; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). Sometimes the glory of the Lord shines from them (Luke 2:9; 9:26)—perhaps the reason they are sometimes seen to be wearing white clothing of brilliant appearance. Note how Matthew describes the angel of the Lord who rolled the stone from Jesus's sepulchre: "His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow" (Matt. 28:3; cf. Ezek. 1:13; Dan. 10:6; Rev. 1:14 and 19:12).

Some of the commonly held conceptions are not supported by the scriptural witness. There are no indications of angels appearing in female form. Nor is there explicit reference to them as winged, although Daniel 9:21 and Revelation 14:6 speak of them as flying. The cherubim and seraphim are represented as winged (Exod. 25:20; Isa. 6:2), as are the symbolic creatures of Ezekiel 1:6 (cf. Rev. 4:8). However, we have no assurance that what is true of cherubim and seraphim is true of angels in general. The idea that angels as a whole are winged is at best an inference, but not a necessary inference, from the biblical passages that describe them as flying.

Their Capacities and Powers

The angels are represented as personal beings. They can be interacted with. They have intelligence and will (2 Sam. 14:20; Rev. 22:9). They are moral creatures, some being characterized as holy (Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 1:26; Acts 10:22; Rev. 14:10), while others, who have fallen away, are described as lying and sinning (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8–10).

In Matthew 24:36 Jesus implies that angels have superhuman knowledge, but at the same time expressly asserts that this knowledge has limits: "About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In 1 Peter 1:12 there may be an allusion to the limited nature of their knowledge. They evidently grow in knowledge by observing human actions and

hearing of human repentance (Luke 12:8; 15:10; 1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10). That their knowledge is greater than that of humans is indicated by their presence at some of the heavenly councils, their involvement in conveying revelation (Gal. 3:19), and their interpretation of visions (as in Daniel and Zechariah). To be likened to an angel may imply that one possesses great wisdom.

Just as the angels possess great knowledge but not omniscience, so they also have great and superhuman power but not omnipotence. The fact of the angels' great power is taught in three ways in Scripture:

1. The titles assigned to at least some of them—principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, thrones.
2. Direct assertions—for example, "angels . . . are stronger and more powerful [than humans]" (2 Pet. 2:11); "Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding" (Ps. 103:20).
3. The effects attributed to their agency—see 2 Chronicles 32:21; Acts 12:7–11; and our discussion of the activities of angels below (pp. 413–14).

Angels derive their great power from God and remain dependent on his favorable will or permission to exercise it. They are restricted to acting within the limits of his permission. This is true even of Satan, whose ability to afflict Job was circumscribed by the will of the Lord (Job 1:12; 2:6). God's angels act only to carry out his commands, not independently. Only God does the miraculous (Ps. 72:18). As creatures, angels are subject to all the limitations of creaturehood.

Organization

Rather elaborate schemes have been worked out at times regarding the organization of the angelic hosts. There is very little definite and clear information on this subject. We do know that there are archangels, who evidently are of higher stature than the ordinary angels, but we do not know how many there are. Only twice in the Bible is the term used, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 9. Only Michael is identified by name as an archangel. Although Gabriel is often popularly thought of as an archangel, perhaps because he is the only other angel named, nowhere in the Bible is he so identified.

Attempts have been made to devise an organizational pattern from Paul's use of various terms, such as principalities, powers, and thrones. While these terms may designate different functions, there really is no way of detecting whether any chain of command is thus implied.

The cherubim and seraphim present special problems, since no statement is made regarding their relationship to angels in general. There is only one mention of seraphim: Isaiah 6:2–3 represents them as worshiping God. The cherubim, on the other hand, are mentioned quite frequently; they are described as appearing like human beings, having wings, and attending in some special way upon God, who has his throne above them (Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Pss. 80:1; 99:1; etc.). When Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden, God placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the tree of life (Gen. 3:24).

There have been several different types of speculation regarding the seraphim and cherubim. Some have argued that the cherubim are to be identified with the seraphim.[746] Augustus Strong contended that they are not to be understood as actual beings, higher in rank than humans, but as "symbolic appearances, intended to represent redeemed humanity endowed with all the creature perfections lost by the Fall, and made to be the dwelling-place of God."[747] In the absence of further data, it seems fruitless to speculate. The most cautious position is simply to regard the seraphim and cherubim as being among spiritual creatures designated by the general term "angel." They may be angels with special functions, or a special type of angel. In any case, we cannot assume that the characteristics of either seraphim or cherubim can be predicated of all angels. And whether they are of the higher or lower ranks, if indeed there are such ranks, we do not know.

Difficult Terms

There are two difficult terms that deserve particular attention: "sons of God" and "the angel of the Lord." In Genesis 6:2 we read that the sons of God took wives from among the "daughters of men." Some scholars have been led to conclude that these sons of God were actually angels who mated with human women to produce a race of mighty men. Among the arguments advanced in favor of this interpretation are that angels are referred to as sons of God elsewhere in Scripture (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and that there was apparently a superhuman race on the earth at this time (v. 4). On the other hand, the fact that there was also great wickedness that so displeased God that he sent the flood has led to the suggestion that the sons of God may in fact have been fallen angels. But the suggestion that angels (whether good or fallen) mated with human women and produced children runs contrary to what Jesus taught us about angels (Matt. 22:30). In light of this, the interpretation that understands the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2 to be sons of Seth who mated with pagan descendants of Cain seems to present less difficulty than does the interpretation of "sons of

God" as angels, although neither view can be held dogmatically. There simply is not enough evidence to justify using this passage as a source of information about angels. This should not be considered a case of "evangelical demythologizing," as some have suggested.[748] It is simply a matter of remaining skeptical in the face of insufficient evidence.

We also face the problem of the identity of "the angel of the Lord." In the Old Testament there are numerous references to the angel of the Lord or "the angel of God" (Gen. 16:7–14; 18; 22:11, 14–15; 24:7, 40; 32:24–30; 48:15–16; Exod. 3:2; 14:19; 23:20–23; 32:34–33:17; Judg. 2:1, 4; 5:23; 6:11–24; 13:3, etc.). The problem comes in the fact that while there are numerous passages where the angel of the Lord is identified with God, there are many other passages where the two are distinguished. Examples of passages in which the two are equated are Genesis 31:11 and 13, where the angel of the Lord says, "I am the God of Bethel," and Exodus 3:2 and 6, where the angel of the Lord tells Moses, "I am the God of your father." Examples of passages in which the two are distinguished are Genesis 16:11, where the angel of the Lord says to Hagar, "The LORD has heard of your misery," and Exodus 23:20, where the Lord tells the people of Israel, "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you." There are three major interpretations of "the angel of the Lord": (1) he is merely an angel with a special commission; (2) he is God himself temporarily visible in a humanlike form; (3) he is the Logos, a temporary preincarnate visit by the Second Person of the Trinity.[749] While none of these interpretations is fully satisfactory, in light of the clear statements of identity, either the second or the third seems more adequate than the first. Where there are apparent distinctions between God and the angel of the Lord, God is referring to himself in third-person fashion. It is not possible, then, to draw from the nature of the angel of the Lord inferences that can be applied to all angels.

Their Activities

1. Angels continually praise and glorify God (Job 38:7; Pss. 103:20; 148:2; Rev. 5:11–12; 7:11; 8:1–4). While this activity usually takes place in God's presence, on at least one occasion it took place on earth—at the birth of Jesus the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:13–14).

2. Angels reveal and communicate God's message to humans. This activity is most in keeping with the root meaning of the word "angel." Angels were particularly involved as mediators of the law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Although they are not mentioned in Exodus 19, Deuteronomy 33:2 says, "The LORD . . . came with myriads of holy ones." This obscure passage may be an

allusion to the mediation of angels. While they are not said to have performed a similar function with respect to the new covenant, the New Testament frequently depicts them as conveyers of messages from God. Gabriel appeared to Zechariah (Luke 1:13–20) and to Mary (Luke 1:26–38). Angels also spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3–7), Peter (Acts 11:13; 12:7–11), and Paul (Acts 27:23).

3. Angels minister to believers. This includes protecting believers from harm. In the early church it was an angel that delivered the apostles (Acts 5:19) and later Peter (Acts 12:6–11) from prison. The psalmists experienced the angels' care (Pss. 34:7; 91:11). Their major ministry is to spiritual needs, however. Angels take a great interest in the spiritual welfare of believers, rejoicing at their conversion (Luke 15:10) and serving them in their needs (Heb. 1:14). Angels are spectators of our lives (1 Cor. 4:9; 1 Tim. 5:21), and are present within the church (1 Cor. 11:10). At the death of believers, they convey them to the place of blessedness (Luke 16:22).

4. Angels execute judgment on the enemies of God. The angel of the Lord brought death to 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35), and to the children of Israel until the Lord told him to stay his hand at Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24:16). It was the angel of the Lord who stood between the people of Israel and the Egyptians (Exod. 14:19–20); the result was the deliverance of the Israelites and the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. It was an angel of the Lord that killed Herod (Acts 12:23). The book of Revelation is full of prophecies regarding the judgment to be administered by angels (8:6–9:21; 16:1–17; 19:11–14).

5. The angels will be involved in the second coming. They will accompany the Lord at his return (Matt. 25:31), just as they were present at other significant events of Jesus's life, including his birth, temptation, and resurrection. They will separate the wheat from the weeds (Matt. 13:39–42). Christ will send forth his angels with a loud trumpet call to gather the elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:31; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17).

What of the concept of guardian angels, the idea that each person or at least each believer has a specific angel assigned to care for and accompany him or her in this life? This idea was part of popular Jewish belief at the time of Christ and has carried over in some Christian thinking.[750] Two biblical texts are cited as evidence of guardian angels. Upon calling a child and placing him in the midst of the disciples, Jesus said: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). When the maid Rhoda told the others in the house that

Peter was at the gate, they said, “It must be his angel” (Acts 12:15). These verses seem to indicate that angels are specially assigned to individuals.

Elsewhere in the Bible, however, we read that not just one, but many angels accompanied, protected, and provided for believers. Elisha was surrounded by many horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17); Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53); several angels carried Lazarus’s soul to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22). Moreover, Jesus’s reference to the angels of the little ones specifies that they are in the presence of the Father. This suggests that they are angels who worship in God’s presence rather than angels who care for individual humans in this world. The reply to Rhoda reflects the Jewish tradition that a guardian angel resembles the person to whom he is assigned. But a report indicating that certain disciples believed in guardian angels does not invest the belief with authority. Some Christians still had mistaken or confused beliefs on various subjects. In the absence of definite didactic material, we must conclude that there is insufficient evidence for the concept of guardian angels.

Evil Angels

The Status of Demonology Today

Where to consider the topic of evil angels presents a problem. Dealing with them in connection with our examination of good angels would tend to suggest a parallel. Since the good angels have been treated at this point because of their obvious relationship to divine providence, are not the evil angels or demons rather out of place here? Would it not be more appropriate to handle this topic in connection with our study of sin? But discussing the evil angels at this point is justified on two grounds. First, the evil angels should be studied in close connection with the good angels since they have the same derivation, and much of what has been said about the latter is true of the former as well. The good angels are still what the evil angels once were. Second, the providence of God has about it the shadow of the problem of evil. Since we have just discussed evil, it seems appropriate to treat the subject of demons and the devil here. We will refer to these evil agents again when we discuss sin and temptation, and when we delve into the doctrine of the last things; but they simply cannot be ignored at this present juncture.

Theologians have recently shown a tendency to restructure the understanding of demons and Satan. One such attempt has of course been Rudolf Bultmann’s program of demythologization, noted earlier in this chapter. According to this

and allied views, demons are merely mythological conceptions drawn from the culture of the day. In particular, the biblical presentation is believed to reflect the influence of Persian mythology. As appealing as this idea is superficially, a serious flaw in it is that it fails to take note that the Christian view contains nothing of the dualism so commonly found in Persian thought.[751]

A second alternative approach is to depersonalize demons. The reality of evil in our day cannot be denied. Even those who reject ideas such as total depravity and original sin frequently decry the injustice and warfare in our world. Some theologians view all this evil not as stemming from a personal source, but as being part of the very structure of reality, and particularly of our present social reality. The term "demonic" is viewed as a characterization of powerful social forces and structures rather than personal beings. An example of those who take this approach is Paul Tillich.[752]

A third approach to demons is that of Karl Barth. He stresses the antithesis between demons and angels.[753] This does not mean that he separates his treatments of the two topics, for he deals briefly with demons after discussing the angels. Nor does he have in mind the opposition there is between the two. Rather, Barth's idea is that demons and angels literally have nothing in common with one another. They are not two species of one common genus, angels. There is an absolute and exclusive antithesis between the two. Just as "nonsense" is not a species of sense, so demons or evil angels are not a special species of angels, but the reality that is condemned, negated, and excluded by the good angels. The origin and nature of demons lie in nothingness, chaos, darkness.[754] They are not created by God, but are part of the threat to God's creation. They are simply nothingness in its dynamic. The basic problem with this position is that it denies the concreteness of evil and evil things.

The Origin of Demons

The Bible has little to say about how evil angels came to have their current moral character and even less about their origin. We may learn something about their origin from what is said about their moral character. Two closely related passages inform us regarding the fall of the evil angels. Second Peter 2:4 says that "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment." Jude 6 says that "the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." The beings described in these two verses are clearly

identified as angels who sinned and came under judgment. They must, like all the other angels, be created beings.

A problem presented by these verses is that the evil angels are said to have been cast into nether gloom to be kept until the judgment. This has led some to theorize that there are two classes of fallen angels: those who are imprisoned, and those who are free to carry on their evil in the world. Another possibility is that these two verses describe the condition of all demons. That the latter is correct is suggested by the remainder of 2 Peter 2. In verse 9 Peter says that "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment." This language is almost identical to that used in verse 4. Note that the remainder of the chapter (vv. 10–22) is a description of the continued sinful activity of these people who are being kept under punishment. We conclude that, similarly, though cast into nether gloom, the fallen angels have sufficient freedom to carry on their evil activities.

Demons, then, are angels created by God and therefore were originally good; but they sinned and thus became evil. Just when this rebellion took place we do not know, but it must have occurred between the time when God completed the creation and pronounced it all "very good," and the temptation and fall of the humans (Gen. 3).

The Chief of the Demons

"The devil" is the name given in Scripture to the chief of these fallen angels. He is also known as Satan. The Hebrew name שָׂטָן (*satan*) derives from the verb שָׂטַן (*satan*), which means to be or act as an adversary.[755] Hence he is the opponent, the one who opposes the cause and the people of God. The Greek word Σατᾶν (*satan*) or Σατανᾶς (*satanas*) is a transliteration of this Hebrew name. The most common Greek word for him is διάβολος (*diabolos*—devil, adversary, accuser). κατήγωρ (*katēgōr*—accuser—Rev. 12:10) is also used. Several other terms are used of him less frequently: tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5), Beelzebul (Matt. 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 19), enemy (Matt. 13:39), evil one (Matt. 13:19, 38; 1 John 2:13; 3:12; 5:18), Belial (2 Cor. 6:15), adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), deceiver (Rev. 12:9), great dragon (Rev. 12:3), father of lies (John 8:44), murderer (John 8:44), sinner (1 John 3:8). All of these convey something of the character and activity of the devil. Although the devil is not explicitly termed a demon in Scripture, Jesus identified Satan with Beelzebul, the prince of demons (see the parallel accounts in Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:22–30; and Luke 11:14–23). That Satan is a demon is also implied in Luke 10:17–

20, where the casting out of demons signals the defeat of Satan. Those who were demon-possessed were characterized as “under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38; cf. Luke 13:16).

The devil is, as his name indicates, engaged in opposing God and the work of Christ. He does this especially by tempting humans. This is shown in the temptation of Jesus, the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30), and the sin of Judas (Luke 22:3). (See also Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:26.)

One of Satan’s primary means is deception. Paul tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and that his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14–15). His use of deception is also mentioned in Revelation 12:9 and 20:8, 10. He has “blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). He opposes and hinders (1 Thess. 2:18) Christians in their service, even using physical ailments to that end (so, probably, 2 Cor. 12:7).

For all of his power Satan is limited, as indicated in the case of Job. He can be successfully resisted, and will flee (James 4:7; see also Eph. 4:27). He can be put to flight, however, not by our strength, but only by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26; 1 Cor. 3:16).

Activities of Demons

As Satan’s subjects, demons carry out his work in the world. It may therefore be assumed that they engage in all the forms of temptation and deception he employs. They inflict disease: dumbness (Mark 9:17), deafness and dumbness (Mark 9:25), blindness and deafness (Matt. 12:22), convulsions (Mark 1:26; 9:20; Luke 9:39), and paralysis or lameness (Acts 8:7). Most particularly, they oppose the spiritual progress of God’s people (Eph. 6:12).

Demon Possession

Incidents of demon possession are given prominent attention in the biblical accounts. The technical expression is to “have a demon” (δαιμόνιον ἔχω —*daimonion echō*) or to “be demonized” (δαιμονίζομαι—*daimonizomai*). Sometimes we find expressions like “evil spirits” (Acts 8:7; 19:12).

The manifestations of demon possession are varied. We have already noted some of the physical ailments demons inflict. The person possessed may have unusual strength (Mark 5:2–4), may act in bizarre ways such as wearing no

clothes and living among the tombs rather than in a house (Luke 8:27), or may engage in self-destructive behavior (Matt. 17:15; Mark 5:5). There evidently are degrees of affliction, since Jesus spoke of the evil spirit who "goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself" (Matt. 12:45). In all of these cases the common element is that the person involved is being destroyed, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually. It appears that the demons were able to speak, presumably using the vocal equipment of the person possessed (e.g., Matt. 8:29, 31; Mark 1:24, 26, 34; 5:7, 9, 10; Luke 4:41; 8:28, 30). Demons can also apparently inhabit animals (see the parallel accounts of the incident involving the swine—Matt. 8; Mark 5; Luke 8).

It is noteworthy that the biblical writers did not attribute all illness to demon possession. Luke reports that Jesus distinguished between two types of healing: "I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow" (Luke 13:32). A similar distinction is made in Matthew 10:8; Mark 1:34; 6:13; Luke 4:40–41; 9:1. Nor was epilepsy mistaken for demon possession. We read in Matthew 17:15–18 that Jesus cast out a demon from an epileptic, but in Matthew 4:24 epileptics (as well as paralytics) are distinguished from demoniacs. In the case of numerous healings no mention is made of demons. In Matthew, for example, demon exorcism is not mentioned in the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5–13), the woman with the hemorrhage of twelve years' duration (9:19–20), the two blind men (9:27–30), the man with the withered hand (12:9–14), and those who touched the fringe of Jesus's garment (14:35–36). In particular, leprosy never seems to be attributed to demons.

Jesus cast out demons without pronouncing an elaborate formula. He merely commanded them to come out (Mark 1:25; 9:25). He attributed the exorcism to the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28) or the finger of God (Luke 11:20). Jesus invested his disciples with the authority to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1). But the disciples needed faith if they were to be successful (Matt. 17:19–20). Prayer is also mentioned as a requirement for exorcism (Mark 9:29). Sometimes faith on the part of a third party was a requirement (Mark 9:23–24; cf. Mark 6:5–6). At times demons were expelled from someone who had expressed no wish to be healed.

There is no reason to believe that demon possessions are restricted to the past. There are cases, especially but not exclusively in less developed cultures, which seem explainable only on this basis. The Christian should be alert to the possibility of demon possession occurring today. At the same time, one should not too quickly attribute aberrant physical and psychical phenomena to demon possession. Even as Jesus and the biblical writers distinguished cases of possession from other ailments, so should we, testing the spirits.

In recent years there has been a flare-up of interest in the phenomenon of demon possession. As a consequence, some Christians may come to regard this as the primary manifestation of the forces of evil. Rather, Satan, the great deceiver, may be encouraging interest in demon possession in hopes that Christians will become careless about other more subtle forms of influence by the powers of evil.

The Destiny of Satan and the Demons

The Bible makes clear that a serious and intense struggle is going on between, on the one side, Christ and his followers and, on the other, Satan and his forces. Evidences of the struggle include the temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:1–11), Jesus's encounters with demons, and numerous other passages (e.g., Luke 22:31–34; Gal. 5:16–17; Eph. 6:10–20). The temptation of Jesus represented a preliminary victory over Satan. Other anticipations of the final victory are found in Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14–15; 1 John 2:13; 3:8; 5:18. Revelation 12 pictures a war in heaven between, on one side, Michael and his angels and, on the other, Satan and his angels, a war that results in Satan's being thrown down from heaven to earth, and then attacking Christ and the church. In Revelation 20 we read that Satan will be bound for a thousand years (v. 2) and then released for a time before being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone forever (vv. 7, 10). Jesus indicates that this will also be the fate of Satan's angels (Matt. 25:41).

The decisive battle in the war between good and evil was fought and won by Christ in the crucifixion and resurrection. Satan has been defeated, and although he continues to fight on desperately, his fate has been sealed. Christians can take comfort in the realization that they need not be defeated in any of their specific encounters with Satan (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 4:4).

The Role of the Doctrine of Angels

Obscure and strange though this belief in good and evil angels may seem to some, it has a significant role to play in the life of the Christian. Several benefits may be drawn from our study of this topic:

1. It is a comfort and an encouragement to us to realize that powerful and numerous unseen agents are available to help us in our need. The eye of faith will do for the believer what the vision of the angels did for Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6:17).

2. The angels' praise and service of God give us an example of how we are to conduct ourselves now and what our activity will be in the life beyond in God's presence.

3. It sobers us to realize that even angels who were close to God succumbed to temptation and fell. This is a reminder to us: "Be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12).

4. Knowledge about evil angels serves to alert us to the danger and the subtlety of temptation that can be expected to come from satanic forces, and gives us insight into some of the devil's ways of working. We need to be on guard against two extremes. We should not take him too lightly lest we disregard the dangers. Nor, on the other hand, should we have too strong an interest in him.

5. We receive confidence from the realization that powerful though Satan and his accomplices are, there are definite limits on what they can do. We can, therefore, by the grace of God, resist him successfully. And we can know that his ultimate defeat is certain.

PART 5
HUMANITY

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Introduction to the Doctrine of Humanity

Chapter Objectives

At the close of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Describe five reasons why the doctrine of humanity is important.
2. Identify and understand seven contemporary images of humanity.
3. Compare and contrast these seven images of humanity with the Christian view of the doctrine of humanity.

Chapter Summary

There are five reasons the Christian view of humanity is important. The Christian view of humanity holds that a human being is a creature of God, made in the image of God. This contrasts with seven contemporary views of humanity. The biblical answer to the meaning of humanity is the most satisfying answer among the possible views.

Study Questions

- How does the doctrine of humanity relate to the person of Christ?
- What is humanity's crisis in self-understanding?
- What are seven contemporary images of humanity?

- How have society's views of the images of humanity affected its perspective on human nature?
- What similarities and differences do you discover between the secular images of humanity and the Christian view of humanity? How do you evaluate each perspective? What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

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Importance of the Doctrine of Humanity

In a seminary homiletics class, the instructor was lecturing on the various parts of the sermon. When he discussed the introduction he said quite emphatically, "The introduction is the most important part of the sermon." When the main body of the sermon was his topic, he declared, "The main body is the most important part of the sermon." In introducing the topic of the conclusion, he soberly intoned, "The conclusion is the most important part of the sermon." Finally one confused student asked the obvious question: "How can all three be the most important?" Patiently the professor explained that whatever part of the sermon one is dealing with is the most important part—*at that time*.

The doctrines of Christian theology have a similar relationship to one another. In a sense, every doctrine is the most important doctrine when it is the one under discussion. But the matter goes further than that. In its own way, each doctrine is the most important (or at least several of them are). The doctrine of Scripture is the most important for epistemological purposes. Had God not revealed himself

to us and preserved that revelation in Scripture, we would not know of our need and the solution to that need. The doctrine of God is the most important from the standpoint of ontology, since God is the ultimate reality, the source and sustainer of all that is. The doctrine of Christ is the most important doctrine in terms of our redemption, because without Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, there would be no basis of salvation for us. The doctrine of salvation is the most important existentially, for it deals with the actual alteration of our lives, our existence. The church is the most important doctrine relationally, since it treats the believer in Christian community. And eschatology is the most important doctrine in terms of history, for it tells us our eternal destiny.

There are several reasons why the doctrine of humanity is especially important:

1. This doctrine is important because of its relationship to other major Christian doctrines. Since the human is the highest of God's earthly creatures, the study of humanity brings to completion our understanding of God's work and, in a sense, of God himself, since we do learn something about the Creator by seeing what he has created. For only humans are said in the Bible to have been made by God in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–27). Thus, a direct clue to the nature of God ought to emerge from a study of humans.

This doctrine also sheds great light on our understanding of the person of Christ, since the Bible teaches that the Second Person of the Trinity took on human nature. That fact means that to understand the nature of Christ, it is necessary to understand the nature of humanity. We must, however, make certain that we distinguish essential humanity, or humanity as it came from the hand of God, from existential or empirical humanity, as we now find it in actual existence. Conversely, study of the human nature of Jesus will also give us a more complete understanding of what humanity was really intended to be.

Further, the doctrine of humanity is also the gate to the study of yet other doctrines with which the connection is not so obvious.[756] If God had not created humans, there would presumably have been no incarnation, no atonement, no need for regeneration and justification. There would have been no church.

This means that extraordinary care must be taken to formulate correctly our understanding of humanity. What humans are understood to be will color our perception of what needed to be done for them, how it was done, and their ultimate destiny. Thus the effort expended here is well worthwhile, for here the issues are overt and consequently more easily dealt with, whereas with other doctrines, these issues are more difficult to examine.

The doctrine of humanity has an unusual status. Here the student of theology is also its object. This sets anthropology apart from doctrines like theology proper and Christology (although not from doctrines like soteriology, which is, of course, concerned with the salvation of humans). Our anthropology will determine how we understand ourselves and, consequently, how we do theology, or even what theology is, that is, to the degree that it is thought of as a human activity.

2. The doctrine of humanity is a point where the biblical revelation and human concerns converge. Theology is here treating an object that everyone (or at least virtually everyone) admits exists. Modern Westerners may not have any certainty as to whether there is a God, or whether there really was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, or whether the miracles attributed to him actually occurred. But they have little or no question about their own reality, unless they have been influenced in some way by Eastern modes of thought.

This means that the subject of humanity is a starting point for dialogue. If one begins a discussion with a nonbeliever about what the Bible says or what God is like, the listener's attention may be lost from the start. Many people today are skeptical about anything that purports to transcend sense experience. In addition, the modern mind often tends toward humanism, making humans and human standards the highest object of value and concern. This is often manifested in an antiauthoritarianism that rejects the idea of a God who claims the right to tell one what to do, or of an authoritative book prescribing belief and behavior. But modern humans are concerned about themselves, what is happening to them, where they are going. They may not do a great amount of thinking about their understanding of humanity, but they are interested in and concerned about their welfare and place in life. Thus, while the conversation will not end with humanity, it is an apt place for it to begin.

We have an excellent opportunity here to utilize what Paul Tillich termed the method of correlation. In his answering or apologetic theology, an analysis is made of the situation, the whole interpretation of life and reality held by a culture. This is expressed through the art, philosophy, politics, and technology of that culture.[757] The analysis informs us of the questions being asked by that society. Thus, in Tillich's system, before theology tells its message, it asks what is most important to the people being addressed.[758] Then theology expresses its message, drawing the content from the pole of the theological authority, but letting the form be governed by the pole of the situation. The message will be expressed as answers to the questions people are asking,[759] rather than as something foreign imposed on them from without.[760]

While the topic of humanity is a fruitful place for beginning a discussion with nonbelievers, the discussion will not end there. For the questions raised by a nonbeliever's self-understanding will lead to answers that go some distance from the starting point of the discussion. For example, the questions raised will lead to discussion of humans' relationship to God, which will in turn require explication of God's nature. Thus, although the discussion may eventually range far afield, it will have begun where the person's interest lies.

This suggests that the declaration of the Christian message might well begin with some common aspect of human experience. In particular, the introduction of a sermon or a study might focus on an issue that is uppermost in the mind of the listener. If the sermon begins with a five-minute explanation of the cultural situation in first-century Philippi or an elucidation of the significance of the breastpiece of the high priest in the book of Exodus, listeners' minds may wander off. If, on the other hand, the sermon begins with some situation of human interest, and then works back to show how the Scripture passage under consideration speaks to that situation, there is a chance of retaining the audience's attention. While we tend to think that this problem is limited to radio and television preachers, we might be surprised to find out how many persons sitting before the speaker on a Sunday morning are capable of turning off the message, whether their eyes are closed or wide open. The doctrine of humanity is one point where it is possible to get a toehold in the mind of the modern secular person. For it at least begins with topics that are on the mind of the person in the street.

3. The doctrine of humanity is particularly significant in our day because of the large amount of attention given to humanity by the various intellectual disciplines. New departments focusing on previously unexplored areas of behavioral science come into being regularly at universities. New cross-disciplinary studies are arising. Even business schools, which formerly concentrated on economic and organizational problems, are increasingly addressing the human factor and finding that it is often the most important. Medical schools are becoming more conscious that doctors do not treat symptoms or illnesses or bodies, but human beings, and accordingly doctors must be aware of the personal dimensions of the practitioner-patient relationship. And of course the traditional behavioral sciences, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science, continue to investigate the human creature.

There is a heightened interest in human problems. Ethical issues dominate discussions, particularly among the young. Whatever their primary issue may be —racial relationships in the 1950s, the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the environment in the 1970s, the nuclear arms race in the 1980s, crime in the

1990s, terrorism in the twenty-first century—there is intensity of concern. And the questions raised—"What should we do?" "What is the right?"—start one on a course that may well lead to the answer of a transcendent God who is the basis for moral norms. It should be noted here that political debate, often quite vigorous in nature, deals with issues that at root are ethical. Is material prosperity more important than good education? Is economic security to be valued more than freedom of choice? These are issues that really pose the questions "What is human nature?" and "What is the good for human beings?"

While our preceding point (namely, that the topic of humanity can be a highly effective springboard for discussion with nonbelievers) related primarily to the individual human being's concern regarding himself or herself, we are thinking here more in terms of the collective self-concern of society, which is a more intellectual matter. Because of the increasing number of academic disciplines focusing on humanity, Christian theology is in an opportune position to enter into dialogue with other scholarly perspectives and methodologies. Just as in a highly personal discussion with an individual, it is also vital in academic dialogue that we have a thorough and accurate understanding of human beings from the standpoint of theology, as well as a familiarity with how they are viewed from perspectives other than that of theology.

4. The doctrine of humanity is important because of the present crisis in human self-understanding. Not only is there a great interest in the question "What is the human?" There is also great confusion regarding the answer, for various recent events and developments cast doubt on many of the answers formerly given to the question.

One development is the struggle of young people to discover who they are. The quest for identity has always been part of the normal process of maturation, of forming one's independent outlook on life, one's own values and goals.[761] Recently, however, it seems to have taken on larger dimensions. For one thing, many parents do not really instill values in their children, or parents advocate values they themselves do not manifest in their lifestyles. The traditional sources of values—the church, the university, the state—have become suspect. Economic and military threats cloud the future of many young people. Who am I? What is life? Where is the world going? These are questions that mark the crises faced by many young people and some older ones as well.[762] The mapping of the human genome has added a whole new dimension to the question.[763]

A second development contributing to the crisis in self-understanding is the loss of historical roots. In many cases, history has become a lost field of knowledge, regarded as impractical or irrelevant. Because of this disregard, people and even whole nations have lost touch with who they are. Traditions

have been cast aside as old, boring, and stifling. But traditions can teach us a great deal about who we are. Many people have in fact made discoveries about themselves as they search out their family roots. The ultimate question, however, is, where did the human race come from? That is the quintessential historical question. Christianity answers that question and thus gives us a sure sense of identity: we are creatures of God, made in his image and likeness and for fellowship with him.

The final development leading to the crisis in human self-understanding relates to traumatic occurrences in national life. We are sometimes brought to the point of asking, "What is our country, or our world, doing?" Since the 1960s a series of political assassinations and assassination attempts, terrorism, and wars cause us to wonder where we are going and whether the human race as a whole has gone mad. The contradiction in the human race is deep and profound. On the one hand, we are capable of incredible accomplishments, including space travel and huge leaps in communication, information processing, and medicine, but, on the other, we seem unable to control ourselves. Morally neutral technology is employed to evil ends. Crime increases, as do class and racial tension and strife. The humans on one hand seem to be almost gods, reaching for the stars; on the other hand they seem to be devils, capable of cruelty not found in the animal kingdom. The self-understanding of the human is indeed at a crisis point, calling for intensive investigation and careful reflection.

5. This doctrine also affects how we minister. Our conception of human beings and their destiny will greatly affect how we deal with them and what we seek to do for them. If we think of humans as primarily physical beings, then the most important consideration, and perhaps virtually the only one, will be the satisfaction of physical drives in the most effective fashion.

If we think of humans as primarily rational beings, then our ministry will appeal chiefly to their intellects. We will present carefully prepared arguments and expositions, reasoned justifications of actions and ideas. Our basic premise will be that the way to obtain desirable action from those with whom we deal is to persuade them that it is the best course to follow. If we see humans as primarily emotional beings, our appeal to them will be basically in terms of emotional considerations. If we see them as essentially sexual beings, then making sure they have achieved satisfactory sexual adjustment will take priority in our ministry to them. In terms of both the ends we pursue and the way we seek to attain them, our conception of humans is crucial to our work with and for them.

Images of the Human

The foregoing considerations should convince us that the doctrine of humanity is a particularly opportune one for us to study and utilize in our dialogue with the non-Christian world. To identify the questions contemporary culture is asking, however, we need to look more closely at some of the more prevalent current conceptions of humanity. These are numerous because so many different disciplines deal with human nature.

A Machine

One of these perspectives is in terms of what the human is able to do. The employer, for example, is interested in the human being's strength and energy, the skills or capabilities possessed. On this basis, the employer "rents" the employee for a certain number of hours a day. That humans are sometimes regarded as machines is particularly evident when automation results in a worker's being displaced from a job. A robot, being more accurate and consistent, often performs the work better; moreover, it requires less attention, does not demand pay increases, and does not lose time because of illness.

The chief concern of those who have this conception of humans will be to satisfy those needs of the person (machine) that will keep it functioning effectively. The health of the worker is of interest not because of possible personal distress, but in terms of working efficiency. If the work can be done better by a machine or by the introduction of more advanced techniques, there will be no hesitation to adopt such measures, for the work is the primary goal and concern. In addition, the worker is paid the minimum necessary to get the task accomplished.[764]

This view also creeps into the church to a degree. Persons may be valued according to what they can do. Churches may reflect this in their choice of pastors, wanting someone who can perform a given ministerial task effectively and efficiently. There may be special concern to enlist members who can get the church's work accomplished. Potential converts may be viewed primarily as "giving units" who can help finance the program of the church. One pastor referred to visitation of the elderly and shut-in members of his congregation as "junk calls," because in his judgment such people cannot contribute much to the work of the church. In all of these instances, the conception of a human being as a machine is present—people are valued for what they can do, rather than what can be done for them.

In this approach, persons are basically regarded as things, as means to ends rather than as ends in themselves. They are of value as long as they are useful. They may be moved around like chess pieces, as some large corporations do with their management personnel, manipulating them if necessary, to accomplish their intended function.

An Animal

Another view sees the human primarily as a member of the animal kingdom and derived from some of its higher forms. Humans have come into being through the same sort of process as have all other animals, and will have a similar end. There is no qualitative difference between humans and the other animals. The only difference is one of degree: a somewhat different but not necessarily superior physical structure, a larger cranial capacity, a more highly trained stimulus-response mechanism.

This view of humanity is perhaps most fully developed in behavioristic psychology. Here human motivation is understood primarily in terms of biological drives. Knowledge of humans is gained not through introspection, but by experimentation on animals.[765]

Human behavior can be affected by processes similar to those used on animals. Just as Pavlov's dog learned to salivate when a bell was rung, human beings can also be conditioned to react in certain ways. Positive reinforcement (rewards) and, less desirably, negative reinforcement (punishment) are the means of control and training.

A Sexual Being

Sigmund Freud regarded sexuality as the key to human nature. In a world in which sex was not openly discussed or even mentioned in polite circles, Freud developed a whole theory of personality around human sexuality. His model of human personality was tripartite. There is the id, an essentially amoral part, a seething cauldron of drives and desires.[766] Derived from the id, the ego is the conscious component of the personality, the more public part of the individual.[767] Here the forces from the id, modified somewhat, seek gratification. The superego is a censor or control on the drives and emotions of the person, the internalization of parental restraint and regulation (or at least direction) of the child's activities.[768] The great driving force or source of energy is the libido, a basically sexual force, which seeks gratification in any possible way and place. Basically, all human behavior is to be understood as modification

and direction of this plastic sexual energy. This energy may be sublimated into other types of behavior and directed toward other goals, but is still the prime determinant of human activity.[769]

According to Freud's view, serious maladjustment can result from the way this sexual energy is handled. Because the id strives for complete and unhampered gratification, a situation that would make society impossible, society imposes limitations on this struggle for gratification and the aggressiveness that frequently accompanies it. These limitations may then produce frustration. Similar maladjustment occurs when a person's sexual development is arrested at one of the early stages of the process. These theories of Freud rest on the concept that all human behavior basically derives from sexual motivation and energy.[770]

While the theoretical scheme developed by Freud has not won very extensive assent, his basic supposition is widely accepted. In a rather crude fashion, the *Playboy* philosophy assumes that a human is primarily a sexual being, and sex is the most significant human experience. Much of today's advertising seems to espouse this idea as well, almost as if nothing can be sold without a sexual overtone. The preoccupation with sex suggests that in practice the view that humans are essentially sexual beings is widely held in our society.

Due to its ethical codes, Christianity, and particularly evangelical Christianity, is sometimes criticized for being too judgmental concerning sex. Joseph Fletcher is among those who voice this criticism.[771] But is Christian ethics unduly judgmental, or is it simply making a reasonable response to the excessive role of sex in our society? C. S. Lewis observed that a considerable portion of the activity within our society is based on an inordinate preoccupation with human sexuality:

> You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?[772]

An Economic Being

Another view is that economic forces are what really affect and motivate the human being. In a sense, this view is an extension of the view that the human is primarily a member of the animal kingdom. It focuses on the material dimension of life and its needs. Adequate food, clothing, and housing are the most significant needs of the human. When persons have the economic resources to

provide these in adequate measure for themselves and their dependents, they are satisfied, or have attained their destiny.

The ideology that has most completely and most consistently developed this understanding of humanity is of course communism or, as it is more accurately labeled, dialectical materialism. While most countries that once were governed by this philosophy no longer embrace it, it still is a live option in parts of Latin America and on university campuses. This ideology sees economic forces as moving history through progressive stages. First came slavery; in this stage the masters of society owned all the wealth, which included other human beings. This was followed by feudalism, where the lord-serf relationship was the model. Then came capitalism, where those of the ruling class own the means of production and hire others to work for them. In liberal capitalism, there is still private ownership of the farms and factories, but government imposes certain limitations on the owners, thus making the laborers' bargaining position easier. Eventually, the time will come when there will be no private ownership of the means of production. They will be owned in their entirety by the state. The economic gap between the classes will disappear, and with it the conflict between them; in this classless society, evil will wither away. In this final stage of the dialectic, the motto of communism will be realized—"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." Material and economic forces will have driven history to its ultimate goal.[773]

If dialectical materialism is the most complete formulation of this philosophy, it is not the only one. On a popular level, the concept that the human is motivated primarily by economic forces seems to be the philosophy of a large percentage of American politicians. Presumably they reflect what their polls tell them are the real concerns of most of their constituents. These economic forces are at work influencing such matters as population trends. For example, it is the availability of jobs, rather than climate, that primarily influences where most people live.

In times of relative prosperity, this matter of economic necessity may come to be overlooked, even as it is overindulged. The global economic crisis that became most severe in 2008 and 2009 reminded people that the necessities of life were not to be taken for granted. In part, the crisis occurred because the contingency of economic matters was forgotten. Prices of stocks and certainly of real estate would continue to rise indefinitely. With this conception, individuals and businesses overextended themselves with purchases and borrowing that they could scarcely afford, while lending institutions made risky loans, based on the same assumptions. The result reminded society that economic cycles do exist, and that the past could be repeated and should be learned from.

A Pawn of the Universe

Among certain existentialists particularly, but also in a broader segment of society, we find the idea that humans are at the mercy of forces in the world that control their destiny but have no real concern for them. These are seen as blind forces, forces of chance in many cases. Sometimes they are personal forces, but even then they are forces over which individuals have no influence, such as political superpowers. This is basically a pessimistic view that pictures people as being crushed by a world that is either hostile or at best indifferent to their welfare and needs. The result is a sense of helplessness, of futility. Bertrand Russell expressed eloquently this feeling of "unyielding despair."

> That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. . . .
>
> Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; . . . proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.[774]

Albert Camus also captured this general idea in his reworking of the classical myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus had died and gone to the nether world. He had, however, been sent back to earth. When recalled to the nether world, he refused to return, for he thoroughly enjoyed the pleasures of life. As punishment he was brought back and sentenced to push a large rock up to the top of a hill. When he got it there, however, it rolled back down. He trudged his way to the bottom of the hill and again pushed the rock to the top only to have it roll back down. He was doomed to repeat this process endlessly. For all his efforts there was no permanent result.[775] Whether immersed in fearful thoughts about death, the forthcoming natural extinction of the planet, or nuclear destruction, or merely in the struggle against those who control the political and economic power, all those who hold that a human being is basically a pawn at the mercy of the universe are gripped by a similar sense of helplessness and resignation.

A Free Being

The approach that emphasizes human freedom sees the human will as the essence of personality. This basic approach is often evident in conservative political and social views. Here freedom from restraint is the most important issue, for it permits humans to realize their essential nature. The role of government is simply to ensure a stable environment in which such freedom can be exercised. Beyond that, a laissez-faire approach is to be followed. Excessive regulation is to be avoided, as is a paternalism that provides for all of one's needs and excludes the possibility of failing. Better failure with freedom than security from want but with no real choice.[776]

According to those who hold this view, the basic human need is information that will enable intelligent choice. In terms of the three requisites for action—knowing what should be done, willingness to do what one knows should be done, and ability to do what one wills to do—the only real problem lies with the first factor. For once one has enough information to make an intelligent choice regarding what should be done (which, of course, takes personal goals and abilities into account), there is nothing internal nor, provided government ensures a proper environment, external to prevent the person from taking that action.

This view maintains not only that humans have the ability to choose, but that they must do so. To be fully human, one must accept the responsibility of self-determination. All attempts to disavow responsibility for oneself are improper. A common excuse is genetic conditioning: "I can't control my behavior. It's in my genes. I inherited it from my father." Another is psychological conditioning: "I was raised that way. I can't help being the way I am." Or social conditioning: "As I grew up, I didn't have a chance. There was no opportunity to get an education." All of these excuses are examples of what existentialism calls "inauthentic existence," unwillingness to accept responsibility for oneself. This failure to exercise one's freedom is a denial of the fundamental dimension of human nature, and thus a denial of one's humanity. Similarly, any effort to deprive others of their free choice is wrong, whether that be through slavery, a totalitarian government, an excessively regulative democracy, or a manipulative social style.[777] William Ernest Henley's poem "Invictus" powerfully embodies this philosophy that a human is in essence a free being:

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul. . . .

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

A Social Being

A final perspective is that an individual human is fundamentally a member of society. Membership in and interaction with a group of persons is what really distinguishes humanity. There is a sense in which one is not truly human, not fulfilling the human end, or telos, except when functioning within a social group.[778]

The exploding world of electronic communications has come to serve in a sometimes artificial way what once was found in primary and direct face-to-face relationships. Through the internet and various forms of instant electronic communication, relationships are established with persons that one has not met personally. Sometimes these turn out to be quite different from what they had represented themselves to be, to the chagrin, pain, and sometimes even death of a person in such a relationship.

This view sometimes includes the idea that the human being does not really have a nature as such. The person is the set of relationships in which he or she is involved. That is to say, the essence of humanness is not in some substance or fixed, definable nature, but rather in the relationships and network of connections one has with others. Through a fostering of these relationships, the individual can become fully human. The church can help a person realize his or her destiny by providing and encouraging positive and constructive social relationships.

The Christian View of Humanity

We have seen a variety of conceptions of the nature of humanity, none fully satisfactory as a view by which to live. Some, such as the view of the human as an animal, may serve well enough as an abstract theory, but even the biologist does not think of his or her newborn child as simply another mammal. Other views fail because even when what they consider the fundamental human needs (e.g., economic or sexual needs) are met, there is still a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. Some views, such as the mechanistic idea, are depersonalizing and therefore frustrating. One can consider these to be satisfactory understandings of humanity only by disregarding aspects of one’s own

experience.[779] The Christian view, by contrast, is an alternative compatible with all of our experience.

The Christian view of humanity, which is the subject of part 5 of this book, is that a human being is a creature of God, made in the image of God. This means, first, that humanity is to be understood as having originated not through a chance process of evolution, but through a conscious, purposeful act by an intelligent, infinite person. The reason for human existence lies in the intention of the Supreme Being.

Second, the image of God is intrinsic and indispensable to humanity. While the meaning of this concept will be explored in chapter 22, we may observe that whatever sets humans apart from the rest of the creation, they alone are capable of having a conscious personal relationship with the Creator and of responding to him, can know God and understand what he desires of them, can love, worship, and obey their Maker. These responses most completely fulfill the Maker's intention for the human.

The human also has an eternal dimension. The finite point of beginning in time was creation by an eternal God, who gave humans an eternal future. Thus, when we ask what is the good for the human, we must not answer only in terms of temporal welfare or physical comfort. Another (and in many senses more important) dimension must be fulfilled. Consequently, we do no favor to humans when we shelter them from thinking about the issues of eternal destiny.

Yet the human, to be sure, as a part of the physical creation and the animal kingdom, has the same needs as do the other members of those groups. Our physical welfare is important. Since it is of concern to God, it should be of concern to us as well. We are also unified beings; thus pain or hunger affects our ability to focus on the spiritual life. And we are social beings, placed within society to function in relationships.

We cannot discover our real meaning by regarding ourselves and our own happiness as the highest of all values, nor find happiness, fulfillment, or satisfaction by seeking it directly. Our value has been conferred on us by a higher source, and we are fulfilled only when serving and loving that higher being. It is then that satisfaction comes, as a by-product of commitment to God. It is then that we realize the truth of Jesus's statement, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

Many of the questions being asked directly or implicitly by contemporary culture are answered by the Christian view of humanity. In addition, this view gives the individual a sense of identity. The image of a human as a machine leads to the feeling that we are insignificant cogs, unnoticed and unimportant.

The Bible, however, indicates that everyone is valuable and is known to God: every hair of our head is numbered (Matt. 10:28–31). Jesus spoke of the shepherd who, although ninety-nine of his sheep were safe, went and sought the one that was missing (Luke 15:3–7). That is how God regards each human.

We are contending here that the Christian view of humans is more pertinent to them than is any competing view. This image of humanity accounts for the full range of human phenomena more completely and with less distortion than does any other view. And this view more than any other approach to life enables us to function in ways that are deeply satisfying in the long run.

The psalmist asked:

> What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
> human beings that you care for them?
> You have made them a little lower than the angels
> and crowned them with glory and honor.
> You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
> you put everything under their feet. (Ps. 8:4–6)

What is the human? Yes, that is a most important question, to which the biblical revelation gives the best answer.

21

The Origin of Humanity

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and comprehend that the meaning of “origin” in relationship to humanity goes beyond the scientific beginning to include purpose.
2. Recognize and understand the status of Adam and Eve, both biblically and historically.
3. Identify and describe five distinct views of human beginning.
4. Identify and describe four conservative views of the age of the human race, and how they relate to the problem of the Neolithic elements in Genesis 4.
5. Explain the theological meaning of human creation and its importance to a Christian worldview.

Chapter Summary

The purpose for the placement of humans on earth goes beyond the simple explanation for the physical existence of humans and is set forth in the biblical revelation. In the light of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, we cannot accept Brunner’s position on creation, but must view Adam and Eve as literal persons. Of the five positions regarding human beginnings, progressive creationism seems to present the fewest problems. Similarly, the evidence seems to support a position that

culture can be dated to about thirty thousand years ago through the beginning of language. There are five views of the Neolithic elements in Genesis 4. No definitive answer may be given. Finally, nine conclusions are reached about the theological meaning of creation.

Study Questions

- How would you distinguish between human beginnings and human origin?
- How would you defend an orthodox response to the status of Adam and Eve in opposition to the position of Emil Brunner?
- How would you compare and contrast the five views of human beginning?
- Articulate a position that seeks to explain the beginning of humanity. What biblical support do you find for your position?
- How would you describe four conservative views about the age of the human race, and which would you defend?
- What is the problem in Genesis 4 and what solutions have been offered to explain and resolve it?
- What are the nine conclusions about the meaning of human creation, and how do they help us better understand ourselves and all humanity?

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The Meaning of "Origin"

When we speak of humanity's origin, we are referring to something more than merely its beginning. For "beginning" refers simply to the fact of coming into being. Thus, to speak of the "beginning of the human" is merely a scientific type of reference to the fact that humans came into being, and perhaps to the way in which this came about. "Origin," however, carries the connotation of the purpose of this coming into being. In terms of individual existence, the beginning of each person's life is the same: it occurs when a male's sperm combines with a female's ovum. But, from an earthly point of view, the origin of every life is not the same. As a matter of fact, in some cases it might be considered incorrect to speak of origin. For while some births are the result of definite planning and desire by two persons to have a child, others are the undesired product of a physical union of two persons, perhaps the consequence of carelessness. Theology does not ask merely how humans came to be on the face of the earth, but why, or what purpose lies behind their presence here. The perspective of human beginning gives us little guidance regarding what we are or what we are to do, but in the framework of purpose, a clearer and more complete understanding of human nature emerges. The biblical picture of humanity's origin is that an all-wise, all-powerful, and good God created the human race to love and serve him, and to enjoy a relationship with him.

The Status of Adam and Eve

Genesis contains two accounts of God's creation of humans. The first, in 1:26–27, simply records (1) God's decision to make humans in his own image and likeness, and (2) God's action implementing this decision. Nothing is said about the materials or method he used. The first account places more emphasis on the purpose or reason for the creation of the humans; namely, they were to be fruitful and multiply (v. 28) and have dominion over the earth. The second account, Genesis 2:7, is quite different: "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Here the emphasis seems to be on the way in which God created.

Numerous differing interpretations of the status of the first pair of humans have been formulated and promulgated. There has been sharp divergence over whether Adam and Eve are to be regarded as actual historical persons or as merely symbolic. The traditional view has been that they were actual persons

and that the events in the biblical account took place within space and time. A number of theologians have challenged this view, however.

One of those who most emphatically rejected this view was Emil Brunner. Unlike Karl Barth, Brunner recognized that the historicity of the account of Adam and Eve is an important question. Barth had said that the really important question is not whether the serpent in paradise had actually spoken, but what the serpent said.[780] Brunner, however, regarded this as merely a clever evasion of a question that needs to be asked, and not merely for apologetic purposes but for theological purposes as well.[781]

According to Brunner, the story of Adam and Eve must be given up on both external and internal grounds. By external grounds he meant the empirical considerations. The evidence of natural science, such as biological evolution, of paleontology, and of history conflicts with the ecclesiastical tradition. In particular, while the idea of a past golden age is required by the ecclesiastical view, with its teaching of an originally perfect and innocent creation and subsequent fall into sin, the scientific evidence indicates an ever more primitive form of humanity the further back we go. Although evolution is a firmly established fact, our glimpse of the early history of the human race, which is at best a faint and dim picture, does not fit the biblical portrait of Adam and Eve. Thus Brunner felt that the church must abandon the belief that they were actual persons, since it has subjected the church to nothing but scorn and ridicule.[782]

Brunner considered the internal reasons actually more important. By this he was referring to the nature and purpose of the biblical literature. The real problem with the ecclesiastical view is that it maintains that the account of Adam and Eve is on the plane of empirical history. When so regarded, the biblical account is at odds with the scientific explanation of human beginnings. Someone who holds to the scientific explanation cannot hold to any of the content of the Christian or biblical account, as long as it is thought that the intent of the biblical account is to provide a factual explanation. This holds true for those who espouse a mechanistic naturalism as well as for idealistic evolutionists, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Hegelian theologians.[783]

Brunner held that there is no loss in abandoning the view that the account of Adam and Eve records historical events. On the contrary, abandoning this view is a necessary purification of our doctrine of humanity, for as long as the biblical account is thought to be concerned with the two persons who are described there, it really has little to do with anyone else. When the account is freed from the traditional ecclesiastical view, however, it is possible for us to see that the biblical discussion of human origins is not about a certain man, Adam, who lived long ago, but about you and me and everyone else in the world.[784]

In many ways Brunner's approach likens the creation account to a parable, such as that of the prodigal son. If "The Prodigal Son" is thought of as an actual historical account, then it is merely an interesting story about a young man who left home centuries ago. If, on the other hand, it is seen as Jesus intended it to be seen, that is, as a parable, then it is applicable and relevant to us today. Similarly, the story of Adam and Eve should not be taken as a factual record of events in the lives of two real persons. That Adam is given a name is not significant here, for Adam actually means "human." The Genesis account, then, is not about two persons who lived long ago, but is actually true of each of us today.

How shall we regard this interpretation? Does it matter whether the story of Adam and Eve is taken as a historical record about an actual pair of people at the beginning of the human race, or as a representative account about all of us? The question is not simply how the writer of the account regarded it, for some might say that the perspective that Adam and Eve were historical is the form in which the writer expressed the doctrine contained in the account. This form could be changed without losing the essence of the doctrine. But is the perspective that Adam and Eve were historical figures merely the form of expression of the doctrine of the origin of humanity, or is it somehow of its essence?

One approach to this issue is to examine how the New Testament views Adam. It is true that the word "Adam" may be taken as a general or class term ("human") rather than a proper name. However, in two passages, Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul relates human sinfulness to Adam in a way that makes it difficult to regard "Adam" as merely a representative term. In Romans 5:12–21 Paul refers several times to the trespass of "one man." He also refers to the obedience, grace, and righteousness of "the one man, Jesus Christ." Paul is drawing a parallel between the one man Adam and the one man Jesus Christ. Note that the negative side of Paul's doctrinal exposition rests on the facticity of Adam. Sin, guilt, and death are universal facts of human existence; they are essential parts of Paul's doctrine of humanity. Paul explains that all humans die because sin came into the world through one person. Death is a manifestation of the condemnation resulting from one human's sin. It is difficult indeed to conclude anything other than that Paul believed that Adam was a particular person who committed a sin significant for the rest of the human race.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul's position becomes even more evident. Here he says that death came by a man (v. 21), and then makes clear (v. 22) that he is referring to Adam. In verse 45 Paul distinctly refers to "the first man Adam." If one understands the word "Adam" always to mean "human," there is something of a redundancy here, to say the very least. Here also it appears that Paul thought of Adam as a real, historical person.

For reasons such as these, we conclude that not only did the New Testament writers like Paul believe that an actual Adam and Eve existed, but it was an indispensable part of their doctrine of humanity. But is such a view tenable? What have the scientific data established regarding the origin of the human race? Has a monogenetic beginning from Adam and Eve been precluded? While the answer hinges to a large extent on one's definition of humanity (a topic we will briefly address later in this chapter), factors of commonality throughout the human race—for example, interfertility—do suggest a common point of origin.

Views of Human Beginning

If we maintain that God did begin the human race with two persons, Adam and Eve, and that all of humanity has descended from that first pair, we are still faced with the question of how they came to be. Here there are a variety of explanations, differing chiefly in whether they stress cataclysmic or processive elements in the origin of the human race.

On the one hand, conservative orthodoxy has tended to emphasize instantaneity and patently supranaturalistic occurrences. God's work is thought to be almost always characterized by immediacy and discontinuity, or sharp breaks in natural processes. It is almost as if an event must be obviously supernatural in order to be considered God's work.

Borden Parker Bowne tells a story that is apropos here. An Eastern king asked one of his counselors to give some sign of the wonderful works of God. The counselor told the king to plant four acorns. When the king looked up after planting them, he saw four full-grown trees. Believing that only a moment had elapsed, he thought a miracle had occurred. When the counselor told the king that eighty years had passed, and the king saw that he had grown old and that his garments were now threadbare, he exclaimed angrily, "Then there is no miracle here." "Oh yes, there is," replied the counselor; "it is God's work, whether he do it in one second or in eighty years."[785] Fundamentalism has sometimes seemed to require immediacy of action, not merely because that is what it holds the Bible teaches, but also because instantaneity seems inherently more supernatural in character. Leonard Verduin speaks of this as the "ictic."[786]

Liberalism, on the other hand, stresses process. God is viewed as working basically within and through nature. He initiates a process and directs it to its intended goal. He does not intervene; that is, he does not alter from without what he is doing within this process.

What is at stake in the difference between these two views is actually our understanding of God and his relationship to the world. Fundamentalism stresses that God is transcendent and works in a direct or discontinuous fashion. Liberalism, on the other hand, emphasizes that God is immanent, working through natural channels. Each view regards the other as inappropriate. Since God is both transcendent and immanent, however, both emphases should be maintained, that is, to the extent they are taught in the Bible.

Naturalistic Evolution

There is a variety of views today regarding the origin of the human species. They differ in the places they assign to the biblical and the scientific data. One of these views is naturalistic evolution. This is an attempt to account for the human species, as well as all other forms of life, without appealing to a supernatural explanation. Immanent processes within nature have produced humans and all else that exists. There is no involvement by any divine person, either at the beginning or during the process.

All that is needed, according to naturalistic evolution, is atoms in motion. A combination of atoms, motion, time, and chance has fashioned what we currently have. No attempt is made to account for these givens—they simply are there, the basis of everything else.

Our world is the result of chance or random combinations of atoms. At the higher levels or later stages of the process, something called "natural selection" is at work. Nature is extremely prolific. It produces many more offspring of any given species than can possibly survive. Because of a shortage of the necessities of life, there is competition. The best, the strongest, the most adaptive survive; the others do not. As a result, there is a gradual upgrading of the species. In addition, mutations occur. These are sudden variations, novel features that did not appear in the earlier generations of a species. Of the many mutations that occur, most are useless, even detrimental, but a few are truly helpful in the competitive struggle. At the end of a long process of natural selection and useful mutations, humans arrived on the scene. They are organisms of great complexity and superior abilities, not because someone planned and made them that way, but because these features enabled them to survive.[787]

Although naturalistic evolution is not necessarily the best explanation of the scientific data, it certainly is at least compatible with them. Nothing from the realm of biology, anthropology, or paleontology seems to contradict it absolutely; on the other hand, these disciplines do not offer material to support its every contention either. In such cases it becomes necessary to assume some of

the generally accepted laws of nature, such as uniformitarianism. But the real difficulty arises when we try to reconcile this view with the biblical teaching. Surely, if the opening chapters of Genesis say anything at all, they affirm that a personal being was involved in the origin of humans.

Fiat Creationism

At the opposite end of the spectrum is what is sometimes termed fiat creationism. This is the idea that God, by a direct act, brought into being virtually instantaneously everything that is. Note two features of this view. One is the brevity of time involved, and hence the relative recency of what occurred at creation. While there were various stages of creation, one occurring after another, no substantial amount of time elapsed from the beginning to the end of the process. Perhaps a calendar week or so was involved. Another tenet of this view is the idea of direct divine working. God produced the world and everything in it, not by the use of any indirect means or biological mechanisms, but by direct action and contact. In each case, or at each stage, God did not employ previously existing material. New species did not arise as modifications of existing species, but were fresh starts, so to speak, specially created by God. Each species was totally distinct from the others. Specifically, God made the first human in his entirety by a unique, direct creative act; the human did not come from any previously existing organism.[788]

It should be apparent that there is no difficulty in reconciling fiat creationism with the biblical account. Indeed, this view reflects a strictly literal reading of the text, which is the way the account was understood for a long time in the history of the church. The statement that God brought forth each animal and plant after its kind has traditionally been interpreted as meaning that he created each species individually. It must be pointed out, however, that the Hebrew noun מִין (*min*), which is rendered "kind" in most translations, is simply a general term of division. It may mean species, but it is not sufficiently specific for us to conclude that it does. Therefore, we cannot claim that the Bible requires fiat creationism, although it permits it.

It is at the point of the scientific data that fiat creationism encounters difficulty. For when those data are taken seriously, they appear to indicate a considerable amount of development, including what seem to be transitional forms between species. There are even some forms that appear to be ancestors of the human species.

Deistic Evolution

Although the term is rarely heard, deistic evolution is perhaps the best way to describe one variety of what is generally called theistic evolution. This is the view that God began the process of evolution, producing the first matter and implanting within the creation the laws its development has followed. Thus, he programmed the process and then withdrew from active involvement with the world, becoming, so to speak, Creator Emeritus. God is the Creator, the ultimate cause, but evolution is the means, the proximate cause. Thus, except for its view of the very beginning of matter, deistic evolution is identical to naturalistic evolution, for it denies that there is any direct activity by a personal God during the ongoing creative process.

Deistic evolution has little difficulty with the scientific data. There is a definite conflict, however, between deism's view of an absentee God and the biblical picture of a God who has been involved in a whole series of creative acts. In particular, both Genesis accounts of the origin of human beings indicate that God definitely and distinctly willed and acted to bring them into existence. In addition, deistic evolution conflicts with the scriptural doctrine of providence, according to which God is personally and intimately concerned with and involved in what is going on in the specific events within his entire creation.[789]

Theistic Evolution

Theistic evolution goes beyond deistic evolution in terms of God's involvement in and with his creation. God began the process by bringing the first organism to life. He then continued by working internally toward his goal for the creation. At some point, however, he also acted supernaturally, intervening to modify the process, but employing already existing materials. God created the first human being, but in doing so utilized an existing creature. God created a human soul, and infused it into one of the higher primates, transforming this creature into the first human. Thus, while God specially created Adam's spiritual nature, his physical nature was a product of the process of evolution.

Theistic evolution has no great difficulty with the scientific data, since it teaches that the physical dimension of human beings arose through evolution. Thus it can accommodate any amount of evidence of continuity within the process that resulted in the human race. With respect to the biblical data, theistic evolution often holds to an actual primal pair, Adam and Eve. When this is the case, there is no difficulty reconciling theistic evolution with Paul's teaching regarding the sinfulness of the race. In dealing with the opening chapters of

Genesis, one of two strategies is followed. Either it is asserted that Genesis says nothing specific about the manner of human origin, or the passage is regarded as symbolic. In the latter case, "dust" (2:7), for example, is not taken literally. Rather, it is interpreted as a symbolic reference to some already existing creature, a lower form than human. This particular interpretation will warrant further scrutiny after we have examined the final option.[790]

Progressive Creationism

Progressive creationism sees the creative work of God as a combination of a series of *de novo* creative acts and an immanent or processive operation. God at several points, rather widely separated in time, created *de novo* (i.e., created afresh). On those occasions he did not make use of previously existing life, simply modifying it. While he might have brought into being something quite similar to an already existing creation, there were a number of changes, and the product of his work was a completely new creature.

Between these special acts of creation, development took place through evolution. For example, it is possible that God created the first member of the horse family, and the various species of the family then developed through evolution. This is "intrakind" development (microevolution), not "interkind" development (macroevolution). For with respect to the biblical statement that God made every creature after its kind, we have already observed that the Hebrew word מִין is rather vague, so that it is not necessarily to be identified with biological species. It may be considerably broader than that. Moreover, considerable amounts of time are available for microevolution to have occurred, since the word יוֹם (*yom*), which is translated "day," may also be much more freely rendered.[791]

According to progressive creationism, when the time came to bring the first human into existence, God made him directly and completely, not out of some lower creature. Rather, both Adam's physical and spiritual nature were specially created by God. The Bible tells us that God made him from the "dust" of the ground. This dust need not be actual physical soil. It may be some elementary pictorial representation that was intelligible to the first readers.

Progressive creationism agrees with fiat creationism in maintaining that the entirety of the first human's nature was specially created. It disagrees, however, in holding that there was a certain amount of development in creation after God's original direct act. It agrees with naturalistic evolution, deistic evolution, and theistic evolution in seeing development within the creation, but insists that

there were several *de novo* acts of creation within this overall process. And although it agrees with theistic evolution that humanity is the result of a special act of creation by God, it goes beyond that view by insisting that this special creative act encompassed the entire human nature, both physical and spiritual.

Given the assumptions and tenets of this book, the two most viable options are theistic evolution and progressive creationism. Both have been and are held by committed, Bible-believing scholars, and each can assimilate or explain both the biblical and the empirical data. The question is, Which can do this more completely, more smoothly, and with less distortion of the material being dealt with?

To answer this question, it is important to ask what type of literary material we have in Genesis 1 and 2. Are there symbolic elements in the creation account? Quite likely we are dealing with a genre in which not every object is to be understood as simply that object. Note, for example, that the tree in the garden of Eden is not merely a tree, but "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It is quite possible as well that the dust that was used in the formation of Adam was not merely dust, but actually the inanimate building blocks from which organic matter and hence life come. But suppose we interpret dust to symbolize, as the theistic evolutionist would have it, some previously existing living creature. What then?

One question that must be faced is whether the symbolism is consistent. The word "dust" (עָפָר—*'aphar*) occurs not only in Genesis 2:7 but also in 3:19, "For dust you are and to dust you will return." If we understand it in 2:7 to represent an already existing creature, we are faced with two choices: either the meaning of the term must be different in 3:19 (and in 3:14 as well), or we have the rather ludicrous situation that upon death one reverts to an animal. It should be noted that in those severe degenerative cases where a person becomes virtually subhuman, the change occurs prior to actual death. It would be better, then, to let the reference to dust in 3:19 (the clearer) interpret that in 2:7 (the less clear).

A second problem for the theistic evolutionist is the expression "and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The words translated "living being" are נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה (*nephesh chayah*), which is the very expression used to denote the other creatures God had made earlier (1:20, 21, 24). As we have seen, theistic evolution claims that the physical dimension of the human developed from one of those earlier creatures. It follows that, like its progenitor, Adam's physical dimension (to which God gave a spiritual nature) must necessarily already have been a living being. But this tenet of theistic evolution contradicts the statement

in Genesis 2:7 that the man *became* a living being when God formed him and breathed into him the breath of life.

One other argument sometimes advanced against theistic evolution is that it militates against the unity of human personality. But the unity between the physical and spiritual dimensions of a human being does not seem to be sufficiently absolute to disprove the theory that the two dimensions originated in different ways.

Despite the weakness of the third argument, the first two considerations do seem significant enough to render theistic evolution less viable than progressive creationism. While the latter view is not totally without difficulties, it does a better job of explaining and integrating the biblical and scientific data, and therefore must be considered more adequate than theistic evolution.

The Age of the Human Race

One additional question that needs to be asked concerns the age of the race. When did humans, specifically as depicted in the Bible, first appear on the earth? Evangelical or conservative Christians have answered this question in several different ways. In part, our answer will depend on our definition of humanity.

Four Conservative Views

1. The issue is of no consequence. Either we cannot determine the age of the human race, or it would make no particular difference if we could. B. B. Warfield once wrote: “The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance. It is to theology, as such, a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth.”[792] Whether Warfield would approve of the use to which this statement has sometimes been put, it does appear that he did not give the issue a high priority.

2. Toolmaking is the mark of humanity. The ability to conceive, fashion, and utilize tools is what distinguishes humans from subhuman creatures. If this is the criterion, then the human race’s origin is to be dated quite early, perhaps 500,000 to 2 million years ago.[793]

3. The practice of burial of the dead is what sets humans apart from other creatures. If this is the criterion, the first human is to be identified with Neanderthal man and dated about 50,000 years ago.[794]

4. The human is distinguished by the presence and use of complex symbolism or, more specifically, of language. While the making of tools and burial of the

dead point to a fairly sophisticated pattern of behavior, it is language that makes possible the type of relationship with God that would be experienced by a being created in God's image. On this basis, one can correlate the beginning of the human race in the full biblical sense with the evidence of a great cultural outburst about 30,000 to 40,000 years ago. The first human is not to be identified with Neanderthal man, but somewhat later, probably with Cro-Magnon man.[795]

The problem of the age of the human race is not easily solved. One answer sometimes given to the question of where Adam fits in the paleontological record is, "Tell me what Adam looked like, and I'll tell you where he fits in that chain." Of course that semifacetious answer does not come to grips with the real problem.

The first view summarized above is unsatisfactory. It does matter when Adam was created, for there are phenomena in the description of his immediate descendants in Genesis 4 that are identifiable as Neolithic. As we correlate the biblical record of Adam and his descendants with the data of anthropology, various issues arise that must be dealt with by the discipline of apologetics.

The second view, which regards toolmaking as the distinguishing mark of humanity, also seems less than fully adequate. Its basic thesis has been challenged by various findings. For example, Jane Goodall observed chimpanzees breaking off twigs, stripping them of leaves, and using them to probe termite hills for food. The chimpanzees carried the twigs as far as half a mile as they went from one hill to another. Goodall concluded, "In so doing . . . the chimpanzee has reached the first crude beginnings of toolmaking. . . . It is unlikely that this pattern of fishing for termites is an inborn behavior pattern."[796]

The third view theorizes that burial of the dead is a sign of the presence of the image of God in the human. James Murk, however, argues that this practice evidences only a fear of the unknown, which in turn presupposes only imagination. It does not follow that a moral sense is involved, and indeed religion and ethics are treated separately in the anthropological literature, because the two often do not coincide.[797]

That leaves the fourth view, which seems to have the fewest difficulties. The growth in culture from about thirty thousand years ago is best understood as the result of the beginning of language at that time. This has been asserted by Bertram S. Kraus: "It seems most likely that Man could not have produced, sustained, and altered culture without the ability to transmit his experiences and knowledge to his offspring other than by example."[798] The biblical record appears to indicate that Adam and Eve possessed language from the very beginning. Communication with one another and with God presupposed possession of language.

The Problem of the Neolithic Elements in Genesis 4

If we accept the view that it is language that distinguishes humans from other creatures and hence the first human appeared about thirty thousand years ago, an additional problem, to which we have already alluded, still remains: the problem of the Neolithic elements in Genesis 4. If Adam was created thirty thousand years ago, if Cain and Abel were his immediate descendants, if we find genuinely Neolithic practices (e.g., agriculture) in Genesis 4, and if the Neolithic period began about ten thousand to eight thousand years ago, then we have the problem of a gap of at least twenty thousand years between generations, the ultimate in generation gaps. Several suggested solutions have been offered:

1. The pre-Adamite theory says that Adam was the first human in the full biblical sense, but was not the first human in the anthropological sense. There were genuine representatives of *Homo sapiens* before him.[799]

2. Cain and Abel were not immediate descendants of Adam. They may have been several generations removed from him. It is even conceivable that the narrative condenses the stories of several individuals into one—Cain the son of Adam, Cain the murderer, and Cain the city builder.[800]

3. In the creation account (Gen. 1:26; 2:7) the Hebrew word אָדָם (*'adam*), which is often used symbolically of the entire human race, refers to the first human, who is anonymous. In other passages (Gen. 4:1; 5:3), it is a proper noun pointing to a specific individual who came later.[801]

4. "Perhaps Cain and Abel were not really *domesticators* of plants and animals but rather in the language of Moses, and particularly of our translations, would only *appear to* be such. Their [Cain's and Abel's] respective concerns with vegetable and animal provision might have been vastly more primitive."[802]

5. The domestication of plants and animals may be much more remote in time than the Neolithic period. Thus, Adam and his descendants could have practiced agriculture thirty thousand years ago.[803]

None of these theories seems completely satisfactory. All have some hermeneutical problems, but these problems appear more severe for views 1 through 3. In addition, in view 1, the pre-Adamites would seem to be fully human. But if that is the case, how are we to account for Paul's statement in Romans 5 that sin and death have come upon the entire human race because of Adam's sin? This seems to argue for a monogenetic origin of the human race—all humans are derived from Adam. For these reasons, I lean more toward view 4 or 5. But this is an area in which there are insufficient data to make any categorical statements; it will require much additional study.[804]

The Theological Meaning of Human Creation

Now that we have discussed the basic content of the doctrine of human creation, we must determine its theological meaning. Several points need special attention and interpretation.

1. That humans are created means that they have no independent existence. They came into being because God willed that they should exist and acted to bring them into being and preserve them. There is nothing necessary about their existence. They may declare themselves independent and then conduct themselves as if they are, but that does not alter the fact that their very life and each breath they continue to take are from God.

This should cause us to ask the reason for our existence. Why did God put us here, and what are we to do in light of that purpose? Since we would not be alive but for God, everything we have and are derives from him. So stewardship does not mean giving God a part of what is ours, some of our time or some of our money. All of life has been entrusted to us for our use, but it still belongs to God and must be used to serve and glorify him.

This also helps establish human identity. If who we are is at least partly a function of where we have come from, the key to our identity will be found in the fact that God created us. We are not merely the offspring of human parents, nor the result of chance factors at work in the world. We are here as a result of an intelligent being's conscious intention and plan, and our identity is at least partially a matter of fulfilling that divine plan.

We are a creation of God, not an outflow from him. We have limited knowledge and power. Although the aim of the Christian life is to be spiritually one with God, humans will always be metaphysically separate from God. Thus, we should not aim at losing our individual human identity.

2. Humans are part of the creation. As different as they are from God's other created beings, they are not so sharply distinguished from the rest of them as to have no relationship with them. Like the other creatures, the human was created on one of the days of creation, the same day (the sixth) as were the land animals.

As we noted earlier in this work, there is a large metaphysical gap within the span of being.[805] This gap, however, is not between humanity and the rest of the creatures. It is between God on the one hand, and all of the creatures on the other. The human, whose origins go back to one of the days of creation, is linked far more closely with all the other created beings than with the God who did the creating.

Because in a sense all creatures are the human's kin, there should be a harmony between them. In actual practice this may not be the case, but it is the

human, and not the rest of the creation, that has introduced the disharmony. When taken seriously, our kinship with the rest of creation has a definite impact. The word "ecology" derives from the Greek οίκος (*oikos*), which means "house," thus pointing up the idea that there is one great household. What the human does to one part of it affects other parts as well, a truth that is becoming very clear to us as we find pollution harming human lives, and the destruction of certain natural predators leaving pests a relatively unhampered opportunity.

This means that what we do to the rest of creation feeds back in its effects upon us. The reality of global warming is that our disregard of the rest of the creation for the sake of our own self-satisfaction is beginning to have adverse effects on us. Much of the growing concern over global warming is not altruism so much as enlightened self-interest. The believer, however, will be concerned for the creation not simply because our actions there affect us, but also because it is God's, is valuable to him, and therefore should be to us as well.

The truth that we are kin to the rest of creation also tells us that we are to be humane. The other living creatures may be used as food for humans. They are not, however, to be treated cruelly or destroyed wastefully for our amusement or sheer pleasure. Those other creatures are distant relatives of ours, for they have been created by the same God. The welfare of those other creatures is important to God, and it should be to us as well. Just as we have a concern and engage in concrete action for the welfare of other humans, because we are one with them, so should our behavior be toward all the rest of the creation.

That we are part of creation also means that we have much in common with the other creatures. This commonality means that there is some validity in behaviorism's attempt to understand humanity by studying animals. For just like animals, humans and their motivations are subject to the laws of creation.

3. The human, however, has a unique place in the creation. Despite our created status, there is an element that makes us distinct from the rest of the creatures. They are all said to be made "according to their kind." The human, on the other hand, is described as made in the image and likeness of God. Humans are placed over the rest of the creation, to have dominion over it. We cannot in every respect be likened to the whole of creation. While subject to the laws governing created beings, we transcend those other beings and their status, for there is more to humanity than just creaturehood. The details of this extra dimension will be treated more fully in the following chapter. We cannot restrict our self-understanding to our creaturehood, or excuse our improper behavior by blaming instincts and drives. Our being is at a higher level.

This means, too, that humans are not fulfilled when all of their animal needs have been satisfied. Human life consists of much more than just the satisfaction

of the needs for food, clothing, and perhaps pleasure. The transcendent element designated by the unique way in which the human is described and thus distinguished from the various other creatures must be kept in mind as well.

4. There is a kinship among humans. One of the great theological debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerned the extent of the fatherhood of God and hence of humanity's brotherhood. Liberals insisted that there is a universal brotherhood among humans, and conservatives equally emphatically maintained that only those who are in Christ are spiritual siblings. Actually, both were correct. The doctrine of creation and of the descent of the entire human race from one original pair means that we are all related to one another. In a sense, each of us is a distant cousin to everyone on this earth. We are not totally unrelated. The negative side of our common descent is that in the natural state, all persons are rebellious children of the heavenly Father and thus are estranged from him and from one another. We are all like the prodigal son.

The truth of the unity of humanity, if fully understood and acted upon, should produce a concern and empathy for other humans. We have a tendency to feel more strongly the needs and hurts of our close friends and relatives than of strangers. We can be fairly blasé about murders, fatal auto accidents, and the like as long as no one we know is involved. The postmodern emphasis on community has tended to accentuate this difference. If, however, we discover that one of our loved ones died in the incident, we feel deep grief. But the doctrine of the brotherhood of the whole human race tells us that all human beings are our relatives. We are not to see them primarily as our rivals but as fellow humans. We therefore ought to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15), even if they are not fellow Christians.

5. Humanity is not the highest object in the universe. Our value is great, for we are, with the exception of the angels, the highest of the creatures. This status is conferred on us, however, by the highest being, God. For all of the respect that we have for humanity, and the special recognition that we accord to humans of distinction or accomplishment, we must always remember that they, their lives, their abilities, their strengths, have been given by God. His glory, not our pleasure and comfort, is the ultimate value. We must never elevate our respect for humans to the point of virtually worshiping them. This danger is particularly great with respect to famous persons, such as entertainers and athletes. Worship is to be given to God alone; when offered to any other person or object, it is idolatry. Similarly, we will not accept a type of adulation that God alone deserves.[806] Even love for fellow humans must not compete with love for God, for the first commandments pertain to our relationship to God (Exod. 20:3–11), and the command to love one's God with all one's being precedes the command

to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:27–28). Indeed, love for God is part of the motivation for love for humans, who are created in God's image. And just like our love for people, human accomplishments must be kept in proper perspective. As wonderful as is much that humans have achieved, such achievements are possible only because of the life, intelligence, and talents that God has bestowed on his human creatures.

6. There are definite limitations upon humanity. As creatures, humans have the limitations that go with being finite. Only the Creator is infinite. Humans do not and cannot know everything. While we ought to seek to know all that we can, and ought to admire and esteem great knowledge, our finiteness means that our knowledge will always be incomplete and subject to error. This should impart a certain sense of humility to all our judgments, as we realize that we might be wrong, no matter how impressive our fund of facts may seem.

Finiteness also pertains to our lives. Whether Adam as he was created would have died had he not sinned is a subject of debate (see pp. 558–59, 1074–75). We do know, however, that he was susceptible to becoming subject to death. That is, if he was immortal, it was a conditional immortality. Thus, humanity is not inherently immortal. And as presently constituted, we must face death (Heb. 9:27). Even in the human race's original state, any possibility of living forever depended on God. Only God is inherently eternal; all else dies.

Finiteness means that there are practical limitations to all of our accomplishments. While humanity has made great progress in physical feats, that progress is not unlimited. A human may now execute a high jump of seven feet, but it is unlikely that anyone will, within our atmosphere, ever jump a thousand feet without the aid of artificial propulsion. Other areas of accomplishment, whether intellectual, physical, or whatever, have similar practical limitations upon them.

7. Limitation is not inherently bad. There is a tendency to bemoan the fact of human finiteness. Some, indeed, maintain that this is the cause of human sin. If we were not limited, we would always know what is right and would do it. Were humans not encumbered by finiteness, they could do better. But the Bible indicates that having made the human with the limitations that go with creaturehood, God looked at the creation and pronounced it "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Finiteness may well lead to sin if we fail to accept our limitation and live accordingly. But the mere fact of our limitation does not inevitably produce sin. Rather, improper responses to that limitation either constitute or result in sin.

Some feel that human sinfulness is a carry-over from earlier stages of evolution but is gradually being left behind. As our knowledge and ability increase, we will become less sinful. That, however, does not prove true. In

actual practice, increases in sophistication seem instead to give humans opportunity for more ingenious means of sinning. One might think that the tremendous growth in computer technology, for example, would result in solutions to many basic human problems and thus in a more righteous human being. While such technology is indeed often used for beneficial purposes, human greed has also led to new and ingenious forms of theft both of money and information, and other forms of exploitation by the use of the computer. Reduction of our limitations, then, does not lead inevitably to better human beings. Human limitations are not evil in themselves.

8. Proper adjustment in life can be achieved only on the basis of acceptance of one's own finiteness. The fact of our finiteness is clear. We may, however, be unwilling to accept that fact and to accept our place in the scheme of things as creatures of God who are dependent upon him. Adam and Eve's fall consisted at least in part of an aspiration to become like God (Gen. 3:4–6), to know what God knows. A similar aspiration underlay the fall of the evil angels (Jude 6). We ought to be willing to let God be God, not seeking to tell him what is right and true, but rather submitting to him and his plan for us. To pass judgment on God's deeds would require an infinite knowledge, something that we simply do not have.

This means that we need not always be right. We need not fear failing. Only God never fails and never makes a mistake. It is not necessary for us, then, to make excuses for our shortcomings or to be defensive because we are not perfect. Yet awareness of our finiteness often leads to feelings of insecurity that we attempt to overcome through our own efforts. Jesus pointed out to his disciples that such attempts to build security by our own efforts will always lead to increased anxiety. We need not be God, for there is a God. We need only to seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and all life's needs will be supplied (Matt. 6:25–34).

A proper humility will follow if we admit to ourselves our finite creatureliness and are willing to live accordingly. A college Bible department once received an application for a teaching position from a person who practiced positive thinking in the extreme. The answers to the questions on the application form dripped with self-promotion, even arrogance, which seemed particularly inappropriate for someone without teaching experience. The department chairman asked a colleague for his reaction. "Oh," was the response, "I don't think we have a position worthy of this man. In fact," he added, "I don't think there is any position anywhere that is worthy of him. There hasn't been an opening in the Trinity for almost two thousand years."

We are not, cannot be, and need not be God. God does not expect us to be God. Satisfaction and happiness lie in wait for us if we accept this fact; disappointment and frustration if we do not. We are not beings who should be God but have failed in the attempt. We are what we were intended to be: limited human creatures.

9. Humanity is, nonetheless, something wonderful. Although they are creatures, humans are the highest among them, the only ones made in the image of God. The fact that the Lord of the entire universe made us simply adds to the grandeur of humanity by giving us a trademark, as it were. We are not simply a chance production of a blind mechanism, or a by-product or scraps thrown off in the process of making something better, but an expressly designed product of God.

Sometimes Christians have felt it necessary to minimize human ability and accomplishments in order to give greater glory to God. To be sure, we must put human achievements in their proper context relative to God. But it is not necessary to protect God against competition from his highest creature. Human greatness can glorify God the more. We should frankly acknowledge that humans have done many wondrous things. They are indeed amazing beings, both in what they are and what they can do. But how much greater must be the One who made them!

Humans are great, but what makes them great is that God has created them. The name *Stradivari* speaks of quality in a violin; its maker was the best. Even as we admire the instrument, we are admiring all the more the giftedness of the maker. The human has been made by the best and wisest of all beings, God. A God who could make such a wondrous creature as a human being is a great God indeed.

> Know that the LORD is God.
> It is he who made us, and we are his;
> we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
>
> Enter his gates with thanksgiving
> and his courts with praise;
> give thanks to him and praise his name.
> For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
> his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Ps. 100:3–5)

22

The Image of God in the Human

Chapter Objectives

After you have studied this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain the relevant Scripture passages concerning the image of God in the human.
2. Distinguish among three differing views of the image of God and explain each.
3. Evaluate by comparing and contrasting the relational, functional, and substantive views of the image of God.
4. Identify six inferences that are drawn from the biblical view of the image of God.
5. Synthesize the previous views of the image of God with the inferences from Scripture.
6. Identify six specific characteristics that constitute our true humanity.

Chapter Summary

The image of God in humanity is critical to our understanding of what makes us human. The substantive, relational, and functional views of the image of God are not completely satisfying explanations. We must reach our conclusions about the image of God by making inferences from the

biblical data. The implications of the image of God should inspire us and set the parameters for our view of all humanity.

Study Questions

- What observations can be made from the scriptural passages that are relevant to an understanding of the image of God?
- How do the substantive, relational, and functional views of the image of God differ? Who are the proponents of each position?
- What is the focus of each view, and what problems exist with each view?
- From the biblical material, what conclusions can be drawn regarding the nature of the image of God, and how do these conclusions help us to better understand our true humanity?
- What does the image of God imply about the intended relationship between humans and God?

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As important as our answer to the question “Where did humanity come from?” is to understanding human identity, it does not tell us all we need to know about what God brought into being when he created humanity.

There are various possible ways of formulating a definition of humanity. One is to investigate what the Bible has to say about human beings. We might, if we did so, conclude that they are inherently evil; but we would probably also

discover that they are different now from what Adam was at the time of creation and that something triggered the change to the present condition. Or we might investigate existing humans using the research methods of various behavioral sciences. This conception would be based on current human behavior.

The Bible's depiction of the human race is that it today is actually in an abnormal condition. The real human is not what we now find in human society, but the being that came from the hand of God, unspoiled by sin and the fall. In a very real sense, the only true human beings were Adam and Eve before the fall, and Jesus. All the others are twisted, distorted, corrupted samples of humanity. It therefore is necessary to look at the original human state and at Christ if we would correctly assess what it means to be human.

A key expression is that God made the human in God's own image and likeness. This distinguished people from all the other creatures, for only of humans is this expression used. While there has been a great amount of discussion on the subject, the concept is critical because the image of God is what makes humans human.[807] Our understanding of the image will affect how we treat our fellow humans and how we minister to them. If we understand the image as being primarily human reason, then our dealings with others will be basically of an educative and cognitive nature. If we understand the image to consist in personal relationships, our ministry will emphasize "relational theology" and small-group interaction.

In this chapter we will examine the salient biblical passages separately. Then we will look at some representative interpretations of the expression "the image of God." These are attempts to draw the several biblical passages together into a construct. Finally, we will attempt to formulate an understanding that is faithful to the full biblical witness, and to spell out the contemporary significance of the concept.

The Relevant Scripture Passages

Several biblical passages speak of the image of God. The best-known is probably Genesis 1:26–27: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Verse 26 is God's statement of intention; it includes the terms צֶלֶם (*tselem*) and מ ת ו ּ (*demuth*), translated, respectively, "image" and "likeness." The former term is repeated

twice in verse 27. In Genesis 5:1 we have a recapitulation of what God had done: "When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God." The writer adds in verse 2: "He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'mankind.'" The term used here is מ ת ָ. In Genesis 9:6 murder is prohibited on the grounds that the human was created in God's image: "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind." While the passage does not explicitly say that humans still bore the image of God, it is clear that what God had earlier done still has some bearing or effect, even at this post-fall point. Beyond this we find no other explicit references in the Old Testament to the image of God, although two passages in the Apocrypha mention it, Wisdom of Solomon 2:23 and Ecclesiasticus 17:3.

Two New Testament passages mention the image of God in connection with the creation of the human. In 1 Corinthians 11:7 Paul says, "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man." Paul does not say that woman is the image of God, but merely points out that she is the glory of man as man is the glory of God. The word for image here is εἰκών (*eikōn*). And in James 3:9, on the grounds that humans are made in the likeness (ὁμοίωσις—*homoiōsis*) of God, the author condemns use of the tongue to curse humans: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness." There is also something of a suggestion of the image of God in Acts 17:28, although the term is not actually used: "'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"

In addition, several passages in the New Testament refer to believers becoming the image of God through the process of salvation. Romans 8:29 notes that they are being conformed to the image of the Son: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." In Ephesians 4:23–24 Paul urges his readers "to be made new in the attitude" of their minds "and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Finally, Colossians 3:10 also refers to putting on "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Views of the Image

What then is the image of God? Formulating a definition will involve both interpreting individual references and integrating the several overt statements as well as various allusions in Scripture. There are three general ways of viewing the nature of the image. Some consider the image to consist of certain characteristics within the very nature of the human, either physical or psychological/spiritual. This view we will call the *substantive* view of the image. Others regard the image not as something inherently or intrinsically present in humans, but as the experiencing of a relationship between the human and God, or between two or more humans. This is the *relational* view. Finally, some consider the image to be, not something a human is or experiences, but something a human does. This is the *functional* view.

The Substantive View

The substantive view has been dominant during most of the history of Christian theology. The common element in the several varieties of this view is that the image is identified as some definite characteristic or quality within the makeup of the human. Some have considered the image of God to be an aspect of our physical or bodily makeup. Although this form of the view has never been widespread, it has persisted even to this day. It may be based on a literal reading of the word צֶלֶם (*tselem*), which in its most concrete sense means "statue" or "form."[808] Given this reading, Genesis 1:26 would actually mean something like, "Let us make humans who look like us." The Mormons are probably the most prominent current advocates of the position that the image of God is physical. This position does not present them with any real problems, since they hold that God has a body.[809]

One might expect that with the emphasis in many circles on a human as a psychosomatic unity, there would be renewed interest in the idea that the image of God is a physical factor in human beings. This would probably be the case except for the fact that most of those who stress the psychosomatic unity of human nature also tend to neglect the metaphysical. We should also note that some see the image as being a physical feature with metaphorical import. That the human walks upright, for example, is taken as a symbol of the moral uprightness or righteousness of God, or of humans' relatedness to God.[810]

More common substantive views of the image of God isolate it in terms of some psychological or spiritual quality in human nature, especially reason.

Indeed, the human species is classified biologically as *Homo sapiens*, the thinking being.

There have been differing degrees of emphasis on reason. When rationality is highly stressed in society in general, as in the Enlightenment, it is also stressed in theological thinking.[811] During more subjectively oriented times, reason receives less attention. In a period such as the latter part of the twentieth century, with its strongly voluntaristic and visceral emphases, reason plays a lesser role. There are also different ways of understanding reason—as abstract contemplation (Platonism) or as a more empirical and scientific matter (Thomistic-Aristotelianism).[812] All hold that the cognitive, cerebral aspect of humanity is most like God; therefore, it is to be emphasized and developed.

It is not surprising that theologians should single out reason as the most significant aspect of human nature, for theologians are the segment of the church charged with intellectualizing or reflecting on their faith. Note that in so doing, however, not only have they isolated one aspect of human nature for consideration, but they have also concentrated their attention on only one facet of God's nature. This may result in a misapprehension. To be sure, omniscience and wisdom constitute a significant dimension of the nature of God, but they are by no means the very essence of divinity.

On the basis of Genesis 1:26–27 a tendency gradually developed to understand "image" and "likeness" as two aspects or dimensions of the image of God. At times there were naturalistic overtones: the human was created in God's image only, but gradually evolved into God's likeness as well. More commonly, however, the presence of God's likeness in humanity was attributed to a spiritual or supernatural cause. Origen, for example, saw the image as something given immediately at the creation, with the likeness to be conferred by God at a later time. It was Irenaeus, however, who gave the distinction between image and likeness a direction that theologians followed for some time, although his statements vary greatly and are not completely consistent. By the former he meant that Adam had reason and free will; by the latter Irenaeus pointed to some sort of supernatural endowment that Adam possessed through the action of the Spirit. Unlike some later theologians, Irenaeus was not thinking of an original righteousness. As a childlike being, Adam bore a likeness to God that was present only in germ form, only as a potential of what he was to become. When, however, Adam fell into sin, he lost the likeness, although the image persisted at least to some degree.[813]

In medieval scholastic theologizing, Irenaeus's distinction was developed further. Now the difference was clarified and the effects of the fall isolated. The image was the human's natural resemblance to God, the powers of reason and

will. The likeness was a *donum superadditum*—a divine gift added to basic human nature. This likeness consisted of the moral qualities of God, whereas the image involved the natural attributes of God. When Adam fell, he lost the likeness, but the image remained fully intact. Humanity as humanity was still complete, but the good and holy being was spoiled.

This perspective of course involved a conception of the nature of sin and the fall, but also a definite idea of the nature of humanity. One's human nature is unitary and relatively immune to the damaging effects of the fall. Even non-Christians and marginal believers are as fully human as are sanctified believers. They possess the ability to evaluate evidence, to recognize the truth, to choose on the basis of knowledge of the truth. This leaves open the possibility of a rational or natural theology: even without special revelation, all persons are able to gain some true knowledge of God. It also leaves open the possibility of a natural ethic: being free, humans are capable of doing some good works apart from grace. Thus, this assumption lent much to the whole system of Catholic theology.[814]

As a skilled exegete, Martin Luther saw that the difference in terminology that led to the conclusion that the image of God remained intact in fallen humans (only the likeness being lost) is not really a difference at all. "Image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 do not have separate referents. Rather, this is simply an instance of the common Hebrew practice of parallelism. Consequently, there is no distinction between image and likeness either before or after the fall.[815]

With this unitary view of the image of God, Luther held that all aspects of the image of God in humans have been corrupted; what is left is a relic or remnant of the image—not certain qualities but fragments, as it were, of all of what constituted the likeness to God. Luther's response to Genesis 9:6 was that the uncorrupted image still exists as God's intention for humans, but is not actually present in them.[816]

Calvin adopted a view similar in many ways to that of Luther, rejecting the dualistic scholastic view, and instead maintaining that a relic of the image remained in each person after the fall. Because a relic remained, knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of God are interrelated. In knowing ourselves we come to know God, since he has made us in his image.[817] Conversely, we come to know ourselves by measuring ourselves against his holiness. While all things, in a sense, display the image of God, humans particularly do so, most notably in our ability to reason.[818]

All of the substantive views we have mentioned, with their widely differing conceptions of the nature of the image of God, agree in one particular: the locus of the image. It is located within humans as a resident quality or capacity.

Although conferred by God, the image resides in humans whether or not they recognize God's existence and his work.

The Relational View

Many modern theologians do not conceive of the image of God as something resident within human nature. Indeed, they do not ordinarily ask what the human is or what sort of a nature a human may have. Rather, they think of the image of God as the experiencing of a relationship. Humans can be said to be in the image or to display the image when standing in a particular relationship, which indeed *is* the image.

In the twentieth century, neo-orthodox theology shifted the focus quite strongly to a more dynamic understanding of the image. Although Karl Barth and Emil Brunner differed on some points, sometimes very emphatically, their two views came to have much in common with one another.

Emil Brunner distinguishes between two senses of the image of God: the formal and the material. The formal image is the *humanum*, that which makes a person human, distinguishing the human from the animal, as a rational being, responsible and free. Persons as sinners have not lost this aspect of the image of God. In fact, the ability to sin presupposes it. This is what is meant by the Old Testament description of humans as being in the image and likeness of God.[819]

The material sense of the image is the act of response, the relationship with God. The material image can be present or absent, but the formal image is always present. Even the person not responding to God still has responsibility.[820] Beyond the human's relationship to God, there is a second command—that we love other human beings. Our "responsibility-in-love" begins to be met as we relate to our fellow humans. We cannot be human by ourselves.[821]

Karl Barth also held a relational view of the image of God. In his early period he did not use the expression "the image of God," but he did speak of a unity between God and humans that was something like the unity between mother and fetus. This unity has been lost since the fall, although the fall was not a temporal occurrence at some point in the history of the human race.[822] In the second period of Barth's thought and writing, the period of controversy with Emil Brunner, he vigorously denied any point of connection between God and the human, any human capacity to receive the Word of God.[823]

The third stage of Barth's thinking on the image is the most novel. In this stage Barth speaks of the image as still present within the human, inasmuch as the person still is human.[824] Barth sees the image of God as consisting not only in the vertical relationship between human and God, but also in the horizontal

relationship between humans. The image is not something a human is or does. Rather, the image is related to the fact that God willed into existence a being that, like himself, can be a partner.[825] He especially sees this in the male-female relationship, so that the statement "male and female created he them" is in effect a parallel to the statement that God created humans in his own image.

Barth makes one other point: that we learn about humanity by studying Christ, not humans.[826] There are significant differences between his humanity and ours, for his was human nature as it was intended to be.[827] Only from revelation can we know humanity as created, and Jesus is the fullest form of that revelation.[828] We cannot determine on some independent grounds what human nature is, and thus know what Jesus was like.[829]

Despite the differences between the two, Barth and Brunner came to hold certain elements in common:

1. The image of God and human nature are best understood through a study of the person of Jesus, not of human nature per se.
2. We obtain our understanding of the image from the divine revelation.
3. The image of God is not to be understood in terms of any structural qualities within humans; it is not something a human is or possesses. Rather, the image is a matter of one's relationship to God; it is something a human experiences. Thus, it is dynamic rather than static.
4. The relationship of a human to God, which constitutes the image of God, is paralleled by the relationship between humans. Barth makes much more of the male-female relationship; Brunner tends to emphasize the larger circle of human relationships, that is, society.
5. The image of God is universal; it is found in all humans at all times and places. Therefore, it is present in sinful human beings. Even in turning away from God, one cannot negate the fact of being related to God in a way in which no other creature is or can be. There is always a relationship, either positive or negative.
6. No conclusion can or need be drawn as to what there might be in a person's nature that would constitute ability to have such a relationship. Brunner and Barth never ask what, if anything, is required structurally for the image of God to be present in a human. Even the formal image of which Brunner speaks is relational, not structural.

Because existentialism is the philosophy underlying the relational view of the image of God, it is important to review some of this philosophy's characteristics.

One of these is de-emphasis of essences or substances. The important question is "Is it?" ("Does it exist?"), not "What is it?" There is a suspicion of any reification of qualities into some sort of permanent structural reality. Rather, with the emphasis on will and consequent action, what is important about any individual person or thing is, according to existentialism, what he or she or it does. Reality is more than an entity that is simply there and that one accepts; rather, it is something one creates. Just as this view underlies Brunner and Barth's view of revelation, their view of the image of God presupposes it. The image is not an entity that a human possesses so much as the experience that is present when a relationship is active.

In recent years, the influence of postmodernism has resulted in an even stronger stress on the social dimension, the relationship of human to human more than the relationship of human to God. In postmodernism the self tends to be dissolved, just as do real essences or independently existing truth. Beyond that, postmodernism's emphasis on community means that humans are really only fully human when in social relationship. Thus, from a postmodern Christian perspective, it is humans collectively that are the image of God, rather than individuals, in the eschatological dimension as well as the ongoing present reality.[830]

The Functional View

A third type of view of the image has had quite a long history and has recently increased in popularity. This is the idea that the image is not something present in the makeup of the human, nor the experiencing of relationship with God or with fellow humans, but rather consists in something one does. It is a human function, the most frequently mentioned being the exercise of dominion over the creation.

While the relational view gives relatively little attention to the content of the image of God, this view attempts to determine from the biblical text itself the content of the image.[831] In Genesis 1:26, the statement "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" is followed immediately by "so that they may rule over the fish of the sea. . . ." A close connection between these two concepts is found not only in this verse, where God expresses his intention to create, but also in verses 27–28, where we read that God did in fact create humans in the image of God and issue to them a command to have dominion.[832] Some regard the juxtaposition of these two concepts as more than coincidental. The exercise of dominion is considered to be the content of the image of God. This was propounded by the Socinians and included in their Racovian Catechism. As God

is the Lord over all of creation, humans reflect the image of God by exercising dominion over the rest of the creation. The image of God is actually an image of God as Lord.[833]

A second passage containing a close connection between the image of God in humanity and human exercise of dominion is Psalm 8:5–6: "You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet." "Commentators generally are satisfied that Psalm 8 is largely dependent on Genesis."[834] One of their proofs is the catalog of creatures in Psalm 8:7–8: beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fish of the sea.[835] The conclusion is then drawn that verse 5 is equivalent to the statements in Genesis 1 that the human was created in God's image. Sigmund Mowinckel says that "the 'godlikeness' of man in Psalm 8 consists above all in his sovereignty and power over all other things, in his godlike 'honour and glory' compared to them."[836] Norman Snaith asserts, "Biblically speaking, the phrase 'image of God' has nothing to do with morals or any sort of ideals; it refers only to man's dominion of the world and everything that is in it. It says nothing about the nature of God, but everything concerning the function of man."[837] Another extensive interpretation of the image of God as humanity's exercise of dominion is Leonard Verduin's *Somewhat Less Than God,* which makes the point quite strongly: "Again the idea of dominion-having stands out as the central feature. That man is a creature meant for dominion-having and that as such he is in the image of his Maker—this is the burden of the creation account given in the book of Genesis, the Book of Origins. It is the central point the writer of this account wanted to make."[838]

In Genesis 1:26, 28, the Hebrew terms כָּבַשׁ (*kavash*) and רָדָה (*radah*) carry the meaning that the human was to exercise a rule over the whole of creation similar to the rule that in later times the Hebrew kings were expected to exercise over their people. The kings were not to rule for their own sakes, but for the welfare of their subjects.[839] When Israel desired a king (1 Sam. 8:10–18), God warned them that a king would exploit them. For one person to dominate others is contrary to God's will because it represents exploitation of the rest of creation.

The perspective that the exercise of dominion is the very essence of the image of God has given rise to a strong emphasis on what is sometimes called in Reformed circles the cultural mandate. Just as Jesus sent his apostles forth into the world and commissioned them to make disciples of all persons, so God sent his highest creatures, humans, out into creation and commissioned them to rule over it. This commission implies that humans are to make full use of their ability to learn about the whole creation. For by coming to understand the creation, humans will be able to predict and control its actions. These activities are not

optional, but are part of the responsibility that goes with being God's highest creature.

We observed that the relational view of Barth and Brunner draws on existentialism. This functional view similarly draws on philosophical functionalism or pragmatism, another prominent twentieth-century philosophy.[840]

Evaluation of the Views

We now need to evaluate the three general views of the image of God. We will begin with the less traditional views, the conceptions of the image as relationship and as a function.

The relational view has correctly seized upon the truth that the human alone, of all of the creatures, knows and is consciously related to God. The portrayals of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden suggest that God and they customarily communed together. Humans were not created merely to be a work of art, statues displaying God's creativity and wisdom, but to fulfill God's special intention for them. It is significant that both in the Old Testament law (the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20) and in Jesus's statement of the two great commandments (Matt. 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:26–27), the thrust of God's will for humans concerns relationship to God and to other humans.

There are certain problems, however, with the view that the image of God is totally a relational matter. One of them is the universality of the image. In what sense can it be said that those who are living in total indifference to God, or even in hostile rebellion against him, are (or are in) the image of God? Brunner has attempted to answer this by indicating that there is always a relationship, that one is always "before God." But this seems to carry little meaning. Brunner's distinction between the material and formal elements of the image, together with his insistence that even the formal element is relational rather than structural, seems lacking in biblical basis and rather forced.

Another problem surfaces when we ask what it is about humans that enables them to have this relationship no other creature is able to have. Although Barth and Brunner resist posing the question, it must be asked. Certainly there are some prerequisite factors if relationship is to occur. In criticism of Brunner's position, John Baillie notes that there is no form without content.[841] It may be contended that Brunner in effect answered this criticism when he stated that the current content is different from the original content.[842] In Brunner's view, then, there is content (although it has changed), and therefore there can also be form.

This seems not to avert the difficulty, however, for Baillie is asking what makes the formal image possible, while Brunner's statement that there is a change in content is actually a reference to the realization of the material sense of the image.

We must conclude that Barth and Brunner were led astray by their wholeheartedly antisubstantialist presuppositions, which we have suggested stemmed from existentialism. This leads to the position that human uniqueness must be formal rather than substantive. But the exact basis of the human's formal constitution as a being capable of relationship is never delineated.

When we turn to the functional view, we again see an insightful seizing upon one of the major elements in the biblical picture of the image of God, namely, that God's act creating the human is immediately followed by the command to have dominion. There certainly is, at the very least, a very close connection between the image and the exercise of dominion.[843] There is also, to be sure, a parallel between Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 (i.e., in the description of the domain over which humans are to have dominion). Yet there are difficulties with this view as well.

One difficulty concerns the connection between Psalm 8 and Genesis 1. The terms *image* and *likeness* do not appear in Psalm 8. If the psalm is indeed dependent upon Genesis 1, where we do find specific reference to the image, and if exercising dominion over the creatures mentioned in verses 7–8 of the psalm does indeed constitute the image of God, then one would expect in this passage as well some specific reference to the image, although this is of course an argument from silence.

Further, Genesis 1 contains no clear equation of the image of God with the exercise of dominion. On the contrary, there are some indications that they are distinguishable. God is said to create the human in his own image; then God gives the command to have dominion. In other words, the human is spoken of as being in God's image before being ordered to practice dominion. In verse 26 the use of two hortative expressions—"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" and "let them rule"—seems to distinguish the two concepts. Walter Eichrodt points out that a blessing is given when the human is created, but that a second blessing is necessary before dominion over the creatures can be exercised.[844] It appears, then, that the functional view may have taken a consequence of the image and equated it with the image itself.

We must now look carefully at the substantive or structural view. It is significant that the text of Scripture itself never identifies what qualities within the human might be the image. The criticism that, in misguided attempts to identify such qualities, a number of advocates of the structural view have

actually suggested nonbiblical concepts (e.g., the ancient Greek notion of reason) is justified.[845] Further, the structural view often is narrowed to one aspect of human nature and, particularly, to the intellectual dimension. This in turn implies that the image of God varies with different human beings. The more intellectual a person is, the greater the extent to which the image of God is present. And then there is the additional problem of determining just what happened when Adam and Eve fell into sinfulness. It does not seem to be the case that the fall affected intelligence or reason in general. Moreover, some unbelievers are more intelligent and perceptive than are some highly sanctified Christians.

Conclusions regarding the Nature of the Image

Having noted difficulties with each of the general views, we must now attempt to form some conclusions as to just what the image of God is. The existence of a wide diversity of interpretations often indicates that there are no direct statements in Scripture to resolve the issue. Our conclusions, then, must be reasonable inferences drawn from what little the Bible does say on the subject.

1. The image of God is universal within the human race. We will go into more detail in chapter 24, but at this point we note that the first and universal human, Adam, not merely a portion of the human race, was made in the image of God. Note also that the prohibitions of murder (Gen. 9:6) and cursing (James 3:9–10) apply to the treatment of all humans. No limitation is placed upon these prohibitions, which are based on the fact that humanity was created in God's image.

2. The image of God has not been lost as a result of sin or specifically the fall. The prohibitions against murder and cursing apply to the treatment of sinful humans as well as godly believers. The presence of the image and likeness in the non-Christian is assumed. If this is the case, the image of God is not something accidental or external to human nature. It is something inseparably connected with humanity. All humans have this image, whether they are in the relationship or fulfilling the function of dominion-having.

3. There is no indication that the image is present in one person to a greater degree than in another. Superior natural endowments, such as high intelligence, are not evidence of the presence or degree of the image.

4. The image is not correlated with any variable. For example, there is no direct statement correlating the image with development of relationships, nor making it dependent upon the exercise of dominion. The statements in Genesis 1

simply say that God resolved to make the human in his own image and then did so. This seems to antedate any human activity. There are no statements limiting the image to certain conditions or activities or situations. While this is essentially a negative argument, it does point up a flaw in the relational and functional views.

5. In light of the foregoing considerations, the image should be thought of as primarily substantive or structural. The image is something in the very nature of humans, in the way in which they were made. It refers to something a human *is* rather than something a human *has* or *does*. By virtue of being human, one is in the image of God; being so is not dependent upon the presence of anything else. By contrast, the focus of the relational and functional views is actually on consequences or applications of the image rather than on the image itself. While we may and should speak of the image as involving all three of these foci, the substantive is the primary one. Although very closely linked to the image of God, experiencing relationships and exercising dominion are not in themselves that image. Yet having said that, we must reckon with the fact that the person most fully bears the image of God when that image is active, not merely static.[846]

6. The image refers to the elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfillment of human destiny. The image involves the powers of personality that make humans, like God, beings capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely.

God's creation was for definite purposes. The human was intended to know, love, and obey God, and live in harmony with other humans, as the story of Cain and Abel indicates. The human was certainly placed here on earth to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. But these relationships and this function presuppose something else. Humans are most fully human when they are active in these relationships and performing this function, fulfilling their telos, God's purpose for them. But these are the consequences or the applications of the image. The image itself is that set of qualities that is required for these relationships and this function to take place. They are those qualities of God that, reflected in human beings, make worship, personal interaction, and work possible. If we think of God as a being with qualities, we will have no problem accepting the fact that humans have such qualities as well. The attributes of God sometimes referred to as communicable attributes[847] constitute the image of God; this is not limited to any one attribute. Humanity qua humanity has a nature encompassing all that constitutes personality or selfhood: intelligence, will, emotions. This is the image in which humans were created, enabling them to

have the divinely intended relationship to God and to fellow humans, and to exercise dominion.

Beyond this matter of what the image of God consists of, we must ask why the human is made in God's image. What in actual application does it mean for one to be in the image of God? What is God's intention for one within life? Here the other views of the image are of special help to us, for they concentrate upon consequences or manifestations of the image. Jesus's character and actions will be a particularly helpful guide in this matter since he was the perfect example of what human nature is intended to be:

1. Jesus had perfect fellowship with the Father. While on earth he communed with and frequently spoke to the Father. Their fellowship is most clearly seen in the high priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus spoke of how he and the Father are one (vv. 21–22). He had glorified and would glorify the Father (vv. 1, 4), and the Father had glorified and would glorify him (vv. 1, 5, 22, 24).

2. Jesus obeyed the Father's will perfectly. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Indeed, throughout his ministry his own will was subordinate: "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34); "I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30); "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

3. Jesus always displayed a strong love for humans. Note, for example, his concern for the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 9:36; 10:6), his compassion for the sick (Mark 1:41) and the sorrowing (Luke 7:13), his patience with and forgiveness of those who failed (e.g., Peter).

God intends that a similar sense of fellowship, obedience, and love characterize humans' relationship to God, and that humans be bound together with one another in love. We are completely human only when manifesting these characteristics.

In drawing on Jesus as embodying the image of God, it is important to bear in mind that the import of passages such as Philippians 2:6 and Hebrews 1:3 seems to be that the Second Person of the Trinity (the Son) bore this similarity to and even qualitative identity with the First Person (the Father) even prior to his incarnation. Thus this may be a clearer revelation of the archetype (that of which the human is the image) than of the ectype (the actual image itself).[848]

Implications of the Doctrine

1. We belong to God. While the fact that we are in the image of God means that some of his attributes belong also to us (at least to a limited degree), it is even more a reminder that we belong to him. Although the expression “image of God” does not appear, it is crucial to a full understanding of Mark 12:13–17.[849] The issue was whether to pay taxes to Caesar. When brought a coin, Jesus asked whose image (εἰκών) appeared on it. The Pharisees and Herodians correctly answered, “Caesar’s.” Jesus responded, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” What are “the things that are God’s”? Presumably, whatever bears the image of God. Jesus then was saying, “Give your money to Caesar; it has his image on it, and thus it belongs to him. But give yourselves to God. You bear his image, and you belong to him.” Commitment, devotion, love, loyalty, service to God—all of these are proper responses for those who bear the image of God.

2. We should pattern ourselves after Jesus, the complete revelation of the image of God. He is the full image of God and the one person whose humanity was never spoiled by sinning (Heb. 4:15). The dedication of him who said, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39), is to characterize us. The determination of him who said, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4), is to be our model. And we are to emulate the love manifested in the life and death of him who said, “Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). This is the image of God in its purest sense, the forming of the likeness of Christ in us (Rom. 8:29).

3. We experience full humanity only when we are properly related to God. No matter how cultured and genteel, no one is fully human unless a redeemed disciple of God. This is the human telos, for which we are created. There is room, then, in our theology for humanism, that is, a Christian and biblical humanism that is concerned to bring others into proper relationship with God. The New Testament makes clear that God will restore the damaged image, and perhaps even build upon and go beyond it (2 Cor. 3:18).

4. Learning and work are good. The exercise of dominion is a consequence of the image of God. Humanity is to gain an understanding and control of the creation, developing it to its ultimate potential for its own good and for God. This also means exercising dominion over our own personalities and abilities. Note that the exercise of dominion was part of God’s original intention for humanity; it preceded the fall. Work, then, is not a curse, but part of God’s good plan. The basis for the work ethic is to be found in the very nature of what God created us to be.

5. The human is valuable. The sacredness of human life is an extremely important principle in God's scheme of things. Even after the fall, murder was prohibited; the reason given was that humans were made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). The implication of the passage is that even sinful humans still possessed the image. For had they not, God would not have cited the image as the grounds of the prohibition of murder.

6. The image is universal in humankind. It was to Adam, a human, that the image was given. Whether one regards him as the first human being or as a representative or symbolic being, "Adam" was the whole human race and "Eve" was the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20). Both Genesis 1:27 and 5:1–2 make it clear that the image was borne by both male and female.

The universality of the image means that there is a dignity to being human. Cairns suggests that Calvin urged the reverencing of persons.[850] While this terminology is too strong a characterization of what Calvin actually said,[851] the general concept is valid. We should not be disdainful of any human being. They are all something beautiful, even though they are distortions of what God originally intended humankind to be. The potential of likeness to the Creator is there. There are good acts done by non-Christians, not meritorious in terms of procuring divine favor for salvation, but pleasing to God in contributing to his overall purpose.

The universality of the image also means that all persons have points of sensitivity to spiritual things. Although at times these points may be deeply buried and difficult to identify, everyone possesses the potential for fellowship with God and will be incomplete unless it is realized. We should look for areas of responsiveness or at least openness in everyone.

Because all are in the image of God, nothing should be done that would encroach upon another's legitimate exercise of dominion. Freedom must not be taken from a human who has not forfeited this right by abusing it (the latter would include murderers, thieves, etc.). This means, most obviously, that slavery is improper. Beyond that, however, it means that depriving someone of freedom through illegal means, manipulation, or intimidation is improper. Everyone has a right to exercise dominion, a right that ends only at the point of encroaching upon another's right to exercise dominion.

Every human being is God's creature made in God's own image. God endowed each of us with the powers of personality that make it possible for us to worship and serve him. When using those powers to those ends, we are most fully what God intended us to be, and then are most completely human.

23

The Constitutional Nature of the Human

Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. List and restate the basic views of the human constitution as trichotomist, dichotomist, and monist.
2. Relate biblical considerations to each of these three basic views of the human constitution.
3. Examine and evaluate the monistic position of John A. T. Robinson.
4. Relate and refute five philosophical objections to a compound human nature.
5. Compare and contrast an alternative model, which is based upon conditional unity.
6. Understand and apply the implications of conditional unity.

Chapter Summary

There are three traditional views of the human constitution: trichotomism, dichotomism, and monism. Particular attention is paid to the monism of John A. T. Robinson. A careful discussion of the biblical and philosophical considerations leads one to reject the three traditional views. In place of these, an alternative model provides for a conditional unity of the person, which has five implications.

Study Questions

- What traditional concepts have been held about the human constitution?
- What biblical support or opposition do you find for each of the traditional views of the human constitution?
- How would you refute or defend each of the traditional views of the human constitution?
- What is the significance of the intermediate state of consciousness?
- How does conditional unity affect our view of human nature?
- What implications come from acceptance of the conditional-unity-of-the-human-constitution position?

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When we ask what the human is, we are asking several different questions. One, which we have already addressed, is the question of origin. We are also asking about the human function or purpose. That might lead us to the question of the human's ultimate destiny. The human makeup is yet another issue raised by the question of what human beings are. Are they unitary wholes, or are they made up of two or more components? And if they are made up of multiple components, what are those?

How we view the human makeup is of considerable importance. If it is dualistic, there develops a tendency to think of certain aspects of human nature as isolated from others. For example, one might consider the spiritual aspect of life to be quite independent of one's physical condition. On the other hand, if we

regard a human as a unitary, singular being, there is the question of what that one "substance" is that makes up human nature. Is it a body, a soul, or what? Once we have answered this question to our satisfaction, there will be a tendency to regard humans as merely that substance. At this point most people will embrace one of the various views of humanity sketched in chapter 20.

In considering the human makeup, we must be particularly careful to examine the presuppositions we bring to our study. Because there are nonbiblical disciplines that also are concerned about humanity, the possibility that some of their conceptions might affect our theological construction looms large. Whether it be an ancient Greek dualism or a modern behavioristic monism, we need to guard against reading a nonbiblical presupposition into our understanding of Scripture.

Basic Views of the Human Constitution

Trichotomism

One popular view in conservative Protestant circles has been termed "trichotomism." A human is composed of three elements. The first element is the physical body, something humans have in common with animals and plants. There is no difference in kind between a human body and that of animals and plants; but there is a difference of degree, as humans have a more complex physical structure. The second part of the human is the soul. This is the psychological element, the basis of reason, emotion, social interrelatedness, and the like. Animals are thought to have a rudimentary soul. Possession of a soul is what distinguishes humans and animals from plants. While the human soul is much more involved and capable than that of the animals, their souls are similar in kind. What really distinguishes the human from the animals is not a more complex and advanced soul, but a third element, namely, a spirit. This religious element enables humans to perceive spiritual matters and respond to spiritual stimuli. It is the seat of the spiritual qualities of the individual, whereas personality traits reside in the soul.[852]

The major foundation of trichotomism is certain Scripture passages that either enumerate three components of human nature or distinguish between the soul and the spirit. A primary text is 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 4:12 describes the word of God as "alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged

sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Beyond that, a threefold division seems to be implied in 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4, where Paul classifies human persons as "of the flesh" (σαρκικός—*sarkikos*), "unspiritual" (ψυχικός—*psuchikos*—literally, "of the soul"), or "spiritual" (πνευματικός—*pneumatikos*). These terms seem to refer to different functions or orientations, if not to different components, of humans. First Corinthians 15:44 also distinguishes between the natural (ψυχικόν) body and the spiritual (πνευματικόν) body.

Some trichotomism is indebted to ancient Greek metaphysics. Some Greek philosophers taught that the body is the material aspect of the human, the soul is the immaterial aspect, and the spirit brings the two into relationship with one another. A parallel was often drawn between the way the body and soul are brought into relationship and the way God and his created world are brought into relationship. Just as God relates through some third (or intermediary) substance, so the soul and the body are related through the spirit.[853] The soul was thought of, on the one hand, as immaterial, and, on the other, as related to the body. To the extent that it is related to the body, it was regarded as carnal and mortal; but insofar as it appropriates the spirit, it was regarded as immortal.

Trichotomism became particularly popular among the Alexandrian fathers of the early centuries of the church, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. It fell into a certain amount of disrepute after Apollinarius made use of it in constructing his Christology, which the church determined to be heretical. Although some of the Eastern fathers continued to hold it, it suffered a general decline in popularity until revived in the nineteenth century by English and German theologians.[854]

More recently, trichotomism has received a revival through some within the "spiritual warfare" movement. Here the scheme is somewhat modified and adapted to the particular interests of that movement. Neil Anderson, for example, teaches that in the "natural person" the spirit is dead, with only the body and soul being alive. "At conversion," however, Anderson writes, the person's "spirit bec[omes] united with God's Spirit. The spiritual life that result[s] from this union is characterized by forgiveness of sin, acceptance in God's family and a positive sense of worth."[855] For the "fleshly person," however, things are different: this one is spiritually alive in Christ, but "instead of being directed by the Spirit, this believing person chooses to follow the impulses of the flesh."[856]

Dichotomism

Probably the most widely held view throughout most of the history of Christian thought has been the view that the human is composed of two elements, a material aspect (the body) and an immaterial component (the soul or spirit). Dichotomism was commonly held from the earliest period of Christian thought. Following the Council of Constantinople in 381, however, it grew in popularity to the point where it was virtually the universal belief of the church.

Recent forms of dichotomism maintain that the Old Testament presents a unitary view of human nature. In the New Testament, however, this unitary view is replaced by a dualism: the human is composed of body and soul. The body is the physical part of humans, the part that dies. It undergoes disintegration at death and returns to the ground. The soul, on the other hand, is the immaterial part of humans, the part that survives death. It is this immortal nature that sets humans apart from all other creatures.[857]

Many of the arguments for dichotomism are, in essence, arguments against the trichotomist conception. The dichotomist objects to trichotomism on the grounds that if one follows the principle that each of the separate references in verses like 1 Thessalonians 5:23 represents a distinct entity, difficulties arise with some other texts. For example, in Luke 10:27 Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Here we have not three but four entities, and these four hardly match the three in 1 Thessalonians. Indeed, only one of them is the same, namely, the soul. Further, “spirit” as well as “soul” is used of the animal creation. For example, Ecclesiastes 3:21 refers to the spirit of the beast (the word here is the Hebrew רוּחַ[*ruach*]). The terms “spirit” and “soul” often seem to be used interchangeably. Note, for example, Luke 1:46–47, which is probably an example of parallelism: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Here the two terms seem virtually equivalent. There are many other instances. The basic components of a human are designated body and soul in Matthew 6:25 (ψυχή—*psuchē*, “life”) and 10:28, but body and spirit in Ecclesiastes 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 5:3, 5. Death is described as giving up the soul (Gen. 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Acts 15:26 [ψυχάς—*psuchas*, “lives”]) and as giving up the spirit (Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46). At times the word “soul” is used in such a way as to be synonymous with one’s self or life: “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul [ψυχήν]?” (Matt. 16:26). There are references to being troubled in spirit (Gen. 41:8; John 13:21) and to being troubled of soul (Ps. 42:6; John 12:27).

Liberal theology quite clearly distinguished the soul and the body as virtually two different substances. The person was identified with the soul or spirit, not the body. William Newton Clarke spoke of a twofold division of the human into body and spirit (soul and spirit are used as interchangeable terms for the same entity). "The person, the self-conscious moral agent, is not the body; rather does it inhabit and rule the body."[858] The spirit of a human is to be conceived of as "incorporeal and immaterial, inhabiting and acting through the body."[859] The body is the seat and means of our present life, but not a necessary part of personality. Rather, it is the organ through which personality gathers sensations and expresses itself. Personality might exist without the body, conceivably learning of the external world by some means other than sensation and expressing itself by some means other than through the body, and yet "be as real as it is at present."[860] The body, then, is not an essential part of human nature. This is a full and true dualism. Death is the death of the body, and the spirit lives on quite successfully. It "leaves the material body, but lives on, and enters new scenes of action."[861]

Less clear-cut but exhibiting the same basic position is the thought of L. Harold DeWolf. He notes that any view that denies that there is a real difference of identity between the human soul and body is contrary to the indications of Christian experience.[862] DeWolf concedes that the Bible assumes that the life of the soul is dependent on a living body; but, he counters, "this assumption may well be attributed to old habits of thought and speech, to the difficulties of representing reality without the imagery of sense and to the indubitable necessity that the consciousness of man have a context of communication provided through some medium."[863]

DeWolf calls attention to numerous passages that suggest a body-soul dualism.[864] At his death Jesus gave up his spirit with the cry, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Matt. 27:50; John 19:30; Luke 23:46). Other salient references are Luke 12:4; 1 Corinthians 15:50; 2 Corinthians 4:11; 5:8, 10. The body has a high place in God's plan. It is used as an instrument to express and accomplish the person's intentions. But the soul must rule the body.[865]

The dualism of Clarke and DeWolf, while holding that the soul can exist apart from the body, did not lead them to deny resurrection of the body. In their view, the separate existence of the soul after death is a temporary situation. Some liberals, however, substituted immortality of the soul for the traditional doctrine of resurrection of the body. One of them, Harry Emerson Fosdick, regarded the New Testament idea of resurrection as a product of its time. Given the Jewish conception of Sheol, a place where the dead abide in meaningless existence, immortality could hardly be understood apart from the idea of resurrection.[866]

During the exile, Judaism came under the influence of Zoroastrianism, and the idea of resurrection became increasingly attached to the expectation of immortality.[867] Fosdick, however, like those who had been working from the perspective of Greek metaphysics, saw no need to identify the idea of immortality with resurrection. He preferred the idea of "persistence of personality through death" to that of resurrection of the flesh.[868]

Conservatives have not taken the dualistic view this far. While believing that the soul is capable of surviving death, living on in a disembodied state, they also look forward to a future resurrection. It is not resurrection of the body versus survival of the soul.[869] Rather, it is both of them as separate stages in a human's future.

Monism

The points of agreement between the trichotomist and the dichotomist views exceed their differences. They both agree that the human is complex or compound, made up of separable parts. In contrast, monism insists that humans are not to be thought of as in any sense composed of parts or separate entities, but rather as a radical unity. In the monistic understanding, the Bible does not view a human as body, soul, and spirit, but simply as a self. The terms sometimes used to distinguish parts of a human are actually to be taken as basically synonymous. A human is never treated in the Bible as a dualistic being.

According to monism, to be human is to be or have a body. The idea that a human can somehow exist apart from a body is unthinkable. Consequently, there is no possibility of postdeath disembodied existence. Not only, then, is there no possibility of a future life apart from bodily resurrection, but any sort of intermediate state between death and resurrection is ruled out as well.

Monism, which arose in part as a reaction against the liberal idea of immortality of the soul, was popular in neo-orthodoxy and in the biblical-theology movement. Their approach was largely through a word-study method. One prominent example is *The Body*, John A. T. Robinson's study in Pauline theology. He contends that the concept of the body forms the keystone of Paul's theology and that Paul is the only New Testament writer for whom the word σῶμα (*sōma*) has any doctrinal significance.[870]

According to Robinson, it is a remarkable fact that there really is no Hebrew word for body, no Old Testament equivalent of the key Greek word σῶμα. There are several Hebrew words translated by σῶμα in the Septuagint, of which the most important and the only one of theological significance is the word רָ֫

(*basar*). Yet it means essentially "flesh" rather than "body," and in the great majority of cases in the Septuagint is translated by σάρξ (*sarx*). Thus, the two most decisive words in Paul's anthropology, "flesh" (σάρξ) and "body" (σῶμα), represent a common Hebrew original. Robinson contends that Paul's anthropology is to be understood in the light of the Hebraic assumptions about humans.[871] Since the Old Testament presents a unitary view of the human, making no distinction between flesh and body, the terms "flesh" and "body," wherever they appear in Paul's writings, are not to be differentiated. Both refer to the whole person. Those who assert that σάρξ and σῶμα have different referents are mistaken.

How does Robinson account for the fact that Greek has two different words for what to the Hebrews was a single concept? He explains that the Hebrews never posed certain questions that the Greeks asked. Various issues that arose in Greek thought eventuated in the distinction between flesh and body:

1. The opposition between *form* and *matter.* The body is the form imposed upon and giving definition to the matter or substance out of which it is made.
2. The contrast between the *one* and the *many*, the whole and its parts. The body stands over against its component parts or organs.
3. The antithesis between *body* and *soul.* In Greek thought the body is nonessential to the personality. It is something a human possesses rather than what a human is.
4. The principle of individuation. The body, in contrast to nonindividuating "flesh," marks off and isolates one human being from another.[872]

Robinson sees these as issues the Greeks raised but which were foreign to Hebrew thought. It is enlightening to note that he does not give as documentation even one source in Greek thought for what he is propounding as the Greek view.

Robinson concedes that Paul does, of course, use the two terms σάρξ and σῶμα. But by σάρξ, Robinson claims, Paul does not mean flesh as the substance or stuff out of which the body is formed. Rather, flesh refers to the whole person, and particularly the person considered in terms of his or her external, physical existence. Thus, for example, it is used to point to the outward circumcision in contrast to the inward circumcision of the heart.[873] The word "flesh" is also used to designate humanity in contrast to God. It denotes weakness and mortality.[874] Similarly, in Paul's letters the word "body" does not refer to something humanity

has, external to one's own self. Rather it is a synonym for the person.[875] Robinson asserts that the words ψυχή and πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) also represent the whole person, but under different aspects, the latter term referring to that in the human by virtue of which the person is open to and transmits the life of God.[876]

In all of this, John A. T. Robinson is following the thinking of H. Wheeler Robinson, who discussed the Old Testament terminology for humans and human nature. The expression "body and soul" is not to be understood as drawing a distinction between the two, or dividing humans into components. Rather, it should be considered an exhaustive description of human personality. In the Old Testament conception, a human is a psychophysical unity, flesh animated by soul. As a now classic sentence of H. Wheeler Robinson has it, "The Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul."[877] He declares that the answer to the old question, "What is man?" is, "Man is a unity, and [this] unity is the body as a complex of parts, drawing their life and activity from a breath-soul, which has no existence apart from the body." Therefore, Hebrew has no explicit word for the body: "it never needed one so long as the body was the man."[878]

To summarize the modern monistic argument: the biblical data picture a human as a unitary being. Hebrew thought knows no distinction within human personality. Body and soul are not contrasting terms, but interchangeable synonyms.

Biblical Considerations

We must now evaluate monism in the light of all the biblical data. It appears that the absolute monistic view of human nature has overlooked or obscured some of the significant data. For there are some issues, especially in the area of eschatology, which the totally monistic view has difficulty dealing with.

Certain passages seem to indicate an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a state in which the individual lives on in conscious personal existence. One of these passages is Jesus's statement to the thief on the cross, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Another is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Some have thought that this is not a parable but the record of an actual event, since it would be unique among parables in naming one of the characters within the story. We are told that a rich man and a poor man died. The rich man went to Hades, where he was in great torment in the flames, while the poor man, Lazarus, was taken to Abraham's bosom. Both were in a conscious state. A third consideration pointing

to an intermediate state is Paul's reference to being away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). The apostle expresses a dread of this state of nakedness (vv. 3–4), desiring rather to be reclothed (v. 4). Finally, there are some references in Scripture where the distinction between body and soul is difficult to dismiss. A prominent instance is Jesus's statement in Matthew 10:28: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

While the radically unitary view has difficulty dealing with these eschatological considerations, there are also problems with the positive case made for this view. In his significant and influential volume *Semantics of Biblical Language*, James Barr cogently criticized John A. T. Robinson's treatise. Barr recalls Robinson's argument that the Greeks asked questions that forced them to differentiate the "body" from the "flesh," while the Hebrews made no such distinction. Barr insists that Robinson's statement "could not have been written except in a total neglect of linguistic semantics."[879] It rests upon the assumption that a difference in conceptions requires multiple terms.[880] Yet an examination of linguistics shows that this is not true. While some languages have two words for "man" (Latin *vir* and *homo*, German *Mann* and *Mensch*, Greek ἀνήρ [*anēr*] and ἄνθρωπος [*anthrōpos*]), others have only one (French *homme*, English *man*). Similarly, French, German, and Greek have more than one word for "know," whereas English and Hebrew have only one. Yet in each case the conceptual distinction exists in the culture; this is true even where there is a lack of separate terms representing each of the concepts.[881] Thus, the fact that the language does not differentiate between "body" and "flesh" does not mean that the Hebrews were unaware of the distinction. When taken beyond the isolated example that Robinson adduces, his procedure is seen to be perverse and even absurd.[882]

Barr further criticizes Robinson for neglecting historical or diachronic semantics.[883] Robinson claims that there was a need for the two terms σῶμα and σάρξ because of the contrast between form and matter, which he believes was basic to Greek thought. Yet, although the two terms were well established in the time of Homer, Aristotle maintains that the distinction between form and matter was unknown to the earliest Greek philosophers.[884] There is a real question, then, whether the Greeks did indeed think of σῶμα and σάρξ in terms of form and matter. As noted earlier, Robinson fails to give any documentation at all from Greek thought.

In addition to Barr's criticism, we need to note some other problems with Robinson's position. One is that he seems to see "the Greek view" as a

monolithic mentality. Yet anyone who has studied early Greek philosophy knows its great variety. Once again Robinson's lack of documentation weakens his argument.

Further, as is common in the biblical-theology movement, Robinson assumes a sharp distinction between Greek and Hebrew thought. This assumption had earlier been asserted by H. Wheeler Robinson, Johannes Pedersen, and Thorleif Boman, but has now, as Brevard Childs observes, been dismissed: "But even among those Biblical theologians who remained unconvinced [by Barr's critique], there was agreement that the emphasis of the Biblical Theology Movement on a distinctive mentality could never be carried on without a major revision."[885] The difference between Greek and Hebrew thought has come to be seen as much less radical than Robinson would maintain.

The assessment of the relative value of the two mentalities must be questioned as well. Robinson assumes that the Hebrew way of thinking is automatically the more biblical. Childs sums up this supposition of the biblical-theology movement: "Hebrew thought was something essentially good in contrast to Greek which was considered bad."[886] This assumption was never really vindicated, however. It now appears to be an expression of biblical theology's discomfort with more ontological and objective thinking. And this in turn may reflect the influence of one or more of the contemporary philosophical schools, such as pragmatism, existentialism, analytical philosophy, and process philosophy. It also appears to preclude any possibility of progressive revelation, which may well involve linguistic and conceptual forms as well as content. To insist rather upon canonizing, as it were, the Hebrew mentality risks what Henry Cadbury called "the peril of archaizing ourselves."[887]

Let us review for a moment Robinson's argument:

1. The Hebrews had a unitary view of human nature. They had no terminology distinguishing "flesh" from "body" because they did not differentiate between the whole person and the physical aspect.
2. Paul adopted the Hebrew conception or framework.
3. Although Paul used differing terms—σάρξ, σῶμα, ψυξή, πνεῦμα—he did not have different entities in mind. They are all synonyms for the whole person.
4. Therefore, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teaches a dualistic view of human nature. A body-soul dualism is not biblical.

Not only is Robinson's case not established, but it appears clear on the basis of the work of professional linguists that the absence of a multiplicity of terms is quite consistent with complexity. Robert Longacre has pointed out, for example, that in Mexican Spanish one word, *llave*, serves to designate what in English we use three words for: "key," "wrench," and "faucet." Does this indicate that the Mexican does not see in these objects the distinctions we see? Longacre thinks not. Because the word appears in various contexts, we know that the Mexican is as capable of clearly distinguishing the objects represented by this single term as is the English-speaking person.[888]

It appears, from the foregoing considerations, that the biblical teaching on the nature of the human does not rule out the possibility of some type of compound character, or at least some sort of divisibility, within the human makeup. This is not to say that the use of the terms σῶμα, ψυχή, and πνεῦμα is proof of complexity within humans' nature, but that the possibility is not precluded on lexical grounds. It may be taught in some other fashion in the Bible. And, indeed, we have already noted the scriptural passages that argue for a disembodied existence after death. There remain, however, a number of philosophical objections.

Philosophical Considerations

The major objections to a compound human nature are philosophical. They are basically contentions to the effect that dualism is simply untenable. A variety of arguments have been advanced, classifiable into five groups.

1. To refer to a "person" exclusive of his or her body is odd language; it is quite different from what is meant by "person" in ordinary language. Antony Flew points out that words such as "you," "I," "person," "people," "woman," and "man" are all used to refer to objects that can be seen, pointed at, touched, heard, and talked to.[889] To use the word "person," or any of these other words, in a sense other than "embodied person" is to change the meaning to such an extent that the crucial implications are lost.[890]

Bruce Reichenbach observes that to regard the human as a compound of body and soul drastically changes our idea of death as well. If we believe in the immortality of the soul, we will have to rephrase the statement, "My uncle died at age eighty," for his soul lives on. We will have to say instead, "My uncle's heart, lungs, and brain ceased functioning at the age of eighty, but he (as a person) lives on." But this will mean determining death (i.e., the cessation of life) by a criterion quite different from what is usually employed, for termination

of the functioning of the heart, lungs, and brain is the commonly accepted criterion of death.[891] In fact, technically, this will make the term "death" inapplicable to humans.

There are special problems here for the Christian dualist, for Scripture speaks of humans dying: "Just as people are destined to die once" (Heb. 9:27); "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8); "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). These verses speak of the individual, the person, as dying; they do not say that the body dies and the person somehow lives on. The resurrection is never spoken of as a resurrection of the body alone, but rather of the person. Consider also Jesus's atoning death. Scripture says plainly, "Christ died for our sins" (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3); it does not say merely that his bodily functions ceased.[892]

2. Human consciousness depends upon the physical organism and specifically the brain. Reichenbach lists several other evidences of a radical interrelatedness between the psychical and the physical: the inheritance of mental abilities; the effect of brain damage upon consciousness, memory, and conceptual ability; physical causes of feeblemindedness, which is a condition of the intellect; the centering of certain sensory states in specific areas of the brain. All of these argue against any sort of separable psychical part of the human.[893]

3. Personal identity is ultimately dependent upon the body. This argument has been advanced in several ways. One of the most cogent presentations is that of Terence Penelhum: our only criteria of personal identity are the physical body and memory. The former, however, is already ruled out if we are talking about a disembodied soul. And the latter is not an independent function, but is dependent upon a body. Thus there is no principle of identity for a disembodied soul or spirit, and the concept is ultimately meaningless.[894]

Penelhum goes to great lengths in objecting to the idea that remembrance of an event is an adequate criterion of personal identity. He presents the hypothetical case of a disembodied person who has experience E_2 as well as the memory of experience E_1. Now if E_2 and the memory of E_1 are successive events, there is the question of whether the same subject had these two experiences.[895] This cannot be established apart from the continuity of a physical body, and so identity has not been proved. If, on the other hand, E_2 and the memory of E_1 are simultaneous events, there is still no way of telling whether they are experienced by two different persons or by the same person, for either claim presupposes "an understanding of what individuates one person from another; which is absent in the disembodied case."[896]

4. Probably the most emphatic objection to dualism is that the concept is simply meaningless. This appraisal is an application of logical positivism's verifiability principle: a proposition is meaningful only if one can specify a set of sense data that would verify (or falsify) it. On this basis, A. J. Ayer concluded that the idea of a person surviving the annihilation of his or her body is self-contradictory: "For that which is supposed to survive . . . is not the empirical self (which is inconceivable apart from the body) but a metaphysical entity—the soul. And this metaphysical entity, concerning which no genuine hypothesis can be formulated, has no logical connection whatsoever with the self."[897] Similarly, Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted that the ideas of disembodied existence and of death as separation of the soul from the body are meaningless because we cannot specify a set of empirical data that would follow from either of them.[898]

5. Another objection to the view that the human is a body-soul dualism comes from behavioristic psychology. Behaviorism, the impetus of which was the work of John Watson, is in a sense to psychology what logical positivism with its principles is to philosophy. The behaviorists are determined to make psychology a science rather than the introspective, subjective matter that it once was. Thus they restrict its data to the observable behavior of human beings and the results of experiments, most of which are conducted on animals. There is an old joke about two behaviorists who meet on the street. One carefully observes the other and then remarks, "You're feeling fine. How am I feeling?"

Given the restriction of data to observable behavior and results of experiments, not only thoughts and feelings, but also entities such as the soul are excluded from consideration by psychology. Thinking and feeling are not regarded as activities of a mind or soul. They are behavioral activities. They represent physical reactions, primarily of the muscular, visceral, or glandular systems. This is clearly a monistic view, and a rather materialistic one at that.

A somewhat modified version of this approach is termed the central-state materialist theory of the mind. This theory takes mental states and sensations more seriously than does behaviorism, treating them as actual conditions of the brain or processes within the central nervous system. Mental states and sensations play a genuine causal role in the life of the individual. They are not merely psychical in nature, however, for they are the same processes that a neurologist would report. Each mental event can be characterized in (at least) two ways. An illustration frequently used is a lightning flash. The physicist reports a concentrated electrical discharge at a given time and place; the lay observer sees a jagged flash of light. Both are referring to the same event, yet their accounts are quite different. So also the neurologist reports electrochemical charges in the brain, whereas the subject would report a particular thought that

he or she had at the moment. Mental occurrences are granted, but they ultimately are explained in terms of physiological factors.[899]

Are these philosophical problems and objections insuperable? We will reply to each of them individually.

1. It is true that it is peculiar to think of a human being apart from a body and to use the word "person," or some similar term, to refer to an immaterial aspect of the human. If measured by customary usage, language that deals with religious matters is necessarily rather odd, because, as we have already noted in chapter 5 of this work (pp. 108–14), it has a special nature. It aims to produce a special discernment to get beyond the empirical referent to the meaning that is not so apparent. In some cases logically odd qualifiers are employed to help us discern that deeper meaning.[900]

"Death" is one of those terms that, in a religious context, are equivocal. There is the empirical referent and a deeper meaning requiring special discernment. Death D_1 refers to the termination of physical life, or cessation of the functioning of the physical organism. Death D_2 refers to termination of the total existence of the entity involved. The point at issue here is whether there is any sense in which some part of the person can survive physical death, and whether there is any type of death other than physical death. The answer is no if we assume that human existence is equivalent to the existence of the body. But the Bible uses the word "death" in different senses; it recognizes more than one type of death. Jesus said: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). And in Revelation 20:6 John speaks of a "second death," apparently distinguishing it from the first death (the normal understanding of death).

2. While the physical organism and specifically the brain are closely interrelated with human consciousness, does it necessarily follow that there is no possibility whatsoever of a separable immaterial aspect of human nature? Anyone who has ever towed a trailer knows that its presence affects the performance of the towing car in many ways, but when the trailer is unhitched, the car functions normally again. Moreover, the fact that mental abilities are physically inherited speaks only of the means of their transmission, not of their nature.

3. Paul Helm has replied to Penelhum's criticism that personal identity is ultimately dependent upon the body. While Helm's argument that memory in itself is an adequate criterion of personal identity is much too complex to deal with exhaustively here, some of the salient points may be mentioned. Facing the question of whether E_2 and the memory of E_1, if occurring successively, are experiences of one subject, Helm notes that the answer may depend upon what

type of experiences they are. If they are parts of a chain of reasoning, it is logical to assume that they are the experiences of the same person. If this were not the case, conclusions could not be reached, since they depend upon earlier premises.[901] If, on the other hand, we were to say that a second individual experienced E_2, someone who came into being with the experiences and memories of the person who went through E_1, would we not be propounding a meaningless statement, and one that is unnecessarily more complicated than the proposition that only one person is involved?

Helm takes his reply to Penelhum a step further. If E_2 and the memory of E_1 are simultaneous, what would distinguish one disembodied person from another is the same principle that distinguishes any two items from one another—either their properties differ or they have two distinct individual essences. To argue that there may be two individuals who have the same properties and the same essence would again tend to make language almost meaningless.[902] What Penelhum seems to be requiring is an independent confirmation, an outside observer to say that the same individual is involved in both events. But will not the problem of the inadequacy of memory as a criterion of personal identity apply to the observer as well? There is no assurance that the person who observed E_1 is the same person who observes E_2. And in addition, there is the possibility of mistaken perception on the part of the observer.[903] Helm argues instead that the concept of a "minimal person," that is, a person who no longer possesses a body but remembers things about his or her past, is intelligible and reasonable.[904]

4. Objections that stem from the verifiability principle are subject to the same difficulties that attach to the principle itself. Those difficulties are well known and have already been reviewed in chapter 5. Ayer says that the idea of a human surviving the annihilation of his or her body is self-contradictory, since the metaphysical entity, the soul, which is supposed to survive death, has no logical connection with the self. This line of reasoning, however, makes the unwarranted assumption that the self is identical with the body. Wittgenstein asserts that we cannot point to a set of empirical consequences that would follow from disembodied existence or separation of the soul from the body. Hence those ideas are meaningless. But he, too, is assuming that narrow standard of meaningfulness (i.e., a statement is meaningful only if verifiable by sense data) that we have seen to be inadequate. Indeed, we have offered models in the light of which religious concepts such as disembodied existence, though not amenable to scientific analysis, can nonetheless be viewed as cognitively meaningful.

5. The behavioristic conception of humanity must be criticized for its failure to depict humans as we find them. Its disregard of the introspective element in

human beings and restriction of valid knowledge to observable behavior truncate our experience of ourselves and of life. In this view a human is little more than a highly developed animal. But what behaviorist really treats love that he experiences as simply a biological matter or a conditioned response?

The modification of this approach, the central-state materialist theory, avoids these more obvious difficulties, allowing that subjective experiences are real, but maintaining that they can also be described in neurological terms as electrochemical charges in the brain. There is no inherent problem in characterizing an event in both ways. But to assume that the neurological account is the only or final word on the matter is to commit the genetic fallacy that an explanation of what caused something to occur is a full explanation. Further, we have no assurance that all subjective experiences can be described in neurological terms. This may very well be the case, but it cannot be proved by any method known today and quite likely never will be.

An Alternative Model: Conditional Unity

We have examined the philosophical objections to the view that in the human person there is some kind of complexity that makes possible a disembodied existence, and seen that none of them are persuasive. It is noteworthy that those who reject the notion of complexity, arguing instead for the absolute unity of the human person, seldom address the question of the nature of this sole component of humanness. Is it material or immaterial (i.e., spiritual)? Or is it perhaps a mixture or compound of the two? Much of the literature on the subject is at least incipiently materialistic, and the underlying assumptions even in some Christian theological writing often seem to be those of behaviorism. If personhood is in fact inseparably tied to bodily existence, the implications need to be thought through carefully.

We should note here that there have been efforts to find an intermediate point between dualism and absolute (materialistic) monism. A prime example is Henri Bergson's view of creative evolution. In addition to matter, there is within the human what Bergson terms an *élan vital*, an inner spiritual force of a purposive, creative character.[905] But this opens up areas that are beyond the scope of our present study.

We must now attempt to draw together some conclusions and form a workable model.[906] We have noted that in the Old Testament, the human is regarded as a unity. In the New Testament, the body-soul terminology appears, but it cannot be precisely correlated with the idea of embodied and disembodied existence.

While body and soul are sometimes contrasted (as in Jesus's statement in Matt. 10:28), they are not always so clearly distinguished. Furthermore, the pictures of humans in Scripture seem to regard them for the most part as unitary beings. Seldom is a spiritual nature addressed independently of or apart from the body.

Having said this, however, we must also recall those passages cited earlier in this chapter which point to an immaterial aspect of the human that is separable from material existence. Scripture indicates that there is an intermediate state involving personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection. This concept of an intermediate state is not inconsistent with the doctrine of resurrection. For the intermediate (i.e., immaterial or disembodied) state is clearly incomplete or abnormal (2 Cor. 5:2–4). In the coming resurrection (1 Cor. 15) the person will receive a new or perfected body.

The full range of the biblical data can best be accommodated by the view that we will term "conditional unity." According to this view, the normal state of a human is as an embodied unitary being. In Scripture humans are so addressed and regarded. They are not urged to flee or escape from the body, as if it were somehow inherently evil. This monistic condition can, however, be broken down, and at death it is, so that the immaterial aspect of the human lives on even as the material decomposes. At the resurrection, however, there will be a return to a bodily condition. The person will assume a body that has some points of continuity with the old body, but is also a new or reconstituted or spiritual body. The solution to the variety of data in the biblical witness is not, then, to abandon the idea of a composite human nature, thus eliminating any possibility of some aspect of a human persisting through death. Nor is it a matter of so sharply distinguishing the components of a human as to result in the teaching that the immortal soul survives and consequently there is no need for a future resurrection. It is not the immortality of the soul *or* the resurrection of the body. In keeping with what has been the orthodox tradition within the church, it is *both/and*.

What sort of analogy can we employ to help us understand this idea or complex of ideas? One that is sometimes used is the chemical compound as contrasted with a mixture of elements. In a mixture, the atoms of each element retain their distinctive characteristics because they retain their separate identities. If the nature of a human were a mixture, then the spiritual and physical qualities would somehow be distinguishable, and the person could act as either a spiritual or a physical being. On the other hand, in a compound, the atoms of all the elements involved enter into new combinations to form molecules. These molecules have characteristics or qualities that are unlike those of any of the elements of which they are composed. In the case of simple table salt (the

compound sodium chloride), for example, one cannot detect the qualities of either sodium or chlorine. It is possible, however, to break up the compound, whereupon one again has the original elements with their distinctive characteristics. These characteristics would include the toxic nature of chlorine, whereas the compound product is nonpoisonous.

We might think of a human as a unitary compound of a material and an immaterial element. The spiritual and the physical elements are not always distinguishable, for the human is a unitary subject; there is no conflict between the material and immaterial nature. The unity is dissolvable, however; dissolution takes place at death. At the resurrection a compound will again be formed, with the soul (if we choose to call it that) once more becoming inseparably attached to a body.

Another analogy has been proposed by Bruce Reichenbach. Suggesting that the body be thought of as an extremely complex computer, he observes that it is possible to construct two identical computers, program them identically, and feed them the same data. At the resurrection the body will be physically re-created and the brain programmed with the same data that one had while living on earth.[907] This analogy, however, fails to account for the biblical pictures of the intermediate state—a program and data without a computer do not constitute a functioning entity. Thus, intriguing as the suggestion is, it fails at a rather major point.

An alternative analogy, which comes from the world of physics, involves the concept of states of being. Whereas we once thought of matter and energy as two different types of reality, from the work of Albert Einstein we now know that they are convertible. They are simply two different states of the same entity. A nuclear explosion, with its tremendous release of energy, is a dramatic illustration of Einstein's formula $E=mc^2$. Now humans can similarly be thought of as capable of existing in two states, a materialized and an immaterialized state. The normal state of human beings is the materialized, in which the self is reified in physical, perceptible form. However, a change of state to an immaterialized condition can take place at death. Death is not so much the separation of two parts as the assumption of a different condition by the self. There can be and will be a final shift back to an embodied state. At the time of resurrection, the bodily condition will be reconstituted.

There are, unfortunately, several problems with this analogy. First, it does not fit perfectly, for Einstein's energy is still physical energy. Second, the analogy might lead to an understanding of God as pure energy, which would not be acceptable. Third, what about the cadaver? In an alteration of state, one would expect something roughly equivalent to vaporization. Perhaps the corpse is

simply a discard or residue from the transfer of state. Or better, as the original vehicle or organ or locus of the embodied state, it will again be used in the future in the rematerializing of the person. Finally, the primary emphasis of the analogy is on the whole self or the subject rather than on the parts of human nature.

Implications of Conditional Unity

What are the implications of contingent monism, that is, the view that human nature is a conditional unity?

1. Humans are to be treated as unities. Their spiritual condition cannot be dealt with independently of their physical and psychological condition, and vice versa. Psychosomatic medicine is proper. So also is psychosomatic ministry (or should it be termed pneumopsychosomatic ministry?). The Christian who desires to be spiritually healthy will give attention to such matters as diet, rest, and exercise. Any attempt to deal with people's spiritual condition apart from their physical condition and mental and emotional state will be only partially successful, as will any attempt to deal with human emotions apart from people's relationship to God.

2. A human is a complex being, whose nature is not reducible to a single principle.

3. The different aspects of human nature are all to be attended to and respected. There is to be no depreciating of the body, emotions, or intellect. The gospel is an appeal to the whole person. It is significant that Jesus in his incarnation became fully human, for he came to redeem the whole of what we are.

4. Religious development or maturity does not consist in subjugating one part of human nature to another. No part of the human makeup is evil per se. Total depravity means that sin infects all of what a human is, not merely the body or mind or emotions. Thus, the Christian does not aim at bringing the body (which many erroneously regard as the only evil part of human nature) under the control of the soul. Similarly, sanctification is not to be thought of as involving only one part of human nature, for no one part of the person is the exclusive seat of good or of righteousness. God is at work renewing the whole of what we are. Consequently, asceticism, in the sense of denying one's natural bodily needs simply for its own sake, is not to be practiced.

5. Human nature is not inconsistent with the scriptural teaching of a personal conscious existence between death and resurrection, as we shall see in our treatment of eschatology.

24
The Universality of Humanity

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Explore the biblical material and discover that God makes no distinctions when it comes to ethnic background, gender, or economic status.
2. Affirm that persons from differing races, genders, and economic backgrounds are all part of God's human family.
3. Recognize the importance of affirming the value of persons at all chronological ages as fully human and valuable to God.
4. Recognize the humanity of the unborn fetus from biological and biblical arguments and affirm its protection.
5. Recognize the biblical view of the unmarried and affirm their relation to God, to the church, and to humanity.
6. Oppose discrimination based on race, gender, economic status, age, the unborn fetal state, and marital status or any other basis.

Chapter Summary

After examining the origin, purpose, and destiny of all humanity, the characteristics of race, gender, economic status, age, the unborn fetal state, and marital status become incidental to one's basic humanity. God has regard for all persons. Since God takes that view, it is incumbent

upon the believer to adopt a similar view and to practice a godly reverence for all humanity. This is especially true for those who may be subject to discrimination.

Study Questions

- How has humanity used Scripture to further its own discriminatory ends concerning race and ethnic background?
- What features of the creation account explain the relationship of the woman to the man?
- Why is wealth, or lack of it, important to humanity and humanity's relationship to God?
- What arguments are given to contend that a fetus is indeed human?
- What does Paul say about individuals who are unmarried?
- How should the study of this chapter affect our practice at home, work, and church, and in general society?
- If you were preparing a lesson on the topic of discrimination, what biblical evidence would you marshal to oppose it on racial, gender, and economic grounds? Consider discrimination also as it affects the plight of the aged, unborn fetus, and single adult.

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We have seen that the human's purpose or destiny is to know, love, and serve God. God made humans able to know him and respond to him. This is the

fundamental distinguishing characteristic shared by all humanity. All other characteristics of the human race are incidental to one's humanity.

Nevertheless, there are some incidental variations among humans that do sometimes affect, at least in practice, society's regard of their humanity. While the fact that people who differ in some way are, nevertheless, fully human may not be rejected in theory, society tends to treat them as being somewhat less than others. It will be our aim in this chapter to examine what the Bible and the theology derived from it have to say about several categories of people. We will find that the special status that God accorded to Adam and Eve by making them, in distinction from the animals, in God's own image is extended to all members of the human race.

All Races

The first point to be noted is that all races are included in God's human family and thus are objects of his love. Yet the phenomenon of racial prejudice is still common. Widely differing groups have been singled out as targets of prejudice, which has sometimes led to outright slavery, and at other times to less extreme forms of discrimination. On occasion it has actually been supported by theological contentions regarding the status of certain racial groups in the sight of God. In *Is God a White Racist?* William Jones has written about one form of this phenomenon, which he terms "divine racism."[908] Divine racism divides the human race into two categories: "we" and "they." It is assumed that God has so divided the race, and shows special interest in and favor toward the "in" group. According to this view, God does not value all persons equally. He treats some more kindly than he does others. There is an intentional imbalance of suffering, with more being apportioned to the "out" group than to the "in" group.[909]

Jones does not suggest that divine racism is restricted to any one religion. Christianity has not been without examples, however. Perhaps the most extreme form has been the arguments of some white racists who actually went so far as to deny the humanity of blacks or, to put it differently, deny that blacks have souls.[910] This was an attempt to justify the inequality of slaves and slaveholders. One of the most common pseudotheological arguments advanced was that the traits of Noah's three sons will characterize their descendants until the end of time.[911] It was contended that Ham was born black; hence his descendants are the black race. A curse was placed upon Ham because of his wickedness, resulting in the servitude of his son Canaan to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. Thus all blacks are to be understood as under the curse of God, and

slavery is justified because God intended it. Another variety of this argument was the contention that Cain, who was cursed for murdering his brother Abel, was placed in servitude and turned black (the mark set upon Cain—Gen. 4:13–15). Ham supposedly married a descendant of Cain, so that Ham's son Canaan was doubly cursed.[912] Yet another contention was that the black is actually not part of Adam's race. The usual form of this contention was that the black is human, but constitutes another species of human; Adam is the father of only the white race.[913]

An additional argument was that blacks are to be understood as two-footed beasts. Since blacks are present with us today, they must have been in the ark. There were only eight souls saved in the ark, however, and they are fully accounted for by Noah's family. As one of the beasts in the ark, the black has no soul to be saved.[914] Racial discrimination and even slavery are justified because blacks are not humans; consequently, they do not have the rights that humans have.

Less extreme forms of prejudice have been directed at various groups. All have the tendency to attribute a lesser human status to the out group. Our response will consist of two approaches: refuting the case made for such positions, and advancing the positive biblical evidence that God's conferral of humanness extends to all races.

There is no biblical support for the position that blacks (or any other race) are less than fully human or inferior humans. There is, for example, no evidence to suggest that Ham was black. The same is true of the claim that the mark of Cain was blackness. Further, the contention that blacks are not humans contradicts anthropological evidence such as the interfertility of all races with one another.[915]

Of greater significance for us is the positive biblical evidence of the way God regards all races and nationalities. This theme is developed in Scripture especially in terms of Jewish and Gentile relationships. One might conclude from Israel's status as the chosen nation that God's concern for and interest in humanity are limited to the Jewish people. The Jews, however, were chosen not to be exclusive recipients of God's blessing, but rather to be recipients and transmitters of it. Even within the Old Testament era, there was room for outsiders to become proselytes to the faith of Israel. Rahab and Ruth the Moabite are prominent instances and are even found in Jesus's genealogy (Matt. 1:5).

Within Jesus's ministry, we find an openness to those who were not of the house of Israel. His concern for the Samaritan woman (John 4) and his offer of the living water to her indicate that salvation was not restricted to Jews alone. The Syrophoenician woman's request for the deliverance of her daughter from

demon possession was granted (Mark 7:24–30). Perhaps the most remarkable incident concerns the Roman centurion who came requesting healing for his paralyzed servant (Matt. 8:5–13). Jesus marveled at this man's faith, which exceeded anything he had found in Israel (v. 10). Jesus granted the man's request, but before he did, he made a remarkable prediction: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 11–12). Here is certainly anticipation of a time of extending God's grace to countless people regardless of their race.

In the book of Acts, the universality of God's grace is apparent. Peter's vision (Acts 10:9–16), in which he was commanded to eat not only clean but also unclean animals, was the sign for him to extend the message of salvation to Gentiles, first of all to the centurion Cornelius (vv. 17–33). Peter gave expression to the new understanding: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (vv. 34–35). When he preached the gospel to the group gathered at Cornelius's house, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he had previously fallen upon the Jews (vv. 44–48). This event gave impetus to the ministry to the Gentiles, which was implemented particularly by Paul and his associates.

Paul's ministry included many incidents that are instructive for us in regard to the status of non-Jews. One of the most significant is his encounter with the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17. The basic thrust of his message to them is universalistic in nature. God made the earth and everything in it (v. 24). He has given life and breath and everything to all people (v. 25). Paul particularly stresses the unity of the human race when he states, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands" (v. 26). His declaration to the Athenians that the "unknown god" whom they worship is actually the God whom he preaches (v. 23) is based upon the assumption that all people are part of the human race that God created and has provided with the means of salvation.

There is to be no division between Jew and Gentile within the church. In Ephesians 2:14 Paul asserts that Christ has broken down the wall of partition between them. Not only is salvation for all, but there is to be no discrimination based on nationality. This lesson was not always quickly understood and learned, and so when Peter compromised the Gentiles' standing by withdrawing from them when certain Judaizers came, Paul found it necessary to oppose him to his face (Gal. 2:11). In Galatians 3:6–9 Paul argues that all who have the faith of

Abraham are heirs of Abraham, regardless of nationality. In Revelation 5:9 the Lamb is said to have redeemed persons from "every tribe and language and people and nation."

The passages cited do not, of course, mention every specific race and nationality. It appears, however, that the grounds on which they rest are broad: all humans have been created in order to have fellowship with God, and the offer of salvation is open to all. In the sight of God with respect to justification, there is no distinction of race (Gal. 3:28).

Both Sexes

Women have at times been regarded as, at best, second-class members of the human race. They have not been allowed to vote or to exercise other rights enjoyed by men, and wives have in some cases been regarded as virtually the property of their husbands.[916] In the biblical world women had few rights, or at least far fewer than men. While to some extent the Old Testament did not overturn this situation, from the beginning there were indications that in God's sight women have equal status. These indications increased as time went on and the special revelation moved to progressively higher levels.

Already in the creation account we find indication of woman's status. In Genesis 1:26–27 there is a special emphasis, seemingly to ensure our understanding that woman possesses the image of God, just as does man. Although Karl Barth[917] and Paul Jewett[918] contend that we have triadic parallelism in 1:27 and thus the human's being created male and female is the image of God, that is not at all obvious. The first two strophes, "So God created man in his own image" and "in the image of God he created him," are equivalent, for they repeat the parallelism of verse 26, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." On the other hand, the third strophe, "male and female he created them," is unique to verse 27, and is not obviously equivalent to the other two. Instead of repeating the idea of the first two strophes, it seems to supplement them. It bears the same relationship to those two strophes that "and let them rule . . ." bears to the two elements in the first part of verse 26. In each case there is an addition to the thought. In the latter instance the addition makes it clear that the "man" who was created in the divine image is both male and female. *Both* bear the image of the Maker.

The same emphasis is found in Genesis 5:1–2 as well: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.'" The

statement about man's being created male and female occurs between two statements about God's creation of man, the first of which declares that God made man in God's likeness. There seems to be an emphasis upon the fact that both the male and the female of the species were made in the image of God.

A second noteworthy feature of the creation account is the relationship of the woman to the man, from whom she is taken. Sometimes much is made of the fact that she is described as a "helper" to him, as if this term implies some sort of inferiority or at least subordination of the woman to the man. A closer examination of Genesis 2:18 belies this conception, however. The expression "helpmeet," used in some older versions, actually translates two Hebrew words. The second, נֶגֶד (*neged*), means "corresponding to" or "equal to" him.[919] The word rendered "help," עֵזֶר (*'ezer*), is used of God in several places in the Old Testament: Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalms 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11. This would suggest that the helper envisioned in Genesis 2:18 is not inferior in essence to the one helped. Rather, the helper is to be thought of as a coworker or enabler. To be sure, the Hebrew word בַּעַל (*ba'al*), meaning "lord" or "master," is frequently used for a husband. It should be observed, however, that the feminine of that word also appears. In Genesis 20:3, for example, it is used to describe Sarah's relationship to Abraham. Thus, whatever the nature of the rule in the marital relationship, it is not unilateral.

The picture of woman given in Scripture is not one of insignificance or abject subservience. In Proverbs 31, for example, the virtuous woman is extolled. She is ever eager to promote the welfare of her family, but does not remain constantly within the confines of her home. She is engaged in trading and business affairs (vv. 18, 24).

We should also note that not only is woman created in God's image, but God is sometimes spoken of in feminine terms or imagery. God is depicted as the mother of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:18: "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth." The terminology Moses uses emphasizes the pangs of the birth process, making clear that it is the mother's role that is in view here. Jesus also uses feminine imagery to depict God. For example, he tells three parables picturing God's concern and search for lost persons: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15). In the first and third, the figure representing God the Father is masculine, but in the parable of the lost coin, it is a woman who is the main character. Moreover, Jesus chooses to single out a widow as an example of generosity in giving (Luke 21:1–4).

Jesus's attitude toward women, and his treatment of them, are also instructive. Although a Jew ordinarily had no dealings with Samaritans, and particularly not

with the blatant sinners among them, Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman in conversation because he cared about her spiritual condition (John 4). Jesus commended the faith of the woman with a hemorrhage who touched the edge of his cloak (Matt. 9:20–22). Mary and Martha were among Jesus's closest friends. The woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany (Matt. 26:6–13) would be remembered for her act of devotion whenever and wherever the gospel was preached (vv. 10–13). Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom Jesus appeared following his resurrection, and he instructed (commissioned) her to tell his disciples that he was risen (John 20:14–18). Indeed, women played a significant role from the very beginning of Jesus's life and ministry. It was Mary, not Joseph, who gave expression of praise to God in connection with the announcement of the coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:46–55). Elizabeth also praised and blessed the Lord (Luke 1:41–45). Anna was probably the first woman disciple of Jesus (Luke 2:36–38). Donald Shaner has summarized well Jesus's relationships to women: "It is striking that Jesus did not treat women as women but as persons. He took them seriously, asked them questions, encouraged their potential, and lifted them up to the dignity that they deserved."[920]

Probably the most direct declaration that women stand on the same footing as men in the sight of God, as far as salvation is concerned, is the classic text in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse is sometimes taken out of context and used to address issues that Paul is not talking about. He is not discussing equality in terms of employment nor the role of woman in places of service within the church, for example, as ordained ministers.[921] Rather, he is treating the important issue of justification by faith, the individual's status before God in terms of personal righteousness. Paul is saying that, with respect to personal salvation, there is no difference in God's treatment of male and female. All who have been baptized in Christ Jesus have put on Christ (v. 27).

We should also note, finally, the important role women have played in the work of the kingdom of God. Although in a minority, at all times of biblical history there have been women who occupy positions of leadership and influence. Miriam assisted Moses and led the Israelite women in singing and dancing after the escape from Egypt (Exod. 15:20–21). Deborah was a judge of Israel, and Jael slew Sisera (Judg. 4:17–22).[922] Esther saved the Jewish people from being destroyed by Haman. We have already observed something of the role of selected women in the New Testament. The faithfulness of the women around Jesus in the time of crisis is striking. We see them at the cross (Luke

23:49); they sought to anoint Jesus's body (Luke 23:55–56); they discovered the empty tomb, heard the message of the two angels, and told the news to the apostles (Luke 24:1–11).[923]

There are several indications in Scripture that the gift of prophecy was given to and to be exercised by women. Isaiah refers to his wife as "the prophetess" (Isa. 8:3), and Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Joel predicts a time when both men and women will prophesy (Joel 2:28), which Peter quotes and underscores (Acts 2:17). Paul specifies the conditions under which women should prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5).

Even Paul, who is sometimes accused of being rigidly opposed to the involvement of women in the work of the church, speaks positively of women in positions of leadership. He writes of Phoebe, "I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me" (Rom. 16:2). Priscilla and Aquila are spoken of as his co-workers in Christ Jesus, adding, "They risked their lives for me" (Rom. 16:3–4). Although we know no details about Mary (v. 6) and Persis (v. 12), we do know that they "worked very hard in the Lord." Paul also greets Tryphaena and Tryphosa, "those women who work hard in the Lord" (v. 12), Rufus's mother, who had been a mother to him, too (v. 13), Julia, and Nereus and his sister (v. 15). Paul allows women to prophesy in the assembly, at least under some conditions (1 Cor. 11:5). These indications of Paul's conception of the usefulness of women in ministering qualify those passages where he seems to restrict their activities. The restrictive passages, then, should probably be seen as relating to particular local situations (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:33–36).

People of All Economic Statuses

The Bible has a great deal to say about the poor. The Old Testament indicates that God has a special concern for the poor, as in his deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage and poverty they experienced in Egypt. This concern is embodied in God's warnings regarding mistreatment of the poor and oppressed. An example of these commands is Deuteronomy 15:9: "Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin."

A whole series of provisions was made for the welfare of the poor. Every third year a tithe was to be given to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut. 14:28–29). A promise was attached to faithful observance of this command: "so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." The sabbatical year (every seventh year) was particularly significant: the landowners were not to sow in their fields, and the poor were to be allowed to gather for themselves what simply grew of itself (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:3–6); Hebrew slaves were to be turned free after six years of service (Exod. 21:2). There was also a sabbath of sabbaths, the year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year, when land reverted to the original owner (Lev. 25:8–17). At all times part of the produce of the fields and vineyards was to be left for the poor to glean (Lev. 19:9–10), and a hungry person was allowed to eat fruit and ripe grain in a field, but not to carry any away (Deut. 23:24–25). Those who had means were to lend to the poor, and no interest was to be charged (Exod. 22:25). No poor Hebrew who sold himself was to be made a slave; rather, he was to be considered a hired servant (Lev. 25:39–40) and not to be treated harshly (v. 43). No one was to take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, since life virtually depended upon them (Deut. 24:6).

In particular, great care was to be taken that justice was done with respect to the poor: "Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits" (Exod. 23:6). Amos preached against those who disobeyed this command: "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos 5:12). The psalmist also denounced the persecutors of the poor: "In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. . . . Like a lion in cover [the wicked man] lies in wait. He lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net" (Ps. 10:2, 9).

Jesus himself was one of the poor. This is made clear in the account of his being brought as an infant to Jerusalem for the ritual of purification. The law prescribed that a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon were to be sacrificed (Lev. 12:6–7). However, "If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v. 8). The fact that Jesus's family offered "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24) rather than a lamb is an indication of their poverty. While Jesus in his ministry apparently did not suffer actual hardship and deprivation, he certainly did not have abundance and evidently depended often upon the hospitality of others, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He referred to this lack of means

when he said, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20).

Jesus’s teachings include a great deal about the poor and poverty. By quoting Isaiah 61:1–2 he indicated that he had come to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18, 21). Concern for the poor lay at the very core of his ministry. He spoke of the blessedness of the poor (Luke 6:20). Among the wonders he wanted reported to John was the fact that the poor had the gospel preached to them (Luke 7:22). Jesus also pointed out repeatedly the danger of wealth: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). In Jesus’s story of the rich man and poor Lazarus, the rich man after death is in the place of torment, but Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. Abraham says to the rich man, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25). It should be noted that wealth per se is no more of a cause for discrimination than is poverty. It is preoccupation with riches (Mark 10:17–31; Luke 8:14; cf. 1 Tim. 6:10) or the abuse of wealth that is the target of Jesus’s warnings and condemnation.

James also had some rather sharp things to say about mistreating the poor within the congregation. The drawing of distinctions in favor of the wealthy comes in for severe criticism: “Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (James 2:4–5).

Many other parts of the Bible emphasize that the poor and the rich are equal before God and that the righteous poor are superior to the ungodly rich. We read in the book of Proverbs: “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all” (Prov. 22:1–2). Earlier in the same book we find: “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse. . . . What a person desires is unfailing love; better to be poor than a liar” (19:1, 22). It does not matter to God whether one has great wealth or little. God has given the wealth and has decided where it is distributed; he is the cause of individual differences in circumstance. The church should adopt God’s perspective on wealth and poverty and regard the rich and the poor alike.

The Aged

The Bible also makes clear that all ages, including the very old, are fully human and valuable to God. In our day, especially in Western cultures, old persons are sometimes looked down upon. In part this is due to the cult of youth; youth is exalted as the fullest expression of humanity. With respect to physical capabilities this is true, for we reach our physical peak in our twenties, but in other respects maturation does not take place until later. In part the discrimination against the elderly is based upon a utilitarian or pragmatic approach to the assessment of individual worth. The elderly are regarded as being of little value since they are not able to contribute much to society, and may actually impose something of a hardship upon it.

The biblical attitude toward old age is much different. In common with Orientals generally, the Hebrews held old age in honor. Respect for the aged was required: "Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:32). A sign of Israel's degradation at the time of Jeremiah was its disregard of the elders—"elders are shown no respect" (Lam. 5:12).

In the Old Testament era old age was not feared or despised but rather was greatly desired as a sign of divine blessing. The book of Proverbs favorably contrasts the assets of old age with those of the young man: "The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old" (Prov. 20:29). Old age was considered a gift from God, additional opportunity to serve him: "With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation" (Ps. 91:16). The believer was given the assurance of God's presence with him to old age: "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you" (Isa. 46:4). The promise of longevity to those who honor their parents is found in both the Old Testament (Exod. 20:12) and the New (Eph. 6:1–3).

One reason for the high status accorded persons of old age was the belief that age carries with it wisdom. This belief is reflected in Job 12:20: "He [God] silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders." Consequently, positions of authority were given to the elderly. Note the use of the term "elder" for the leaders of Israel, a term that was carried over and applied to leaders of the local Christian assemblies or congregations. The decline in the physical strength that had made men valuable to their community was compensated for by an increase in wisdom that contributed another type of value. For this reason Peter advises, "You who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders" (1 Pet. 5:5).

The major impetus for the esteem of older people, however, came from a set of religious values—individuals were not valued simply in terms of what they could do for someone else. God does not love us simply for the sake of what we

can do for him, but for the sake of what he can do for us as well, the care he can provide for us. And because God has had such a relationship with older persons for a long time, he in a sense values them all the more. In a genuinely Christian setting, while there will of course be concern for young people and their potential, the elderly will not be disregarded or discarded. Their contribution will be welcomed, and their welfare will be highly prized.[924]

The Unborn

One other issue with far-reaching implications, particularly for ethics, concerns the status of the unborn or, more specifically, of the fetus still in the mother's uterus. Is the fetus to be regarded as a person, or merely as a mass of tissue within the mother's body? If the former, abortion is indeed the taking of a human life and has serious moral consequences. If the latter, abortion is simply a surgical procedure involving the removal of an unwanted growth like a cyst or a tumor.

Two types of arguments are advanced by those who contend that the fetus is indeed a person: biological and biblical. Frequently, they are utilized together. The biological argument employs various scientific studies of the development of the fetus during the period of gestation. The data are examined in an effort to determine the point of differentiation, the moment at which the individual identity of the fetus is positively established. It is generally observed that there is a gradual and continuous development of the fetus from conception to birth; therefore, no specific moment or event can be identified as the instant of the emergence of humanity or infusion of the soul. On this basis, it is necessary to regard the fetus as a human at every point of the developmental process.[925] More recent experiments seem to support the idea that the fetus actually has memory of events occurring earlier in the gestation.[926] Such arguments, of course, are based in natural theology; it employs the data of general revelation only. As significant as this endeavor is, we will not make it our chief authority.

Those who present the biblical argument have examined the Scriptures for indications of the status of an unborn fetus. A considerable number of passages are cited as bearing upon the question of whether God regards the fetus as human.

A passage frequently mentioned is David's great penitential outcry, Psalm 51, which contains the expression, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (v. 5). Although David uses personal pronouns here, it is not at all clear from this verse that he thought of himself as being a person

during the prebirth period. He comes closer to expressing this idea in Psalm 139:13–16: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body.” Here David speaks as if God had some sort of personal relationship with him when he was still in his mother’s womb.

A New Testament passage thought by some to bear upon this issue is Luke 1:41–44. Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist, is greeted by her kinswoman Mary, bringing the news that she, Mary, is to give birth to the Messiah. Luke reports: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed blessings over Mary and her baby, and said, ‘As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.’” If Elizabeth’s words are taken literally, we would have here an instance of prenatal faith. Yet it is hard to know just what interpretation to attach to this event. We are not certain as to precisely what is meant by Elizabeth’s being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Were she and therefore her words actually “inspired” in the technical sense of that term? Nor is it clear whether she meant for her assertion interpreting the action of her unborn child (he leaped *for joy*) to be taken literally.

Another New Testament passage sometimes cited in connection with the issue of the status of the fetus is Hebrews 7:9–10, the account of Abraham’s meeting and paying a tithe to Melchizedek. The writer concludes by commenting, “One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.” Taken at face value, this comment would argue for the humanity not only of an unborn fetus, but even of persons who have not yet been conceived, since Levi was a great-grandson of Abraham. It is more significant, however, to take this passage as evidence for traducianism, the view that a person’s entire human nature, both material and immaterial (or body and soul), is received by transmission directly from the parents; that is to say, the soul is not at some later time (e.g., birth) infused into the body, which was physically generated at conception. If Hebrews 7 does indeed support traducianism (and it appears to do so), this passage would in turn argue for the humanity of the fetus, since it would not then be possible to think of the fetus apart from a soul or a spiritual nature.

Perhaps the most helpful passage is Exodus 21:22–25, which appears in a long list of precepts and injunctions following the Ten Commandments. It reads, “If

people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." This is an application of the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation spelled out in Leviticus 24:17–20 ("Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner"). One common interpretation of Exodus 21:22–25 is that in the case of a miscarriage caused by a struggle between two other people, the *lex talionis* is applied only if the mother is harmed. On this basis it is concluded that the fetus was not considered a soul or a person, and thus is not to be thought of as fully human.[927]

An alternative interpretation, which, while less popular, has had a rather long history, has recently been revived in the midst of the modern controversy over abortion. Jack Cottrell has presented one of the clearest and most complete statements of this alternative.[928] According to Cottrell, the clause translated "so that there is a miscarriage" (RSV) should be literally rendered—"so that her children come out." The noun here is יֶלֶד (*yeledh*), which is a common word for child or offspring. The only thing unusual about the noun in Exodus 21:22 is that it is in the plural. The verb here is יָצָא (*yatsa'*), which usually means "to go out, to go forth, to come forth." It is often used to refer to the ordinary birth of children, as coming forth either from the loins of the father or from the womb of the mother. Examples of the former usage are found in Genesis 15:4; 46:26; 1 Kings 8:19; and Isaiah 39:7. Instances of the latter are found in Genesis 25:25–26; 38:28–29; Job 1:21; 3:11; Ecclesiastes 5:15; and Jeremiah 1:5; 20:18. In each of these cases יָצָא refers to the ordinary birth of a normal child; in no case is the word used of a miscarriage. In Numbers 12:12 it refers to the birth of a stillborn child; it should be noted that this is a stillbirth, not a miscarriage. The concept of stillbirth is communicated through the specific description of the child ("a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away"), not through the verb יָצָא. There is a Hebrew word—שָׁכֹל (*shakhol*)—which specifically refers to a miscarriage; it is used in Exodus 23:26 and Hosea 9:14. Cottrell concludes, "Thus there seems to be no warrant for interpreting Exodus 21:22 to mean 'the destruction of a fetus.'"[929]

According to Cottrell, the situation in view in Exodus 21:22–25 is simply this: if no harm is done in the case of a child born prematurely because its mother was hurt by men struggling against one another, there is no penalty other than a fine. If, however, there is harm, the principle of a life for a life and an eye for an eye is to be enforced. Note that there is no specification as to who must be harmed

for the *lex talionis* to come into effect. Whether the mother or the child, the principle applies. Interpreted in this way, Exodus 21:22–25 supports the contention that the Bible regards the unborn child as a person. The interpretation of Cottrell, Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch,[930] and others is more in keeping with the data of the passage than is the commonly held or traditional rendering. At the very least, then, the idea that the passage does not treat the fetus as fully human has been rendered highly questionable. Yet we cannot say that the passage conclusively establishes the humanity of the unborn.

Indeed, none of the passages we have examined demonstrates conclusively that the fetus is a human being in God's sight. Nevertheless, when taken as a whole, they do give us enough evidence to render that conclusion very likely. And when dealing with an issue as momentous as the possible destruction of a human life, prudence dictates that a conservative course be followed. If one is hunting and sees a moving object that may be either a deer or another hunter, or if one is driving and sees what may be either a pile of rags or a child lying in the street, one will assume that it is a human. And a conscientious Christian will treat a fetus as human, since it is highly likely that God regards a fetus as a person capable of (at least potentially) that fellowship with God for which human beings were created.

The Unmarried

Our final category concerns marital status. There is a tendency in many societies to regard marriage as the normal state of the human being. While there has been a decline in the popularity of marriage, with more and more persons choosing not to marry or postponing marriage, American culture still regards the marital state as more desirable and more natural. And within the church, the unmarried person often does not fit. Church programs frequently are designed for families. The single person may feel left out. The idea that a person is truly fulfilled only within marriage may well be present, either overtly or tacitly. Sometimes the idea is carried still further. The command of God to the first human pair to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28) is taken to mean that persons are truly human only when they have reproduced themselves, and that presupposes marriage.

The Bible, however, does not look upon singleness as a second-class condition. Indeed, the single life is honored and commended through both personal example and teaching. Our Lord never married, although some have attempted to offer reconstructions of history to establish that he did.[931] Further,

we have Paul's personal example and direct teaching commending the unmarried state. He wishes that all were as he is (1 Cor. 7:7). He advises the unmarried and the widows to remain single as he does (v. 8). While acknowledging that he has no command of the Lord regarding this matter, he nonetheless maintains that he is giving his "judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy" (v. 25). Some have interpreted this statement as an admission by Paul that what he is recommending here is merely a human opinion; it is not God's inspired Word. It appears more likely, however, that Paul is stating that the Lord is indeed speaking (or writing) through him even though the tradition has not preserved any words that the Lord himself spoke on this matter during his earthly ministry. This is the explication of "one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."

Paul urges upon his readers that in view of the impending (or present) distress they remain as they are (v. 26). Those who are married should remain married; the single should remain unmarried (v. 27). While it is certainly permissible for a widow to remarry, in Paul's judgment it is better to remain unmarried (vv. 39–40). Paul's advice is based on certain practical considerations. The married person must be concerned about pleasing his or her spouse as well as the Lord, whereas single people can devote themselves totally to pleasing the Lord (vv. 32–35).

It may well be that Paul's recommendation to remain single was related to a definite cultural situation of his time. The reference to "the present crisis" lends support to this hypothesis. If Paul did have a specific situation in mind, the preferability of the unmarried state cannot be generalized to all situations. It should be observed, however, that at least in this one situation, there was nothing wrong with being single. Thus the single state cannot be *inherently* inferior to the married state. The church would do well to keep this in mind in its ministry to the never married and the formerly married.

A consideration sometimes raised against the single state is Paul's prescription that bishops (1 Tim. 3:2), elders (Titus 1:6), and deacons (1 Tim. 3:12) be "the husband of but one wife" (NIV 1984). This is thought by some to exclude unmarried persons from these offices. However, the Greek phrase (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα—*mias gunaikos andra*) should not be seen as prescribing that a church officeholder be a married man, but that he be what we would call a "one-woman" type of man. That is, Paul is not prescribing a minimum of one wife, but a maximum. Accordingly, some translations have the reading "married only once," or something similar. Thus no one should be excluded from these offices merely because of being unmarried.

We have noted that the distinguishing mark of humanity, which is designated by the expression “the image of God,” is far-reaching, extending to all humans. In the sight of God, all humans are equal. The distinctions of race, social status, and sex are of no significance to him (Gal. 3:28). Salvation, eternal life, and fellowship with God are available to all persons. And because this is the case, Christians should show the same impartial interest in and concern for all humans, regardless of the incidentals of their lives (James 2:9).

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The Nature of Sin

Chapter Objectives

After completing the reading of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Relate the doctrine of sin to other doctrines and explain why it is difficult to discuss sin in contemporary society.
2. Identify and describe three methods for discussing sin and affirm the necessity of God's Word in understanding sin.
3. Examine the eight biblical terms that are used to characterize sin and thereby have a wider understanding of sin and its nature.
4. Identify and explain the results of sin from four biblical words.
5. Examine three common approaches to understanding the essential nature of sin and synthesize a definition.

Chapter Summary

The doctrine of sin is important to us since it affects and is affected by all other doctrines. Several methods have been used to study sin, but the analysis of the biblical data provides the best understanding of sin and its consequences. The causes of sin, character of sin, and results of sin may be analyzed through studying the terms for sin as set forth in Scripture. Sin is any evil action or evil motive that is in opposition to God.

Simply stated, sin is failure to let God be God and placing something or someone in God's rightful place of supremacy.

Study Questions

- Why is it difficult for people in contemporary culture to even discuss the concept of sin?
- Why, in the study of sin, is the biblical approach, among other possible approaches, the best one to use?
- What do the scriptural terms from both the Old and New Testaments contribute to our understanding of sin and its consequences?
- Consider the results of sin. How would you describe them?
- Sin has been described as a failure to let God be God. Do you agree with that description? Give some examples to support your answer.
- How is your life affected by sin? How does personal sin affect the lives of others? Give some examples.

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The Interrelationship between the Doctrine of Sin and Other Doctrines

The doctrine of sin is both extremely important and much disputed. It is important because it affects and is also affected by many other areas of doctrine. Our view of the nature of God influences our understanding of sin. If God is a very high, pure, and exacting being who expects all humans to be as he is, then the slightest deviation from his lofty standard is sin and the human condition is very serious. If, on the other hand, God is himself rather imperfect, or if he is an indulgent, grandfatherly type of being and perhaps a bit senile so that he is unaware of much that is going on, then the human condition is not so serious. Thus, in a real sense, our doctrine of sin will reflect our doctrine of God.

Our understanding of humanity also bears on our understanding of sin. If intended to reflect the nature of God, a human is to be judged not by comparison with other humans, but by conformity to the divine standard. Any failure to meet that standard is sin. If humans are free beings, that is, not simply determined by forces of nature, then they are responsible for their actions, and their shortcomings will be graded more severely than if some determining force controls or severely limits the capability of choosing and doing.

Our doctrine of salvation will be strongly influenced by our understanding of sin. For if a human is basically good with intellectual and moral capabilities essentially intact, then any problems with respect to his or her standing before God will be relatively minor. Any difficulty may be merely a matter of ignorance, a lack of knowledge as to what to do or how to do it. In that event, education will solve the problem; a good model or example may be all that is

needed. On the other hand, if humans are corrupt or rebellious, and thus either unable or unwilling to do what is right, a more radical transformation of the person will be needed. Thus, the more severe our conception of sin, the more supernatural the salvation needed.

One's understanding of sin is also important because it has a marked effect upon one's view of the nature and style of one's ministry. If humans are considered basically good and inclined to do what God desires and intends for them, the message and thrust of ministry will be positive and affirmative, encouraging persons to do their best, to continue in their present direction. If, on the other hand, persons are viewed as radically sinful, then they will be told to repent and be born again. In the former case, appeals to fairness, kindness, and generosity will be thought to be sufficient; in the latter case, anyone who has not been converted will be regarded as basically selfish and even dishonest.

Our approach to the problems of society will also be governed by our view of sin. On the one hand, if we feel that humanity is basically good or, at worst, morally neutral, we will view the problems of society as stemming from an unwholesome environment. Alter the environment, and changes in individual humans and their behavior will follow. If, on the other hand, the problems of society are rooted in radically perverted human minds and wills, then the nature of those individuals will have to be altered, or they will continue to infect the whole.

The Difficulty of Discussing Sin

As important as the doctrine of sin is, it is not an easy topic to discuss in our day, for several reasons. One is that sin, like death, is an unpleasant subject. We do not like to think of ourselves as bad or evil persons. Yet the doctrine of sin teaches us that this is what we are by nature. Our society emphasizes having a positive mental attitude. To speak of humans as sinners is almost like screaming out a profanity or obscenity at a very formal, dignified, genteel meeting, or even in church. It is strongly disapproved. This general attitude is almost a new type of legalism, the major prohibition of which is, "You shall not speak anything negative."[932]

Another reason it is difficult to discuss sin is that to many people it is a foreign concept. With the problems of society blamed on an unwholesome environment rather than on sinful humans, a sense of objective guilt has become relatively uncommon in certain circles. Guilt is understood as an irrational feeling that one ought not to have. Without a transcendent, theistic reference

point, there is no one other than oneself and other human beings to whom one is responsible or accountable. Thus, if our actions harm no humans, there is no reason to feel guilt.[933]

Further, many people are unable to grasp the concept of *sin* as an inner force, an inherent condition, a controlling power. People today think more in terms of *sins*, that is, individual wrong acts. Sins are something external and concrete, logically separable from the person. On this basis, one who has not done anything wrong (generally conceived of as an external act) is considered good.

Methods of Studying Sin

The topic of sin can be approached and studied in a number of ways. One is the empirical or inductive approach. One can either observe the actions of contemporary human beings or examine the deeds of biblical persons, and then make generalizations regarding their behavior and the nature of sin.

A second approach is the paradigm method. We could select one type of sin (or one term for sin) and set it up as our basic model of sin. We would then analyze other types of sin (or terms for sin) with reference to this basic model, regarding them as varieties or elucidations of our paradigm.

A third approach begins by noting all of the biblical terminology for sin. A wide variety of concepts will emerge. These concepts are then examined in order to discover the essential element of sin. This basic factor may then be used as our focal point as we endeavor to study and understand the nature of specific instances of sin. This will largely be the approach followed in this chapter.

Terms for Sin

Terms Emphasizing Causes of Sin

The Bible uses many terms to denote sin. Some focus on its causes, others on its nature, and still others on its consequences, although these categories may not always be clear-cut. The first are those that emphasize causes of sin, predisposing factors that give rise to sin.

IGNORANCE

One of the New Testament words stressing a cause of sin is ἄγνοια (*agnoia*). A combination of a Greek verb meaning “to know” (γινώσκω—*ginōskō*, from

γνόω—*gnoō*) and the alpha privative, it is related to the English word "agnostic." Together with its cognates it is used in the Septuagint to render the verbs שָׁגָה (*shagah*) and שָׁגַג (*shagag*), which basically mean "to err." Its immediate derivation is from ἀγνοέω (*agnoeō*, "to be ignorant"). This word is often used in settings where it means innocent ignorance (Rom. 1:13; 2 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 1:22). Some things done in ignorance were apparently innocent in the sight of God, or at least he overlooked them (Acts 17:30). Yet at other points ignorant actions seem to be culpable. Ephesians 4:18 says of the Gentiles: "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." In two passages, Acts 3:17 and 1 Peter 1:14, it is questionable whether the ignorance is culpable or innocent. In the former, however, Peter's immediate appeal to his hearers to repent would suggest responsibility. The one instance of the noun ἀγνόημα (*agnoēma*, "sin of ignorance") is in Hebrews 9:7, referring to the annual visit of the high priest into the Holy of Holies in order to offer sacrifice both for himself and "for the sins the people had committed in ignorance." These errors or ignorances apparently were such that the people were liable to punishment for them. This was willful ignorance—the people could have known the right course to follow, but chose not to know it.

Error

More abundant are references to sin as error, that is, the human tendency to go astray, to make mistakes. The primary terms in the Old Testament are שָׁגָה (*shagah*) and שָׁגַג (*shagag*) together with their derivatives and related words. שָׁגָה is used both literally and figuratively. In its literal sense it is used of sheep that stray from the flock (Ezek. 34:6) and of drunken persons stumbling and reeling (Isa. 28:7). Although the related noun מִשְׁגֶּה (*mishgeh*) is used of an accidental mistake in Genesis 43:12, the verb generally refers to an error in moral conduct. The context indicates that the person committing the error is liable for the action. A particularly clear example is found in 1 Samuel 26:21. Saul sought to kill David, but David has spared Saul's life. Saul says, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong."

The verb שָׁגַג and the related noun שְׁגָגָה (*sh^{e}gagah*) occur primarily in ritualistic passages. Among the nonritualistic instances, Genesis 6:3 seems to refer to human weakness and propensity to error. The Lord says: "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years." In two other cases, Psalm 119:67 and Ecclesiastes

10:5, the error appears to be culpable. The latter passage reads, “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler.” Job 12:16 may also refer to culpable error. The ritualistic passages in many cases have to do with the discovery that a law of the Lord has been unwittingly broken through ignorance or a mistake in judgment (e.g., Lev. 4:2–3, 22–24, 27–28; Num. 15:22–29). In Leviticus 22:14 we have the case of someone’s mistakenly eating food that only the priests were to eat. Although it was done in error, the fact that a small fine was levied is an indication that the offending party should have been more careful. This sense of responsibility for one’s errors carries over to other instances as well.

More common than either גָּה or גַּג is עָה (*ta’ah*), occurring approximately fifty times in the Old Testament. The basic meaning is “to err or wander about.” Like עָה, גָּה is used to describe someone who is intoxicated (Isa. 28:7).[934] It is also used of perplexity (Isa. 21:4). Isaiah speaks of sinners who err in spirit (29:24). The term refers to deliberate rather than accidental erring.

In the New Testament, the term that most frequently denotes sin as error is πλανῶμαι (*planōmai*), the passive form of πλανάω (*planaō*). It emphasizes the cause of one’s going astray, namely, being deceived. Yet going astray as a result of being deceived is often an *avoidable* error, as statements like “Take heed that no one leads you astray” and “Do not be deceived” indicate (Mark 13:5–6; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 6:7; 2 Thess. 2:9–12; 1 John 3:7; 2 John 7). The source of this leading astray may be evil spirits (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:6; Rev. 12:9; 20:3), other humans (Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 3:13), or oneself (1 John 1:8). Regardless of the source, those who fall into error know or ought to know that they are being led astray. Jesus likened sinners to straying sheep (Luke 15:1–7), and also observed that the Sadducees’ error was that they knew neither the Scripture nor the power of God (Mark 12:24–27). The sin against nature is termed error in Romans 1:27, and in Titus 3:3, Paul describes life without Christ as “foolish, disobedient, deceived.” In Hebrews the people in the wilderness are characterized as going astray in their hearts (3:10). The high priest dealt gently with the sins of the ignorant and wayward, since he also was subject to such weaknesses; nevertheless, sacrifices had to be offered for those sins (5:2–3).

From the foregoing, it appears that both the Old and New Testaments recognized various errors as sin, although there were clearly innocent errors, acts committed in ignorance, for which no penalty (or perhaps a small fine) was assessed. Evidence of this is seen in the provision of cities of refuge for those who had unwittingly killed someone (Num. 35:9–15, 22–28; Josh. 20). Of course, acts like involuntary manslaughter are more in the nature of accidents

than the result of willful ignorance. In most cases, however, what the Bible terms errors simply ought not to have occurred: one should have known better, and was responsible to so inform oneself. While these sins are less heinous than the deliberate and rebellious type of wrongdoing, the individual is still responsible for them, and therefore penalty attaches to them.

INATTENTION

Another scriptural designation for sin is inattention. In classical Greek the word παρακοή (*parakoē*) has the meaning "to hear amiss or incorrectly."[935] In several New Testament passages it refers to disobedience as a result of inattention (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 10:6). The clearest case is Hebrews 2:2–3, where the context indicates the meaning that we are suggesting: "For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience [παρακοή] received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him."

Similarly, the verb παρακούω (*parakouō*) means "refuse to listen" (Matt. 18:17) or "ignore" (Mark 5:36). Thus the sin of παρακοή (*parakoē*) is either failure to listen and heed when God is speaking, or disobedience following upon failure to hear aright.

Terms Emphasizing the Character of the Sin

In the preceding section we examined terms emphasizing causes of sin, factors predisposing us to sin, rather than the character or nature of the sin, although something of the latter is also contained within those terms. In many cases, the sins we examined involve relatively minor consequences. We now come to a group of sins, however, which are so serious in character that it makes little difference why they occur, what prompts the individual to commit them. The nature of the deed is the crucial matter.

MISSING THE MARK

Probably the most common of those concepts that stress the nature of the sin is the idea of missing the mark. It is found in the Hebrew verb חָטָא (*chaṭa'*) and in the Greek verb ἁμαρτάνω (*hamartanō*). The Hebrew verb and its cognates appear about six hundred times and are translated in the Septuagint by thirty-two different Greek words, the most common rendering by far being ἁμαρτάνω and its cognates.[936]

A literal usage of חָטָא can be found in Judges 20:16. Seven hundred crack marksmen, all of them left-handed (or ambidextrous) and from the tribe of Benjamin, "could sling a stone at a hair and not miss." Another literal usage is in Proverbs 19:2: "hasty feet [will] miss the way." Such literal usages are rare, however.

The phrase "missing the mark" usually suggests a mistake rather than a willful, consciously chosen sin. But in the Bible the word חָטָא suggests not merely failure, but a decision to fail, a voluntary and culpable mistake.[937] Ryder Smith puts it very strongly: "The hundreds of examples of the word's *moral* use require that the wicked man 'misses the right mark *because he chooses* to aim at a wrong one' and 'misses the right path *because he deliberately* follows a wrong one'—that is, there is no question of an innocent mistake or of the merely negative idea of 'failure.'"[938]

The word חָטָא is used to refer to one's actions in relationship both to other humans and to God, although the latter is much more common than the former. In ritualistic passages there are a few instances where the noun form seems to refer to an unwitting sin. There it is often found in conjunction with the noun שְׁגָגָה (“unwittingly," i.e., through ignorance); it is translated "sin" or "sin offering" (e.g., Lev. 4–5). These two concepts of the sin committed and the offering made for the sin seem to be bridged in the idea of "bearing sin," which is found, for example, in Leviticus 24:15 and Isaiah 53:12. This is in keeping with Gerhard von Rad's observation that "in Hebrew the act and the evil consequences following it which Israel will 'meet with,' that is, which will react upon Israel, are one and the same."[939] Sin is a heavy burden that must be borne.

The most common New Testament term, and the one most nearly equivalent to חָטָא, is ἁμαρτάνω and its two noun forms, ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) and ἁμάρτημα (*hamartēma*). This conclusion is based upon two considerations. One is that, as we pointed out earlier, ἁμαρτάνω is the word most frequently used in the Septuagint to render חָטָא. The other consideration is that the basic meaning of the two words is the same. The verb ἁμαρτάνω originally meant "to miss, miss the mark, lose, not share in something, be mistaken."[940] The noun ἁμαρτία denotes the act itself, the failure to reach a goal, and ἁμάρτημα denotes the result of this act.

This word family constitutes the most prominent New Testament terms for sin. It is used far more frequently (there are almost three hundred occurrences) than any of the other terms. As in the Septuagint, the meaning in the New Testament is to miss the mark because one aims at the wrong target, emphasizing what actually occurs rather than one's motivation for aiming wrong.

This sin is always sin against God, since it is failure to hit the mark he has set, his standard, of perfect love of God and perfect obedience to him. We miss this mark and sin against God when, for example, we fail to love others, since love of others would inevitably follow if we truly loved God. Similarly, sinning against one's own body is mistreatment of God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16–17) and therefore a sin against God.

Some additional observations are needed. One is that the idea of blameworthiness is clearly attached to missing the mark. Whatever antecedents may have led to the act of sin, it is culpable behavior. The fact that חָטָא is often found in confessions indicates that the sinner senses responsibility. One has a goal or purpose and has failed to achieve it. While some protest that this is a Greek way of thinking, it is found in both Testaments.

Further, we should note that there was a development and refinement of the concept between the Old Testament and New Testament periods. Greek has not only the noun ἁμαρτία, the actual act of sinning, but also the noun ἁμάρτημα, the end result of the sin. There is no equivalent distinction in Hebrew, perhaps because, as we pointed out earlier, the act and the result were thought of as inseparable and even identical.

Irreligion

Sin is also designated irreligion, particularly in the New Testament. One prominent word is the verb ἀσεβέω (*asebēo*), along with its noun form ἀσέβεια (*asebeia*) and its adjectival form ἀσεβής (*asebēs*). This is the negative of σέβω (*sebō*), which means "to worship" or "to reverence" and is always found in the middle voice in the New Testament. Ἀσεβέω is the contrary of the term εὐσεβέω (*eusebeō*) and its cognates, which are especially common in the Pastoral Epistles. The verb εὐσεβέω and its cognates, together with the term θεοσεβής (*theosebēs*), are used of the piety of the devout. Thus the cluster of terms around ἀσεβέω means not so much ungodliness as irreverence. They are found particularly in Romans, 2 Peter, and Jude. "Impiety" and its cognates may be the best English rendering.

The words ἀδικέω (*adikeō*), ἀδικία (*adikia*), and ἄδικος (*adikos*) also denote irreligion, or the absence of righteousness. In classical Greek ἀδικία is not very clearly defined and hence takes on various nuances of meaning.[941] The adjective ἄδικος can mean "wrong, useless, not of a right nature." The words in this family often occur in legal contexts, where they signify neglect of one's duties toward the gods. In the Septuagint they are used to translate a variety of Hebrew words; ἀδικέω is used for no fewer than twenty-four words. The noun form is

most frequently found in the singular, which some have seen as an indication that the idea of individual sins had already advanced to the more encompassing idea of *sin*.

The δίκη (*dikē*), or righteousness, to which ἀδικία is contrasted, was originally the justice of the law court.[942] Thus, in the New Testament ἀδικία is injustice or, more broadly, any unrighteous conduct. It is failure to measure up to the standard of righteousness. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul asks, "Do you not know that the unrighteous [ἄδικοι—*adikoi*] will not inherit the kingdom of God?"(RSV). And in Colossians 3:25 he says, "Anyone who does wrong [ἀδικῶν—*adikōn*] will be repaid for their wrongs [ἠδίκησε—*ēdikēse*], and there is no favoritism." From these and other texts we conclude that in the New Testament, ἀδικία is behavior (either active or passive) contrary to the standard of righteousness, although that standard may not be concretely identified as the law.

One additional term in this grouping is the noun ἀνομία (*anomia*) together with the adjective ἄνομος (*anomos*) and the adverb ἀνόμως (*anomōs*). These are not very common in the New Testament. They are obviously, in one way or another, the negation of νόμος (*nomos*, "law"). There are two basic senses. Paul uses the adjective and adverb to refer to persons who did not have the Jewish law, that is, Gentiles (Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 9:21), and Peter is probably using the adjective in a similar way in Acts 2:23. More often, however, these words refer to lawbreakers in general, both Jew and Gentile. Peter says of Lot that he "was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard" (2 Pet. 2:8; see also 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 1:9). The Gentiles, although they did not have the Jewish law, nonetheless did possess a divine law, which they constantly broke. The word ἀνομία never refers to a breaking of the law in the narrow sense of the Mosaic regulations, but always to a breaking of the law of God in the broader sense. The only usages of ἀνομία in the Synoptic Gospels are four instances in Matthew (7:23; 13:41; 23:28; 24:12). In each case it is Jesus who uses the term; in each case a breach of the universal law known to everyone is in view; and in each case the context alludes to the judgment that will occur at the second coming of Christ. Several other passages in the New Testament speak of the violation of God's law in the broader sense and occur in contexts that refer to Christ's second coming and the judgment (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:1–12; 1 John 3:2–4). Ryder Smith summarizes: "Whenever *anomia* is used, the concepts of law and judgment are present, and, in the characteristic and more numerous instances, the reference is not to the Jewish Law, but to anything and everything that any man knows that God has commanded."[943] It is noteworthy that when Paul refers to a

violation of the law of the Jews, he uses another word, παρανομέω (*paranomeō*) (Acts 23:3).

Transgression

The Hebrew word עָבַר (*‘abar*) appears approximately six hundred times in the Old Testament. It means, literally, “to cross over” or “to pass by”; nearly all of the occurrences are in the literal sense. In a number of passages, however, the word involves the idea of transgressing a command or going beyond an established limit. In Esther 3:3 it is used of an earthly king’s command. In most of the parallel cases, however, it is used of transgressing the Lord’s commands. There is a concrete example in Numbers 14:41–42. The people of Israel want to go up to the place that the Lord has promised, but Moses says, “Why are you disobeying the LORD’S command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies.” The people of Israel were not to transgress God’s covenant (Deut. 17:2) or his commandment (Deut. 26:13). Other examples include Jeremiah 34:18; Daniel 9:11; and Hosea 6:7; 8:1.

While a number of Greek words are used in the Septuagint to translate עָבַר, the one closest in meaning is παραβαίνω (*parabainō*, “break”) and its noun form παράβασις (*parabasis*, “transgression”). The verb appears in Matthew 15:2–3. The Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus: “‘Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!’ Jesus replied, ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?’” Sometimes these terms refer to the transgression of a particular commandment, for example, Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14).[944] The terms always carry the implication that some law has been transgressed. Consequently, Paul can say, “And where there is no law there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). The reference is usually to Jewish law (Rom. 2:23, 25, 27; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; 9:15). Even where something wider is suggested (Gal. 2:18; James 2:9, 11), there is a direct reference to the Jewish law. This is in keeping with the distinction noted earlier between ἀνομία and παρανομέω.

Iniquity or Lack of Integrity

Sin is also characterized as iniquity. The primary word here is עָוַל (*‘awal*) and its derivatives. The basic concept seems to be deviation from a right course. Thus, the word can carry the idea of injustice, failure to fulfill the standard of

righteousness, or lack of integrity. The idea of injustice is evident in Leviticus 19:15: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” In the former case, lack of integrity is seen in failure to fulfill or maintain the just law of God. In the latter case, lack of integrity is seen in the disunity in the individual—a discrepancy between present and past behavior or character.

Rebellion

A number of Old Testament words depict sin as rebellion, a rather prominent idea in Hebrew thought. The most common of these is עָשַׁע (*pasha’*) together with its noun עֵשַׁע (*pesha‘*). The verb is often translated “transgress,” but the root meaning is “to rebel.” It is sometimes used of rebellion against a human king (e.g., 1 Kings 12:19), but more frequently refers to rebellion against God. One of the most vivid of these latter usages is Isaiah 1:2: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.”

Among other words that convey the idea of rebellion is מָרָה (*marah*). Usually translated “to rebel,” it denotes “refractoriness.”[945] Isaiah 1:20 reads, “‘If you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.’ For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Another word depicting sin as rebellion is מָרַד(*marad*). God says to Ezekiel: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day” (Ezek. 2:3). We should also mention סָרַר(*sarar*). It conveys the idea of stubbornness as well as rebellion (Deut. 21:18; Ps. 78:8). The Hebrews had an extensive vocabulary for rebellion, evidence that this was an all too common practice among them. The prophets in particular spoke out against this type of behavior, for by their time the temptation to throw off the rule of the Lord had become severe.

The New Testament also characterizes sin as rebelliousness and disobedience. The most common terms are the noun ἀπείθεια (*apeitheia*) and the related verb ἀπειθέω (*apeitheō*) and adjective ἀπειθής (*apeithēs*). In all, these terms appear twenty-nine times. In two cases (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2), they refer to disobedience to parents, but in the vast majority of cases they refer to disobedience to God. The Israelites in the time of Moses failed to enter the promised land because of their disobedience (Heb. 3:18; 4:6). John the Baptist was sent to turn the disobedient Jews of his time to wisdom (Luke 1:17). It is also said of ancient Gentiles (Heb. 11:31; 1 Pet. 3:20) that they were disobedient, as were the contemporary Gentiles (Rom. 1:30). Gentiles were responsible since they apparently had the law of God written on their hearts. Paul even uses the

expression “sons of disobedience” in Ephesians 2:2 and 5:6, and perhaps in Colossians 3:6 (depending on the textual reading). It is not merely believers who disobey, but in numerous passages outsiders are referred to as disobedient (e.g., John 3:36; Acts 14:2; 19:9; 1 Pet. 2:8; 3:1; 4:17). Rejecting the gospel is referred to as “disobeying,” since it is assumed that those who accept the gospel will obey.

Two other New Testament terms that more concretely convey the idea of rebellion are ἀφίστημι (*aphistēmi*) and ἀποστασία (*apostasia*). The former is used in 1 Timothy 4:1 and Hebrews 3:12 of Christians who fall away from the faith. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul speaks of a final apostasy, and in Acts 21:21 the Jerusalem brothers inform him that he is rumored to have taught the Jews to forsake Moses (his teachings). The verb πικραίνω (*pikrainō*) and its derivatives, which are frequently used in the Septuagint (particularly in the form παραπικραίνω—*parapikrainō*) to translate the Hebrew terms for rebellion, are usually used in the New Testament to speak of provoking humans rather than God. The one major exception is in Hebrews 3:8–16.

To summarize: All persons are assumed to be in contact with the truth of God, even the Gentiles, who do not have his special revelation. Failure to believe the message, particularly when openly and specially presented, is disobedience or rebellion. Anyone who disobeys a king is considered an enemy.[946] Likewise the multitudes who disobey God’s Word.

Treachery

Closely related to the concept of sin as rebellion is the idea of sin as breach of trust or treachery. The most common Hebrew word in this connection is מָעַל (*ma’al*), which in the majority of instances denotes treachery against God. It is used in Numbers 5:12 and 27 of a woman’s unfaithfulness to her husband. Achan is said to have “acted unfaithfully” by taking devoted things (Josh. 7:1; 22:20). An excellent example of the use of this term to denote treachery against God is found in Leviticus 26:40 (NIV 1984): “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me . . .” In Ezekiel 14:13 and 15:8 God affirms that any land that acts faithlessly against him will be made desolate and unbearing. One other Hebrew word, בָּגַד (*bagad*), is occasionally used to refer to treachery against God (Ps. 78:57; Jer. 3:10; Mal. 2:11).

There are New Testament references to sin as treachery as well. Among the words used in the Septuagint to translate מָעַל are παρατίπτω (*parapiptō*) and παράπτωμα (*paraptōma*), both of which mean “to fall away.” The one instance

of παραπίπτω in the New Testament is in Hebrews 6:6, referring to a deliberate turning from what one has been exposed to and has partaken of. Of twenty-one occurrences of παράπτωμα, Ryder Smith says that "it is likely that, in the New Testament as in LXX, the idea of a traitor's desertion is never wholly lost."[947]

In both Testaments, there is a focus upon the bond or covenant between God and his people. The people in the covenant enjoy a special relationship with God or have at least been introduced to the things of God. God has entrusted them with an exceptional gift. The sin of betrayal of or infidelity to that trust is appropriately labeled treachery. It is especially reprehensible because of what has been violated.

PERVERSION

The basic meaning of the word עָוָה (*awah*) is "to bend or twist." It means, as well, "to be bent or bowed down."[948] This literal meaning is seen in Isaiah 21:3 ("I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see") and 24:1 ("See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants"). In Proverbs 12:8 the idea is transferred from the physical to the mental realm, from a twisted body (as in Isa. 21:3) to a warped mind: "A person is praised according to their prudence, and one with a warped mind is despised." The noun forms derived from עָרָה speak of the destruction of cities (Ps. 79:1; Isa. 17:1; Jer. 26:18; Mic. 1:6; 3:12) and of distortion of judgment: "The LORD has poured into them a spirit of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit" (Isa. 19:14).

The basic meaning is metaphorically present when עָרָה or a related word is used to denote sin. The term frequently carries the suggestion of punishment. Cain, for example, says, "My punishment is more than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). Again we see a close connection between sin and its consequences. Similarly, עָרָה and its derivatives occasionally suggest the condition of guilt or iniquity. This emphasis is seen clearly in Hosea 5:5 ("Israel's arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them") and 14:1 (2) ("Your sins have been your downfall!"). Here emerges the concept of sin not merely as isolated acts, but as an actual alteration of the condition or character of the sinner. The true nature for which and in which the human was created (the image and likeness of God) is twisted or disturbed. This is both the result and the cause of sin.

ABOMINATION

The characterization of sin as abomination appears to have special reference to God's attitude toward sin and its effect upon him. "Abomination" is the most common English translation of שִׁקּוּץ (*shiqquts*) and תּוֹעֵבָה (*to'ebah*). These terms generally describe an act particularly reprehensible to God, such as idolatry (Deut. 7:25–26), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), wearing clothing of the opposite sex (Deut. 22:5), sacrificing sons and daughters (Deut. 12:31) or blemished animals (Deut. 17:1), and witchcraft (Deut. 18:9–12). These practices virtually nauseate God. The term "abomination" indicates that these sins are not simply something that God peevishly objects to, but that produces revulsion in him.

Terms Emphasizing Results of Sin

Some terms focus neither upon the predisposing factors that give rise to sin, nor upon the nature of the act itself, but rather upon the consequences that follow from sin.

Agitation or Restlessness

The word רָשַׁע (*resha'*), which is usually translated "wickedness," is believed to have originally suggested the concept of tossing and restlessness. Related to an Arabic word that means "to be loose (of limbs)," the root of רָשַׁעmay mean "to be disjointed, ill regulated, abnormal, wicked."[949] There is evidence of the literal meaning in Job 3:17 ("There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest") and Isaiah 57:20–21 ("But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'"). The wicked therefore are to be seen as causing agitation and discomfort for themselves and for others as well. They live in chaotic confusion and bring similar disorder into the lives of those close to them. This moral sense is always present when the word רָשַׁע or a cognate is applied to human beings.

Evil or Badness

The word רַע (*ra'*) is a generic term, meaning evil in the sense of badness. Thus, it can refer to anything that is harmful or malignant, not merely the morally evil. For example, it can be used of food that has gone bad or a dangerous animal.[950] It may mean distress or adversity. Jeremiah 42:6 quotes the commanders of the forces as saying to Jeremiah, "Whether it is favorable or

unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God." The words "favorable or unfavorable" could have been rendered "prosperity or adversity" here. In Amos 6:3 we read of a day of calamity. This word, then, binds together the act of sin and its consequences. In Deuteronomy 30:15 God sets before the people the choice of "life and prosperity, death and destruction." They may choose to keep God's commandments, in which case good will come to them, or to disobey, in which case the result will be evil: they will perish (v. 18).

GUILT

Although some of the words examined earlier imply the idea of guilt, in the word אָשָׁם (*'asham*) it becomes explicit. In speaking of the act of sin, אָשַׁם means "to do a wrong, to commit an offense, or to inflict an injury." A wrong has been done to someone, for which the perpetrator ought to be punished or the victim compensated. And, as a matter of fact, in about one-third of the passages where אָשַׁם or a related word appears, the meaning is "sin offering." In Numbers 5:8 it means "restitution made for the wrong": "But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the LORD and must be given to the priest, along with the ram with which atonement is made for the wrongdoer." The idea in this case and in many others is that harm has been done by the act of sin, and there must be some form of restitution.

The word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word אָשַׁם, πλημμέλεια (*plēmmeleia*), does not occur in the New Testament. There is a New Testament word for "guilty," however—ἔνοχος (*enochos*)—which appears only ten times. Jesus pointed out that, regardless of the human verdict, whoever hates his brother is guilty of murder in the sight of God (Matt. 5:21–22). Paul warned that whoever partakes of the Lord's Supper unworthily is guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:27). And James insisted that whoever offends in one point of the law is guilty of all (James 2:10). In all of these usages of the word ἔνοχος, the standard of justice is God's. The sinner is liable to punishment for offending God.

TROUBLE

The word אָוֶן (*'aven*) literally means "trouble," almost always in a moral sense. The underlying idea is that sin brings trouble upon the sinner. Thus Hosea refers to Bethel, after it became a seat of idolatry, as Beth-aven, the "house of trouble" (Hos. 4:15; 10:8). Smith points out that the expression "'workers of

trouble' occurs again and again in the Psalms (e.g., 5:5; 6:8),"[951] and it is also found in numerous other books of the Old Testament. (Job 31:3; 34:8, 22; Prov. 10:29; 21:15; Isa. 31:2; Hos. 6:8). The Arabic equivalent means "to be fatigued, tired"; it suggests weariness, sorrow, trouble.[952] The Hebrew term appears to bear the idea of consequent misery, trouble, difficulty, and sorrow. This implication of the term is clearly spelled out in its usage in Proverbs 22:8 (NIV 1984): "He who sows wickedness reaps trouble."

The Essential Nature of Sin

We have seen that there is a wide variety of terms for sin, each emphasizing a somewhat different aspect. But is it possible in the midst of this bewildering variety to formulate some comprehensive definition of sin, to identify the essence of sin? We have seen that sins are variously characterized in the Bible as unbelief, rebellion, perversity, missing the mark. But what is sin?

A common element running through all of these varied ways of characterizing sin is the idea that the sinner has failed to fulfill God's law. There are various ways in which we fail to meet his standard of righteousness. We may go beyond the limits imposed, or "transgress." We may simply fall short of the standard set, or not do at all what God commands and expects. Or we may do the right thing, but for a wrong reason, thus fulfilling the letter of the law, but not its spirit.

In the Old Testament, sin is to a large extent a matter of external actions or outward lack of conformity to the requirements of God. Inward thoughts and motives are not completely ignored in the Old Testament conception, but in the New Testament they become especially prominent, being virtually as important as actions. So Jesus condemned anger and lust as vehemently as he did murder and adultery (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28). He also condemned outwardly good acts done primarily out of a desire to obtain the approval of humans rather than to please God (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16).

Yet sin is not merely wrong acts and thoughts, but sinfulness as well, an inherent inner disposition inclining us to wrong acts and thoughts. We are not simply sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

We offer, then, this definition of sin: "Sin is any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God. This may be a matter of act, of thought, or of inner disposition or state." Sin is failure to live up to what God expects of us in act, thought, and being. We must still ask at this point, however, whether there is one basic principle of sin, one underlying factor that characterizes all of sin in its manifold varieties. Several suggestions have been made.

Sensuality

One suggestion is that sin is sensuality. According to this conception, sin is the tendency of the lower or physical nature to dominate and control the higher or spiritual nature. This takes Paul's warnings against living "according to the flesh" quite literally, and bases sin in the physical or material aspect of the human.[953] This conception is also prominent in the thought of Augustine, in his case growing out of his own struggle with sensuality.[954]

As appealing as this view is because of its simplicity, it nonetheless has significant shortcomings. For one thing, it seems to disregard the fact that many sins, and perhaps the worst sins, are not physical in nature. In Paul's famous catalog of sins in Galatians 5:19–21, many are indeed "works of the flesh" in the literal sense: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, drunkenness, and orgies. But several are definitely more "spiritual" in nature: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. The view that sin is sensuality has to maintain that contact of the soul or spirit with a corrupted body produces these "spiritual" sins. But at this point the meaning of sensuality seems to have been stretched excessively.

Further, rigid control of one's physical nature does not appear to have any marked effect upon one's degree of sinfulness. Ascetics attempt to bring their physical impulses under control, and often succeed to a considerable extent, yet they are not necessarily less sinful as a result. Other sins may be present, including pride. The sinful nature, repressed in one area, simply forces expression in some other area. This is often true as well of older persons. While their physical passions are frequently considerably diminished, they may display great fits of irritability, impatience, or something similar.

Moreover, the idea that sin is essentially sensuality is a misunderstanding of "flesh," especially as Paul uses the term (see pp. 481–85). Therefore, we must conclude that the view that sensuality is the essential principle of sin is inadequate.

Selfishness

A second view is that sin is essentially selfishness—the "choice of self as the supreme end which constitutes the antithesis of supreme love to God."[955] This view was held by Augustus Strong, and, in a somewhat different form, by Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr contended that pride, *hubris*, is the major form of human opposition to God.[956]

According to Strong, selfishness, the preference of oneself to God, may reveal itself in many forms: sensuality, unbelief, enmity toward God. Thus, sin, in whatever form, is selfishness. It is preferring one's own ideas to God's truth, or the satisfaction of one's own will to doing God's will, or loving oneself more than God. Dethronement of God from his rightful place as the Lord of one's life requires enthroning something else, and this is understood to be the enthronement of oneself.[957]

Here again is a view that has much to commend it. It certainly strikes a responsive note in the thinking of many of us, for we know that selfishness holds a firm grip on our lives and induces us to commit many sins. Yet there is one major problem with this view. Some of what we do cannot really be characterized as selfish in the strict sense, yet is sinful. For example, there are those who sin against God, not by loving themselves more than they love God, but by loving some other person more, or by giving their lives for a cause that is opposed to that of God. It might, of course, be countered that this is what brings such people satisfaction. Suffering or death is what really meets their selfish needs and desires. But this counterargument would involve defining "selfishness" in such an elastic way that nothing could possibly count against the theory that selfishness is the essence of sin, in which case the theory would be a meaningless statement.

Displacement of God

A preferable alternative to these two views is that the essence of sin is simply failure to let God be God. It is placing something else, anything else, in the supreme place which is his. Thus, choosing oneself rather than God is not wrong because self is chosen, but because something other than God is chosen. Choosing any finite object over God is wrong, no matter how selfless such an act might be.

This contention is supported by major texts in both the Old and New Testaments. The Ten Commandments begin with the command to give God his proper place. "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3) is the first prohibition in the law. Similarly, Jesus affirmed that the first and great commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Proper recognition of God is primary. Idolatry in any form, not pride, is the essence of sin.

One might ask what the major factor in our failure to love, worship, and obey God is. I submit that it is unbelief. Anyone who truly believes God to be what he

says he is will accord to him his rightful status. Failure to do so is sin. Setting one's own ideas above God's revealed Word entails refusal to believe it to be true. Seeking one's own will involves believing that one's own values are actually higher than those of God. In short, it is failing to acknowledge God as God.

26
The Source of Sin

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify five conceptions of the source of sin.
2. Relate and express the biblical teaching about the source of sin.
3. Identify and describe the implications of each of the various views on the source of sin.
4. Explain the cure for sin.

Chapter Summary

There are many theories about the source of sin. The animal-nature approach is adopted by Frederick Tennant. Anxiety of finiteness was the view held by Reinhold Niebuhr. Existential estrangement is a view maintained by Paul Tillich. Economic struggle is the view of the liberation theologians. Individualism and competitiveness is a view held by Harrison Elliott and those who espouse the philosophy of John Dewey. None of these views adequately represents the biblical perspective.

Study Questions

- How does the conception of an animal nature as the source of sin affect our view of humanity?
- How has Frederick Tennant expressed his view on the source of sin?
- How would you describe the view expressed by Reinhold Niebuhr?
- How does Paul Tillich's view of the source of sin differ from the other views?
- What effect has liberation theology had on the understanding of the source of sin?
- Why is education alone insufficient to deal with the problem of sin?
- What is the cure for sin?

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Various Conceptions of the Source of Sin

We have seen that the Old and New Testaments have a wide variety of terms for sin. Now we need to ask about the source of sin, the cause of or occasion leading to sin. This is vital because our understanding of the source out of which sin arises will greatly affect our idea of the nature of the action necessary to prevent or eliminate sin.

Animal Nature

One conception of the source of sin considers humans to have evolved from animals and thus to possess an animal nature with impulses still persisting from earlier periods. Since they are yet evolving, those impulses are declining and humanity is less sinful today than in the past. This view of sin was particularly

popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period when theological construction was under a couple of highly significant influences. The biblical accounts of creation and the fall were beginning to be regarded in a somewhat different light. The critical study of the Pentateuch and acceptance of the documentary hypothesis were probably at their peak. The other major factor was the popularity of the theory of biological evolution. From the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, belief in his view had spread steadily and had extended into areas other than merely the biological.[958] For example, the various religions were thought of as products of long periods of development. Based on study of the development of religions, it was concluded that the Hebrews' religion was the product of an evolutionary process and had derived many of its major conceptions from the religions of the surrounding peoples. The Genesis account of the creation of the human came to be regarded as untenable, and with it belief in the historicity of the story of the fall had to be abandoned as well. So another explanation of the origin of sin had to be found.

One significant attempt in this direction is that of Frederick R. Tennant, who wrote three works on sin.[959] He regards the doctrine of the fall, that is, the belief that the human freely rebelled and fell from a state of original righteousness, as a convenient explanation adopted by theology and sometimes by philosophy to account for the widespread phenomenon of sin. Although the belief has been popular, Tennant asserts that there is no justification for reading the Bible's teaching back into the early history of the human race.[960] Several different disciplines now make belief in a state of original righteousness impossible:

> The increased light thrown upon the early history of mankind, not to speak of the continuity of the human species with those lower in the scale of animal life, compels us to entertain the conviction that what was once necessarily received as a genuine tradition is rather, transfigured and spiritualised, the product of primitive speculation on a matter beyond the reach of human memory. Literary Criticism and Historical Exegesis, Comparative Religion and Race-Psychology, Geology and Anthropology all contribute materially to the cumulative evidence on this head.[961]

Tennant notes that there also is a problem if one attempts to reconcile two propositions that grow out of the experience of the believer: the commonness, even universality, of sin; and the sense of guilt. Sin is universal, yet individually chosen, and therefore the sinner is culpable. As long as belief in original sin is maintained in terms of the old Augustinian doctrine that all sinned in Adam, this antinomy cannot be reconciled.[962] Tennant thinks it is possible to find the source of sin instead in the makeup of human nature and the gradual development of moral consciousness through the process of evolution.[963]

Tennant finds the outlines of his view expressed in the thought of Archdeacon J. Wilson and in Otto Pfleiderer's philosophy of religion. Wilson said in his Hulse lectures:

> Man fell, according to science, when he first became conscious of the conflict of freedom and conscience. To the evolutionist sin is not an innovation, but is the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies that were incidental to an earlier stage in development, whether of the individual or the race, and were not originally sinful, but were actually useful. Their sinfulness lies in their anachronism: in their resistance to the evolutionary and Divine force that makes for moral development and righteousness. Sin is the violation of a man's higher nature which he finds within, parallel to a lower nature.[964]

Pfleiderer traced sin to the natural impulses of the human that survive from an earlier stage. All living beings, human beings included, tend to satisfy their own natural impulses. This is not evil or sinful. It is merely the expression of the implanted instinct for survival. When we humans advance to the point where we have knowledge of the law, these natural strivings do not simply die away. Conflict arises. We are no longer enslaved to animal impulses, but have developed enough freedom of will to control them. Pfleiderer terms as sin every failure in the attempt to bring these natural impulses under the dominion of the higher or rational nature, and every conscious desistance from the struggle.[965]

Tennant adopts and expands upon the suggestions of these two theologians. His first major axiom is that humanity evolved from lower forms of life: "I shall venture to assume as overwhelmingly probable that there is continuity between the physical constitution of man and that of the lower animals."[966] The first life of humans was social; the tribe was all-important, and the individual relatively insignificant. While we do not have direct historical knowledge of this early stage, we can extrapolate from what we do know a picture of how humanity has developed within history. The study of contemporary primitive societies supplements our knowledge. This leads us increasingly to the conclusion that the individual was of relatively little importance in the early stages of human life. The idea of moral personality emerged extremely late in human thought.[967]

Tennant does not get involved in the question of the origin of the acts we today call sin. They are simply the continuation of acts of self-preservation that are natural to animals and thus, because of their origin, to human beings as well. When moral consciousness arose, these acts took on the character that now deserves the designation of sin. Personal moral consciousness, or what we call conscience, evolved when what was merely arbitrary or ceremonial became by degrees internal and introspective. The origin of sin, in this sense, was a gradual process.[968]

Tennant makes much of Paul's statement, "I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. . . . For apart from law, sin was dead" (Rom. 7:7–8). It is this law that gives natural acts the character of sin. "The appearance of sin, from this point of view, would not consist in the performance of a deed such as man had never done before, and of whose wickedness, should he commit it, he was previously aware; it would rather be the continuance in certain practices, or the satisfying of natural impulses, after that they were first discovered to be contrary to a recognized sanction of rank as low as that of tribal custom."[969] On this basis, the first sin was not the most tragic point in the history of the human race. It was, rather, quite insignificant. Indeed, the sinfulness of sin has gradually increased from zero as the human race has become more and more sensitive to the fact of the wrongness of their actions.[970] At the same time, of course, humans have continued to evolve and the number of sinful acts has diminished.

Let us recapitulate what Tennant has said. Humans have certain impulses by virtue of being animals evolved from less highly developed forms. These impulses are natural, being means to human survival. They have been intensified through the process of natural selection over long periods of time. It was not wrong for God to make humans with these impulses; nevertheless, they are to be brought under control to the extent that we are conscious of the moral law.

We are natural beings before we are moral beings, and the individual recapitulates not only the physical development of the human race but also its moral development. Thus, just as the race came to moral consciousness relatively late, so also individuals come to realize the moral significance of their acts slowly and gradually.[971]

The universality of sin is to be accounted for by the fact that all of us have necessarily passed through the process of evolutionary development, which produces persons with natural tendencies to self-preservation.[972] Paradoxically, only as humans progress and natural impulses diminish do they actually become sinful. If we are to speak of a fall, it must designate the coming to moral consciousness first of the race and then of the individual. The fall was therefore not a fall downward from the original perfect state, but a fall upward. For while this development introduced sinfulness, it also made it possible to overcome the tendencies of the animal nature, or at least to bring them under the dominance and redirection of human reason and moral will. This enables the human perfection that the Christian view has traditionally placed at the start of human development.

Anxiety of Finiteness

Reinhold Niebuhr sees the problem of sin as arising from another source, namely, human finitude on the one hand, and freedom to aspire on the other. In his assessment of the human predicament Niebuhr follows the thinking of Albrecht Ritschl, who saw the removal of this contradiction as the aim of every religion. For Niebuhr, this contradiction is not sin, but the occasion of sin, although not its cause. This situation need not lead to sin, although it often does.

A corollary of human finitude is insecurity in the face of threatening problems. This is what Niebuhr calls "natural contingency." Humans seek to overcome this insecurity in two major ways. Perhaps the more common is by asserting the will in an effort to gain such power as oversteps the limits of the human creature's place. A more intellectual form is attempting to deny the limited character of human knowledge and perspectives.[973] This intellectual pride and assertion of will to gain undue power disturb the harmony of creation. They are the fundamental forms of sin. There are both religious and moral dimensions to sin. The former manifest themselves as rebellion against God. The latter show themselves in human injustice toward others.

The biblical depictions of the primal sins bear out Niebuhr's contention. Note the picture of the devil suggested in the condemnation of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12–15. Lucifer's fault lay in his ambition to ascend into heaven, to set his throne above the stars of God. Being unwilling to remain within the bounds of his proper position, he fell into sin.[974] Such was also the case in the human fall. The temptation placed before Adam and Eve was the temptation to become as God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:5). In other words, their sin consisted in yielding to the temptation to try to be more than what they were created to be, human. They tried, in effect, to be God.

Temptation to go beyond what is proper is possible (and successful) only because of what the human is. On the one hand, humans are limited beings, incapable of knowing everything and of doing everything.[975] Yet they are capable of envisioning the possibility of knowing and doing everything, of imagining what they might be but are not. Consciously or unconsciously, humans never escape the fact of their finiteness.

Niebuhr depends heavily upon Søren Kierkegaard's *Concept of Dread*. Kierkegaard's "dread" is the dizziness encountered in the face of freedom. It is, he says, like the dizziness we feel when looking down from a great height. There is the temptation to jump, and there is also the fear of the consequences. Yet something within us wants to jump. There is the realization that we have within our grasp the power of being and nonbeing. This is *dread*. It is the awareness of

being free and yet of being bound. It is the precondition of sin. It is not sin itself, but it can be the occasion of sin.[976]

This is what Niebuhr means by "anxiety." It is the inevitable spiritual state of any human standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finitude. It is the subjective experience of temptation—"anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation."[977] This state is not to be identified with sin, however, for there is always the possibility that perfect faith will purge it of its tendency toward sinful self-assertion. Those who place their trust fully in God will find complete security. Thus, orthodoxy has regularly regarded unbelief, lack of trust, as the root of sin. This is why Jesus said, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need [all these things]" (Matt. 6:31–32). No life, even the most saintly, conforms perfectly to the injunction not to be anxious.

To seek to overcome the state of anxiety, the tension between finiteness and freedom, by denying one's finiteness is the most obvious form of sin. It leads to various manifestations of pride and self-exaltation; for example, failure to recognize that one's own knowledge is finite, or domination and exploitation of others. Each case represents an attempt to build one's security by one's own effort.[978]

The other form of sin is the attempt to relieve the tension between freedom and finitude by denying one's freedom. This involves "losing oneself in some aspect of the world' s vitalities."[979] Here sin is sensuality, living merely in terms of some particular impulses of one's own nature.[980] While these impulses may be of many varieties, they all represent human descent to the level of the animal, or capitulation to nature's determination of human behavior. In either direction, denial of one's finiteness or one's freedom, the sin is occasioned, but not caused, by the state of anxiety. Human finitude in itself is not sinful. But being finite and also being able to imagine and aspire to the infinite puts one in a position of tension that can become either faith or sin.

Niebuhr has analyzed the dynamics of sin and temptation in a way that is in many respects insightful and accurate. Yet a problem remains. His solution to the anxiety of finiteness entails learning to trust God, accepting the fact of one's own finitude, and living with the realization that there will always be a measure of insecurity. But is this really possible? Does this not require self-stimulation, motivation, and ability exceeding human capacity? Even the most vital Christian frequently finds it necessary to pray, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). The failure to acknowledge the need for a transformation wrought by God undermines the force of Niebuhr's contentions.

Existential Estrangement

Paul Tillich has constructed a view of sin built to a large extent upon an existentialist basis. He notes that various ancient myths make humans responsible for the fall. In these myths, among which he includes the biblical account, both subhuman and superhuman figures influence the human decision. In the Bible it is the serpent who induces the humans to sin. Tillich clearly rejects a literal understanding of Genesis 3, replacing it with a reinterpretation.[981]

Tillich's doctrine of God is that God is the ground or power of being of all that is, rather than *a* being as such. Everything that is exists because of its participation in this ground of being. The human state of existence, however, is a state of estrangement—from the ground of one's being, from other beings, and from oneself. In many ways this estrangement is an equivalent of what Christianity has traditionally called "sin." "Man's predicament is estrangement, but estrangement is sin," Tillich says.[982] Yet estrangement is not identical with sin, for "sin" refers to something not included in the concept of estrangement, namely, the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs.[983] If estrangement is the state of not being what one essentially is and ought to be, sin is the act of becoming estranged, the conscious step into estrangement. It is necessary to distinguish between humans' essence, or what they were intended and created to be, and their existence, what they actually and empirically are. For humans, to be in existence is to be in a state of estrangement. Existence and estrangement coincide.[984]

Those who hold to a literal interpretation of Genesis speak of a point within time when humanity was not estranged or, in their terms, sinful. Their position is that the fall changed nature in and around them.[985] A change from essence to existence took place within time. For Tillich, "The notion of a moment in time in which man and nature were changed from good to evil is absurd, and it has no foundation in experience or revelation."[986] His alternative is this: "Creation and the Fall coincide in so far as there is no point in time and space in which created goodness was actualized and had existence."[987] Tillich maintains that this is the only possible position for anyone who rejects the literal interpretation of the story of the fall and takes seriously the reality of estrangement as it is found about us on every hand. "Actualized creation and estranged existence are identical. Only biblical literalism has the theological right to deny this assertion. He who excludes the idea of a historical stage of essential goodness should not try to escape the consequence."[988]

If, however, creation and fall coincide, then is not Tillich's view close to that of Origen, that humans fell in a preexistence, and therefore are sinful from birth?[989] This would seem to make sin both necessary and identical with finitude. Aware of the criticism, Tillich admits that many critics' hesitancy to accept the identity of creation and fall is "caused by their justified fear that sin may become a rational necessity, as in purely essentialist systems."[990] He insists, however, that once created by God, newborn children themselves fall into the state of existential estrangement. Growing into maturity, they affirm their state of estrangement in acts of freedom that imply responsibility and guilt.[991] Tillich claims that it is every human's freedom and responsible actions that produce the estrangement.

Tillich is presenting a detemporalized scheme. Thus, the human race is not at one point in time unfallen and innocent, and at another fallen and guilty or estranged. Rather, at each moment every person is estranged by his or her own choice. He would characterize the human as both fallen and unfallen at every moment of experience; these categorizations cannot be compartmentalized into a before-and-after temporal scheme. Thus, the essence of what is created is good, but we creatures always utilize our freedom in such a way as to fall into the state of estrangement.

Has Tillich really resolved the problem? If it is in any sense meaningful to say that creation and fall coincide, must not the free choice or affirmation of alienation be somehow contained within our creation? If all without fail choose in this way, then is not the fall a virtual result of creation? The tension here between freedom to choose and the coincidence of creation and fall needs to be resolved, or at least clarified.

Economic Struggle

Liberation theology, in the broad sense including black and feminist theologies, understands sin as arising from economic struggle. This is quite different from the conventional or orthodox view. If orthodoxy sees Genesis 1–3 as the key to understanding sin, liberation theology might be thought of as understanding sin in the light of Exodus 1–3.

A first step in understanding the position of liberation theology is to note its rejection of the privatization of sin.[992] In the traditional understanding, sin is often seen as a matter of the individual's broken relationship with God; thus sin is basically unbelief, rebellion, or something of that type. Liberation theology, however, is much more concerned about the social and economic dimensions of sin. Thus, James Cone says, "Sin is not primarily a religious impurity, but rather

it is the social, political, and economic oppression of the poor. It is the denial of the humanity of the neighbor through unjust political and economic arrangements."[993] The true nature of sin and God's reaction to it are apparent in passages such as Amos 5:11–12 (NIV 1984): "You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts." A major dimension of sin, then, is oppression and exploitation.

Gustavo Gutiérrez has described sin as selfish turning in upon oneself.[994] To sin is to refuse to love one's neighbors and therefore the Lord himself. This refusal, whether personal or collective, is the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and oppression. Gutiérrez classifies as unjust and sinful the use of violence by oppressors to maintain the inequitable system. On the other hand, he justifies the use of violence by the oppressed to liberate themselves.[995] Clearly such a view is notably different from traditional Christianity, particularly of the pacifist type, according to which the use of violence is wrong, even in resistance to sinful and unjust actions by others.

James Fowler classifies liberation theologians as either "ideological theologians" or "theologians of balance."[996] The former, including James Cone, Albert Cleage, and William Jones, see things in sharp dichotomies. In their view, God is to be identified with either the oppressed or the oppressor. It cannot be both ways. Cone says, "Black theology cannot accept a view of God which does not represent him as being for blacks and thus against whites. Living in a world of white oppressors, black people have no time for a neutral God."[997] The theologians of balance, on the other hand, see the line separating good and evil as drawn, not between the two groups, but through each of them. "In the struggle against the structures of evil and oppressors Christians must struggle as those who hope for the redemption of the oppressor."[998]

What of the oppressed? What would sin consist in for them? In the traditional understanding of sin and, for that matter, in the approach of the theologians of balance, sin might well be thought of as hatred, bitterness, lack of love for the oppressor. For Jesus commanded us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). To the ideological theologians, on the other hand, the sin of the enslaved consists in their acquiescence to the oppressive situation. Cone says, "Their sin is that of trying to 'understand' the enslaver, to 'love' him on his own terms."[999] To accept the oppressive situation, rather than resisting and attempting to overthrow it, is the sin of the oppressed. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez put it this way:

> If we turn to anthropology, liberation theology rejects the notion that God is best served by our self-abasement. Too often has the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith been presented in such a manner. It is significant that many of those who tell us that humility is the greatest virtue, or that the root of all sin is pride, are doing so from prestigious pulpits and endowed chairs. . . . Traditional theology has often been bent on promoting the virtue of humility, particularly since those who are humble will stay in their place and refuse to claim their rightful status in human societies as children and heirs of God.[1000]

Whether or not one believes liberation theology to be influenced by Marxism, it is not difficult to recognize certain parallels between the two, in both the conception of human problems and the means advocated for overcoming the problems. In each case, the problems of society, whether termed evils or sins, are seen as resulting from inequitable distribution of power and wealth, and the solution lies in removing these inequities and the attending oppression.

Liberation theology assumes, as does Marxism, that the economic struggle, and particularly the inequities in power and property, determine human behavior. Presumably, those who are promoting such inequities are great sinners, while those who fight injustices are not. In fact, certain liberation theologians will in some cases regard a particular action (e.g., killing) as sin if it is committed by an oppressor, but not if it is committed by the oppressed in the struggle to remove inequities. The removal of inequities is believed to result in the removal of the occasion of sin as well.

In reality, however, this theory seems not to have worked out quite this way. In the former Soviet Union, where the classless society was achieved, there were still notable power struggles among the leaders and repression, even involving the use of violence, of those outside the power structure, as millions of Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles could testify. It appears that possession of adequate resources for the supplying of the basic necessities of life does not negate the tendency to seek one’s own satisfaction, even at the expense of others. Redistribution of power and wealth does not eliminate “sin.”

Individualism and Competitiveness

Another view is that sin derives from individualism and competitiveness. In the midst of the neo-orthodox emphasis upon human sinfulness, particularly in the 1930s, voices were raised in protest. One of the objectors was Harrison Sacket Elliott, professor of Christian education at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Like many others who sought a return to the theme of the goodness and perfectibility of humanity, Elliott had been deeply influenced by

John Dewey's instrumentalism in philosophy and his progressive approach to education.[1001]

Elliott did not merely reinterpret the idea of human sinfulness, as theologians like Tennant had done. Rather, he denied that humans are sinful at all. He did acknowledge the existence of sin and the fact that humans sin, but the idea of innate depravity or corruption had no place within his thought. There are four basic points in his argument:

1. Karl Barth's and Emil Brunner's idea that all human self-assertion is sinful is related to and derived from an authoritarian view of God as an absolute sovereign or a father who insists upon total submission to his will. Anything less is rebellion. Sociologically, this view of God is correlated with an authoritarian view of human institutions, including the family.[1002] To Elliott, however, sin in a son does not consist in asserting his own will against his father, but rather in assuming that what he is and has accomplished is his own independent doing.[1003] Sin is denial or misuse of one's native endowment and social heritage.[1004] It is self-absorbed, individualistic struggling against other humans and God instead of cooperating with them. Contrary to the authoritarian view, which makes the relationship between humans and God somewhat adversative in nature, Elliott stresses comradeship between the two. Although not necessarily equals, they will work together to attain their common goals. Human beings will take initiative and responsibility, they will make decisions, but they will also recognize and acknowledge their dependence on God, whose resources they utilize.[1005]

2. The idea of humans as sinners does not and cannot stand up under logical analysis. "Sin" defies exact definition. It does not stand for any *one* entity, but is actually a label for a whole complex of different acts. The interpretation of sin varies greatly and is distinctly influenced by the cultural situation.[1006] Elliott rejects all attempts to reduce sin to one particular type of behavior, and especially to egoism. While the "American sin" has been characterized as the egoistic striving of the "rugged individualist," one cannot make the generalization that all assertiveness, all egoistic striving, is wrong. It may well be accurate to characterize the egoism of the supercompetitive, superaggressive individualist as sin, but what of the persons "who are the victims of this competitiveness and whose problem is sensitiveness, fear, inability to call [their] life [their] own, defeat"?[1007] Such people need to be more egoistic. For them egoism is not sin.

3. The idea of humans as sinners can be psychologically unhealthy and harmful. In particular, sacrificing for the sake of others in an effort to atone for one's sinful condition may lead to giving up one's own legitimate ego rights.[1008]

In addition, emphasis upon sin and guilt may well lead to individuals turning in upon themselves destructively.[1009]

4. Psychological analyses of the human condition have not led to the conclusion that humans are sinful. The idea of sinfulness assumes that certain tendencies or drives are actually innate and inflexible, incapable of being altered or modified. The evidence, however, seems to indicate that humans are quite malleable. Indeed, Elliott contends, there are no well-defined inborn human tendencies, either evil or good. “The original nature is a-moral in the sense that there is nothing in the nature with which an individual is born which predetermines whether he will be a saint or a devil. Whether the ‘divine’ or the ‘demonic’ possibilities are developed depends upon what happens to that original nature in the experiences of life. The individual’s personality is of social origin.”[1010]

Elliott sees sin, then, not as something innate, but as something learned. It is not egoism or assertiveness per se, but egoism or assertiveness to an excessive degree—the ruthless, competitive struggle of individuals against one another. This need not be, however. While humanity can use the resources of their minds to develop instruments of power unknown in the animal world, they can also substitute for ruthless competitive struggle cooperative relationships that go far beyond the mutual aid found in the animal world.[1011]

Elliott proposes that since individualistic competitiveness is not inherent, but is acquired as a “second nature,” so to speak, it can be socially modified, primarily by means of education. Education has not always succeeded, however, as Niebuhr has observed.[1012] Instead of using science for the alleviation of human suffering, humans have instead used it to develop instruments of destruction, which they turn against their fellow humans.

Elliott, recognizing the legitimacy of Niebuhr’s criticism, contends that the problem lies not in human intelligence, but in the present strategy for developing and using it. There are two difficulties with the way liberal education has usually been conducted. One is that it has been overly intellectual. The attention has been almost exclusively upon the training of the mind, with little or no attention given to the emotions. The second problem is even more pertinent to the issue at hand. Education has been an individualistic matter, the logic being that persons with individual initiative will solve the problems of society. Experience shows, however, that reason becomes the servant, rather than the master, of the individual’s desire for power.[1013] If there is an appeal to attend to social needs, it is soon subordinated to individualistic egoistic concerns. Elliott suggests that instead of emphasizing individual activity, competition, and success, education emphasize cooperative activities in which individuals contribute to a group goal

and receive the benefits of the group's success. If the wrong kind of education and social conditioning has led to the "sin" of individualistic competitiveness, then the right kind of education should remove it.

From the perspective of many years later, Elliott's suggestions seem almost humorous, as do those of more recent advocates of his view. Progressive education has been attempted and found wanting, from the standpoint of both Christian theologians and many secular educators. The hopes of seeing a radical modification of human nature have not materialized with the introduction of noncompetitive learning situations. Indeed, our society not only seems no less competitively structured, but may be even more competitive than it was when Elliott wrote.

An Inclusive Biblical Teaching

We have examined five different views of the source of sin. We have found each of them to be seriously lacking at one or more significant points. Therefore, we must now inquire more thoroughly as to what the Bible actually teaches on the subject. Certain aspects of some of the conceptions we have rejected will be found in the biblical understanding of the nature and cause of sin. Yet the scriptural position is in many ways far different from these views.

It is important to note first that sin is not caused by God. James very quickly disposes of this idea, which would probably be quite appealing to some: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13). Nor is any encouragement given for the idea that sin inevitably results from the very structure of reality. Rather, responsibility for sin is placed squarely at the door of humans themselves: "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14–15).

Humans have certain desires. These, at root, are legitimate. In many cases their satisfaction is indispensable to the survival of the individual or the race. For example, hunger is the desire for food. Without the satisfaction of this desire or drive, we would starve to death. Similarly, the sexual drive seeks gratification. Were it to go unsatisfied, there would be no human reproduction and hence no preservation of the human race. We may assert that these drives were given by God, and that there are situations in which their satisfaction is not only permissible but may even be mandatory.

We note, further, human capability. Humans are able to choose among alternatives, including options that may not be immediately present. They alone of all the creatures are capable of transcending their locations in time and space. Through memory they can relive the past and accept or repudiate it. Through anticipation they can construct scenarios regarding the future, and choose among them. Through their imagination they can picture themselves in some other geographical location. One can imagine oneself to be someone other than who one is, occupying a different position in society or being married to a different partner. Thus, we may desire not only what is actually available, but also what is not proper or legitimate. This capability expands greatly the possibilities of sinful action and/or thoughts.[1014]

A number of natural desires, while good in and of themselves, are potential areas for temptation and sin:[1015]

1. The desire to enjoy things. God has implanted certain needs in each of us. Not only is the satisfaction of those needs essential, but it can also bring enjoyment. For example, the need for food and drink must be satisfied because life is impossible without them. At the same time food and drink may also be legitimately desired as a source of enjoyment. When food and drink are pursued, however, merely for the pleasure of consumption, and in excess of what is needed, the sin of gluttony is being committed. The sex drive, while not necessary for the preservation of the life of the individual, is essential for sustaining and continuing the human race. We may legitimately desire satisfaction of this drive because it is essential and also because it brings pleasure. When, however, the drive is gratified in ways that transcend natural and proper limitations (i.e., when satisfied outside marriage), it becomes the basis of sin. Any improper satisfaction of a natural desire is an instance of “the lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16).

2. The desire to obtain things. There is a role in God’s economy for the obtainment of possessions. This is implicit in the command to have dominion over the world (Gen. 1:28) and in the stewardship parables (e.g., Matt. 25:14–30). Further, material possessions are regarded as legitimate incentives to encourage industriousness. When, however, the desire to acquire worldly goods becomes so compelling that it is satisfied at any cost, even by exploiting or stealing from others, then it has degenerated into “the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16).

3. The desire to do things, to achieve. The stewardship parables also depict this desire as both natural and appropriate. It is part of what God expects of humanity. When, however, this urge transgresses proper limitations and is

pursued at the expense of other humans, it has degenerated into "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

There are proper ways to satisfy each of these desires, and there are also divinely imposed limits. Failure to accept these desires as they have been constituted by God and therefore to submit to divine control is sin. In such cases, the desires are not seen in the context of their divine origin and as means to the end of pleasing God, but as ends in themselves.

Note that in Jesus's temptation, Satan appealed to legitimate desires. The desires that Satan urged Jesus to fulfill were not wrong per se. Rather, the suggested time and manner of fulfillment constituted the evil. Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights and consequently was hungry. This was a natural need that had to be satisfied if life was to be preserved. It was right for Jesus to be fed, but not through some miraculous provision and probably not before the completion of his trial. It was proper for Jesus to desire to come down safely from the pinnacle of the temple, but not to require a miraculous display of power by the Father. It was right for Jesus to lay claim to all the kingdoms of the earth, for they are his. He had created them (John 1:3) and even now sustains them (Col. 1:17). But it was not right to seek to establish this claim by worshiping the chief of the forces of evil.

Oftentimes temptation involves inducement from without. This was true in the case of Jesus. In the case of Adam and Eve, the serpent did not directly suggest that they eat of the forbidden tree. Rather, he raised the question whether the fruit of all the trees was off limits to them. Then he asserted, "You will not certainly die . . . [but] will be like God" (Gen. 3:4–5). While the desire to eat of the tree or to be like God may have been present naturally, there was also an external inducement of satanic origin. In some cases another human entices one to overstep the divinely imposed bounds on behavior. In the final analysis, however, sin is the choice of the person who commits it. The desire to do what is done may be present naturally, and there may be external inducement as well. But the individual is ultimately responsible. Adam and Eve chose to act upon impulse and suggestion; Jesus chose not to.

In addition to natural desire and temptation, there must of course be an opportunity for sin as well. Initially, Adam could not have been tempted to infidelity to his wife, nor could Eve have been jealous of other women. For those of us who live after the fall and are not Jesus, there is a further complicating factor. There is something termed "the flesh," which strongly influences what we do. Paul speaks of it in numerous passages, for example, Romans 7:18: "I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." In Galatians 5:16–24 he

speaks vividly of the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit, and of the works of the flesh, which constitute a whole catalog of evils. By “flesh” Paul does not mean the physical nature of the human being. There is nothing inherently evil about the human bodily makeup. Rather, the term designates the self-centered life, denial or rejection of God. This is something that has become part of human nature—a tendency or bias toward sin and away from doing God’s will. Accordingly, we are now less able to choose the right than Adam and Eve originally were. It is even conceivable that natural human desires, which are good in themselves, may have undergone alteration.

Implications of the Various Views—The Cure for Sin

But, one might ask, what real difference does it make what position is taken on this matter? The answer is that our view of the cause of sin will influence our view of the cure for sin, since the cure for sin will necessarily involve negating the cause.

If one holds, as Tennant does, that sin is simply the persistence of normal instincts and patterns of behavior from one’s animal ancestry into a period of moral responsibility, the cure cannot be a reversal to an earlier innocent stage. Rather, it will be a matter of completely freeing oneself from those older instincts, or of learning to control or direct them properly. This conception of the cure for sin embraces the optimistic belief that the evolutionary process is carrying the human race in the right direction.

If one adopts Niebuhr’s view that sin grows out of the anxiety of finiteness, being the attempt to overcome through one’s own efforts the tension between finiteness and freedom to aspire, the cure will involve accepting one’s limitations and placing one’s confidence in God. But this cure is a matter of altering one’s attitude, not of real conversion.

Tillich relates sin to human existential estrangement, which seems to be virtually a natural accompaniment of creaturehood. Here, too, the fundamental cure is a matter of changing one’s attitude, not of real conversion. The solution entails becoming increasingly aware of the fact that one is part of being, or that one participates in the ground of being. The result will be cancellation of one’s alienation from the ground of being, other beings, and self.

If one adopts the premises of liberation theology, the solution to the problem of sin is to be found in eliminating oppression and inequities in possessions and power. Rather than evangelism of individuals, we will pursue economic and

political action aimed at altering the structure of society as the means of eliminating sin.

On Elliott's terms, the solution is education. Since sin (individualistic competitiveness) is learned through education and social conditioning, it must be eliminated the same way. The antidote is education that stresses noncompetitive endeavor toward common goals.

From the evangelical perspective, the problem lies in the fact that human beings since the fall are sinful by nature and live in a world in which powerful forces seek to induce them to sin. The cure for sin will come through a supernaturally produced alteration of one's human nature and also through divine help in countering the power of temptation. It is individual conversion and regeneration that will alter the person and bring him or her into a relationship with God that will make successful Christian living possible.

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The Results of Sin

Chapter Objectives

After completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Outline the consequences of sin concerning humanity's relationship with God.
2. Express the seriousness of sin.
3. Identify and explain the specific effects of sin on the sinner.
4. Describe the effects of sin on human relationships.

Chapter Summary

Sin has very serious consequences when it comes to the relationship between the sinner and God. These results include divine disfavor, guilt, punishment, and death. Physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death flow from the consequences of sin. Sin also has consequences that affect the individual sinner. These include enslavement, flight from reality, denial of sin, self-deceit, insensitivity, self-centeredness, and restlessness. These effects on the sinner also have social implications in competition, inability to empathize, rejection of authority, and inability to love. Sin is a very serious matter both to God and to humanity.

Study Questions

- How do the Old and New Testaments compare in their understanding of sin and its effects?
- What is retribution and how does it relate to sin and the individual?
- How is sin related to death?
- What effects are evident in the sinner?
- What consequences result from sin in relation to other human beings?
- Assuming you were writing a sermon or lesson on sin, how would you impress upon your audience the seriousness of sin?

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Restlessness

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Competition

Inability to Empathize

Rejection of Authority

Inability to Love

One emphasis that runs throughout both Testaments is that sin is a very serious matter with far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. In a later chapter we will look at the corporate effects of sin, that is, the impact of Adam's sin on the whole of his posterity. In this chapter, however, we are concerned with the individual effects of one's sin as they are illustrated in Scripture (particularly in the account of Adam and Eve) and found in our own experience.

The impact of sin has several dimensions. There are effects on the sinner's relationships with God and fellow humans, as well as oneself. Some of the results of sin might be termed "natural consequences," that is, they follow from the sin in virtually an automatic cause-and-effect sequence. Others are specifically ordained and directed by God as a penalty for sin.

Results Affecting the Relationship with God

Sin produced an immediate transformation in Adam and Eve's relationship with God. They had evidently been on close and friendly terms with God. They trusted and obeyed him, and on the basis of Genesis 3:8 it can be concluded that they customarily had fellowship with God. He loved them and provided everything they needed; we are reminded of the friendship of which Jesus spoke in John 15:15. Now, because they had violated God's trust and command, they had placed themselves on the wrong side of God, and had in effect become his enemies. It was not God who had changed or moved, but Adam and Eve.

Divine Disfavor

It is notable how the Bible characterizes God's relationship to sin and the sinner. In two instances in the Old Testament, God is said to hate sinful Israel. In Hosea 9:15 God says, "Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house. I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious." This is a very strong expression, for God actually says that he has begun to hate Israel and will love them no more. A similar sentiment is expressed in Jeremiah 12:8. On two other occasions God is said to hate the wicked (Pss. 5:5; 11:5). Much more frequent, however, are passages in which he is said to hate wickedness (e.g., Prov. 6:16–17; Zech. 8:17). The hate is not one-sided on God's part, however, for the wicked are described as those who hate God (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 7:10) and, more commonly, as those who hate the righteous (Pss. 18:40; 69:4; Prov. 29:10). In

those few passages where God is said to hate the wicked, it is apparent that they initiated the change in the relationship.

That God looks with favor upon some and with disfavor or anger upon others, and that he is sometimes described as loving Israel and at other times as hating them, are not signs of change, inconsistency, or fickleness in God. His reaction to our every deed is determined by his unchanging nature. God has indicated quite clearly that he cannot and does not tolerate certain things. It is part of his holy nature to be categorically opposed to sinful actions. When we engage in such actions, we have moved into the sphere of God's disfavor. In the case of Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was off limits. They had been told what God's response would be if they ate of its fruit. They chose, as it were, to become enemies of God, falling into the domain of his disapproval.

The Old Testament frequently describes those who sin and violate God's law as enemies of God. Yet only very rarely does the Bible speak of God as their enemy (Exod. 23:22; Isa. 63:10; Lam. 2:4–5). Ryder Smith comments: "In the Old Testament, 'enmity,' like hatred, is rare with God, but common with man."[1016] By rebelling against God, it is humans, not God, who break the relationship.

Enmity toward God had grievous results for Adam and Eve, and such will be the case for us today as well whenever we, though aware of the law and the penalty for violating it, sin anyway. In the case of Adam and Eve, trust, love, confidence, and closeness were replaced by fear, dread, and avoidance of God. Whereas they had previously anticipated positively their meetings with God, after the fall they did not want to see him. They hid themselves in an attempt to avoid him. Just as for Adam and Eve, the consequence of sin, for anyone who believes in the judgment of God, is that God becomes feared. He is no longer one's closest friend, but is consciously avoided. The situation is like our reaction to officers of the law. If we are abiding by the law, we do not mind seeing a police officer. We may even have a good, comfortable feeling when we see a police car. It gives us a sense of security to know that protection is available and that someone is there to apprehend lawbreakers. If, however, we know we have broken the law, our attitude is quite different. We become very upset at the sight of a squad car complete with flashing lights, in our rearview mirror. The activity of the police has not changed, but our relationship to them has.

While God is only rarely spoken of as hating the wicked, it is common for the Old Testament to refer to him as angry with them. God's anger should not be thought of as uncontrolled fury or personal spitefulness. Rather, it is more in the nature of righteous indignation.

There are several Hebrew terms that depict the anger of God. The term אָנַף

(‘*anaph*) originally meant “to snort.” It is a very concrete and picturesque word, conveying the idea of one of the physical accompaniments or expressions of anger. While the verb form is rare, it is used of God (Deut. 1:37; Isa. 12:1) and of his anointed (Ps. 2:12). The noun is much more common and has three meanings—nostril, face, and anger. It is used of God’s anger 180 times, about four times as frequently as it is used of humans.[1017] God is pictured as angry with Israel for having made the golden calf while Moses was conferring with him on the mountain. The Lord says to Moses, “Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.” Moses responds, “LORD, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?” (Exod. 32:10–11). God’s anger is pictured as a fire that will consume or burn up the Israelites. There are numerous other references to God’s anger: “In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them” (Judg. 2:14). Jeremiah asks the Lord to correct him, but “not in your anger” (Jer. 10:24). The psalmist rejoices that God’s “anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime” (Ps. 30:5).

Two other Hebrew roots, חָרָה (*charah*) and יָחַם (*yacham*), suggest the idea of heat. The verb of the former is frequently translated “kindle,” as in Jer. 15:14: “In my anger a fire is kindled which will burn forever” (RSV). The noun form is usually rendered “fierce [anger]” or “fierceness.”[1018] The nominal form of the latter root is properly rendered “wrath,” as in “or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it” (Jer. 4:4).

In the New Testament there is a particular focus on the enmity and hatred of unbelievers and the world toward God and his people. To sin is to make oneself an enemy of God. In Romans 8:7 and Colossians 1:21 Paul describes the mind that is set on the flesh as being “hostile to God” or alienated from God. In James 4:4 we read that “friendship with the world means enmity against God.” God, however, is not the enemy of anyone; he loves all and hates none. He loved enough to send his Son to die for us while we were yet sinners and at enmity with him (Rom. 5:8–10). He epitomizes what he commands. He loves his enemies.

Although God is not the enemy of sinners nor does he hate them, it is also quite clear that God is angered by sin. The two words that express this most clearly are θυμός (*thumos*) and ὀργή (*orgē*) (“anger, wrath”). In many cases these words do not merely refer to God’s present reaction to sin, but also suggest certain divine actions to come. In John 3:36, for example, Jesus says, “Whoever

believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." Romans 1:18 teaches that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Romans 2:5 speaks of "storing up wrath" for the day of judgment; and Romans 9:22 notes that God, while "choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction." The picture in all of these passages is that God's wrath is a very real and present matter, but will not be fully revealed, or manifested in action, until some later point.

From the foregoing it is evident that God looks with disfavor upon sin, indeed, that sin occasions anger or wrath or displeasure within him. Two additional comments should be made, however. The first is that anger is not something that God chooses to feel. His disapproval of sin is not an arbitrary matter, for his very nature is one of holiness; it automatically rejects sin. He is, as we have suggested in another place, "allergic to sin," as it were.[1019] The second comment is that we must avoid thinking of God's anger as being excessively emotional. It is not as if he is seething with anger, his temper virtually surging out of control. He is capable of exercising patience and long-suffering, and does so. Nor is God to be thought of as somehow frustrated by our sin. Disappointment is perhaps a more accurate way of characterizing his reaction.

Guilt

Our relationship with God is also affected by guilt. This word needs some careful explication, for in today's world the usual meaning of the term is guilt feelings, or the subjective aspect of guilt. These feelings are often thought of as irrational, and indeed they sometimes are. That is, a person may have done nothing objectively wrong but nonetheless may have these feelings. What we are referring to here, however, is the state of having violated God's intention for one and thus being liable to punishment.

To clarify what we mean by "guilt," it will be helpful for us to comment briefly on two words that may occur in one's definition of sin, namely, "bad" and "wrong." On the one hand, we may define sin as that which is intrinsically bad rather than good. It is impure, repulsive, hated by God simply because it is the opposite of the good. There is a problem here, however, inasmuch as the word is capable of many meanings—for example, it can mean "defective, inadequate, insufficient." One may think of a bad athletic team or a bad worker as being inept and nonproductive, but not necessarily morally wrong. And so the statement that sin is bad may be understood only in aesthetic terms—sin is ugly,

twisted, spoiled action that comes short of the perfect standard of what God intended.

On the other hand, however, we may define sin as involving not merely the bad, but the wrong as well. In the former case, sin might be likened to a foul disease that healthy people shrink from in fear. But in the latter case, we are thinking of sin not merely as a lack of wholeness or of perfection, but as moral wrong, as a deliberate violation of God's commands, and thus deserving of punishment. This is to think of sin not in aesthetic, but juristic, terms. In the former view, the good is thought of as the beautiful, harmonious, lovable, desirable, and attractive, whereas evil is understood as the inharmonious, turbulent, ugly, and repulsive. In the latter view, the law is emphasized. The right is what conforms to the law's stipulations, and the wrong is whatever departs from that standard in some way. It therefore deserves to be punished.[1020]

This distinction can be illustrated in other ways. One might think of an automobile that is hard to maneuver and inefficient, gets very poor gas mileage, or is badly damaged and an eyesore. Such an automobile might be a trial of patience for its owner and arouse feelings of disgust, but as long as the headlights, turn signals, and other safety features function properly, the exhaust emissions are within the prescribed limits of the law, and it is properly licensed and insured, there is nothing illegal about the vehicle. The driver cannot be given a citation for driving it, provided that he or she does not violate any traffic regulations. If, however, the automobile is emitting an excessive amount of contaminants into the environment, or some safety feature is malfunctioning, the law is being broken and a penalty would be deservedly imposed. Now when we speak of guilt, we mean that the sinner, like the automobile that does not meet legal safety regulations, has violated the law and, accordingly, is deserving of punishment.

At this point we must look into the precise nature of the disruption that sin and guilt produce in the relationship between God and human. God is the almighty, eternal one, the only independent or noncontingent reality. Everything that is has derived its existence from him. And the human, the highest of all of the creatures, has the gifts of life and personhood only because of God's goodness and graciousness. As the master, God has placed humans in charge of the creation and commanded them to rule over it (Gen. 1:28). They have been appointed stewards of God's kingdom or vineyard, with all the opportunities and privileges that entails. As the almighty and completely holy one, God has asked for our worship and obedience in response to his gifts. But we have failed to do God's bidding. Entrusted with the wealth of the creation, we have used it for our own purposes, like embezzlers. In addition, like citizens who treat

contemptuously a monarch or a high elected official, a hero or a person of great accomplishment, we have failed to treat with respect the highest of all beings. Further, we are ungrateful for all that God has done for us and given us (Rom. 1:21). And, finally, we have spurned God's offer of friendship and love, and, in the most extreme case, the salvation accomplished through the death of God's own Son. These offenses are magnified by who God is: he is the almighty Creator, infinitely above us. Under obligation to no one, he brought us into existence. Hence he has an absolute claim upon us. And the standard of behavior he expects us to emulate is his own holy perfection. As Jesus himself said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

We must think of sin and guilt in metaphysical categories if we are to gain a conception of their immense effect on our relationship with God and indeed on the whole of the universe. God is the highest being and we are his creatures. Failure to fulfill his standards disrupts the whole economy of the universe. Whenever the creature deprives the Creator of what is rightfully his, the balance is upset, for God is not being honored and obeyed. Were such disruption to go uncorrected, God would virtually cease to be God. Therefore, sin and the sinner deserve and even need to be punished.

Punishment

Liability to God's punishment, then, is another result of our sin. It is important for us to ascertain the basic nature and intent of God's punishment of the sinner. Is it remedial, intended to correct the sinner? Is it deterrent, pointing out the consequences to which sin leads and hence warning others against wrongdoing? Or is it retributive, designed simply to give sinners what they deserve? We need to examine each of these concepts in turn.

There is today a rather widespread feeling of opposition to the idea that God's punishment of the sinner is retribution. Retribution is regarded as primitive, cruel, a mark of hostility and vindictiveness, which is singularly inappropriate in a God of love who is a Father to his earthly children.[1021] Yet despite this feeling, which may reflect a permissive society's conception of a loving father, there is definitely a dimension of divine retribution in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. Ryder Smith puts it categorically: "There is no doubt that in Hebrew thought punishment is retributive. The use of the death penalty is enough to show that."[1022] It does appear that retribution was a prominent element in the Hebrew understanding of the law. Certainly, the death penalty, being terminal, was not intended to be rehabilitative. And while it also had a deterrent effect, the direct connection between what had been done to the victim and what was to be

done to the offender is clear. This is seen particularly in a passage like Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.” Because of the heinousness of what has been done (the image of God has been destroyed), there is and must be a corresponding penalty.

The idea of retribution is also seen quite clearly in the term נָקַם (*naqam*). This word, which (including its derivatives) appears about eighty times in the Old Testament, is frequently rendered “avenge, revenge, take vengeance.” While the terms “vengeance” and “revenge” are appropriate translations in designating Israel’s actions against her neighbors, there is something inappropriate about applying them to God’s actions.[1023] For “vengeance” applies particularly to a private individual’s reacting against a wrong done to him or her. God, however, considered in relationship to the violations of the moral and spiritual law, is not a private person, but a public person, the administrator of the law. Further, “vengeance” or “revenge” carries the idea of retaliation, of gaining satisfaction (psychologically) to compensate for what was done, rather than the idea of obtaining and administering justice. God’s concern, however, is in maintaining justice. Thus, in connection with God’s punishment of sinners, “retribution” is a better translation than is “vengeance.”

There are numerous references, particularly in the Major Prophets, to the retributive dimension of God’s punishment of sinners. Examples are to be found in Isaiah 1:24; 61:2; 63:4; Jeremiah 46:10; and Ezekiel 25:14. In Psalm 94:1 God is spoken of as the “God who avenges.” In these cases, as in most instances in the Old Testament, the punishment envisioned is to take place within historical time rather than in some future state.

The idea of retribution is also found in numerous narrative passages. To punish the awful wickedness of the whole human race upon the earth, God sent the flood to destroy humankind (Gen. 6). The flood was not sent to deter anyone from sin, for the only survivors, Noah and his family, were already righteous people. And it certainly could not have been sent for any corrective or rehabilitative reason, since the wicked were all destroyed. The case of Sodom and Gomorrah is similar. Because of the wickedness of these cities, God acted to destroy them. God’s action was simply retribution for their actions.

Although less frequently than in the Old Testament, the idea of retributive justice is also found in the New Testament. Here the reference is more to future rather than temporal judgment. Paraphrases of Deuteronomy 32:35 are found in both Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30—“It is mine to avenge; I will repay.” In Romans Paul’s purpose is to deter believers from attempting to avenge wrongs done to them. God is a God of justice, and wrongs will not go unpunished.

We should not overlook punishment's two other dimensions or functions. Warnings in Deuteronomy to beware of sin are coupled with examples of punishments inflicted on sinners. These examples were intended to deter persons from wrongdoing (Deut. 6:12–15; 8:11, 19–20). The same is true of Jeremiah's reminder to Judah of what God did to Shiloh (Jer. 7:12–14) and the psalmist's recalling of what happened to the generation that perished in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8–11). The stoning of Achan and his family (Josh. 7) was partly retribution for what he had done, but also a means of dissuading others from a similar course of conduct. For this reason punishment was frequently administered publicly.

There is also the disciplinary effect of punishment. Punishment was administered to convince sinners of the error of their ways and to turn them from it. Psalm 107:10–16 indicates that the Lord had punished Israel for their sins and they had consequently turned from their wrongdoing, at least temporarily. The psalmist elsewhere acknowledges that punishment had been good for him since he had thereby learned the Lord's statutes (Ps. 119:71). The writer to the Hebrews tells us "the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6).

In the Old Testament there is even a bit of the idea of purification from sin through punishment. This is at least hinted at in Isaiah 10:20–21. God will use Assyria to punish his people; as a result of this experience, a remnant of Israel will learn to lean upon the Lord. "A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God."

The way punishment is administered is also significant. At times it is administered indirectly, simply through God's immanent working in the physical and psychological laws that he has established in the world. Indirect punishment may be external, as, for example, when sin violates the principles of health and hygiene and results in illness. The person who engages in sexual sin and contracts a venereal disease is an obvious and frequently cited instance, but less dramatic cases also abound. We are now learning increasingly from psychologists that hatred and hostility have destructive effects on physical health. Indirect punishment may also take the form of external conflicts (e.g., in one's family) issuing from one's sin and the psychological laws God has ordained. David may be a case in point. Because of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, David was told that trouble would come upon his house (2 Sam. 12:10–12). Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom's murder of Amnon, and Absalom's revolt against David were fulfillments of this prophecy. These tragedies may have been natural consequences flowing automatically from David's behavior and basic human psychology. The crimes

of the sons may well have been the consequences either of the propensity of children to imitate their parents or of David's failure to discipline his sons, thinking that this would be hypocritical in view of his own past behavior. Finally, indirect punishment may be internal. For example, sin may lead automatically to an awful feeling of guilt, a gnawing sense of responsibility.

Some of the didactic passages of the Bible teach that there is in some cases a virtual cause-and-effect relationship between sin and punishment. In Galatians 6:7–8 Paul uses the imagery of sowing and reaping to compare the results of sin and of righteousness. He implies that just as the crop follows from the nature of the seed planted, so the punishment follows automatically from the sinful act. But while God often works indirectly through the physical and psychological laws he has established, this is not his only or even primary channel of punishment. More common in Scripture are those cases where God by a definite decision and direct act metes out punishment. Even where the punishment follows naturally from the act, it is not something impersonal, a piece of misfortune. The law that governs these fixed patterns is an expression of God's will.

The Christian view that God punishes indirectly through the patterns he has established is to be distinguished from the Hindu and Buddhist concept of karma, according to which every act has certain consequences. In karma there is an inexorable connection between the two.[1024] Nothing can break this connection, not even death, for the law of karma carries over into the next incarnation. In the Christian view, the sin-punishment sequence can be interrupted by repentance and confession of sins, with consequent forgiveness, and death brings a release from the temporal effects of sin.

Death

One of sin's obvious results is death. This truth is first pointed out in God's statement forbidding Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:17). It is also found in clear didactic form in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." Paul's point is that, like wages, death is a fitting return, a just recompense for what we have done. This death that we have deserved has several different aspects: (1) physical death, (2) spiritual death, and (3) eternal death.

PHYSICAL DEATH

The mortality of all humans is both an obvious fact and a truth taught by Scripture. Hebrews 9:27 says, “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Paul in Romans 5:12 attributes death to the original sin of Adam. Yet while death entered the world through Adam’s sin, it spread to all humans because all sinned.

This raises the question of whether humans were created mortal or immortal. Would they have died if they had not sinned? Calvinists have basically taken the negative position, arguing that physical death entered with the curse (Gen. 3:19).[1025] The Pelagian view, on the other hand, is that humans were created mortal. Just as everything about us dies sooner or later, so it is and has always been with humans. The principle of death and decay is a part of the whole of creation.[1026] Pelagians point out that if the Calvinist view is correct, then it was the serpent who was right and Jehovah was wrong in saying, “for when you eat of it you will surely die,” for Adam and Eve were not struck dead immediately upon committing their sin.[1027] Physical death, in the Pelagian view, is a natural accompaniment of being human. The biblical references to death as a consequence of sin are understood as references to spiritual death, separation from God, rather than physical death.

The problem is not as simple as it might at first appear. The assumption that mortality began with the fall, and that Romans 5:12 and similar New Testament references to death are to be understood as references to physical death, may not be warranted. An obstacle to the idea that physical mortality is a result of sin is the case of Jesus. Not only did he not sin himself (Heb. 4:15), but he was not tainted by the corrupted nature of Adam. Yet he died. How could mortality have affected someone who, spiritually, stood where Adam and Eve did before the fall? This is an enigma. Is it possible somehow to slip between the horns of the dilemma created by these conflicting data?

It appears that physical death is linked to the fall in some clear way. Genesis 3:19 would seem to be not a statement of what is the case and has been the case from creation, but a pronouncement of a new situation: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Further, it seems difficult to separate the ideas of physical death and spiritual death in Paul’s writings, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul’s theme is that physical death has been defeated through Christ’s resurrection. Humans still die, but death’s finality has been removed. Paul attributes to sin the power that physical death possesses in the absence of resurrection. But with Christ’s overcoming of physical death, sin itself (and thus spiritual death) is defeated (vv. 55–56). Apart from Christ’s resurrection from physical death, we would remain in our sins, that is, we would

remain spiritually dead (v. 17). Louis Berkhof appears to be correct when he says, “The Bible does not know the distinction, so common among us, between a physical, a spiritual, and an eternal death; it has a synthetic view of death and regards it as separation from God.”[1028] On the other hand, there are the considerations that Adam and Eve died spiritually but not physically the moment or the day that they sinned, and that even the sinless Jesus was capable of dying. How is all of this to be untangled?

I would suggest the concept of conditional immortality as the state of Adam before the fall. He was not inherently able to live forever, but he need not have died.[1029] Given the right conditions, he could have lived forever. This may be the meaning of God’s words when he decided to expel Adam and Eve from Eden and from the presence of the tree of life: “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (3:22). The impression is given that Adam and Eve, even after the fall, could have lived forever if they had eaten the fruit of the tree of life. What happened at the time of their expulsion from Eden was that the humans, who formerly could have either lived forever or died, were now separated from those conditions that made eternal life possible, and thus it became inevitable that they would die. Previously they *could* die; now they *would* die. This also means that Jesus was born with a body that was subject to death. He had to eat to live; had he failed to eat he would have starved to death.

We should note that there were other changes as a result of sin. In Eden the humans had bodies that presumably could become diseased; after the fall there were diseases for them to contract. The curse, involving the coming of death to humankind, also included a whole host of ills that would lead to death. Paul tells us that someday this set of conditions will be removed, and the whole creation delivered from this “bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:18–23).

To sum up: the potential of death was within the creation from the beginning, but so was the potential of eternal life. Sin, in the case of Adam and each of us, means that death is no longer merely potential but actual.

We have not attempted to define physical death, although most older theologies define it as the separation of body and soul. This definition is not fully satisfactory, for reasons indicated in our treatment of the makeup of human nature (chap. 23). We will attempt to define physical death more completely in our discussion of the last things. For the time being, we will think of it as the termination of human existence in the bodily or materialized state.

Spiritual Death

Spiritual death is both connected with physical death and distinguished from it. It is the separation of the entire person from God. God, as a perfectly holy being, cannot look upon sin or tolerate its presence. Thus, sin is a barrier to the relationship between God and humans, bringing them under God's judgment and condemnation.

The essence of spiritual death can be seen in the case of Adam and Eve. "For when you eat of it [the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will certainly die" (Gen 2:17) did not mean that they would experience immediate physical death. It did mean, as we have seen, that their potential mortality would become actual. It also meant spiritual death, separation between them and God. And indeed, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they tried to hide from God because of their shame and guilt, and God pronounced severe curses upon them. Sin results in alienation from God. This is the wages of sin of which Paul speaks in Romans 6:23.

In addition to this objective aspect of spiritual death, there is also a subjective aspect. The Bible frequently states that people apart from Christ are dead in trespasses and sins. This means, at least in part, that sensibility to spiritual matters and the ability to act and respond spiritually, to do good things, are absent or severely impaired. The newness of life that is now ours through Christ's resurrection and symbolized in baptism (Rom. 6:4), while not precluding physical death, means that sin no longer dominates us. We possess a new spiritual sensitivity and vitality.

Eternal Death

Eternal death is in a very real sense the extension and finalization of spiritual death. If one comes to physical death still spiritually dead, separated from God, that condition becomes permanent. As eternal life is both qualitatively different from our present life and unending, so eternal death is separation from God that is both qualitatively different from physical death and everlasting in extent.

At the last judgment, the persons who appear before God's judgment seat will be divided into two groups. Those who are judged righteous will be sent into eternal life (Matt. 25:34–40, 46b). Those judged to be unrighteous will be sent into eternal punishment or eternal fire (vv. 41–46a). In Revelation 20 John writes of a "second death." The first death is physical death, from which the resurrection gives us deliverance, but not exemption. Although all will eventually die the first death, the important question is whether in each individual case the second death has been overcome. Those who participate in the first resurrection are spoken of as "blessed and holy." Over such the second

death is said to have no power (v. 6). In the latter part of the chapter, death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire (vv. 13–14), into which the beast and the false prophet were earlier cast (19:20). This is spoken of as the second death (20:14). Anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the permanent state of what the sinner chose in life.

We have examined the results sin has upon a human's relationship with God. This is the primary area affected by sin. David had most assuredly sinned against Uriah, and against Bathsheba, and even against the nation of Israel. Yet in his great penitential psalm he prayed, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps. 51:4). Even where there is no apparent horizontal dimension to sin, God is affected by it. The argument that certain actions are not wrong, provided they are performed by consenting adults and no one is harmed, disregards the fact that sin is primarily wrong against God and primarily affects the relationship between the sinner and God.

Effects on the Sinner

Enslavement

Sin also has varied and complex internal consequences for the person who commits it. One of these is its enslaving power. Sin becomes a habit or even an addiction. One sin leads to another sin. For example, after killing Abel, Cain felt constrained to lie when God asked him where his brother was. Sometimes a larger sin is required to cover a smaller one. Having committed adultery, David found it necessary to commit murder to conceal what he had done. Sometimes the pattern becomes fixed, so that the same act is repeated in virtually the same way. This was the case with Abraham. In Egypt he lied about Sarah, saying that she was his sister rather than his wife, with the result that Pharaoh took her as his wife (Gen. 12:10–20). Later Abraham repeated the same lie to Abimelech (Gen. 20). It appears that he had not learned anything from the first incident. Even his son Isaac later repeated the same lie with regard to his wife, Rebekah (Gen. 26:6–11).[1030]

What some people consider freedom to sin, freedom from the restrictions of obedience to the will of God, is actually the enslavement that sin produces. In some cases sin gains so much control and power over a person he or she cannot escape. Paul recalls that the Roman Christians "used to be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:17). But sin's grip on the individual is loosed by the work of Christ: "Through

Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2 NIV 1984).

Flight from Reality

Sin also results in an unwillingness to face reality. The harsh dimensions of life, and especially the consequences of our sin, are not faced realistically, in particular, the stark fact of death (Heb. 9:27). One way of avoiding this fact is through positive language. No one ever dies anymore; instead, one simply "passes away." Death is made to sound like a pleasant little trip. There are no longer cemeteries and most certainly no graveyards in our modern society. What we have instead are "memorial parks." And the experience of growing old, which signals the approach of death, is carefully masked with euphemisms like "senior citizen" and "golden age," even "chronologically gifted." This disguising or ignoring of death sometimes constitutes a virtual denial, which actually is a sign of fear of death. A suppressed realization that death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23) may underlie many of our attempts to avoid thinking about it.

Denial of Sin

Accompanying our denial of death is a denial of sin, in various ways. It may be relabeled, so that it is not acknowledged as sin at all. It may be considered a matter of sickness, deprivation, ignorance, or perhaps social maladjustment at worst. Karl Menninger wrote of this phenomenon in his book *Whatever Became of Sin?*[1031] Denying the existence of sin is one way of disposing of the painful consciousness of one's wrongdoing.

Another way of denying our sin is to admit the wrongness of our actions, but to decline to take responsibility for them. We see this dynamic at work in the case of the very first sin. When confronted by the Lord's question, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Gen. 3:11), Adam responded by shifting the blame: "The woman . . . gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (v. 12). Adam's immediate reaction was to deny personal responsibility—he had eaten only at Eve's inducement. But Adam's attempt to shift the blame was even more involved, for what he said was, "The woman *you* put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Adam tried to shift the blame even to God, for had God not given the woman to Adam, he would not have been exposed to temptation. The woman, too, exhibits the same denial of personal responsibility: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (v. 13). The serpent had no

one to blame, and so the process stopped there. Note, however, that the judgment came upon all three—Adam, Eve, and the serpent. The fact that someone else had instigated the respective sins of Eve and Adam did not remove their responsibility. Both sinner and instigator were punished.

Attempting to shift responsibility from oneself is a common practice. For deep down there is often a sense of guilt one desperately wants to eradicate. But trying to shift responsibility compounds the sin and makes repentance more unlikely. All of the excuses and explanations that we offer for our actions are signs of the depth of our sin. Appealing to determinism to explain and justify our sin is simply a sophisticated form of denial.

Self-Deceit

Self-deceit is the underlying problem when we deny sin. Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is deceitful [slippery, crooked] above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (17:9). The hypocrites of whom Jesus often spoke probably fooled themselves before they tried to fool others. He pointed to the ludicrous lengths to which self-deceit can go: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3). David denounced the injustice of the rich man in Nathan's parable who took the poor man's one little ewe lamb, but he did not see the point of the parable (his own injustice in taking Uriah's wife) until Nathan pointed it out to him (2 Sam. 12:1–15).

Insensitivity

Sin also produces insensitivity. As we continue to sin and to reject God's warnings and condemnations, we become less and less responsive to the promptings of conscience, and the stirrings by the Word and the Spirit. In time, even gross sins can be committed with no compunction. A shell, a spiritual callous, as it were, grows upon the soul. Paul spoke of those "whose consciences have been seared" (1 Tim. 4:2) and of those whose minds are darkened as a result of rejecting the truth (Rom. 1:21). Perhaps the clearest example in Jesus's ministry is the Pharisees, who, having seen Jesus's miracles and heard his teaching, attributed what was the work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons (Matt. 12:24).

Self-Centeredness

An increasing self-centeredness also results from sin. In many ways sin is a turning in upon oneself that is confirmed with practice. We call attention to ourselves, and to our good qualities and accomplishments, and minimize our shortcomings. We seek special favors and opportunities in life, wanting an extra little edge that no one else has. We display a certain special alertness to our own wants and needs, while we ignore those of others.

Restlessness

Finally, sin often produces restlessness. There is a certain insatiable character about sin. Complete satisfaction never occurs. Although some sinners may have a relative stability for a time, sin eventually loses its ability to satisfy. As with habituation to a drug, a tolerance is built up, and it becomes easier to sin without feeling pangs of guilt. Further, it takes a greater dosage to produce the same effects. In the process, our wants keep expanding as rapidly as, or more rapidly than, we can fulfill them. It is alleged that in answer to the question, "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" John D. Rockefeller responded, "Just a little bit more." Like a restless, tossing sea, the wicked never really come to peace.

Effects on the Relationship to Other Humans

Competition

Sin also has massive effects upon the relationships between humans. One of the most significant is the proliferation of competition. Since sin makes one increasingly self-centered and self-seeking, there will inevitably be conflict with others. We wish the same position, the same marriage partner, or the same piece of real estate that another has. Whenever someone wins, someone else loses. The loser, out of resentment, will often become a threat to the winner. The person who succeeds will always have the anxiety that others may attempt to take back what they have lost. Thus, there really are no winners in the competitive race. The most extreme and large-scale version of human competition is war, with its wholesale destruction of property and human lives. James is quite clear as to the major factors that lead to war: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel

and fight" (James 4:1–2). We observed earlier that sin becomes enslaving, leading to more sin. James's assertion bears out this observation.

Inability to Empathize

Inability to empathize with others is a major consequence of sin. Being concerned about our personal desires, reputation, and opinions, we see only our own perspective. We cannot step into the shoes of others and see their needs as well, or see how they might understand a situation in a somewhat different way. This is the opposite of what Paul commended to his readers: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3–5).

Rejection of Authority

Rejection of authority is often a social ramification of sin. If we find security in our own possessions and accomplishments, then any outside authority is threatening. Since it restricts our doing what we want, it must be resisted or ignored. In the process, of course, many others' rights may be trampled.

Inability to Love

Finally, sin results in inability to love. Since other people stand in our way, representing competition and a threat to us, we cannot really act for the ultimate welfare of others if our aim is self-satisfaction. And so suspicions, conflicts, bitterness, and even hatred issue from the self-absorption or the pursuit of finite values that has supplanted God at the center of the sinner's life.

Sin is a serious matter; it has far-reaching effects—upon our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to other humans. Accordingly, it will require a cure with similarly extensive effects.

28
The Magnitude of Sin

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Relate the Old and New Testament teaching on the extent of sin to a fuller understanding of sin.
2. Relate the Old and New Testament teaching on the intensiveness of sin to an expanded understanding of sin's pervasiveness.
3. Identify and explain three traditional theories of original sin: Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism.
4. Extrapolate biblically appropriate concepts from the traditional theories and formulate a biblical and contemporary model of original sin.

Chapter Summary

It is evident from both the Old and New Testament descriptions of sin that sin is universal. Both Testaments further affirm the depth and breadth of sin in all humans. Three historical views of original sin include Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism. Pelagianism shows the least affinity to Scripture. The author presents a contemporary understanding of the magnitude of sin that incorporates a biblical perspective and the best elements of traditional views.

Study Questions

- What similarities and differences do you perceive between the Old and New Testament teachings on the extensiveness of sin?
- How did the Pharisees become an example of the intensiveness of sin among humanity?
- What is Pelagianism, and how would you argue against this position? How does this position reflect the point of view of many persons in contemporary culture?
- How would you compare and contrast Arminianism and Calvinism?
- What conclusions would you draw from the Bible and your understanding of the three theories of original sin? Develop a position and try to defend it.
- How does your position compare with the model offered by the author?

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Having seen something of the nature of sin, its source, and its effects, we must now ask regarding its magnitude. There are two facets to this question: (1) How extensive, how common, is sin? (2) How intensive, how radical, is it?

The Extent of Sin

To the question of who sins, the answer is apparent: sin is universal. Not merely a few isolated individuals or even a majority of the human race, but all humans, without exception, are sinners.

The Old Testament Teaching

The universality of sin is taught in several ways and places in Scripture. In the Old Testament, we do not usually find general statements about all persons at all times, but about all those living at the time being written about. In the time of Noah, the sin of the race was so great and so extensive that God resolved to destroy everything (with the exception of Noah, his family, and the animals taken on board the ark). The description is vivid: "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). God regretted having made humanity and resolved to blot out the entire human race, together with all other living things, for the corruption was worldwide: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence" (Gen. 6:11). Noah appears to be an exception: he found favor in the eyes of the Lord, being described as a "righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" (v. 9). Yet while he stands out in contrast to those surrounding him, he was guilty of the sin of drunkenness (9:21), which is condemned elsewhere in Scripture (Hab. 2:15; Eph. 5:18).

Even after the flood has destroyed the wicked of the earth, God still characterizes "every inclination of the human heart [as being] evil from childhood" (Gen. 8:21). David describes the corruption of his contemporaries in terms that Paul quotes in Romans 3. In Psalms 14 and 53, which are almost identical, human corruption is pictured as universal: "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. . . . All have turned away, they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps. 14:1, 3). Here again, there are a few righteous among the evildoers (v. 5). David does not suggest, however, that righteousness is one's own accomplishment rather than a gift of the Lord's grace. Proverbs 20 implies that a quest for a righteous and faithful person will prove fruitless: "Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?" (v. 6). "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin'?" (v. 9). Between these two rhetorical questions are statements about some who are righteous and a king who sits on the throne of judgment (vv. 7–8), but apparently even they cannot claim credit for righteousness.

A categorical statement about human sinfulness is found in 1 Kings 8:46: “for there is no one who does not sin” (cf. Rom. 3:23). David makes a similar statement when he asks for mercy from God: “Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you” (Ps. 143:2). The same idea is implied in Psalm 130:3: “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?” The writer of Ecclesiastes says, “There is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins” (Eccles. 7:20).

These statements of the universal sinfulness of the human race should be regarded as qualifying all the scriptural references to perfect or blameless persons (e.g., Ps. 37:37; Prov. 11:5). Even those who are specifically described as perfect have shortcomings, like Noah. The same is true of Job (cf. Job 1:8 and 14:16–17, where Job refers to his transgressions). Abraham was a man of great faith; the Lord even bade him be blameless (Gen. 17:1). Yet his actions prove that he was not sinless. In siring a son, Ishmael, by Hagar he showed a lack of belief in God’s ability to fulfill his promise of an heir: Abraham demonstrated a lack of integrity as well in twice representing his wife, Sarah, as his sister (Gen. 12, 20). Moses was certainly a man of God, but his lack of belief resulted in his not being allowed to bring the people of Israel into the promised land (Num. 20:10–13). David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). Yet his sins were grievous and occasioned the great penitential psalm (Ps. 51). Isaiah 53:6 takes pains to universalize its metaphorical description of sinners: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The New Testament Teaching

The New Testament is even clearer concerning the universality of human sin. The best-known passage is Romans 3, where Paul quotes and elaborates upon Psalms 14 and 53, as well as 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1; and Isaiah 59:7–8. He asserts that “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin” (v. 9), and then heaps up a number of descriptive quotations beginning with, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (vv. 10–12). None will be justified by works of the law (v. 20). The reason is clear: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). Paul also makes it plain that he is talking not only about unbelievers, those outside the Christian faith, but believers as well, including himself. In Ephesians 2:3 he acknowledges, “All of us also lived among them [the sons of disobedience, v. 2] at one time, gratifying the cravings

of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." It is apparent that there are no exceptions to this universal rule. In his statement on the law and its function, Paul makes mention of the fact that "Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin" (Gal. 3:22). Similarly 1 John 5:19 indicates that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one."

Not only does the Bible frequently assert that all are sinners; it also assumes it everywhere. Note, for example, that the commands to repent relate to everyone. In his Mars' Hill address Paul said, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Although Jesus never needed to confess sin or repent, it is necessary for everyone else to do so, for it is obvious that all sin. In speaking to Nicodemus about being born again, Jesus made his statement universal: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Everyone needs the transformation the new birth brings. In the New Testament each person, by virtue of being human, is regarded as a sinner in need of repentance and new birth. Sin is universal. As Ryder Smith puts it, "The universality of sin is taken as matter of fact. On examination, it will be found that every speech in Acts, even Stephen's, and every Epistle just assumes that men have all sinned. This is also the assumption of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. . . . Jesus deals with everyone on the assumption, 'Here is a sinner.'"[1032]

In addition to affirming and everywhere assuming that all humans are sinners, the Bible also abundantly illustrates this fact. Blatant sinners appear in the pages of Scripture. The Samaritan woman in John 4 and the thieves on the cross are obvious instances. But what is more impressive is that even the good people, the righteous, the heroes of Scripture, are presented as sinners. We have already pointed to several Old Testament examples—Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. And in the New Testament we read of Jesus's disciples' shortcomings. Peter's sins brought him several rebukes from Jesus, the most severe being, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Matt. 16:23). Selfish ambition and pride were revealed not only in the attempt of James and John to be named to the places of authority at Jesus's right and left hands, but also in the resentment and indignation of the other disciples (Matt. 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–27). This incident is all the more amazing because it came not long after they had disputed which of them was the greatest, and Jesus had responded with a speech on the necessity of servanthood (Matt. 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48).

An additional proof of the universality of sin is that all persons are subject to the penalty for sin, namely, death. Except for those alive when Christ returns, everyone will succumb to death. Romans 3:23 (“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”) and 6:23 (“the wages of sin is death”) are interconnected. The universality of the death spoken of in the latter is evidence of the universality of sin of which the former verse speaks. Between these two verses comes Romans 5:12: “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” Here, too, sin is considered universal.

The Intensiveness of Sin

Having seen that the extent of sin is universal, we turn now to the issue of its intensiveness. How sinful is the sinner? How deep is our sin? Are we basically pure, with a positive inclination toward the good, or are we totally and absolutely corrupt? We must look carefully at the biblical data and then seek to interpret and integrate them.

The Old Testament Teaching

The Old Testament for the most part speaks of sins rather than of sinfulness, of sin as an act rather than as a state or disposition. The condemnation pronounced by the Hebrew prophets was generally directed at acts of sin or sins, yet these were not merely external acts of sin, but inward sins as well. Indeed, a distinction was drawn between sins on the basis of the motivation involved. The right of sanctuary for someone who killed a person was reserved for those who had killed accidentally rather than intentionally (Deut. 4:42). The motive was fully as important as the act itself. In addition, inward thoughts and intentions were condemned quite apart from external acts. An example is the sin of covetousness, an internal desire that is deliberately chosen.[1033]

There is yet a further step in the Old Testament understanding of sin. Particularly in the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, sin is depicted as a spiritual sickness that afflicts the heart. Our heart is wrong and must be changed, or even exchanged. We do not merely do evil; our very inclination is evil. Jeremiah says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Later Jeremiah prophesies that God will change the hearts of his people. The day will come when the Lord will put his law within the house of Israel and “write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Similarly, in the book of Ezekiel

God asserts that the hearts of the people need change: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19).

It is also noteworthy that while some of the Hebrew terms for sin that we examined in chapter 25 point to definite and specific sins, others seem to suggest a condition, state, or tendency of the heart. One particularly significant term here is the verb בָּ ־ חָ (*chashab*), which in various forms appears some 180 times.[1034] While there are more than twenty different renderings in English, the basic meaning is “to plan,” which combines the ideas of thinking and devising. The term is used in connection with God’s thoughts and purposes, and especially in connection with the cunning and sinful devisings of a human heart. In the latter case, the word calls attention not to the act of sin, but the purpose and even the scheming behind it. In Ecclesiastes 7, the preacher is reflecting upon the prevalence of the folly of wickedness. He speaks of the woman whose heart is a trap (v. 26), and then concludes, “This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes” (v. 29). The person who commits wicked acts is one whose heart devises evil, whose habit is to sin. The image of the scheming heart is found as early as the account of the flood; God observed of sinful humanity that “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). Later examples are abundant: “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isa. 55:7); “I did not realize that they had plotted against me” (Jer. 11:19); “The LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked, but gracious words are pure in his sight” (Prov. 15:26). Ryder Smith comments on these passages: “Here the idea of *separate* inward sins is passing into that of a habit of sin.”[1035]

Psalm 51, the great penitential psalm, most fully expresses the idea of sinfulness or a sinful nature. Here we find a strong emphasis on the idea of sin as an inward condition or disposition, and the need of purging the inward person. David speaks of his having been sinful from not just birth but conception (v. 5). He speaks of the Lord’s desiring truth in the inward parts, and the need of being taught wisdom in the secret heart (v. 6). The psalmist prays to be washed and cleansed (v. 2, 7) and asks God to create in him a clean heart and to put a new and right (or steadfast) spirit within him (v. 10). It is clear that the psalmist does not think of himself merely as one who commits sins, but as a sinful person.

The New Testament Teaching

The New Testament is even clearer and more emphatic on these matters. Jesus spoke of the inward disposition as evil. It is insufficient not to commit murder; one who is angry with a brother is liable to judgment (Matt. 5:21–22). It is not enough to abstain from committing adultery. If a man lusts after a woman, he has in his heart already committed adultery with her (Matt. 5:27–28). Jesus put it even more strongly in Matthew 12:33–35, where actions are regarded as issuing from the heart: "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." Luke makes it clear that the fruit produced reflects the very nature of the tree, or of the person: no good tree bears bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit (Luke 6:43–45). Evil actions and words stem from the evil thoughts of the heart: "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:18–19).

Paul's own self-testimony also is a powerful argument that it is the corruption of human nature that produces individual sins. He recalls that "when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death" (Rom. 7:5). And still now he says, "I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (v. 23). In Galatians 5:17 he writes that the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. The word here is ἐπιθυμέω (*epithumeō*), which can refer to either a neutral desire or an improper desire. There are numerous "acts of the flesh": "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (vv. 19–21). In Paul's thinking, then, as in Jesus's, sins are the result of human nature. In every human being there is a strong inclination toward evil, an inclination with definite effects.

The adjective "total" is often attached to the idea of depravity. This idea derives from certain of the texts we have already examined. Very early in the Bible we read, "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). Paul describes the Gentiles as "darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in

every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed" (Eph. 4:18–19). His descriptions of sinners in Romans 1:18–32 and Titus 1:15, as well as of the people of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:2–5, focus on their corruption and callousness and desperate wickedness. But the expression "total depravity" must be carefully used. For it has sometimes been interpreted as conveying a false understanding of human nature.[1036]

We do not mean by total depravity that the unregenerate person is totally insensitive in matters of conscience, of right and wrong. For Paul in Romans 2:15 says that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts, "their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."

Further, total depravity does not mean that the sinful person is as sinful as possible. No one continuously does only evil and in the most wicked fashion possible. There are genuinely altruistic unregenerate persons, who show kindness, generosity, and love to others, who are good, devoted spouses and parents. Some completely secular persons have engaged in acts of heroism on behalf of their country. These actions, insofar as they are in conformity with God's will and law, are pleasing to God, though not in any way meritorious. They do not qualify the person for salvation, or contribute to it in any way.

Finally, the doctrine of total depravity does not mean that the sinner engages in every possible form of sin. Because virtue is often, as Aristotle pointed out, a mean between two extremes, both of which are vices, the presence of one vice would in some cases automatically exclude another.[1037]

What then do we mean, positively, by the idea of total depravity? First, sin is a matter of the entire person.[1038] The seat of sin is not merely one aspect of the person, such as the body or the reason. Certainly several references make clear that the body is affected (e.g., Rom. 6:6, 12; 7:24; 8:10, 13). Other verses tell us that the mind or the reason is involved (e.g., Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:14–15; 4:4) and that the emotions also are involved (e.g., Rom. 1:26–27; Gal. 5:24; and 2 Tim. 3:2–4, where the ungodly are described as being lovers of self and pleasure rather than lovers of God). Finally, the will is also affected. The unregenerate person does not have a truly free will, but is a slave to sin. Paul starkly describes the Romans as having once been "slaves to sin" (6:17). He is concerned that the opponents of the Lord's servant come to "repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and . . . escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:25–26).

Further, total depravity means that even the unregenerate person's altruism always contains an element of improper motive. The good acts are not done entirely or even primarily out of perfect love for God. In each case there is

another factor, whether the preference of one's own self-interest or of some other object less than God. Thus, while there may appear to be good and desirable behavior, and we may be inclined to feel that it could not in any way be sinful, yet even the good is tainted. The Pharisees who so often dialogued with Jesus did many good things (Matt. 23:23), but they had no real love for God. So he said to them, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts" (John 5:39–42).

Sometimes sinfulness is covered by a genteel layer of charm and graciousness. Yet, as the doctrine of total depravity indicates, under that veneer is a heart not truly inclined to God. Langdon Gilkey tells how he discovered this truth in a Japanese prison camp. He had been raised in cultured circles. He had known thoughtful, generous people. But when in a prison camp with many of the same type of people, he saw a different side of human nature. Here, with a shortage of everything, the selfishness that is natural to humans manifested itself, sometimes in quite spectacular fashion. Space was at a premium, and so definite allotments were made, as equitably as possible for everyone. Gilkey was in charge of housing assignments. A number of people offered elaborate explanations of why they should have more space than others. Some moved their beds a fraction of an inch each night in order to gain just a bit more space. Among these offenders were even some Christian missionaries. In a moving passage he describes his discovery of something like original sin. It is a vivid reminder that what happens in situations of exigency may be a better indication of the true condition of the human heart than are the normal circumstances of life.

> Such experiences with ordinary human cussedness naturally stimulated me to do a good deal of thinking in such time as I had to myself. My ideas as to what people were like and as to what motivated their actions were undergoing a radical revision. People generally—and I know I could not exclude myself—seemed to be much less rational and much more selfish than I had ever guessed, not at all the "nice folk" I had always thought them to be. They did not decide to do things because it would be reasonable and moral to act in that way, but because that course of action suited their self-interest. Afterward they would find rational and moral reasons for what they had already determined to do.[1039]

Humans here are not much above the level of animals, which fight each other for food even if there is enough for everyone. When society functions normally, humanity does not appear to be so bad; what we forget is that the law enforcement authorities are serving as a deterrent. But when an electrical blackout prevents police from fulfilling their duties normally, crime breaks loose

in large proportions. We should not too quickly assume, then, that the relative goodness of human beings in normal circumstances refutes the idea of original sin. This goodness may be motivated by fear of detection and punishment.

Similar considerations apply to the puzzling problem of "Mr. Nice," the very pleasant, thoughtful, helpful, generous non-Christian. It is at times hard to think of this type of person as sinful and in need of regeneration. How can such a person be a desperately wicked, selfish, rebellious sinner? In the correct understanding of the doctrine of total depravity, sin is not defined in terms of what other human beings may regard as unpleasant. It is, rather, a matter of failure to love, honor, and serve God. Thus, even the likable and kindly person is in need of the gospel of new life, as much as is any obnoxious, crude, and thoughtless person.

Finally, total depravity means that sinners are completely unable to extricate themselves from their sinful condition.[1040] Apart from the good acts they do being tainted by less than perfect love for God, good and lawful actions cannot be maintained consistently. The sinner cannot alter his or her life by a process of determination, will power, and reformation. Sin is inescapable. This fact is depicted in Scripture's frequent references to sinners as "spiritually dead." Paul writes, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live. . . . [God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Eph. 2:1–2, 5). The same expression is found in Colossians 2:13. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of "acts that lead to death" (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). These various expressions do not mean that sinners are absolutely insensitive and unresponsive to spiritual stimuli, but, rather, that they are unable to do what they ought. Unregenerate persons are incapable of genuinely good, redeeming works; whatever they do is dead or ineffective in relationship to God. Salvation by works is absolutely impossible (Eph. 2:8–9).

Anyone who has attempted to live a perfect life in his or her own strength has discovered what Paul is talking about here. Such endeavors eventually end in frustration at best. One seminary professor described his personal attempt. He listed thirty characteristics of the Christian life. Then he assigned each one to a different day of the month. On the first day, he worked very hard on the first attribute. With a great deal of concentration, he managed to live up to his goal the entire day. On the second day of the month, he shifted to the second area, and mastered it. Then he moved on to the other areas, successively mastering each in turn, until on the final day he perfectly realized the characteristic assigned to it. But just as he was reveling in the sense of victory, he looked back at the first day's goal to see how he was doing. To his chagrin, he discovered that he had completely lost sight of the goal of the first day—and of the second, third, and

fourth days. While he had been concentrating on other areas, his former failures and shortcomings had simply crept back in. His experience is an empirical study of what the Bible teaches us: “there is no one who does good, not even one (Pss. 14:3b; 53:3b; Rom. 3:12). The Bible also gives the reason for this: “everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt [depraved]” (Pss. 14:3a; 53:3a). We are totally unable to do genuinely meritorious works sufficient to qualify for God’s favor.

Theories of Original Sin

All of us, apparently without exception, are sinners. By this we mean not merely that all of us sin, but that we all have a depraved or corrupted nature that so inclines us toward sin that it is virtually inevitable. How can this be? What is the basis of this amazing fact? Must not some common factor be at work in all of us? But what is this common factor that is often referred to as original sin?[1041] Whence is it derived, and how is it transmitted or communicated?

We find the answer in Romans 5: “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” (v. 12). This thought is repeated in several different ways in the succeeding verses: “the many died by the trespass of the one man” (v. 15); “judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation” (v. 16); “by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man” (v. 17); “one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people” (v. 18); “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (v. 19). Paul sees some sort of causal connection between what Adam did and the sinfulness of all people throughout all time. But just what is the nature of this influence exerted by Adam upon all humans, and by what means does it operate?

A number of attempts have been made to understand and elucidate this Adamic influence. In the following pages, we will examine and evaluate each of these efforts in turn. We will then attempt to construct a model that does justice to the various dimensions of the biblical witness and is also intelligible within the contemporary context.

Pelagianism

The first view of the relationship between individual humans and the first sin of Adam is that of Pelagius. He is thought to have been a British monk who had moved to Rome to teach. When, as a result of Alaric’s invasion, he left Italy for

Carthage in North Africa in 409, conflict with Augustine's teachings was almost inevitable.[1042]

Pelagius was a moralist: his primary concern was for people to live good and decent lives. It seemed to him that an unduly negative view of human nature was having an unfortunate effect upon human behavior. Coupled with an emphasis upon God's sovereignty, the estimation of human sinfulness seemed to remove all motivation to attempt to live a good life.[1043]

To counteract these tendencies, Pelagius strongly emphasized the idea of free will. Unlike the other creatures, humans were created free of the controlling influences of the universe. Furthermore, humans today are free of any determining influence from the fall. Holding to a creationist view of the origin of the soul, Pelagius maintained that the soul, created by God specially for every person, is not tainted by any supposed corruption or guilt.[1044] Adam's influence, if any, upon his descendants is merely that of a bad example. Humans have no congenital spiritual fault. Hence, baptism does not remove sin or guilt in infants, since there is none, although it may remove the sin of adults.[1045]

If Adam's sin has no direct effect on every human being, there is no need for a special working of God's grace within the heart of each individual. Rather the grace of God is simply something present everywhere and at every moment.[1046] When Pelagius spoke of "grace," he meant free will, apprehension of God through reason, and the law of Moses and Jesus's instruction. There is also the grace of forgiveness given to adults in baptism. Grace is available equally to all persons. Thus, Pelagius rejected anything even faintly resembling the predestination taught by Augustine.

As Pelagius spelled out the implications of his various tenets, the idea emerged that humans can, by their own efforts, perfectly fulfill God's commands without sinning.[1047] There is no natural inclination toward sin at the beginning of life; any later inclination in that direction comes only through the building up of bad habits. Salvation by works is thus quite possible, although that is something of a misnomer. Since we are not really sinful, guilty, and condemned, this process is not a matter of salvation from something that presently binds us. It is rather a preservation or maintenance of our right status and good standing. By our own accomplishment we keep from falling into a sinful condition.

Pelagius did not eliminate infant baptism, but he regarded its significance as merely benedictory rather than regenerative. What infants receive in baptism is "spiritual illumination, adoption as children of God, citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem, sanctification and membership of Christ, with inheritance in the Kingdom of heaven."[1048] Some of Pelagius's disciples took his teachings a bit further. Coelestius taught that children may have eternal life even without

baptism, and that Adam was created mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not.[1049] Julian of Eclanum insisted that humans' free will places them in a situation of absolute independence from God.[1050]

Arminianism

A more moderate view is the Arminian. James Arminius was a Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian who modified considerably the theological position in which he had been trained.[1051] Arminius himself took a rather restrained stance, but subsequent statements by others went considerably further. Later modifications by John Wesley were closer to the original position of Arminius. There are considerable differences among Arminians; we will here attempt to sketch a rather moderate form of Arminianism.

Unlike Pelagianism, Arminianism holds that we receive from Adam a corrupted nature. We begin life without righteousness. Thus, all humans are unable, without special divine help, to fulfill God's spiritual commands. This inability is physical and intellectual, but not volitional.

Although some Arminians say that "guilt" is also part of original sin, they do not mean actual culpability, but merely liability to punishment. For whatever culpability and condemnation may have accrued to us through Adam's sin have been removed through prevenient grace, a doctrine that is a unique contribution of later Arminianism. Orton Wiley says: "Man is not now condemned for the depravity of his own nature, although that depravity is of the essence of sin; its culpability, we maintain, was removed by the free gift of Christ." This prevenient grace is extended to everyone, and in effect neutralizes the corruption received from Adam.[1052]

Calvinism

Calvinists have given more attention to the question of original sin than have most other schools of theology. In general terms, the Calvinist position on this matter is that there is a definite connection between Adam's sin and all persons of all times. In some way, his sin is not just the sin of an isolated individual, but is also our sin. Because we participate in that sin, we all, from the beginning of life, perhaps even from the point of conception, receive a corrupted nature along with a consequent inherited tendency toward sin. Furthermore, all persons are guilty of Adam's sin. Death, the penalty for sin, has been transmitted from Adam to all humans; that is evidence of everyone's guilt. Thus, whereas in the Pelagian view God imputes neither a corrupted nature nor guilt to humanity, and in the

Arminian view God imputes a corrupted nature but not guilt (in the sense of culpability), in the Calvinist scheme he imputes both a corrupted nature and guilt. The Calvinist position is based upon a very serious and quite literal understanding of Paul's statements in Romans 5:12–19 that sin entered the world through Adam and death through that sin, and so death passed to all people, because all sinned. Through one person's sin all became sinners.

A question arises concerning the nature of the connection or relationship between Adam and us, and thus also between Adam's first sin and our sinfulness. Numerous attempts have been made to answer this question. The two major approaches see the relationship in terms of federal headship and natural headship.

The approach that sees Adam's connection with us in terms of a federal headship is generally related to the creationist view of the origin of the soul. This is the view that humans receive their physical nature by inheritance from their parents, but that the soul is specially created by God for each individual and united with the body at birth (or some other suitable moment). Thus, we were not present psychologically or spiritually in any of our ancestors, including Adam. Adam, however, was our representative. God ordained that Adam should act not only on his own behalf, but also on our behalf, so that the consequences of his actions have been passed on to his descendants as well. Adam was on probation for all of us, as it were; and because Adam sinned, all of us are treated as guilty and corrupted. Bound by the covenant between God and Adam, we are treated as if we have actually and personally done what he as our representative did. The parallel between our relationship to Adam and our relationship to Christ (Rom. 5:12–21) is significant here. Just as we are not actually righteous in ourselves, but are treated as if we have the same righteous standing that Jesus has, so, though we are not personally sinful until we commit our first sinful act, we are, before that time, treated as if we have the same sinful standing that Adam had. If it is just to impute to us a righteousness that is not ours but Christ's, it is also fair and just to impute to us Adam's sin and guilt. He is as able to act on our behalf as is Christ.[1053]

The other major approach sees Adam's connection with us in terms of a natural (or realistic) headship. This approach is related to the traducianist view of the origin of the soul, according to which we receive our souls by transmission from our parents, just as we do our physical natures. So we were present in germinal or seminal form in our ancestors; in a very real sense, we were there in Adam. His action was not merely that of one isolated individual, but of the entire human race. Although we were not there individually, we were nonetheless there. The human race sinned as a whole and became guilty. Thus,

there is nothing unfair or improper about our receiving a corrupted nature and guilt from Adam, for we are receiving the just results of our sin. This is the view of Augustine.[1054]

Recently, some self-identified Calvinists have modified the idea that persons will be judged for the original sin of Adam. Particularly in connection with the question of the fate of those who die in infancy or at least before attaining sufficient maturity to recognize right and wrong, they contend that persons will be judged only for the sins that they personally commit. Ronald Nash, for example, says that "original sin leaves all humans including infants and the mentally incapable both guilty and depraved."[1055] Then, however, he goes on to say that "God's condemnation is based on the actual commission of sins," and comments on 2 Corinthians 5:10, "Note the clear statement that the final judgment is based on sins committed during our earthly existence. Note further that since infants are incapable of being moral agents, since they die before they are able to perform either good or evil acts, deceased infants cannot be judged on the criterion specified in this verse."[1056] As elect, these infants are somehow regenerated prior to death. Nash, however, has stated so broadly the principle of responsibility only for sins personally committed that it applies not only to infants, thus modifying the traditional Calvinist view of original sin.

Original Sin: A Biblical and Contemporary Model

The key passage for constructing a biblical and contemporary model of original sin is Romans 5:12–19. Paul is arguing that death is the consequence of sin. The twelfth verse is particularly determinative: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned . . ." Whatever the exact meaning of these words is, Paul certainly is saying that death originated in the human race because of Adam's sin. He is also saying that death is universal and the cause of this is the universal sin of humankind. Later, however, he says that the cause of the death of all is the sin of the one man, Adam: "many died by the trespass of the one man" (v. 15); "by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man" (v. 17). The problem is how to relate the statements that the universality of death came through the sin of Adam to the statement that it came through the sin of all human beings.

Augustine understood ἐφ ᾧ (*eph hō*, "because") as meaning "in whom," since the Latin mistranslated the Greek at this point. Accordingly, his understanding of the final clause in verse 12 was that we were actually "in Adam," and therefore

Adam's sin was ours as well.[1057] But since his interpretation was based upon an inaccurate translation, we must investigate the clause more closely. In particular, we must ask what is meant by "all sinned."

It has been suggested that in the final clause of verse 12 Paul is speaking of the personal sin(s) of all. All of us sin individually and thereby incur through our own action the same personal guilt that Adam incurred through his action. The clause would then be rendered, "in this way death came to all, because each has sinned." In keeping with the principle of responsibility for one's personal actions and for them alone, the meaning would be that all die because all are guilty, and all are guilty because each one has sinned on his or her own.

There are several problems with this interpretation. One is the rendering of ἥμαρτον (*hēmarton*). Were this interpretation correct, the word would properly be written ἁμαρτάνουσιν (*hamartanousin*), the present tense denoting something continually going on. Further, the sin referred to in "because all sinned" would be different from that referred to in "sin entered the world through one man," as well as from that referred to in verses 15 and 17. And, in addition, the latter two clauses would still need to be explained.

There is another way of understanding the final clause in verse 12, a way that avoids these problems and makes some sense out of verses 15 and 17. The verb ἥμαρτον is a simple aorist. This tense most commonly refers to a single past action. Had Paul intended to refer explicitly to a continued process of sin, the present and imperfect tenses were available to him. But he chose the aorist, and it should be taken at face value. Indeed, if we regard the sin of all human beings and the sin of Adam as the same, the problems we have pointed to become considerably less complex. There is then no conflict between verse 12 and verses 15 and 17. Further, the potential problem presented by verse 14, where we read that "death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam," is resolved, for it is not imitation or repetition of Adam's sin, but participation in it, that counts.

The final clause in verse 12 tells us that we were involved in some way in Adam's sin; it was in some sense also our sin. But what is meant by this? On the one hand, it may be understood in terms of federal headship—Adam acted on behalf of all persons. There was a sort of contract between God and Adam as our representative, so that what Adam did binds us. However, our involvement in Adam's sin might better be understood in terms of natural headship. We argued in chapter 21 for a special creation of the entirety of human nature. We further argued in chapter 23 for a very close connection (a "conditional unity") between the material and immaterial aspects of human nature. In chapter 24 we examined several biblical intimations that even the fetus is regarded by God as a person.

These and other considerations support the position that the entirety of our human nature, both physical and spiritual, material and immaterial, has been received from our parents and more distant ancestors by way of descent from the first pair of humans. On that basis, we were actually present within Adam, so that we all sinned in his act. There is no injustice, then, to our condemnation and death as a result of original sin.

There is one additional problem here, however: the condition of infants and children. If the reasoning that precedes is correct, then all begin life with both the corrupted nature and the inherited guilt that are the consequences of sin. Does this mean that should these little ones die before making a conscious decision to "receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (v. 17), they are lost and condemned to eternal death?

While the status of infants and those who never reach moral competence is a difficult question, it appears that our Lord did not regard them as under condemnation. Indeed, he held them up as an example of the type of person who will inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3; 19:14). David had confidence that he would again see his child who had died (2 Sam. 12:23). On the basis of such considerations, it is difficult to maintain that children are to be thought of as sinful, condemned, and lost.

This does not rest upon merely a sentimental impulse, however. There are several indications in Scripture that persons are not morally responsible before a certain point, which we sometimes call "the age of accountability." In Deuteronomy 1:39, Moses says, "And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it." Even with the Hebrew idea of corporate personality and corporate responsibility, these children were not held responsible for the sins of Israel. In the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7, there are two references to the time when the boy "knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right" (vv. 15, 16). Finally, Jonah quotes God as saying, "Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" (4:11). Although this is less clear, it appears from the context that the reference is to the ability to distinguish morally. Underlying these statements is the apparent fact that prior to a certain point in life, there is no moral responsibility, because there is no awareness of right and wrong.

To summarize the major tenets of the doctrine as we have outlined it: we have argued that the Bible, particularly in the writings of Paul, maintains that because of Adam's sin all persons receive a corrupted nature and are guilty in God's sight

as well. We have, further, espoused the Augustinian view (natural headship) of the imputation of original sin. We were all present in undifferentiated form in the person of Adam, who along with Eve was the entire human race. Thus, it was not merely Adam but humans who sinned. We were involved, although not personally, and are responsible for the sin. In addition, we have argued that the biblical teaching is that children are not under God's condemnation for this sin, at least not until attaining an age of responsibility in moral and spiritual matters. We must now ask whether the doctrine of original sin can be conceived of and expressed in a way that will somehow do justice to all of these factors.

The parallelism that Paul draws in Romans 5 between Adam and Christ in their relationship to us is impressive. A similar statement is found in 1 Corinthians 15:22: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Paul asserts that in some parallel way, what each of them did has its influence on us (as Adam's sin leads to death, so Christ's act of righteousness leads to life). What is this parallel? If the condemnation and guilt of Adam are imputed to us without there being on our part any sort of conscious choice of his act, the same would necessarily hold true of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and redeeming work. But does his death justify us simply by virtue of his identification with humanity through the incarnation and independently of whether we make a conscious and personal acceptance of his work? And do all humans have the grace of Christ imputed to them, just as all have Adam's sin imputed to them? The usual answer of evangelicals is no; there is abundant evidence that there are two classes of persons, the lost and the saved, and that only a decision to accept the work of Christ makes it effective in our lives. But if this is the case, then would not the imputation of guilt based upon the action of Adam, albeit Adam as including us, require some sort of volitional choice as well? If there is no "unconscious faith," can there be "unconscious sin"? And what are we to say of infants who die? Despite having participated in that first sin, they are somehow accepted and saved. Although they have made no conscious choice of Christ's work (or of Adam's sin for that matter), the spiritual effects of the curse are negated in their case. While some theologies preserve the parallelism by allowing both unconscious or unconditional imputation of Adam's guilt and Christ's righteousness, another available alternative seems preferable.

The current form of my understanding is as follows: We all were involved in Adam's sin, and thus receive both the corrupted nature that was his after the fall, and the guilt and condemnation that attach to his sin. With this matter of guilt, however, just as with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, there must be some conscious and voluntary decision on our part. Until this is the case, there is

only a conditional imputation of guilt. Thus, there is no condemnation until one reaches the age of responsibility. If a child dies before becoming capable of making genuine moral decisions, the contingent imputation of Adamic sin does not become actual, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation based on Christ's atoning death. The problem of the corrupted nature of such persons is presumably dealt with in the way that the imperfectly sanctified nature of believers will be glorified.

What is the nature of the voluntary decision that ends our childish innocence and constitutes a ratification of the first sin, the fall? One position on this question is that there is no final imputation of the first sin until we commit a sin of our own, thus ratifying Adam's sin. Unlike the Arminian view, this position holds that at the moment of our first sin we become guilty of both our own sin *and the original sin as well*. There is another position, however, which more fully preserves the parallelism between our accepting the work of Christ and that of Adam, and at the same time more clearly points out our responsibility for the first sin. We become responsible and guilty when we accept or approve of our corrupt nature. There is a time in the life of each one of us when we become aware of our own tendency toward sin. At that point we may abhor the sinful nature that has been there all the time. We would in that case repent of it and might even, if there is an awareness of the gospel, ask God for forgiveness and cleansing. At the very least there would be a rejection of our sinful makeup. But if we acquiesce in that sinful nature, we are in effect saying that it is good. By placing our tacit approval upon the corruption, we are also approving or concurring in the action in the garden of Eden so long ago. We become guilty of that sin without having committed any sin of our own.

A similar result would be achieved by a model in which the guilt of the Adamic sin is immediately imputed to everyone, and then Christ's righteousness is imputed without the recipient's faith, to those unable to exercise faith. While all theories require some assumptions, this theory seems to require more of these than the one stated above. Sometimes it speculates about the possibility of infants being justified at the first sight of Christ,[1058] or becoming matured so that they are able to make a conscious choice.[1059] The view advocated here is preferable because of its greater simplicity, thus meeting the criterion of Ockham's Razor, or as scientists term it, The Law of Parsimony.

29

The Social Dimension of Sin

Chapter Objectives

After completing the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify five reasons why it is difficult to recognize social sin.
2. Examine the concept of evil from a biblical perspective.
3. Recall and explain four characteristics of the world as a spiritual force in opposition to the kingdom of God.
4. Delineate the concept of the powers that serve in opposition to God and examine the role that Christ plays in opposition to those powers.
5. Interpret the meaning of the corporate personality as a transmitter of evil in the world.
6. Identify three strategies for overcoming social sin and synthesize a biblical approach toward responding to social evil of society.

Chapter Summary

Social sin is prevalent in our society and exists alongside individual sin. Persons who oppose sin on a personal level may be drawn into the corporate nature of sin through the evil acts of government, economic structures, or other forms of group identification. The Bible identifies the evil that comes through the world, the powers, and corporate personality that draws both believers and nonbelievers into the evil of

society. Our hope lies in Christ, who has overcome the world. But we also need to be proactive in opposing social sin by finding strategies that will respond to social sin.

Study Questions

- Why is it so difficult for Christians to recognize the social sin of society?
- What role does the cosmos play in social evil? What confidence can the Christian have in the midst of a sinful world?
- What are the powers, as identified in Scripture, and what role do they play in the sin of society?
- What does the author mean by corporate personality, and how does it contribute to the pervasiveness of evil in culture?
- How can Christians respond to corporate evil? What strategies may be employed? What criteria determine the appropriateness of strategies?
- Why is it important to understand the corporate aspects of sin and its ubiquitous nature in our society?

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For the most part, the sin of which we have been speaking to this point is individual sin—actions, thoughts, and dispositions that characterize individual human beings. Individual sin has often been the major object of the attention of

evangelical Christians. Sin and salvation are considered matters pertaining strictly to the individual human being.

Scripture, however, also makes frequent reference to group or collective sin. A case in point is the context of Isaiah 1:18, a text commonly cited in evangelistic appeals: "'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'" It is instructive to note the courses of action the Lord prescribes in the two verses that immediately precede: "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." Clearly, God is speaking of oppressive conditions for which he holds society responsible.

The Difficulty of Recognizing Social Sin

We are faced with a paradox here. We may become quite sensitized to God's displeasure with our individual sins, but be considerably less aware of the sinfulness of a group of which we are part. Thus, some persons who would never think of killing another human being, taking another's property, or cheating in a business deal may be part of a corporation, nation, or social class that in effect does these very things. Such persons contribute to these evils through financial involvement (by paying taxes or dues), direct approval (by voting), or tacit consent (by not disagreeing or registering opposition). There are several reasons for this strange phenomenon:

1. We are not inclined to regard as our own deeds matters in which we do not have a very active choice. Someone else may be the leader or decision maker; we simply acquiesce in what is done. We are much less aware of responsibility for such an occurrence, since it would have taken place even if we were not part of the group.

2. We may be so conditioned by membership in a group that our very perception of reality is colored by it. If, for example, we are white, we may never have put ourselves in the situation of blacks. This conditioning is something so subtle and thoroughgoing that we may not be aware that there is another side of a given issue, or even that there is an issue at all.

3. We may not recognize group selfishness because it may actually involve individual unselfishness. As we noted in chapter 25, although there is a tendency to consider sin to be basically selfishness, we may actually sin in a rather unselfish fashion. We may not personally profit (at least not obviously and

directly) from a particular action of a group to which we belong. That may blind us to the fact that the group might be acting selfishly. Thus, our sacrifice or unselfishness for the sake of the group may seem to be a virtue, but in reality we may well be profiting indirectly.

4. Our excesses may be much less obvious to us because we are part of a group. Observe sometime the behavior of the home-team crowd at a hotly contested athletic event. There are a boldness, a brashness, and a boastfulness on behalf of the team that probably very few individuals would think of asserting by or for themselves. People who would not display attitudes of superiority regarding themselves as individuals may think their country or their church superior to others.

5. The further removed we are from the actual evil, the less real it seems. Accordingly, we are less likely to see ourselves as responsible. Many of us would find it very difficult to look directly at an enemy soldier, aim a gun at him, and pull the trigger, for we would see the person whom we are shooting and the results of our action. It might not seem quite so difficult, however, to be involved in dropping a bomb or firing a large-bore artillery piece, situations in which we would not see the victims or the results of our actions. Further, if we have an accounting position in the factory that makes the ammunition, we will probably feel even less responsibility and guilt. If we personally misrepresent a product or cheat on a law, we will feel bad about what we have done. If, however, we are stockholders in a company that does the same thing, we will probably have much less difficulty sleeping. In many cases, we do not know what the group of which we are citizens, shareholders, or members actually does.

The Biblical Teaching

The World

The Bible teaches that evil has a status apart from and independent of any individual human will, a subsistence of its own, an organized or structured basis. We occasionally refer to this reality as “the world.” The Greek original here is the word κόσμος (*kosmos*). Sometimes this term designates the physical object, the earth. At other times it refers to the entire population of the human race, at still other times to all those inhabiting the earth at a given time. But there are other references where κόσμος designates a virtual spiritual force, the antithesis, as it were, of the kingdom of God.[1060] It is the very embodiment of evil. This

concept is found particularly in the writings of John and Paul, although it is found elsewhere in the New Testament as well.

There are numerous references to the enmity, hostility, and opposition that the world displays toward Christ, the believer, and the church. Jesus said, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil" (John 7:7); "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:18–19). The same idea is repeated in Jesus's high priestly prayer (John 17:14).

Paul says the world and the believer have totally different understandings of things. The things of God are foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:21, 27); they are low and despised in the world (v. 28). God has, on the contrary, made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19). This is because different "spirits" are involved: "What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us" (2:12). The things and gifts of the Spirit of God are not received (δέχομαι —*dechomai*) by the "unspiritual man" because they must be spiritually discerned (v. 14). They are foreign to such a person, and therefore he or she cannot (or will not) accept them.

The idea of inability to perceive or understand is also found in Jesus's words about the world's not receiving him or the Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples "the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). After a little while the world would no longer see him, but he would manifest himself to his disciples and they would know him (vv. 19, 22). This is in keeping with the fact that the world knew neither the Father (John 17:25) nor the Son when he came (John 1:10–11).

The world may at times produce effects superficially similar to those God produces, yet the two have very different end results. Paul speaks of a letter of his that had grieved the Corinthians, but grieved them into repentance, for they had felt a godly grief. Then he adds, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

The world represents an organized force, a power or order that is the counterpoise to the kingdom of God. Paul in Ephesians 2 describes this structure that controls the unbeliever. The Ephesians had been dead through the trespasses and sins in which they "used to live when [they] followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (v. 2). In their former state, Paul says, "All of us also lived

among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath" (v. 3). There is a permeating order of the world, a structure that affects and governs humankind. This order is also referred to as "the elemental spiritual forces of this world" (Col. 2:8). Paul urges the Colossians not to let themselves be made a prey of these elemental spirits, or of "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition" (v. 8). Having died with Christ to these elemental spirits, the Colossians must not now submit to these forces, living as if they still belonged to the world. These elemental spirits are the operating principles according to which the world is governed. Paul also writes to the Galatians of their having formerly been "slaves to those who by nature are not gods," and then questions how they who now know God can turn back again to become slaves of "those weak and miserable forces" (Gal. 4:8–9).

This κόσμος or evil system is under the control of the devil. We have already noted this in Paul's reference to "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:2). John wrote that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Just prior to his betrayal, Jesus said to his disciples, "The prince of this world is coming" (John 14:30). Behind and in a sense over all of the authorities exercising control in the world, there is a far greater power; they are merely his agents, perhaps unwittingly. Satan actually is the ruler of this domain. Thus Satan's offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8–9) was not idle and exaggerated boasting. These kingdoms lie within his power, although they are not rightfully his and one day will be fully delivered from the control that he now exercises as a usurper.

As evil as is the devil, so also is this world, which is the very embodiment of all that is corrupt and which defiles those who come under its control and influence. Jesus indicated that he is not of this world, and had not come from it. He contrasted himself with the Jews: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Jesus's kingship also is not of this world (John 18:36). In saying this to Pilate, Jesus undoubtedly meant that his kingdom would not be established upon earth at that time. But because there is to be a future earthly kingdom of God, it appears that Jesus had more in mind; namely, his kingdom does not derive its power from such earthly forces as would fight for him.

Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated himself to be separated from the evil attitudes and practices of the world. His followers are to do likewise. James lists both positive and negative criteria of true religion: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

There is a basic mentality associated with being of the world: “Don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). Akin to enmity with God is fixation upon self. The self-centered orientation of those who belong to the world is so at odds with the kingdom of God that it vitiates any prayer they might offer. “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:3). The total incompatibility between the kingdom of God and the world reminds us of Jesus’s statement that one cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The two are antithetical to one another.

Perhaps the sharpest warning is in 1 John 2:15–17. Here John commands his readers not to love the world or the things in the world, for those who love the world do not have love for the Father in them (v. 15). “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (v. 16). The warning is a sober one, for the issue is a matter of eternal destiny: “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (v. 17). The person who loves what is transient will also pass away. The one whose loyalty is to that which is permanent will also abide forever.

The believer is not merely to avoid the world, however. That would be largely a negative and defeatist approach. Just as Christ willingly came into the world, the believer should willingly exercise and manifest righteousness before the world, so that its darkness is dispersed. Paul urged the Philippians to be “blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (Phil. 2:15). This is not unlike Jesus’s command to his disciples to “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Yet we know that in many cases when light came into the world, people preferred darkness because the light exposed their evil deeds (John 3:19–21). Believers should therefore expect rejection and even hostility and opposition to the light that they display.

The witness of Scripture is also clear, however, that the world is doomed; its judgment has already taken place, but will be executed in the future. The believer need not and indeed will not be overcome by the world. John says of the spirit of antichrist, of which there already are many manifestations in the world, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them” (1 John 4:4–5). It is by faith that the world is overcome. “For everyone

born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4–5).

The use of the word "overcome" suggests that Jesus's followers are not to expect that their lot will be an easy one. Indeed, being hated by the world is an indication that they belong to him rather than to the world: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18). He warns and encourages simultaneously: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In a sense, the judgment of the world has already taken place, for Christ says in John 12:31: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." That this judgment has been accomplished through Christ's death is made clear in the verses following, where he speaks of being lifted up from the earth and drawing all people to himself (vv. 32–33).

That the world has already been judged is also evident in Paul's writings. He says that believers are chastened so as not to be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). He also argues that believers should not take their differences to court to be judged by unbelievers, for believers will someday judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). What has already been accomplished through the death of Christ will be made manifest at some point in the future.

The believer need not be under the control of this world. Its power over the believer has been broken. This is linked to the death of Christ, for the believer is identified with Christ in his victorious death. Paul writes, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). What was accomplished at the cross and will someday become complete can be experienced at least in part by the believer now.

To summarize what we have found in our examination of the biblical teaching about the world:

1. The world as a whole organized system of spiritual force is a fact. It is the very embodiment of evil. It is a pervasive entity that exists quite apart from particular evil individuals; it is the structure of all reality apart from God. It is a mind-set and frame of reference totally different from and opposed to that of Christ and his disciples.

2. The world is under Satan's control. Although created to serve God, it now is Satan's kingdom. He is able to use it and its resources to accomplish his purposes and oppose those of Christ. The persons and institutions that exercise negative influence in this world are not the ultimate source of the evil that

occurs. Behind this theme is Satan's activity. At times this activity may take the form of demon possession, but it usually is more subtle.

3. The world is clearly evil. It has the ability to corrupt whatever it touches. Thus, the Christian must avoid falling under its influence. Just as Jesus was not of this world, Christians must not be a part of it. This is not merely a matter of avoiding certain worldly actions. A whole set of diametrically different attitudes and values is involved.

4. Powerful as are the world's system and ruler, they are doomed. The defeat of the world is already determined. In a spiritual sense, the world was judged at the time of and through the death and resurrection of Christ. It will someday be actually judged before God's own throne. Indeed, believers will themselves be involved in judging the world, so they should not submit to the world today.

The Powers

An additional consideration bearing upon the whole issue of collective sin is the Pauline concept of "powers." Long neglected, it has recently come in for considerable attention. Hendrikus Berkhof produced the first major treatment of the subject,[1061] which has since been followed by the studies of several other scholars.[1062]

The idea that the world and what transpires therein are the outcome of certain unseen forces within it received a fair amount of attention in the Hellenistic world of Paul's time.[1063] In the Jewish apocalyptic writings this idea took the form of an extensive scheme of angelology. According to this scheme, there are various classes of angels (e.g., principalities and thrones), each class occupying a different level of the heavens. A number of Jewish thinkers became virtually preoccupied with angels and their influence upon earthly events. As a result, two beliefs about angels ("powers") were fairly common in Paul's culture: (1) they are personal, spiritual beings; (2) they influence events on earth, especially within nature.[1064]

Paul worked with this Jewish background, but made significant changes, going beyond current conceptions by adapting (rather than adopting) them. While the terms he used were familiar to his readers, we must not assume that he used these terms with their customary meaning. For example, in Romans 8:38–39 he distinguishes powers from angels: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Angels,

principalities, and powers are here treated as separate entities. All of them apparently are created realities capable of controlling or dominating our lives.

Paul's use of the term στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*—"basic principles") in Colossians 2:8 and 20 is an indication that his concept of the powers is to some extent more impersonal than the Jewish concept, which holds that they are angels. Here in Colossians 2 the term, which literally refers to the letters of the alphabet,[1065] designates elementary or rudimentary principles of the ordering of the universe. These "powers and authorities" (v. 15) exercise control over persons in the world (v. 14). They appear to be regulations (often religious) of conduct. While it is difficult to determine whether Paul thought of these powers as being in any way personal, it is clear that he did not identify them with angels.[1066] They are created realities that give an order to society and are capable of having either a constructive or detrimental effect.

As created realities the principalities and powers are not inherently evil. They are specifically mentioned in Colossians 1:16 among the "all things" created by Christ and for Christ. Berkhof speaks of the creation as having a visible foreground of physical things and an invisible background, the powers, which were created as instruments of God's love, as bonds between God and humanity. "As aids and signposts toward the service of God, they form the framework within which such service must needs be carried out."[1067] They are ordering principles intended to keep the creation from falling into chaos.

The fall, however, has affected the entire creation. Not only are the individual human members of creation now separated and alienated from God, but so also are the powers that organize and influence them, which are now allied with Satan and his purposes. This is expressed quite clearly and directly in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Behind the visible structures and institutions of society and culture, evil forces are at work using these invisible powers to enslave and bind believers, to attack them and do them harm.

As Paul in Colossians 2 discusses human relationships to the principalities and powers, he emphasizes that Christ is the Creator and Lord of even these realities. The Colossians, however, have shown a propensity for regarding these structures and regulations as ends in themselves, idols as it were, rather than as means to facilitate their relationship with Christ. This is the whole point of Paul's discussion of practices regarding food and drink, festivals and worship (vv. 16–19).[1068] They may be the expression of a moral code, a political or philosophical ideology, a national or racial grouping, or something similar. What was

originally intended to be a means of relating humans to God has instead become an obstacle separating them from God.

Paul does not tell us much about the specific forms in which the powers appear. What is clear, however, is that any of the patterns of a society can be used by the forces of evil to influence the thoughts and actions of the members of that society. John Yoder has suggested that these patterns include both intellectual structures (ologies or isms) and moral structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race, and nation).[1069] To the extent that they control or at least influence humans, they are powers. The term "structures" is appropriate, for the patterns utilized by the forces of evil form and constitute the very framework within which a person functions. They make their impact before or at a level below conscious influence and choice. Characteristically, the individual is not really conscious of their influence, or that other viable options exist.

In Colossians 2:13–15, Paul is very clear about the way in which Christ and his work have dealt with the powers: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Christ has nullified the powers and their ability to dominate humans. He has done this in three ways:

1. Christ has disarmed the powers; their strength is now neutralized. The claims of these regulations as to what humans must be and do no longer carry any force. For by his death and resurrection Christ has done for each one what is required of us. The law can therefore require nothing more. Much of evil's strength rests upon a bluff as to what human beings must do, and that bluff is now called.

2. Christ has made a public example of the powers, revealing their true nature and function. Previously they appeared to be the ultimate realities of the universe, the ruling gods of the world. His victory has made clear that this is a great deception. It is obvious now that the powers are actually in opposition to God's plan and working. Sin's capability to pervert is so great that humans can be convinced that they are doing God's will when in reality their actions are opposing it. The keeping of the law, which was once thought to be the essence of God's will for our lives, is now seen as potentially compromising our trust in God's grace (cf. Gal. 3:1–5).

3. Christ has triumphed over the powers. There are two dimensions to his triumph. First, Christ's very death, which was the ultimate expression of the

powers' evil intentions and efforts, has now, ironically, become the means to their demise. Second, he triumphed over the powers by disarming and making a public example of them.

All of this is not to suggest, however, that the victory over the powers and their banishment have already been completely realized. Much of the victory awaits future completion. For Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:24, "Then [at Christ's coming] the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." The last of the enemies to be destroyed is death (v. 26). Yet Paul also affirms that death is already swallowed up in victory (vv. 54–57). And what is true of death is true of the other enemies as well. The coming deliverance of the creation from its bondage is already in process (Rom. 8:18–25). We might think of the victory over the powers, then, as "already, but not yet." By his death Christ has already overcome and destroyed these enemies. Yet the full execution or application of the accomplished fact is not yet realized or experienced.

Numerous analogies can be drawn. Berkhof, who lived in the Netherlands during World War II, recalls that the Nazis during the "hunger winter" of 1944–45 were already defeated, yet were still able to oppress the Dutch.[1070] So although the powers' doom has already been assured, they still oppress the believers.

Corporate Personality

Also important to an understanding of social sin is the biblical concept of corporate personality. In the nation of Israel, the actions of individuals were not regarded as isolated from the actions of the group. Although on occasion the actions of a subgroup were separated from those of the rest of the nation (as in the case of Korah and those who rebelled with him), at other times the whole group suffered for the actions of one or a few. An example is found in Joshua 7. Because of Achan's sin, thirty-six men of Israel were killed at Ai, three thousand fighting men were put to flight, and the entire nation suffered the humiliation of defeat. When the wrongdoer was discovered, not only was he stoned, but also his household with him. The principle of a whole group's being bound by the actions of one of their number was not uncommon in other nations as well. Goliath and David went out to fight one another with the understanding that the results of their individual struggle would determine the outcome of the conflict between their nations.

Paul develops the idea of corporate personality most dramatically in his discussion of the effect of Adam's sin upon the entire human race. Through one

person sin came into the human race, and death through sin, and this death has spread to all persons (Rom. 5:12). There is an interlocking character to the human race, so that we do not function in isolation. The sin of Adam has brought judgment, affliction, and death to each and every person who has ever lived.

Interestingly, many modern sociologists and other behavioral scientists tell us that we cannot separate the individual and his or her actions from society as a whole. We always find ourselves, in the decisions and actions of our lives, functioning within the context of society and conditioned by its realities.[1071] In several ways social realities affect or even govern the Christian in this world. Some of these influences we are aware of, others we are not.

One social influence affecting every individual is simply the political realities of life. In a political democracy, while every citizen of the nation has a voice and a vote, in the final analysis the majority rules and prevails. If the government has decided upon a course of action with which some citizens disagree on ethical grounds, they have little choice in the matter. They can express their disagreement by various forms of protest, but these are likely to have only limited effect. The country will proceed with its policies on military armament, racial treatment, and the environment, regardless of those convictions. And it will use their tax monies to finance its actions. They have no real choice, unless they are willing to suffer penalties and imprisonment. In other words, we may well find ourselves coerced to contribute to that which is contrary to our moral convictions. In some cases, the government may actually be opposed to the practice of one's Christian faith. While this was undoubtedly true for those living in oppressive communist or fascist societies, it may well be true, in a more limited fashion, under any governmental system.

Our vocations may also impose certain strictures or limitations upon us. We may find within a given industry certain factors so ingrained that it is difficult to avoid sinful or unethical practices.

We may also face certain moral choices where there is no good course of action available. The best that one can do is to choose the lesser of two evils. This is a sad reminder of the extent to which our world is fallen and broken, twisted and distorted from God's original intention. Sometimes, indeed, one problem can be solved or alleviated only at the cost of aggravating another. We make our moral decisions from within the context of many givens, over which we have little or no control. They represent very real limitations upon our freedom and options as individuals.

Our moral decisions may also be circumscribed by intellectual structures. Each of us is exposed in varying proportions to a whole host of ideologies that differ in their degree of absolutism. They give a particular bent to our minds.

Someone raised in a society that emphasizes that one particular race is superior to another may have difficulty perceiving matters in any other way. Such an individual may feel that there is a great deal of justification for prejudice. A discriminatory or exploitative course of action may appear to be quite natural and proper. Similarly, the conditioning influence of one's church, religious group, or nation may severely limit one's perspective and adversely affect his or her actions in every sphere of life.

Family influences also impose limitations upon personal moral freedom. One of the most curious statements in Scripture is God's assertion that he will visit the sins of the parents upon the children (e.g., Exod. 20:5). This could be taken as a vindictive God's pledge to avenge himself upon innocent descendants of guilty ancestors. Instead, it should be taken as a declaration that sinful patterns of action and their consequences are transmitted from one generation to the next. This transmission may be a genetic, hereditary matter. Or it may be an environmental matter, stemming from either example or conditioning. Countless cases of patterns of behavior are repeated generation after generation. Most child abusers, for example, were themselves abused by their parents. And alcoholism frequently recurs in one's children.[1072]

Even the presence of disease within the human race may induce or foster evil. For example, a population in whom worm infestations are widespread does not have the energy, determination, and ability to fight its other social ills.

The simple fact that we live where we do contributes powerfully to various evils of which we are unaware. How many Americans, for example, squandering their resources on luxuries and demanding grain-fed beef, realize how many persons are being denied an adequate diet as a result? Most of us, if we lived among the economically less fortunate, would probably find it difficult to gorge ourselves on food that could be used instead to keep them alive. Yet because they are several thousand miles removed, we do not sense the impropriety of our own lifestyle.

It should be clear by now that we are conditioned and severely limited by social realities. The particular social situation in which we involuntarily find ourselves—including the political and economic system, our intellectual and family background, even the geographical location in which we were born—inevitably contributes to evil conditions and in some instances makes sin unavoidable. Sin is an element of the present social structure from which the individual cannot escape.

It is important that we see all of this in the context of the fall. The account in Genesis 3 lists specific curses following from the fall, or perhaps we should say specific aspects of the curse. The toilsome character of work, thistles and thorns,

and the anguished nature of childbirth are mentioned. It seems likely, however, that this list is not exhaustive. The curse certainly includes these matters, but there is no reason to believe that it is limited to them. It may well include the sort of social structures that we have been describing here. In Romans 8:18–25 Paul speaks of the cosmic character of sin. The whole creation was subjected to futility (v. 20). It is presently waiting for the time when it "will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (vv. 21–22). If the sin of humankind has distorted the entire creation, certainly its social structures are included.

Strategies for Overcoming Social Sin

If we are agreed from the foregoing that there is a dimension of sin and evil that goes beyond that of particular or individual human beings, it remains for us to determine what approach should be taken as we attempt to deal with corporate sin. Here we find considerable divergence of opinion.

Regeneration

One approach regards the social dimension of sin as merely the composite of the sins of individuals. Consequently, social problems will not be solved by treating society. Since the direction of society is determined by the minds and wills of its constituent members, alteration of society will take place only by changing the individuals who compose it. This is the strategy of regeneration, which, in its own way, is a type of utopianism. For it asserts that if all the persons within society are transformed, society itself will be transformed.[1073]

Underlying this view is a thoroughgoing belief in human depravity and sinfulness. Improving external circumstances or the environment will not change the corrupt inner person. And without inner transformation, the sinful conditions of society will simply return.

There also is an emphasis on the individual. Each person is an isolated, self-contained entity capable of making free choices, relatively unaffected by conditions within society. The unit of morality is the individual person. The group is not an organic entity with characteristics of its own.

The thrust of those who adopt and practice this strategy is strongly evangelistic. They urge individuals to make a decision and reverse the direction of their lives. There is often a strong emphasis as well upon Christian fellowship.

This may take the form of quite intensive social groupings within the context of the organized church. The primary commitment is to this Christian grouping, the basic function of which is mutual support among its members. Thus there may be a tendency to withdraw from involvement with the world. Others advocate involvement in society, for example, by working in the helping professions. Generally speaking, however, these people are oriented more toward social welfare (alleviating the conditions resulting from faulty social structures) than toward social action (altering the structures causing the problems).[1074] It should be noted that the groups that follow this strategy, generally known as evangelicals, are the most rapidly growing segment of Christianity, not only in the United States but in Latin America and Africa as well.

Reform

Other strategies have in common the conviction that the problems are larger than individual human wills, and must therefore be handled by using a broader base than individual conversion/regeneration. The structures of society must be directly altered. There are several possibilities.

The most frequently advocated possibility is modification of the political form of society through political channels. Society is to be restructured by electing legislators who will pass laws changing undesirable conditions. Evil is to be made illegal. Enforcement of such laws will change the conditions that constitute structural evil. This view might be termed the approach or strategy of reform. It rests on the idea that the group structure, which may be as broad as the whole of society, has a reality of its own apart from the wills of its individual members. Thus, the structure cannot be changed simply by modifying the individuals who constitute it. While there is no guarantee, conversely, that individuals will necessarily be changed if the structure is, at least the conditions or circumstances within which they function will be altered.

Sometimes means of reform other than political are used. This may well involve economic pressures, such as various forms of boycott. The Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott by blacks in the mid-1950s is a notable example. Specific products or a particular manufacturer may be boycotted. Shareholder rebellions may change the policy of a corporation. Nonviolent resistance such as was advocated by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. is another means of seeking reform.[1075]

Revolution

The most radical approach to changing the structures of society involves destroying or removing them and replacing them with others, using force if necessary. The structures are considered so corrupt that they cannot be redeemed by transformation. There needs to be a completely fresh start, requiring overthrow of the existing forms. Sometimes the conception here is that humanity, given a chance, is basically good or at least morally neutral. Thus if the present structure is abolished, what will arise in its place will be basically good. Also connected with this approach is the apparent belief that society's influence has no lasting effect upon its members. Consequently, once removed, a structure's influence is gone. It has not produced a perverted human nature which, unless and until regenerated, will continue to function for evil. There is every confidence, then, that once the evil structures are removed, those who rise to positions of leadership will not establish a new order favorable solely to their own interests.

This strategy, which we might term revolution, is found in the more radical political and religious philosophies. It is found in various forms of liberation theology, especially those of the more aggressive type.[1076] It is also, of course, a tenet of Marxism and of several modern-day terrorist groups. While revolutions often involve the use of violence, nonviolent revolutions have recently become more common.[1077]

If, as we have argued in this and earlier chapters, evil is both individual/personal and societal in nature, it must be attacked by a combination of strategies rather than merely one. Because individual human hearts and personalities are corrupted, regeneration is necessary for a lasting change to be effected. On the other hand, because there are structures of evil in the world that transcend individual human wills, some means of renovating these structures must be pursued. Revolution is too extreme an approach if it violates Christ's teachings regarding violence. While what strategies to adopt for dealing with evil is a topic beyond the scope of this present writing, a combination of regeneration and nonviolent reform would seem to provide the best hope for combating sin and evil in our world. This would call for emphasis upon evangelism, personal ethics, and social ethics.

PART 7
THE PERSON OF CHRIST

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Contemporary Issues in Christological Method

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, the learner should be able to do the following:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the current issues in christological methodology.
2. Identify and describe the historical christological concepts from all viewpoints.
3. Evaluate traditional and liberal christological methodologies and determine their coherence to biblical precepts.
4. Determine the procedure for studying the person and work of Jesus Christ.
5. Examine and refute the current trend of viewing the incarnation as mythology.

Chapter Summary

In the history of the church, the most heated debate in Christology has been over the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some theologians have researched the life of Jesus based on their determination that Christ cannot be both human and God. Others either have understood Christ from above, grounded in the church's

proclamation, or from below, basing their view of Christ on historical investigation. More recently, a number of popular but flawed attempts to reconstruct the life and teaching of Jesus have emerged. However, a perspective utilizing faith to interpret the history of Jesus, found through reason, may provide the most adequate christological methodology.

Study Questions

- What are the contemporary issues concerning christological methodology, and how do they concern the church?
- What is the "search for the historical Jesus," and how important is it for understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ?
- How has Rudolf Bultmann's understanding of Christology affected views of Christ and his work?
- How should a study of the person and work of Jesus Christ progress? Why is it necessary to operate in a particular order?
- How should one react to the growing tendency to view the incarnation of Jesus Christ as mythological and irrelevant for modern religious practice?

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We have seen that humans were created to love, serve, and fellowship with God. We have also seen that all humans fail to fulfill this divine intention; in other

words, all humans sin. Because God loved the human race, however, he chose to act through Christ to restore them to the intended condition and relationship. Thus, our understanding of the person and work of Christ grows directly out of the doctrines of humanity and of sin.

The study of the person and work of Christ is at the very center of Christian theology. For since Christians are by definition believers in and followers of Christ, their understanding of Christ must be central and determinative of the very character of the Christian faith. Consequently, particular care and precision are especially in order in the doing of our Christology.

There are certain perennial problems of Christology. These arise at various times. There are also specific issues that appear only at one point in history. It is important that we survey and form our own conclusions regarding certain of these matters. In this chapter we will examine three contemporary issues regarding the methodology of Christology: (1) the relationship between faith and history, (2) the relationship between study of the person of Christ and study of the work of Christ, and (3) the literalness of the idea of incarnation. To frame these questions differently, (1) Can a proper understanding of Christ be based strictly upon historical data, or must it be posited by faith? (2) Should we first determine our understanding of Christ's nature and then apply it to our investigation of his work, or should we approach the subject of his nature through a study of his work? (3) Is the idea of the incarnation of God inherently mythological and hence untenable? The first two of these questions deal with the method of Christology; the third concerns the possibility of doing Christology at all.[1078] To understand the contemporary environment of christological construction, it will be necessary to examine its historical background. For the present approaches to the doing of Christology represent the culmination of a long process involving reactions and counterreactions.

History and Christology

For a long period of time, theologians limited their discussion of Christ to the views set forth in their respective denominational or confessional traditions. These traditions in turn tended to follow the positions worked out in the ecumenical councils of the early centuries of the church. The problems of Christology were posed largely in terms of metaphysics: How can the divine nature and the human nature coexist within one person? Or, to put it differently, how can Jesus be both God and man at once? In the twentieth century, however, the focus changed. In some circles theology is hostile (or at least indifferent) to

metaphysics. So the study of Christ is now carried on largely in historical terms. In part, this shift has been motivated by a suspicion that the Christ of the theological tradition is different from the actual Jesus who walked the paths of Palestine, teaching and working among his disciples and the crowds.

The Search for the Historical Jesus

The quest to discover what Jesus was actually like and what he did came to be known as the "search for the historical Jesus." Often underlying this search was the expectation that the real Jesus would prove to be different even from the Christ who appears within the Scriptures and who is in some sense the product of the theologizing of Paul and others. Among the more famous early "lives of Jesus" were those produced by David Strauss[1079] and Ernest Renan.[1080] Increasingly, the earthly Jesus was depicted as basically a good man, a teacher of great spiritual truths, but not the miracle-working, preexistent Second Person of the Trinity.

Perhaps the best-known and most influential picture of Jesus is that of Adolf von Harnack, which in many ways represents the pinnacle and the end of the search for Jesus. He notes that the Gospels do not give us the means of constructing a full-fledged biography of Jesus, for they tell us very little about Jesus's early life.[1081] They do provide us with the essential facts, however. Four general observations lead Harnack to set forth a nonmiraculous Jesus:

1. In Jesus's day, a time when there was no sound insight into what is possible and what is not, people felt surrounded by miracles.
2. Miracles were ascribed to famous persons almost immediately after their death.
3. We know that what happens within our world is governed by natural laws. There are, then, no such things as "miracles," if by that is meant interruptions of the order of nature.
4. There are many things that we do not understand, but they should be viewed as marvelous and presently inexplicable, not miraculous.[1082]

Harnack's assessment of the message of Jesus has been considered the classic statement of the liberal theological position. He contends that Jesus's message was primarily not about himself, but about the Father and the kingdom:

> If, however, we take a general view of Jesus's teaching, we shall see that it may be grouped under three heads. They are each of such a nature as to contain the whole, and hence it can be exhibited in its entirety under any one of them.

Firstly, the Kingdom of God and its coming.
Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul.
Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.[1083]

As the search for the historical Jesus proceeded, there was a growing uneasiness that the Jesus found within the Gospel account was being unconsciously fabricated by those searching for him, and was amazingly like the searchers. George Tyrrell, a Catholic scholar, possibly put it best: "The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well."[1084]

Two writings in particular spelled the end of the liberal search for Jesus. In his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer shared the basic historical method and goals of the liberal searchers but differed with their conclusions, seriously questioning their objectivity. He felt that they approached the study of Jesus's life with their own preconceptions and then proceeded to accept or reject material on the basis of whether it fit these preconceptions. When Schweitzer examined the Gospels, he did not find the reflection of a typical nineteenth-century liberal. Rather, he found in Jesus a thoroughly eschatological figure who believed and taught that the end of the world was coming soon, and that his own parousia would take place in connection with that end.[1085] Jesus, however, was wrong, according to Schweitzer. The chief point for our purposes here is Schweitzer's contention that as an eschatological figure, Jesus is not to be remade into a thoroughly modern person.[1086]

Martin Kähler's *So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* struck new ground in its analysis of the problem. Kähler was dubious about the utility of the efforts that had been made to develop a picture of Jesus. Not only was the search for the historical Jesus unsuccessful; it was actually counterproductive. Kähler summarized his "cry of warning in a form intentionally audacious: *the historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ*. The Jesus of the 'Life-of-Jesus movement' is merely a modern example of human creativity, and not an iota better than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. One is as far removed from the real Christ as is the other."[1087] In answer to the search for the historical Jesus, Kähler proposed a major distinction. He noted that the Jesus of history, the Jesus behind the Gospels, had relatively little influence. He was able to win only a few disciples, and these to a rather shaky faith. The Christ of faith, however, has exercised a very significant influence. This is the risen Christ, believed in and preached by the apostles. This *historic* Christ, rather than the *historical* Jesus, is the basis of

our faith and life today. We can never get behind the Gospel accounts to *Historie*, the objective, actual occurrences. We instead build our belief on *Geschichte*, or significant history, which pertains to the impact Jesus made upon the disciples.[1088]

This distinction was in many ways the greatest influence upon Christology during the first half of the twentieth century. Increasingly, study was focused not upon the actual events of the life of the historical Jesus, but upon the faith of the church. This shift is seen most clearly and fully in Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization, but it is also apparent within the Christologies written by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

Eventually, a reaction to Bultmann's skeptical approach set in. Thus began a new twentieth-century quest for the historical Jesus. Ernst Käsemann officially sounded the trumpet indicating this turn of events.[1089] Others, too, have been and are at work attempting to formulate a sketch of what Jesus actually said and did. Ethelbert Stauffer and Joachim Jeremias have been among the more prominent persons engaged in this new search. We will take up this development shortly, under the heading "Christology from Below." But first we need to examine another approach that dominated much of the early history of twentieth-century Christology.

"Christology from Above"

"Christology from above" was the basic strategy and orientation of the Christology of the earliest centuries of the church. It also was, to a large extent, the Christology of orthodoxy during the precritical era when there was no question as to the historical reliability of the whole of Scripture. In the twentieth century, this approach to Christology was associated especially with Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Emil Brunner in his early book *The Mediator.* Several key features of Christology from above are evident in that writing:

1. The basis of the understanding of Christ is not the historical Jesus, but the kerygma, the church's proclamation regarding the Christ. Brunner asserts:

> We are bound to oppose the view that the Christian faith springs out of historical observation, out of the historical picture of Jesus of Nazareth. Christendom itself has always known otherwise. Christian faith springs only out of the witness to Christ of the preached message and the written word of the Scriptures. The historical picture is indeed included in the latter . . . ; but this picture itself is not the basis of knowledge.[1090]

2. In Christology from above, there is a marked preference for the writings of Paul and the fourth Gospel over the Synoptic Gospels. The former contain more

explicitly theological interpretations, whereas the Synoptics are basically matter-of-fact reporting of Jesus's actions and teachings. This principle is closely tied to the first:

> If once the conviction is regained that the Christian faith does not arise out of the picture of the historical Jesus, but out of the testimony to Christ as such—this includes the witness of the prophets as well as that of the Apostles—and that it is based upon this testimony, then inevitably the preference for the Synoptic Gospels and for the actual words of Jesus, which was the usual position of the last generation, will disappear.[1091]

3. Faith in the Christ is not based on nor legitimized by rational proof. The content believed lies outside the sphere of natural reason and historical investigation and consequently cannot be conclusively proven. While historical investigation may serve to remove obstacles to various beliefs (e.g., belief in the deity of Jesus Christ), it cannot succeed in establishing those beliefs. "Jesus taught a group of disciples beside the sea" is a statement open to historical research; "Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity" is not. We accept historical statements by being rationally persuaded. We accept proclamation by faith.

Brunner draws a distinction that clarifies the sense in which, for him, Christology is historical and the sense in which it is not. This distinction is between the "Christ *in* the flesh" and the "Christ *after* the flesh." By "Christ in the flesh" Brunner means that God became incarnate, the Word became flesh and penetrated history. The "Christ after the flesh" is the Christ known by the historiographer, the chronicler, with his methods of research. To know "Christ in the flesh" is to know something more than the "Christ after the flesh." The believer knows Christ

> as the One who has come in the flesh, as Him of whom the chronicler and the humanist historian must have something to say. But he knows this "Christ in the flesh" in a way of which they can know nothing; he knows Him therefore as someone quite different, and this is what matters. For the knowledge of others—of the chronicler and of the humanist historian—is not yet knowledge of Christ, of the "Word made flesh," but is itself "after the flesh."[1092]

Brunner emphasizes the Christ in the flesh, but does not ignore the Christ after the flesh. For although faith never arises out of the observation of facts, but out of the witness of the church and the Word of God, the fact that this Word has come "into the flesh" means that faith is in some way connected with observation. The witness of the church and Scripture always includes the picture of Jesus.

"Christology from Below"

With the publication of Bultmann's *Jesus and the Word*,[1093] Christology from above reached its zenith. Here in effect was a statement that faith in the kerygmatic Christ cannot with certainty be connected with the actual earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. In Bultmann's view this did not really matter. The stream of negative reaction to Bultmann's view grew into an enunciation of methodology. Probably the most significant of the early reactions was Ernst Käsemann's "Problem of the Historical Jesus," originally published in 1954. Käsemann asserted the necessity of building belief in Jesus upon a historical search for who he was and what he did. While this was not a resumption of the nineteenth-century search, it was dubbed "the *new* search for the historical Jesus."

It might be said that the nineteenth-century searches scarcely were real Christologies. It would be better to call them "Jesusologies." The Jesus who emerged from those studies was a human being and little more. It seemed to some in the "new quest" that this was a result of antisupernatural biases within the historical method itself; in other words, there was a methodological inadequacy. In the new quest for the historical Jesus, there is the possibility of a genuine Christology. That is, it is possible that the historical investigation might arrive at belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, as a conclusion, not a presupposition, of the historical investigation.

The most instructive example for us of a recent "Christology from below" is undoubtedly that of Wolfhart Pannenberg. In *Jesus—God and Man* Pannenberg has produced a thoroughly christological treatment, as indicated by the title. While recognizing certain benefits in the approach of Christology from above, he indicates three basic reasons why he cannot employ this method:

1. The task of Christology is to offer rational support for belief in the divinity of Jesus, for this is what is disputed in the world today. Christology from above is unacceptable in that it *presupposes* the divinity of Jesus.[1094]
2. Christology from above tends to neglect the significance of the distinctive historical features of Jesus of Nazareth. In particular, his relationship to the Judaism of his day, which is essential to understanding his life and message, is relatively unimportant in this approach.[1095]
3. Strictly speaking, a Christology from above is possible only from the position of God himself, and not for us. As limited, earthbound human beings, we must begin and conduct our inquiry from the human perspective.[1096]

Pannenberg constructs from the life of the man Jesus of Nazareth a full Christology, including his deity. The positive features of Pannenberg's approach make clear the basic contour of Christology from below as contrasted with Christology from above:

1. Historical inquiry behind the kerygma of the New Testament is both possible and theologically necessary. Form criticism has demonstrated that an exact chronological sequence of Jesus's life cannot be constructed. It is nonetheless possible to discover from the apostles' witness Jesus's major characteristics. Such knowledge of Jesus is necessary. If we rest our faith upon the kerygma alone, and not upon the historical facts of Jesus's life as well, we may find ourselves believing not in Jesus, but in Luke, Matthew, Paul, or someone else. A further complication if we rest our faith upon the kerygma alone is that these New Testament witnesses do not give us unity, but diversity, and on occasion even antithesis. We must penetrate beyond these varied witnesses to discern the one Jesus to whom they all refer.[1097]

In Pannenberg's judgment, it is extremely important to bring an openness to the task of historical investigation. Because many earlier searches for Jesus were governed by certain rather narrow conceptions of what is historically possible and what is not, it is imperative to approach the horizons of biblical times without our modern-day naturalistic prejudices. Only then can a Christology from below be properly constructed.[1098]

2. History is unitary, not dualistic. The life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, are not part of a unique type of history distinct from history in general. There is no special realm of redemptive or sacred history, be that *Geschichte*, *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history), or whatever. For Pannenberg, the history of the Christ cannot be separated or isolated from history in general. Consequently, it need not be approached by a method different from that used to gain a knowledge of ordinary history.[1099]

3. While a Christology from below can give us a fully human Jesus, can it also establish the deity of Jesus? The evidence most commonly adduced by Christology from below in trying to establish Jesus's unity with God is his pre-Easter claim to authority through declaration and deed, pointed out by theologians such as Werner Elert[1100] and Paul Althaus.[1101] Pannenberg comments, "The basic agreement is striking. Dogmatics seems in this case to have preceded historical research."[1102]

This effort to demonstrate Jesus's divinity through his pre-Easter claim to authority must inevitably fail, however, for this claim to authority is related to a future verification of his message, which will not take place until the final

judgment. “Rather,” Pannenberg says, “everything depends upon the connection between Jesus’s claim and its confirmation by God.”[1103]

This confirmation is to be found in the resurrection of Jesus. Pannenberg believes that the resurrection is a historical fact. Having examined separately the evidences—the empty tomb and the appearances of the resurrected Lord—Pannenberg concludes that the Gospel accounts of the appearances are so strongly legendary in character that one can scarcely find in them a historical kernel. Consequently, he turns to Paul’s summation in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 and concludes:

> Thus the resurrection of Jesus would be designated as a historical event in this sense: If the emergence of primitive Christianity, which, apart from other traditions, is also traced back by Paul to appearances of the resurrected Jesus, can be understood in spite of all critical examination of the tradition only if one examines it in the light of the eschatological hope for a resurrection from the dead, then that which is so designated is a historical event, even if we do not know anything more particular about it.[1104]

Pannenberg similarly attributes validity to the empty tomb accounts. If this tradition and the tradition of the Lord’s appearances came into existence independently of one another, then, “by their mutually complementing each other they let the assertion of the reality of Jesus’s resurrection, in the sense explained above, appear as historically very probable, and that always means in historical inquiry that it is to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears.”[1105]

While many possible meanings might be attached to the fact of the resurrection, from Pannenberg’s perspective this is not so. Given its place within the history of traditions and cultural expectations, the resurrection carried with it a definite meaning. The idea of resurrection occurring apart from the will and activity of God is unthinkable for a Jew. The resurrection of Jesus means, then, that God gave his approval to the claims of Jesus and that these claims, which would be blasphemous unless Jesus really is the Son of Man, are true. Thus, not only the historical fact of Jesus’s resurrection, but also the theological truth of his deity, have been established.[1106]

Evaluation

This is a dispute of continuing importance. Lest we think this is merely an intramural debate among European theologians, a cross-cultural study reveals the same issues. Latin American theologians tend to do Christology in a more historical framework,[1107] thus emphasizing the approach from below, while Asians work in a more metaphysical orientation, favoring the approach from

above.[1108] These two types of Christology, from above and from below, have their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, the statement of one position has also constituted a criticism of the other approach.

Christology from above has the strength of recognizing that the real aim and value of the incarnation were the effect of Jesus's life upon those who believed in him. Their testimony deserves our closest attention, for they of all people knew him most intimately and were in the best position to describe him to others. Further, this approach is committed to a genuine supernaturalism, something that has not always been true of Christologies from below. It leaves open the possibility of a divine, miracle-working Jesus.

The basic problem for a Christology from above is the substantiality of the belief. Is the Christ of faith really the same person as the Jesus who walked the paths of Galilee and Judea? Is commitment to the kerygmatic Christ based on what really is, or is it an unfounded faith? The problem of subjectivity in one form or another always plagues this type of Christology. How can we be sure that the Christ whom we know from the witness of the apostles and encounter in our own experience today is Jesus as he really is and not merely our own feelings? A second problem relates to the content of faith. While it is all well and good to say we take something on faith, how do we determine what it is we are taking on faith? Without an empirical referent, the Christ of faith is somewhat unreal and vague.

Christology from below, on the other hand, blunts the charge that at best Christian theology (and specifically Christology) is based upon faith and at worst it may be completely vacuous. This approach has attempted to eliminate undue amounts of subjectivity. Recognizing the need for a subjective involvement (or commitment) by every believer, Christology from below avoids filtering it through the subjectivity of other believers, namely, the first disciples.

There is one persistent problem, however. Especially in Pannenberg's version, the success of Christology from below depends upon establishing its historical contentions with objective certainty; but this is difficult to achieve. If the facts of Christology are matters of genuinely objective history, then it ought to be possible to demonstrate the divinity of Jesus to any honest objective inquirer. In practice, however, some who examine the evidences remain quite unconvinced. In addition, Paul Althaus maintains that Pannenberg's unitary view of history makes faith a function of reason.[1109] Pannenberg has responded that while faith is indeed a gift of the Spirit, not a product of reason, nonetheless, knowledge of the historical revelation is logically, although not psychologically, prior to faith. Reason in its essential structure is sufficient to grasp God's revelation and recognize its truth. Human reason, however, has fallen into an unnatural state

and needs to be restored. This restoration is not a case of being supernaturalized, but of being naturalized through the aid of the kerygma and the Spirit.[1110]

This distinction, however, is not very helpful. Regardless of whether human reason needs to be supernaturalized or merely naturalized, the same specter of subjectivity, which this theology attempts to avoid at all costs, still raises its head. Although the Spirit employs the historical evidences to create faith, there is still the problem of whether this faith is veridical. May not someone else, on the basis of the same evidences, come to a different conclusion? Are we not again, at least to a small extent, driven back to the Christ of faith in the attempt to arrive at the Jesus of history? The real point of Christology from below has been compromised when one begins to appeal to such concepts as the need to naturalize reason. Although the gap between objective historical evidences and the conclusions of faith has been narrowed a bit, it is still there.

An Alternative Approach

We have seen that each of these two seemingly mutually exclusive positions has certain strengths and weaknesses. Is there some way to unite Christology from above and Christology from below so as to preserve the best elements of both while minimizing the problems of each? Can the kerygmatic Christ and the historical Jesus, faith and reason, be held together? Evangelicals are concerned to retain both. This concern stems in part from the evangelical understanding of revelation as *both* the historical events *and* the interpretation of them. These are two complementary and harmonious means by which God manifests himself. Both are therefore sources of knowledge of him. We will propose here a conceptual analysis and model that may enlighten the issue.

Since the Jesus of history is approached through reason and the kerygmatic Christ is seized by faith, we are apparently dealing with a case of the classic faith-reason dichotomy. Whereas in the traditional form faith and philosophical reason are involved, here it is faith and historical reason. In both cases, the question is the utility and value of reason as grounds for faith. In the philosophical realm there are three basic positions regarding the relative roles of faith and reason. There are three similar positions in the historical realm:

1. Christology from above is basically fideistic. Particularly in the form expounded by Brunner and other existentialist theologians, it draws heavily upon the thought of Søren Kierkegaard. According to this position, our knowledge of Jesus’s deity is not grounded in any historically provable facts about his earthly life. It is a faith based upon the faith of the apostles as enunciated in the kerygma.

2. Conversely, Christology from below is primarily Thomistic. It attempts to demonstrate the supernatural character of Christ from historical evidences. Hence, the deity of Christ is not a presupposition but a conclusion of the process. The appeal is to historical reason, not to faith or authority. As faith predominates in the former model, reason does here.

3. There is another possible model, namely, the Augustinian. In this model, faith precedes but does not remain permanently independent of reason. Faith provides the perspective or starting point from which reason may function, enabling one to understand what otherwise could not be understood.

When this model is applied to the construction of a Christology, the starting point is the kerygma, the belief and preaching of the church about Christ. The content of the kerygma serves as a hypothesis to interpret and integrate the data supplied by inquiry into the historical Jesus. According to this position, the early church's interpretation of or faith in Christ enables us to make better sense of the historical phenomena than does any other hypothesis. Thus, our alternative model is not Christology from below, which, ignoring the kerygma, leads to conundrums in attempting to understand the "mystery of Jesus," as theologians often referred to it in the nineteenth century. Nor is our model an unsupported Christology from above, constructed without reference to the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth; rather, it is tested and supported and rendered cogent by the ascertainable historical facts of who and what Jesus was and claimed to be.

Our model entails following neither faith alone nor historical reason alone, but both together in an intertwined, mutually dependent, simultaneously progressing fashion. Increased familiarity with the kerygmatic Christ will enable us to understand and integrate more of the data of historical research. Similarly, increased understanding of the Jesus of history will more fully persuade us that the apostles' interpretation of the Christ of faith is true.

There is biblical basis for this contention. Some of those who knew Jesus's words and deeds very well did not arrive at an accurate knowledge of him thereby. For example, the Pharisees saw Jesus perform miraculous healings through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:20–30; Luke 11:14–23). Although they certainly were familiar with the Jewish traditions and presumably had observed Jesus for quite some time, their appraisal was, "By the prince of demons he is casting out demons." Somehow they had failed to draw the right conclusion, although they possessed a knowledge of the facts. Even those closest to Jesus failed to know him fully. Judas betrayed him. The other disciples did not realize the significance of his crucifixion and even his resurrection. The religious authorities obviously knew that the tomb was empty, but did not interpret this fact correctly.

On a more positive note, there are also indications that when one comes to a correct perception of Jesus, it is on the basis of something more than natural perception. For example, when in response to Jesus's question, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus commented, "this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:15–17). While the meaning of "flesh and blood" in the original has been debated, it is clear that Jesus is contrasting some sort of direct revelation from the Father with some purely human source such as the opinions of others.

Another case in point, proceeding from the other side of the dialectic, is John the Baptist. In prison he began to wonder about Christ. And so he sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:19). John may have been expecting some concrete historical event as evidence that Jesus was indeed, as John knew him to be, the Christ. Jesus's answer was to point to the deeds he had been performing: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (v. 22). The historical Jesus was the confirmation of the Christ of faith.

In this model the two factors are held in conjunction: neither the Jesus of history alone, nor the Christ of faith alone, but the kerygmatic Christ as the key that unlocks the historical Jesus, and the facts of Jesus's life as support for the message that he is the Son of God. Faith in the Christ will lead us to an understanding of the Jesus of history.

A Third Search for the Historical Jesus?

The original modern search for the historical Jesus took place in the nineteenth century. The second search was a more modest one, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a number of attempts have been made to reconstruct the life and teachings of Jesus. Many of these have been on the popular level. An early example was Hugh Schonfield's *The Passover Plot.*[1111] A best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, although not claiming to be historical, had a considerable influence on the popular view of Jesus and was even made into a movie.[1112] A more scholarly and sustained phenomenon has been the work of the Jesus Seminar. Founded by Robert Funk in 1985 and cochaired by him and John Dominic Crossan, it began meeting semi-annually and publishing the results of its work in a series of books. The meetings consisted of papers presented to, discussed, and debated by the members of the group. The professed aim was to

get at the actual words and deeds of Jesus, as indicated by the titles of the works produced.[1113] A system of voting with colored beads enabled each member of the group to indicate his or her judgment of the degree of authenticity of a passage.

Unfortunately, these endeavors have been marred by significant flaws. They have been based in many cases on rather antisupernatural presuppositions and unusual historical assumptions. For example, the members of the seminar tended to give to the Gospel of Thomas credence equal to or greater than the four traditional Gospels, even though it is later and has less historical support. The result of these presuppositions was a Jesus much like the personal convictions of the researchers themselves. Beyond that, however, these searches have often sensationalized the reconstructed picture of Jesus. The idea that Jesus may have fathered children is an extreme instance of this type of thing.

Parallel to this endeavor have been more sober and careful researches into the life of the historical Jesus. We noted some of these developments in the consideration of biblical criticism in chapter 5.[1114] Seeking to apply sound principles of historical research but without the naturalistic bias sometimes found in such an endeavor, these have gone far toward establishing the accuracy of the Gospel accounts as we have them. Thoroughly familiar with the best of historical methodology, these scholars have not made the type of conclusive claims for their conclusions that the Jesus Seminar has made. They present a solid basis for confidence in the traditional picture of Jesus found in the Gospels.[1115]

The Person and the Work of Christ

A second major methodological question pertains to the relationship between the study of the person and the work of Christ. May they be separated, and if so, what is the logical order of Christology? Should the understanding of the person of Christ, his nature, be developed first, and then applied in order to give us an understanding of the work of Christ? Or should we begin with the work of Christ and then deduce what type of person he is?

In the early history of the church, the two were held together in rather close connection. This approach changed during the medieval period, however. Scholastic theology separated the doctrine of the person of Christ (his divinity, humanity, and the unity of the two) from the offices and work of Christ. As a result, Christology was no longer relevant to most believers. The debates over Jesus's deity, the extent of his knowledge, and his sinlessness, as well as

questions like whether he had one will or two, were very abstract. It was difficult for average Christians to see what effect such issues had on their lives.

An opposite tendency developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, built on a famous sentence of Philipp Melanchthon: "To know Christ is to know his benefits."[1116] This in turn is linked to Luther's reaction against the scholastic concentration on the being of Christ. Luther emphasized instead Christ's saving activity *for us*.[1117] This emphasis on the work of Christ is explicitly realized in the Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher more than two centuries later. In keeping with his general thesis that religion (or piety) is not a matter of dogma or ethical activity, but of feeling, for Schleiermacher the prime element in Christology is our experience of what Christ does within us. In theory, however, the person of Christ and his work are inseparable, and Christology can be approached from either angle.[1118]

This correlating of the two considerations, but with priority given to the work of Christ, was picked up by Bultmann and perhaps even more explicitly by Paul Tillich, who asserted that "Christology is a function of soteriology. The problem of soteriology creates the Christological question and gives direction to the Christological answer."[1119] In Tillich's method of correlation, the theological answer is correlated with the existential question. Accordingly, we should concentrate upon the symbolism of the biblical materials, since it stresses the universal significance of the Christ event.[1120]

There are two major reasons for approaching the person of Christ through the work of Christ. One is the desire for greater coherence between Christology and soteriology. It is possible to treat the former in isolation from the latter. But it is not possible to speak of what Christ does in our lives without relating that work to the nature of Christ, which it presupposes. The second reason is the desire to demonstrate the relevance of the doctrine of Christ. It is difficult for most persons to take an interest in the discussion of some of the issues concerning the nature of Christ unless they see how it affects them.

Certain difficulties emerge from this approach, however. One is that when the emphasis is placed upon what Christ's work does for humanity, the human's self-perception of need tends to dictate or set the agenda for construction of the understanding of Christ's person or nature. There is, then, a dilemma: either one considers Christ's work first and then applies the findings to the human situation, or one examines the situation first and then moves back to the biblical materials regarding Christ's work. In the former case, there is still the danger of potential irrelevance; in the latter case, of tailoring the understanding of Christ's work to the human perception of need.

One problem with the concern for relevance is that it assumes that the person is asking the right questions. But is this assumption always valid? Some questions not being asked perhaps should be. Analogous to this situation is the difference between telling one's doctor about some specific symptoms and having a complete physical examination. The physical may reveal some facts of which the patient is unaware, but which are important nevertheless. Likewise, significant issues of Christology may never be considered if the agenda is set by our subjective awareness of need. Another problem is that a particular conclusion in soteriology may leave open more than one possible position on Christ's nature. Therefore, basing one's Christology upon "felt needs" will prove inadequate.

In spite of all these difficulties, there is an acceptable way of beginning Christology with Christ's work. While it must not be allowed to set the agenda, it can be used as the point of contact for more elaborate discussions of his nature. These discussions will in turn give answers in the area of his work. We should be aware that if we are to build a complete Christology, we must look at considerations in each area to find answers to questions in the other.

Incarnation Viewed as Mythology

Another issue of growing concern in Christology is whether the idea of incarnation is mythological. According to some, the idea that God became human and entered human history, which the doctrine of the incarnation has historically signified, is not to be taken literally.[1121] Indeed, according to this contention, it is neither necessary nor possible to do so. A number of factors have fostered this theory.

One is Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Bultmann concluded that much of the New Testament is myth, by which he meant an attempt by human beings to give expression to the otherworldly in terms of symbolism drawn from the this-worldly. These conceptions are simply culturally conditioned conceptions of the nature of reality. In many cases, we can identify the sources from which they were taken: Hellenism, Judaism, Gnosticism. Bultmann insisted that these conceptions must be "demythologized," not meaning to eliminate, but rather to reinterpret, them. The Scripture writers used myth to express what had happened to them existentially. Consider as an example the story of Jesus's walking on the water (Matt. 14:22–33). Taken literally, it purports to tell us of an actual event, a miraculous occurrence. But when demythologized, it is seen to tell us something of what had happened to

the disciples. Whatever *actually* happened is of little concern. The point is that Jesus had made a profound impact upon the Twelve, and the way they sought to give expression to the fact that Jesus had made an impression on them unequaled by anyone they had ever known was to tell this and other "miracle" stories about him. Jesus was the sort of person of whom one would have to say: "If anyone could walk on water, it would be Jesus!"[1122]

A second influence contributing to the contention that the incarnation is mythological is the rise of a more generalized view of God's relationship to the world. Traditionally, orthodox theology saw God's contact with and involvement in the world as related especially to the person of Jesus during a thirty-year period in Palestine. By contrast, movements such as the short-lived Death of God theology posited an ongoing process through which the primordial God has become fully immanent within the world. This has taken place in steps or stages, with the most complete step occurring in Christ. From that point onward, the process has been one of diffusion outward from Christ into the rest of the human race, as his teachings and practices come to be adopted. The primordial God has ceased to exist; he is now totally immanent within the human race.[1123]

This particular conception shows a great deal of similarity to the thought of Georg Hegel. For Hegel, the event of Christ is not singularly significant in itself. It is merely a symbol of the greater abstract truth of God's going forth into the world, representing a more philosophical truth.[1124]

There are many variations within the Christologies that view the incarnation as mythological. In spite of the variety and diversity, there are several points of agreement:

1. The idea that God literally became man is quite incredible and logically contradictory.[1125]

2. The Christology of the New Testament represents the faith of the disciples rather than Jesus's teachings. The disciples sought to give expression to the profound impression Jesus had made on them. In so doing, they utilized titles and conceptions common in that day, such as the idea of God's coming to earth. These titles and ideas were not used by Jesus of himself. His message was about the kingdom of God, not about himself. The disciples were attempting to express that they had found in Jesus a man who lived a model life of trust and faith in God. They were also giving expression to their sense that God is involved with the world, with its pain and tragedy. The theological conceptions found in the Gospels, and especially the fourth Gospel, represent their meditations upon the person of Christ, not teachings that he gave. The message of Jesus and the original, earliest faith of the disciples were in no way ontological. In particular,

there was no idea of a metaphysical Son of God. If there was any sort of similar idea at all, it was that God had adopted Jesus.[1126]

3. The traditional type of Christology stems not from the New Testament, but from the church's theologizing, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries. In so doing, the church utilized then-current philosophical conceptions. As a result, the doctrines formulated resembled the philosophical dogmas of the time. These prevented the church from correctly understanding the New Testament witness to Christ. Furthermore, many of these formulations (e.g., that Jesus had two natures but was one person) are themselves internally self-contradictory and actually lacking in content. They are vacuous formulas. The church never really spelled out what was meant by these expressions; every attempt to do so was pronounced heretical.[1127]

4. The idea of Jesus as the incarnate one is not as unique as has usually been supposed. For example, Gautama Buddha also represents the coming of God to humans, evidencing God's desire to be involved with his creation, and the essential unity of God and humanity.[1128] Jesus is, then, not the only expression of this religious truth. To think that Jesus is the only way, and that only those who believe what the church teaches about him will be saved, is at best parochial and at worst abhorrent. It is to say that the vast majority of all those who have lived have not been saved, indeed, had no opportunity to be saved. Rather, we must realize that Christianity's basic affirmation—that God loves the world and desires to be reconciled to it—is also believed and expressed in differing forms in other religions. God is present in other religions as well, but under differing names. "Jesus" is the distinctively Christian term for the presence of God.[1129]

5. Incarnation may be understood in a narrow and a broad sense. In the narrow sense, it is the belief that at one point in time and space God entered the world, in the person of Jesus Christ, as he had never done before and has never done since. In the broad sense, incarnation signifies God's immanence in the world. Thus, the means by which humanity is to approach God lies in the physical world, not in escape from it. The physical world is a carrier of spiritual value. This broad sense is not unique to Christianity, but is also found in Judaism. Relating not only to Christology, but also to the doctrines of creation and providence, the doctrine of incarnation means that God is in the world and is at work there.

These two senses, God's immanence in the world and the absolute uniqueness of the God-man Jesus Christ, are not inseparable. While the latter meaning of incarnation has been used by the church during much of its history to communicate the former, the former can be maintained without the latter. This is parallel to the church's ability to maintain the Eucharist without belief in

transubstantiation, and to maintain the authority of the Bible without belief in inerrancy.

It is necessary to outline a reply to the contention that the incarnation is mythical. The following three chapters will clarify and elaborate the real meaning of the incarnation. Nonetheless, some suggestions need to be offered at this point.

1. The idea of the incarnation of God is not inherently contradictory. Brian Hebblethwaite has argued that the belief that the incarnation involves a contradiction stems from taking the incarnation too anthropomorphically. To be sure, there is a paradox here, a concept that is very difficult to assimilate intellectually.[1130] The function of a paradox, as Ian Ramsey has shown, is to force our minds beyond the natural to the supernatural.[1131] In this case, we are not predicating divinity of Jesus's humanity, or suggesting that God became an entirely different kind of God, or that one person was both limited and unlimited at the same time and in the same respect. Rather, we are simply claiming that God voluntarily assumed certain limitations upon the exercise of his infinity. He had similarly limited his options when he created humans.

2. There is historical evidence that the Christology of the New Testament goes back to Jesus himself rather than merely to the faith of the disciples. A number of considerations are involved here. For one thing, the theory that the disciples might have borrowed from similar myths the idea of a god's becoming incarnate is doubtful. That they had access to such myths has been shown to be highly questionable at best.[1132] Further, the pre-Pauline Hellenistic congregations that are alleged to have fused Hellenistic ideas with the story of Christ are now known not to have existed.[1133] Finally, there is indication that a "high" Christology is present in the earliest of the New Testament writings.[1134]

3. The suggestion that the incarnation of God in Jesus is paralleled in the teachings of other religions cannot be sustained. The doctrine of the incarnation is radically different from the doctrine of divine immanence. Further, it is inconceivable that, if God is one, more than one person could be God incarnate.[1135] When the full biblical meaning of the doctrine of the incarnation is understood, the incarnation of God in Jesus simply cannot be compared with, for example, Buddhism's view of Buddha.

The doctrine of the incarnation requires much fuller development. We will continue in that investigation, assured that the task we are undertaking is not an impossible one.

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The Deity of Christ

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, the student should be able to achieve the following:

1. Demonstrate a full understanding of the deity of Jesus Christ and the importance it has for the Christian faith.
2. Identify and explain the biblical teaching regarding the deity of Christ.
3. Recognize and describe Ebionism and Arianism, two views about Jesus Christ, and how they deviate from the historical and biblical understanding of the deity of Jesus Christ.
4. Understand the limited nature of "functional Christology" and how its presuppositions affect the conclusions that are drawn about the biblical and early church writers.
5. Formulate implications concerning the deity of Christ for the purpose of developing a balanced Christology.

Chapter Summary

The deity of Christ sits at the pinnacle of controversy and belief concerning the Christian faith. While some have overemphasized the deity of Christ, others, such as the Ebionites and the Arians, have portrayed Christ as a unique human not possessing a divine nature. Relevant biblical passages clearly indicate that this is not the case. More

recently, “functional Christology” has developed, focusing on the actions of Jesus rather than his nature. Again, biblical evidence does not support this view. The deity of Christ has real value to the believer concerning knowledge of God, new life, personal relationship with God, and the ability to worship Christ for who he is.

Study Questions

- Why is the deity of Christ so important to the Christian faith? Use biblical references to support your answer.
- Why did Jesus not speak of his divinity overtly? What did he say that would support his divinity?
- What views have developed that diminish the deity of Christ, and are they still effective today?
- What are the main elements of a “functional Christology,” and how would you respond to them?
- What implications may be drawn concerning the deity of Christ, and why do you think they are important?

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One of the most controversial and yet crucial topics of Christian theology is the deity of Christ. It lies at the heart of our faith. For our faith rests on Jesus's actually being God in human flesh, and not simply an extraordinary human, even the most unusual person who ever lived.

During the history of the church, different challenges to Jesus's deity have arisen, with Islam recently having become an aggressive challenger. Islam maintains that Jesus was one of the great prophets, that he did not die on the cross, someone else taking his place there, and was not raised from the dead. While the larger issue of the proper authority divides Islam and orthodox Christianity, it is important to understand clearly what the Bible teaches about Jesus.

The Biblical Teaching

As with other doctrines, our primary source is the witness of Scripture. Here we find a wide variety of material and emphases, but not a divergence of opinion. While it is not possible to investigate every reference that bears on this consideration, we may at least sample the data.

Jesus's Self-Consciousness

In looking at the biblical evidence for the deity of Christ, we begin with Jesus's own self-consciousness. What did Jesus think and believe about himself? Some have argued that Jesus did not himself make any claim to be God. His message was entirely about the Father, not about himself. We are therefore called to believe *with* Jesus, not *in* Jesus.[1136]

It is true that Jesus did not make an explicit and overt claim to deity. He did not say in so many words, "I am God." What we do find, however, are claims that would be inappropriate if made by someone who is less than God. For example, Jesus said that he would send "his angels" (Matt. 13:41); elsewhere they are spoken of as "the angels of God" (Luke 12:8–9; 15:10). That reference is particularly significant, for he spoke not only of the angels but also of the kingdom as his: "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil." This kingdom is repeatedly referred to as the kingdom of God, even in Matthew's Gospel (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), where one would expect to find "kingdom of heaven" instead.

More significant yet are the prerogatives Jesus claimed. In particular, his claim to forgive sins resulted in a charge of blasphemy against him. When the paralytic was lowered through the roof by his four friends, Jesus's initial comment was, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). The reaction of the scribes indicates the meaning they attached to his words: "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). Robert Stein notes that their reaction shows that they interpreted Jesus's comment "as the exercising of a divine prerogative, the power to actually forgive sins."[1137] Here was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to clarify the situation, to correct the scribes if they had indeed misunderstood the import of his words. This he did not do, however. His response is highly instructive: "'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home'" (vv. 8–11).

Jesus claimed other prerogatives as well. In Matthew 25:31–46 he speaks of judging the world. He will sit on his glorious throne and divide the sheep from the goats. The power of judging the spiritual condition and assigning the eternal destiny of all people belongs to him. Certainly this is a power only God can exercise.

Jesus made other direct claims. We note, in examining the Gospels, that in the beginning of his ministry, Jesus allowed the people to draw inferences about him from the power of his moral teaching and his miracles. Thus this segment of Jesus's ministry lends some support to the theories of Harnack and others. In the later portions, however, the focus is much more upon himself. We might, for example, contrast the Sermon on the Mount with the discourse in the upper room. In the former, the message is centered upon the Father and the kingdom. In the latter, Jesus himself is much more the center of attention. Thus the contention that Jesus directed our faith to the Father, but not to himself, is difficult to sustain.

The authority Jesus claimed and exercised is also clearly seen with respect to the Sabbath. God had established the sacredness of the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8–11). Only God could abrogate or modify this regulation. Yet consider what happened when Jesus's disciples picked heads of grain on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees objected that the Sabbath regulations (at least their version of them) were being violated. Jesus responded by pointing out that David had violated one of the laws by eating of the bread reserved for the priests. Then, turning directly to the situation at hand, Jesus asserted: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28).

He was clearly claiming the right to redefine the status of the Sabbath, a right that belongs only to someone virtually equal to God.

We see Jesus also claiming an unusual relationship with the Father, particularly in the sayings reported in John. For example, he claims to be one with the Father (John 10:30), and that to see and know him is to see and know the Father (John 14:7–9). There is a claim to preexistence in his statement in John 8:58, "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" Note that rather than saying, "I was," he says, "I am." Leon Morris suggests that there is an implied contrast here between "a mode of being which has a definite beginning" and "one which is eternal."[1138] It is also quite possible that Jesus is alluding to the "I AM formula" by which the Lord identified himself in Exodus 3:14–15. For in this case, as in Exodus, the "I am" is a formula denoting existence. The verb is not copulative (as in, e.g., "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"). Another allusion to preexistence is found in John 3:13, where Jesus asserts, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." There is also a claim to simultaneous and coterminous working with the Father: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). While some of Jesus's statements may seem rather vague to us, there is no doubt as to how his opponents interpreted them. The Jews' immediate reaction to Jesus's claim that he existed before Abraham was to take up stones to throw at him (John 8:59). Certainly this is an indication that they thought him guilty of blasphemy, for stoning was the prescription for blasphemy (Lev. 24:16). If they attempted to stone him merely because they were angered by his unfavorable references to them, they would, in the eyes of the law, have been guilty of attempted murder.

In some respects, the clearest indication of Jesus's self-understanding is found in connection with his trial and condemnation. The charge, according to John's account, was that "he claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). Matthew reports the high priest to have said at the trial, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (v. 64). This is as clear a declaration of his deity as one can find in the Gospels. Some have argued that Jesus was speaking satirically, and saying in effect, "You said that, not I." It is true that the personal pronoun is used here to supplement the second-person singular of the verb, suggesting that the emphasis of the sentence falls on the subject—"*You* said that!" However, two additional observations need to be made: (1) Jesus went on to speak of his power

and second coming, thus confirming rather than contradicting the charge; (2) Jesus had an ideal opportunity here to correct any misconception that may have been involved. He could have avoided execution simply by denying that he was the Son of God, but he did not do that. Either he desired to die, albeit on a false charge, or he did not respond because the charge brought against him was correct. The Jews' reaction is instructive. The high priest said, "'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered" (Matt. 26:65–66). The crime was that Jesus claimed what only God has the right to claim. Here we have Jesus in effect asserting, through acquiescence, his equality with the Father.

Not only did Jesus not dispute the charge that he claimed to be God, but he also accepted his disciples' attribution of deity to him. The clearest case of this is his response to Thomas's statement, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Here was an excellent opportunity to correct a misconception, if that is what it was, but Jesus did not do so.

There are additional indications of Jesus's self-estimation. One is the way he juxtaposes his own words with the Old Testament, the Scripture of his time. Time and again he says, "You have heard that it was said, . . . But I tell you . . ." (e.g., Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28). Here Jesus presumes to place his word on the same level as Old Testament Scripture. It might be argued that this was merely a claim to be a prophet of the same stature as the Old Testament prophets. The prophets, however, based their claim to authority upon what God had said or was saying to and through them. Thus, one finds the characteristic formula, "The word of the LORD came to me . . ." (e.g., Jer. 1:11; Ezek. 1:3). Jesus, however, does not cite any such formula in setting forth his teaching. He simply says, "But I tell you . . ." Jesus is claiming to have the power in himself to lay down teaching as authoritative as that given by the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus also, by implication, direct statement, and deed, claims power over life and death. Hannah in her song of praise credits God with having the power to kill and to make alive (1 Sam. 2:6). In Psalm 119, the psalmist acknowledges about a dozen times that it is Jehovah who gives and preserves life. In John 5:21 Jesus claims this power for himself: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." Perhaps the most emphatic statement is found in his words to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25).

Jesus specifically applied to himself expressions that conveyed his self-understanding. One of these is "Son of God." Form critics find this title in all the

Gospel strata—clear proof that Jesus used it of himself. While the title is capable of various meanings, Jesus "poured into it a new content to describe His own unique person and relationship to God."[1139] It signified that Jesus had a relationship to the Father distinct from that of any other human. The Jews understood that Jesus was thereby claiming a unique sonship differing "not merely quantitatively but qualitatively, not merely in degree but in kind."[1140] We read in John 5:2–18, for example, that they reacted with great hostility when, in defense of his having healed on the Sabbath, Jesus linked his work with that of the Father. As John explains, "For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (v. 18). From all of the foregoing, it seems difficult, except on the basis of a certain type of critical presupposition, to escape the conclusion that Jesus understood himself as equal with the Father and as possessing the right to do things that only God has the right to do.

The Gospel of John

When we examine the whole New Testament, we find that what its writers say about Jesus is thoroughly consistent with his own self-understanding and claims about himself.[1141] The Gospel of John is, of course, noted for its references to Jesus's deity. The prologue particularly expresses this idea: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What John actually says is, "Divine [or God] was the Word" (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος—*theis ēn ho logos*). By placing θεὸς first, in contrast to the word order of the preceding clause, he makes the term particularly forceful.[1142] He has both identified the Word as divine and distinguished the Word from God. He is not describing a simple monotheism or a modalistic monarchianism here. The remainder of the Gospel supports and amplifies the thrust of the prologue.

Hebrews

The book of Hebrews is also very emphatic regarding Jesus's divinity. In the opening chapter the author speaks of the Son as the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of his nature (χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ—*charaktēr tēs hupostaseōs autou*, Heb. 1:3). This Son, through whom God created the world (v. 2), also upholds (or carries) all things by his word of power (v. 3). In verse 8, which is a quotation of Psalm 45:6, the Son is addressed as "God." The argument here is that the Son is superior to angels (1:4–2:9), Moses

(3:1–6), and the high priests (4:14–5:10). He is superior, for he is not merely a human or an angel, but something higher, namely, God.

Paul

Paul frequently witnesses to Jesus's deity. In Colossians 1:15–20 Paul writes that the Son is the image (εἰκών—*eikōn*) of the invisible God (v. 15); he is the one in whom and through whom and for whom all things hold together (vv. 16–17). In verse 19 Paul brings this line of argument to a conclusion: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness [πλήρωμα—*plērōma*] dwell in him." In Colossians 2:9 he states a very similar idea: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

Paul also confirms some of the claims Jesus had made earlier. In the Old Testament judgment is ascribed to God. In Genesis 18:25 Abraham refers to God as "the Judge of all the earth." In Joel 3:12 Jehovah proclaims, "for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side." Paul confirms Jesus's claim (Matt. 25:31–46) that he will judge the nations. Although he on occasion refers to the judgment of God (e.g., Rom. 2:3), he also speaks of "Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1) and of "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10).

One Pauline passage that addresses the status of Jesus has become a subject of considerable controversy. On the surface Philippians 2:5–11 is a clear assertion of the deity of Christ Jesus, since it speaks of him as being or existing in the "form" (μορφή—*morphē*) of God. In biblical and classical Greek this term refers to "the whole set of characteristics that makes something what it is."[1143] In recent scholarship, however, this view of the passage has been questioned. Much modern interpretation of Philippians 2:5–11 goes back to Ernst Lohmeyer, who proposed that what we have here is actually a quotation of a liturgical hymn—the passage can be divided into two strophes, each consisting of three stanzas of three lines.[1144] Further, according to Lohmeyer, the hymn is not Hellenistic but Aramaic in origin; that is, it can be traced back to the early Hebrew Christians. As proof he points out four parallels with the Old Testament:

1. "In the form of God" (v. 6 RSV)—"in our image, in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).
2. "Made himself nothing" (v. 7)—"poured out his life" (Isa. 53:12).
3. The image of Jesus as a servant—Isaiah 53.
4. "In human likeness" (v. 7)—"one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13).

The major point for our purposes is that "in the form of God" has come to be equated with an Old Testament reference to the image and likeness of God. That the Septuagint sometimes uses μορφή in the sense of εἰκών is presented as evidence that the "form of God" is to be understood as the image of God that is found in all human beings. Accordingly, some scholars hypothesize that the early Christian hymn Paul borrowed did not depict Jesus as preexistent God, but merely as a second Adam. They interpret "[he] did not count equality with God something to be grasped" (v. 6 NIV 1984) in light of Adam's attempt to become like God. Unlike Adam, Jesus did not attempt to seize equality with God.

There are numerous problems with Lohmeyer's interpretation:

1. There is no agreement as to the specific division of the passage into stanzas.
2. Even if the passage does represent a hymn, interpretation cannot be governed by form.
3. The origin of a portion of material is not the sole factor explaining its meaning. To proceed as if it were is to commit a genetic fallacy.
4. Interpreting μορφή as an equivalent of εἰκών is tenuous at best. Based on a few rare occurrences of μορφή in the Septuagint, this argument ignores the fundamental classical sense of the word—the substance, the genuine nature, of a thing.

We conclude, then, that Philippians 2:6 does indeed teach an ontological preexistence of the Son. And the whole passage, as Reginald Fuller maintains, presents a "threefold christological pattern": Jesus, being God, emptied himself, became man, and then was again exalted to the status of deity or of equality with the Father.[1145]

In cultures where age is seen as a positive rather than a negative, some theologians have found the preexistence of Christ to be a helpful support in presenting his deity. For example, some African theologians, such as Charles Nyamiti, have seen in the doctrine of Christ's preexistence an opportunity to relate Christology to Africans' strong respect for their ancestors.[1146] Other African theologians, however, have not regarded this as a wise tactic.[1147]

The Term "Lord"

There is a more general type of argument for the deity of Christ. The New Testament writers ascribe the term κύριος (*kurios*—"Lord") to Jesus, particularly

in his risen and ascended state. While the term can most certainly be used without any high christological connotations, several considerations argue that the term signifies divinity when it is applied to Jesus. First, in the Septuagint κύριος is the usual translation of the name יְהֹוָה (Jehovah) and of the reverential אֲדֹנָי (Adonai), which was ordinarily substituted for it. Further, several New Testament references to Jesus as "Lord" are quotations of Old Testament texts employing one of the Hebrew names for God (e.g., Acts 2:20–21 and Rom. 10:13 [cf. Joel 2:31–32]; 1 Pet. 3:15 [cf. Isa. 8:13]). These references make it clear that the apostles meant to give Jesus the title "Lord" in its highest sense. Finally, κύριος is used in the New Testament to designate both God the Father, the sovereign God (e.g., Matt. 1:20; 9:38; 11:25; Acts 17:24; Rev. 4:11), and Jesus (e.g., Luke 2:11; John 20:28; Acts 10:36; 1 Cor. 2:8; Phil. 2:11; James 2:1; Rev. 19:16). William Childs Robinson comments that when Jesus "is addressed as the exalted Lord, he is so identified with God that there is ambiguity in some passages as to whether the Father or the Son is meant (e.g., Acts 1:24; 2:47; 8:39; 9:31; 11:21; 13:10–12; 16:14; 20:19; 21:14; cf. 18:26; Rom. 14:11)."[1148] For the Jews particularly, the term κύριος suggested that Christ was equal with the Father.

The Evidence of the Resurrection

To some, the approach we have been taking in our effort to demonstrate Jesus's deity may appear uncritical, using the Bible without taking into consideration the findings of the more radical methods of biblical investigation. There is, however another way to establish Jesus's deity, a way that will not enmesh us in contesting critical issues point for point. We noted in chapter 30 the methodology known as "Christology from below." We now turn again to the Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, especially as it is developed in his book *Jesus—God and Man*. The trend in recent years, both among evangelical and nonevangelical scholars, has been to conclude on purely historical grounds the probability of Jesus's resurrection having occurred.[1149] Pannenberg follows this same path but goes on to show how the fact of Jesus's resurrection argues for his deity.

Pannenberg sees a strongly eschatological dimension in Jesus's ministry. Together with Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, Heinz Eduard Tödt, and others, he maintains that the oldest stratum of the New Testament sayings about the Son of Man, who will come on the clouds of heaven to judge men, is from Jesus himself; they are not a formulation of the early Christian community.[1150] All of

Jesus's ministry had a proleptic character. Like the prophetic utterances of the apocalyptic background, his claims required future confirmation.

Pannenberg's argument can be understood only in light of his view of revelation and of history. To Pannenberg, the whole of history is revelatory. Thus, revelation can be said to have fully taken place only when history has run its course, because only then can we see where it has been going. One would therefore expect that history has no revelatory value for us now since we have only incomplete parts, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The resurrection, however, because it is the end of history, having taken place proleptically, does give us revelation, even within time.[1151]

Pannenberg holds that the resurrection must be understood from the viewpoint of the historical traditions of which it is a part. Whereas it has become commonplace to regard an event as a constant and its interpretation as a variable changing with time, he unites the two. The meaning of an event is the meaning attached to it by the persons into whose history it comes, his Jewish contemporaries:[1152]

1. To a Jew of the time, Jesus's resurrection would have meant that the end of the world had begun. Paul expected that the resurrection of all people, and particularly of believers, would quickly follow that of Jesus. Therefore he spoke of Jesus as the "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20) and the "firstborn from among the dead" (Col. 1:18).[1153]

2. The resurrection would have been evidence that God himself confirmed Jesus's pre-Easter activity. To the Jews, Jesus's claim to authority, putting himself in God's place, was blasphemous. If he was raised from the dead, however, it must have been the God of Israel, the God who had presumably been blasphemed, who raised him. Hence, contemporary Jews would have regarded the resurrection as God's confirmation that Jesus really was what he claimed to be.[1154]

3. The resurrection would have established that the Son of Man is none other than the man Jesus. Before Easter, Jesus was understood to be a man who walked visibly upon the earth; the Son of Man was a heavenly being who would come in the future on the clouds of heaven. After Easter, however, the two were regarded as identical.[1155]

4. The resurrection would have meant that God has been ultimately revealed in Jesus. Only at the end of time can God be fully revealed in his divinity. In Jesus, God has already appeared on earth. While this concept lacks the precision found in later orthodox Christology, "Jesus's divinity is already implied in some way in the conception of God's appearance in him."[1156]

As evidence for Jesus's resurrection, Pannenberg points to the emergence of Christianity, which Paul traced back to the appearances of the resurrected Christ. If the emergence of Christianity can be understood "only if one examines it in the light of the eschatological hope for a resurrection from the dead, then that which is so designated is a historical event, even if we do not know anything more particular about it."[1157]

Pannenberg agrees with Paul Althaus that the proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem so soon after Jesus's death is very significant. Within the earliest Christian community there must have been a reliable testimony to the empty tomb. Pannenberg also observes that in the Jewish polemic against the Christian message of Jesus's resurrection, there is no claim at all that Jesus's grave was not empty.[1158]

In Pannenberg's judgment, the evidence of 1 Corinthians 15 is really more significant than that of the Gospels. He concedes that some legendary elements may have filtered into the Gospel accounts. An example is Jesus's eating fish after his resurrection. Yet, for the most part we have adequate evidence to establish the historicity of the resurrection, which is proof in itself of Jesus's deity.[1159]

Evangelicals have been especially concerned about the resurrection, since Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 made it such a crucial matter. In the fundamentalist-modernist debate, it was a crucial point of contention. More recently a number of very competent arguments have been developed, often as part of a formal debate, based on a more conventional use of the historical sources.[1160]

Historical Departures from Belief in the Full Deity of Christ

As the church struggled to understand who and what Jesus is, and particularly how he is related to the Father, some deviant interpretations arose.

Ebionism

One group, known as the Ebionites, solved the tension by denying the real or ontological deity of Jesus. The name "Ebionite," derived from a Hebrew word meaning "poor," was originally applied to all Christians; later, only to Jewish Christians; and then, to a particular sect of heretical Jewish Christians.

The roots of Ebionism can be traced to Judaizing movements within the apostolic or New Testament period. Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to counter the activity of one such group. Judaizers had come to the Galatian

Christians and were attempting to undermine Paul's apostolic authority. They taught that in addition to accepting by faith the grace of God in Jesus, it was necessary to observe all the regulations of Jewish law, such as circumcision. The Ebionites were a continuation of or offshoot from the Judaizers. Being strongly monotheistic, they focused their attention upon the problematic deity of Christ. They rejected the virgin birth, maintaining that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary in normal fashion.[1161]

Jesus was, according to the Ebionites, an ordinary human possessing unusual but not superhuman or supernatural gifts of righteousness and wisdom. He was the predestined Messiah, although in a rather natural or human sense. At the baptism, the Christ descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. This was understood more as the presence of God's power and influence within the man Jesus than as a personal, metaphysical reality. Near the end of Jesus's life, the Christ withdrew from him. Thus Jesus was primarily a human, albeit a human in whom, at least for a time, the power of God was present and active to an unusual degree. The Ebionites maintained their position partly through a denial or rejection of the authority of Paul's letters.[1162]

The Ebionite view of Jesus had the virtue of resolving the tension between belief in the deity of Jesus and the monotheistic view of God, but at a high price. Ebionism had to ignore or deny a large body of scriptural material: all of the references to the preexistence, the virgin birth, and the qualitatively unique status and function of Jesus. In the view of the church, this was far too great a concession.

Arianism

A much more thoroughly developed and subtle view sprang up in the fourth century around the teaching of an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius. It became the first major threat to the views implicitly held by the church regarding Jesus's deity. Because Arianism arose in a period of serious theological reflection and represented a much more thorough and systematic construction than Ebionism, this movement had a real chance of becoming the official view. Although it was condemned by the church at the Council of Nicea in 325 and at subsequent councils, it lingers on to our day in various forms, most notably the movement known as Jehovah's Witnesses.

A central conception in the Arian understanding of Jesus is the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God.[1163] God is the one source of all things, the only uncreated existent in the whole universe. He alone possesses the attributes of deity. Further, he cannot share his being or essence with anyone else, for he

would then be divisible and subject to change; that is, he would not be God. If any other being participated in the divine nature, it would be necessary to speak of a duality or multiplicity of divine beings. But this would contradict the one absolute certainty of monotheism, the uniqueness and oneness of God. Nothing else that exists, then, can have originated as some sort of emanation from God's essence or substance. Everything other than God has, rather, come into being through an act of creation by which he called it into existence out of nothing. The Father alone is uncreated and eternal.

The Father, however, while creating everything that is, did not directly create the earth. Rather, the Father worked through the Word, the agent of his creation of and continuing work in the world. The Word is also a created being, although the first and highest of the beings, a fiat creation out of nothing. The word γεννάω (*gennaō*—"beget"), when used in reference to the Father's relationship to the Word, is to be understood as a figure of speech for ποιέω (*poieō* —"make"). While the Word is a perfect creature, not really in the same class with the other creatures, he is not self-existent.

From this, two other conceptions regarding the Word followed. First, the Word must have had a beginning at some finite point. The Arians' slogan therefore became "There was a time when he was not." It seemed to the Arians that if the Word were coeternal with the Father, there would be two self-existent principles. This would be irreconcilable with monotheism, the one absolute tenet of their theology.

Second, the Son has no communion with or even direct knowledge of the Father. Although he is God's Word and Wisdom, he is not of the very essence of God; being a creature, he bears these titles only because he participates in the word and wisdom of the Father. Totally different in essence from the Father, the Son is liable to change and even sin. When pressed as to how they could then refer to the Word as God or the Son of God, the Arians indicated that these designations were merely a matter of courtesy.

The Arians did not formulate their view only upon an a priori philosophical or theological principle. Rather, they based it upon a rather extensive collection of biblical references:[1164]

1. Texts that suggest that the Son is a creature. Among these are Proverbs 8:22 (in the Septuagint); Acts 2:36 ("God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah"); Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15 ("the firstborn over all creation"); and Hebrews 3:2.
2. Texts in which the Father is represented as the only true God. Most significant is Jesus's prayer in John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life: that

they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

3. Texts that seem to imply that Christ is inferior to the Father. The most notable of these is John 14:28, where Jesus says, "the Father is greater than I." The fact that this verse and the one cited in the preceding point are from the book of John, the most theological of the Gospels, and the Gospel containing the most frequently cited proof-texts for the deity of Christ, makes the argument the more impressive.
4. Texts that attribute to the Son such imperfections as weakness, ignorance, and suffering. One of the foremost is Mark 13:32: "About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

The result of all this was that the Word was given the status of a demigod. Although the highest of all the creatures, he was still a creature. He was an intermediate being between God the Father and the rest of the creation, the agent by whom the Father had created them and continued to relate to them, but not God in the full sense. He might be called God as a courtesy, but he is at most a god, a created god, not the God, the eternal, uncreated being. Somewhat less extreme were the semi-Arians, who stressed the similarity rather than the dissimilarity between the Word and the Father. They were willing to say that the Word is similar in nature (or essence) to the Father (ὁμοιούσιος—*homoiousios*), but not that he is of the same essence as the Father (ὁμοούσιος—*homoousios*).

There are two major responses to Arian theology. One is to note that the types of evidence appealed to earlier in this chapter in substantiating the deity of Christ are either ignored or inadequately treated by the Arians. The other is to take a closer look at the passages that have been appealed to in support of the Arian view. In general, it must be said that the Arians have misconstrued various biblical statements referring to the Son's subordination during his incarnation. Descriptions of his temporary functional subordination to the Father have been misinterpreted as statements about the Son's essence.

It will be seen upon closer examination that the passages that seem to speak of Jesus as made or created teach no such thing. For example, the references to Jesus as the "first-born" of creation are assumed by the Arians to have a temporal significance. In actuality, however, the expression "firstborn" does not primarily mean first in time, but first in rank, or preeminent. This is indicated, for example, by the context of Colossians 1:15, for the following verse notes that Jesus was the means of origination of all created beings. Paul certainly would have qualified this statement (e.g., by writing "all other things" instead of "all

things" were created in him) if the Son were one of them. Further, Acts 2:36 does not say anything about creation of the Son. It says that God made him to be Lord and Christ, references to his office and function, the fulfillment of his messianic task.

John 17:3 must also be seen in context. We must evaluate it in the light of the numerous other references in this Gospel to the deity of Christ. In speaking of the Father as the only genuine (ἀληθινός—*alēthinos*) God, Jesus is contrasting the Father not with the Son, but with the other claimants to deity, the false gods. Indeed, Jesus links himself very closely with the Father here. Eternal life is not only knowing the Father, but also knowing the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ.

John 14:28, the passage in which Jesus says that the Father is greater than he is, must be seen in the light of the Son's functional subordination during the incarnation. In his earthly ministry Jesus was dependent upon the Father particularly for the exercise of his divine attributes. But when he states that he and the Father are one (John 10:30) and prays that his followers may be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21), he is expressing a great closeness, if not an interchangeability, between the two. Further, the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19) and the Pauline benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 indicate a linking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in equality; none of the members of the Trinity is superior to the others.

Finally, the passages referring to weakness, ignorance, and suffering must be seen as statements confirming the genuineness of the incarnation. Jesus was fully human. This does not mean that he ceased to be God, but that he took upon himself the limitations of humanity. During the earthly stay of his first coming he genuinely did not know the time of his second coming. His deity was exercised and experienced only in concert with his humanity. While the problem of the relationship of his two natures will be closely examined in chapter 33, it needs to be observed at this point that a temporary limitation, not a permanent finitude, was involved. For a short period of time Jesus did not have absolute knowledge and physical ability. Thus, while on earth it was possible for him to develop physically and grow intellectually.

The church, forced to evaluate the Arian view, came to its conclusion at the Council of Nicea in 325. On the basis of considerations such as those we have just cited, it concluded that Jesus is as much and as genuinely God as is the Father. He is not of a different substance or even of a similar substance; he is of the very same substance as the Father. Having decided on this formulation, the council condemned Arianism, a condemnation repeated by later councils.

Functional Christology

Not all modifications of the doctrine of the full deity of Jesus are found in the first centuries of the history of the church. One of the interesting christological developments of the late twentieth century was the rise of "functional Christology." By this is meant an emphasis upon what Jesus did rather than upon what he is. Basically, functional Christology claims to work on the basis of purely New Testament grounds rather than the more metaphysical or speculative categories of a later period of reflection, which are viewed as rooted in Greek thought.

One clear example of functional Christology is Oscar Cullmann's *Christology of the New Testament*. He points out that the christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries were concerned with the person or nature of Christ.[1165] These concerns centered on two issues: first, the relationship between the nature of Jesus and that of God; second, the relationship between Jesus's divine and human natures. The New Testament, however, is not concerned with these issues. If we do not discard these later issues from our examination of the New Testament, we will have a false perspective on Christology from the very beginning. This is not to say, according to Cullmann, that the church did not need to deal with those issues at that later time, or that its treatment of them was improper. But we must remember that the fourth- and fifth-century church was wrestling with problems resulting from "the Hellenizing of the Christian faith, the rise of Gnostic doctrines, and the views advocated by Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches and others."[1166] These problems simply did not arise in New Testament times.

Cullmann presses us to ask, "What are the orientation and the interest of the New Testament with respect to Christ?" His own response is that the New Testament hardly ever speaks of the person of Christ without at the same time speaking of his work. "When it is asked in the New Testament, 'Who is Christ?' the question never means exclusively, or even primarily, 'What is his nature?' but first of all, 'What is his function?'"[1167]

In seeking to combat the views of heretics, related primarily to the nature of Christ or his person, the church fathers subordinated the discussion of Jesus's work to that of his nature. While granting the necessity of these efforts by the church fathers, Cullmann nonetheless warns us to be alert to the shift: "Even if this shifting of emphasis was necessary against certain heretical views, the discussion of 'natures' is none the less ultimately a Greek, not a Jewish or biblical problem."[1168]

Cullmann's approach is to use "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) as an organizing principle for his examination of the various New Testament titles for Jesus. His Christology, then, is centered on what Jesus has done in history: "It is characteristic of New Testament Christology that Christ is connected with the total history of revelation and salvation, beginning with creation. There can be no *Heilsgeschichte* without Christology; no Christology without a *Heilsgeschichte* which unfolds in time. Christology is the doctrine of an 'event,' not the doctrine of natures."[1169]

There are two ways in which advocates of a functional Christology interpret its role:

1. A functional Christology of the New Testament, as opposed to an ontological Christology, is the truly biblical view, but it can be used to construct a more ontological Christology, since ontological concepts are implicit within the functional.
2. It is neither necessary nor desirable to go beyond the functional approach taken by the New Testament. The New Testament Christology is normative for our Christology.

Although Cullmann does not explicitly state that he holds the second position, one might draw such an inference. A similar inference can be drawn concerning those who maintain that the theology necessitated by the present milieu has a far greater affinity with the functional approach than with fourth- and fifth-century Greek metaphysics.[1170]

Space does not permit a complete and thorough exposition and evaluation of the whole of Cullmann's or any other functional Christology. Several observations need to be made by way of response, however:

1. It is true that the biblical writers were very interested in the work of Christ and that they did not engage in sheer speculation about the nature of Jesus. However, their interest in his nature is not always subordinated to their interest in his work. Note, for example, how John in his first epistle refers to the humanity of Jesus: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God" (4:2–3). It may, of course, be maintained that the coming of Jesus is his work, but the primary thrust in this passage is that he came "in the flesh." Recall also the prologue of the Gospel of John. Cullmann counters that even here "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" is connected with "through him all things were made."[1171] But while it is one thing to claim as evidence that in asking "Who is Christ?" the

New Testament never means *exclusively* "What is his nature?" it is quite another thing to claim, as Cullmann does, that the New Testament never means this *primarily*. In the light of passages like John 1:1 and 1 John 4:2–3, it is impossible to maintain that in the New Testament the functional always has priority over the ontological.

2. The assumption that the discussion of natures is "ultimately a Greek, not a Jewish or biblical problem," reflects the common presupposition of the biblical theology movement that there is a marked difference between Greek and Hebrew thinking, and that the Hebrew is the biblical mentality. James Barr's monumental work *Semantics of Biblical Language* demonstrates that this and several other conceptions held by the biblical theology movement are untenable.[1172] Brevard Childs maintains that the loss of credibility of these conceptions constitutes the "cracking of the walls" of the biblical theology movement.[1173] Whether or not one accepts Barr's evaluation, we cannot simply ignore it and mouth uncritical statements about the Hebraic mentality.

3. Consequently, the assumption that the mentality of the Hebrews was nonontological or nontheoretical must be called into question. George Ladd considers Paul's use of *mar* in 1 Corinthians 16:22 very significant: "That Paul should use an Aramaic expression in a letter to a Greek-speaking church that knew no Aramaic proves that the use of *mar* (*Kyrios*) for Jesus goes back to the primitive Aramaic church and was not a product of the Hellenistic community."[1174] This text, as well as *Didache* 10:9, "testifies to a worship of Jesus as Lord in the Aramaic speaking community which looked for his coming rather than that of the Father."[1175] Clearly, then, there was an ontological element in the Hebrew concept of Christ.

4. There is broad agreement that the fourth-century Christologists were influenced by Greek presuppositions as they came to Scripture. No doubt they believed that those presuppositions reflected what was within the minds of the Hebrew Christians. But one searches in vain for any admission by Cullmann and other functional Christologists that they bring to their study of the New Testament presuppositions colored by the intellectual milieu of their own day. Even less do they acknowledge what those presuppositions might be. The assumption throughout is that from their vantage point in the twentieth century they are better able to understand the mind of the first-century writers than were the fourth- and fifth-century theologians. Presumably the possession of superior historical methods enables them to gain special insight. But may it not be that the Chalcedonian theologians, standing so much closer to the time of the New Testament, actually understood it as well as or better than do modern theologians?

In particular, one should scrutinize the work of functional theologians to see whether categories drawn from contemporary functionalism (i.e., pragmatism) may not be coloring their interpretation of the Bible. The conclusion of Barr and others that the mentality of the Hebrews was not as nonmetaphysical as it is sometimes thought should prompt us at least to consider this possibility.

5. Cullmann warned against distorting the biblical perspective by analyzing it under the categories of a later period. But what of his basic organizational principle of *Heilsgeschichte*? It is noteworthy how few times that concept appears in either the Old or the New Testament. Of course, the concept is there, but does the Bible so enlarge on it as to warrant using it as an organizing principle? Cullmann answers yes and documents his contention by appealing to his *Christ and Time*, but that work has also been severely criticized by Barr.[1176] This is not to say that Barr's case is conclusive, but it should warn us against uncritically assuming that Cullmann uses no category extraneous to the biblical text. In practice, Cullmann appears to work in a circular fashion: *Heilsgeschichte* validates functional Christology, and functional Christology validates *Heilsgeschichte*. But the statement that "Christology is the doctrine of an 'event,' not the doctrine of natures," needs more evidence from outside the circle.

6. Even if we grant that the early Christian church was more concerned with what Jesus had done than with what kind of person he is, we cannot leave our Christology there. Whenever we ask how something functions, we are also asking about the presuppositions of the function, for functions do not happen in abstraction. Function assumes some sort of form. To fail to see this and to rest content with a functional Christology is to fall into a "Cheshire cat Christology." Like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat, which gradually faded away until only its grin remained, functional Christology gives us formless functions. Whether or not the early Christians asked ontological questions about Jesus, we cannot afford not to, if we wish to be responsible and contemporary.[1177] To fail to do so is to fall into one of Henry Cadbury's categories of "archaizing ourselves": the substituting of biblical theology for theology.[1178] We simply do not live in the first century. We must go on, as Cullmann suggests the theologians of the fourth century properly did, to pose questions concerning the nature of Jesus.

To sum up: because functional Christology overlooks some features of the biblical witness and distorts others, it is not an adequate Christology for today. It is questionable whether, as Cullmann maintains, the New Testament puts far more stress on Jesus's function or work than on his person or nature. Ontological concepts are implicit if not explicit in the New Testament. Any Christology to be fully adequate must address and integrate ontological and functional matters.

Implications of the Deity of Christ

In introducing this chapter, we contended that the deity of Christ is of vital importance to the Christian faith. The dispute between the orthodox (who maintained that Jesus is *homoousios*—of the same nature as the Father) and the semi-Arians (who contended that Jesus is *homoiousios*—of a similar nature) has at times been ridiculed. It is but a dispute over a diphthong.[1179] Yet a very small change in spelling makes all the difference in meaning.[1180]

There are several significant implications of the doctrine of Christ's deity:

1. We can have real knowledge of God. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Whereas the prophets came bearing a message from God, Jesus *was* God. If we would know what the love of God, the holiness of God, the power of God are like, we need only look at Christ.

2. Redemption is available to us. The death of Christ is sufficient for all sinners who have ever lived, for it was not merely a finite human, but an infinite God who died. He—the Life, the Giver and Sustainer of life, who did not have to die—died.

3. God and humanity have been reunited. It was not an angel or a human who came from God to the human race; rather, God himself crossed the chasm created by sin.

4. Worship of Christ is appropriate. He is not merely the highest of the creatures, but is God in the same sense and to the same degree as the Father. He is as deserving of our praise, adoration, and obedience as is the Father.

One day everyone will recognize who and what Jesus is. Those who believe in the deity of Christ already recognize who he is and act accordingly:

> Beautiful Savior!
> Lord of the nations!
> Son of God and Son of Man!
> Glory and honor
> Praise, adoration,
> Now and forevermore be Thine!

32
The Humanity of Christ

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Assess the importance of the doctrine of the humanity of Christ.
2. Probe the biblical material for the physical, emotional, and intellectual evidence for the humanity of Christ.
3. Understand the early church heresies, Docetism and Apollinarianism, that denied or limited the humanity of Christ.
4. Comprehend the more recent tendencies of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann to devalue Jesus's humanity.
5. Examine and affirm the sinlessness of Jesus.
6. Assess six implications of the humanity of Jesus.

Chapter Summary

While the doctrine of the humanity of Christ is less controversial than the doctrine of his divinity, there have been several ancient heresies and more modern views that deny or diminish his humanity. The issue of the sinlessness of Jesus creates a special problem. Some maintain that Jesus could not have been human if he did not sin. This conclusion does not necessarily follow. There are several implications that follow from accepting the orthodox position of Jesus's humanity.

Study Questions

- How would you describe the doctrine of Jesus's humanity?
- Why is the doctrine of Jesus's humanity important?
- How would you explain the heresies of Docetism and Apollinarianism so they would be understandable to a person who has not studied doctrine or church history?
- How would you explain the problems with the positions of Barth and Bultmann on the humanity of Christ?
- Assume that you have been asked to defend the concept of Jesus's sinlessness, particularly with the possibility that he could have sinned. What would you say?
- If you were preaching or teaching about the humanity of Jesus, what points would you want to make?

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The topic of the humanity of Jesus Christ does not, in some ways, arouse quite the attention and controversy that his deity does. It seems on first glance to be something of a self-evident matter, for whatever Jesus was, he most surely must have been human. In the twentieth century, Jesus's humanity did not receive the close and extensive attention paid to his deity, which was a major topic of

dispute between fundamentalists and modernists. For what is not disputed tends not to be discussed, at least not in as much depth as are major controversies. Yet, historically, the topic of Jesus's humanity has played at least as important a role in theological dialogue as has his deity, particularly in the earliest years of the church. And in practical terms, it has in some ways posed a greater danger to orthodox Christianity.

The Importance of the Humanity of Christ

The importance of Jesus's humanity cannot be overestimated, for the issue in the incarnation pertains to our salvation. The human problem is the gap between us and God. The gap is, to be sure, ontological. God is far superior to humans, so much so that he cannot be known by unaided human reason. If he is to be known, God must take some initiative to make himself known to humanity. But the problem is not merely ontological. There also is a spiritual and moral gap between the two, a gap created by humans' sin. Humans cannot by their own moral effort counter their sin in order to elevate themselves to the level of God. If there is to be fellowship between the two, they have to be united in some other way. This, it is traditionally understood, has been accomplished by the incarnation, in which deity and humanity were united in one person. If, however, Jesus was not really one of us, humanity has not been united with deity and we cannot be saved. For the validity of the work accomplished in Christ's death, or at least its applicability to us as human beings, depends upon the reality of his humanity, just as its efficacy depends upon the genuineness of his deity.

Furthermore, Jesus's intercessory ministry depends upon his humanity. If he was truly one of us, experiencing all of the human temptations and trials, then he is able to understand and empathize with us in our struggles as humans. On the other hand, if he was not human, or only incompletely human, he cannot really intercede as a priest must on behalf of those whom he represents.

The Biblical Evidence

There is ample biblical evidence that Jesus was a fully human person, not lacking any of the essential elements of humanity that constitute each of us. First, he had a fully human body. He was born. He did not descend from heaven and suddenly appear upon earth, but was conceived in the womb of a human mother and nourished prenatally like any other child. Although his conception

was unique, not involving a male human, the process from that point on was apparently identical to what every human fetus experiences.[1181] The birth in Bethlehem, although under somewhat remarkable circumstances, was nonetheless a normal human delivery. The terminology describing his birth is the same as that used of ordinary human births. Jesus also had a typical family tree, as is indicated by the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. He had ancestors and presumably received genes from them, just as every other human being receives genes from his or her forebears.

Not only Jesus's birth but also his life indicates that he had a physical human nature. We are told that he grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). He grew physically, nourished by food and water. He did not have unlimited physical strength. Yet his body may have been more nearly perfect in some respects than ours, because there was in him none of the sin that affects health.

Jesus had the same physiology and the same physical limitations as other humans. He experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), and fatigue (John 4:6). Thus, he was justifiably dismayed when his disciples fell asleep while he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, for he experienced the same type of weariness they did (Matt. 26:36, 40–41).

Finally, Jesus suffered physically and died, just like everyone else. This is evident in the entire crucifixion story, but perhaps most clear in John 19:34, where we read that a spear was thrust into his side, and water and blood mingled came out, indicating that he had already died. Surely he had felt physical suffering (as genuinely as would you or I) when he was beaten, the crown of thorns was placed on his head, and the nails were driven through his hands (or wrists) and feet.

Jesus's contemporaries had a genuine physical perception of him, indicating that he had a physical body. John puts it vividly in 1 John 1:1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." John is here establishing the reality of the human nature of Jesus. He actually heard, saw, and touched Jesus. Touch was thought by the Greeks to be the most basic and most reliable of the senses, for it is a direct perception—no medium intervenes between the perceiver and the object perceived. Thus, when John speaks of what "our hands have touched," he is emphasizing just how thoroughly physical was the manifestation of Jesus.

Rudolf Bultmann, among others, objected to the idea of a physical perception of Jesus. Citing 2 Corinthians 5:16—"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view [κατὰ σάρκα—*kata sarka*]. Though we once regarded

Christ in this way, we do so no longer"—Bultmann argues that we cannot know Jesus through ordinary human means of perception or empirical historical research.[1182] However, as we have already seen (p. 546), "flesh" is not used of bodily physiology in Paul's writings, but of humanity's natural orientation away from God. It is the unregenerate human's way of doing or viewing things. So what Paul is speaking of is best rendered, "from a worldly [or human] point of view." The phrase κατά σάρκα does not refer to a possible way of gaining knowledge about Jesus, but rather to a perspective, an outlook, an attitude toward him. In contradiction to Bultmann, then, the possibility of acquiring historical information about Jesus cannot be excluded on the basis of this particular text of Paul.

If Jesus was a true human being physically, he also was fully and genuinely human psychologically. Scripture attributes to him the same sort of emotional and intellectual qualities found in other men. He thought, reasoned, and felt.

When we examine the personality of Jesus, we find the full gamut of human emotions. He loved, of course. One of his disciples is referred to as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). When Lazarus was ill and Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, their message was, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:3). When the rich young man asked about inheriting eternal life, Jesus looked upon him and "loved him" (Mark 10:21). Jesus had compassion or pity on those who were hungry, ill, or lost (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). The Greek word is σπλαγχνίζομαι (*splanchnizomai*), which literally means "to be moved in one's internal or visceral organs." Jesus was stirred by human predicaments.

Jesus reacted to differing situations with appropriate emotions. He could be sorrowful and troubled, as he was just before his betrayal and crucifixion (Matt. 26:37). He also experienced joy (John 15:11; 17:13; Heb. 12:2). He could be angry and grieved with people (Mark 3:5), and even indignant (Mark 10:14).

Some of these emotions, of course, do not in themselves prove that Jesus was human. For God certainly feels love and compassion, as we observed in our discussion of his nature, as well as anger and indignation toward sin. Some of Jesus's reactions, however, are uniquely human. For example, he shows astonishment in response to both positive and negative situations. He marvels at the faith of the centurion (Luke 7:9) and the unbelief of the residents of Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

Instructive as well are the references to Jesus's being troubled. Here we see his peculiarly human reaction to a variety of situations, especially his sense of the death to which he had to go. He acutely felt the necessity and importance of his mission—"how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50 NIV 1984). Awareness of what it would entail troubled his soul (John 12:27). In the

garden of Gethsemane, he was obviously in struggle and in stress, and apparently did not want to be left alone (Mark 14:32–42). On the cross, his outcry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), was a very human expression of loneliness.

One of Jesus’s most human reactions occurred at the death of Lazarus. Seeing Mary and her companions weeping, Jesus “was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (John 11:33); he wept (v. 35); at the tomb he was “once more deeply moved” (v. 38). The description here is vivid, for to depict Jesus’s groaning in the spirit, John chose a term that is used of horses snorting (ἐμβριμάομαι —*embrimaomai*). Jesus possessed a human nature capable of feeling sorrow and remorse as deeply as we do.

When we turn to the subject of Jesus’s intellectual qualities, we find that he had some rather remarkable knowledge. He knew the past, present, and future to a degree not available to ordinary human beings. For example, he knew the thoughts of both his friends (Luke 9:47) and his enemies (Luke 6:8). He could read the character of Nathanael (John 1:47–48). He “did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person” (John 2:25). He knew that the Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was presently living with a man to whom she was not married (John 4:18). He knew that Lazarus was already dead (John 11:14). He knew that Judas would betray him (Matt. 26:25) and that Peter would deny him (Matt. 26:34). Indeed, Jesus knew all that was to happen to him (John 18:4).

Yet this knowledge was not without limits. Jesus frequently asked questions, and the impression given by the Gospels is that he asked because he did not know. Of course some persons, particularly teachers, ask questions the answers to which they already know. But Jesus seemed to ask because he needed information he did not possess.[1183] For example, he asked the father of the epileptic boy, “How long has he been like this?” (Mark 9:21). Apparently Jesus lacked this information, necessary for the proper cure.

The biblical witness goes even further. In at least one case Jesus expressly declared that he did not know a particular matter. In discussing the second coming, he said, “About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).

It is difficult to account for the fact that Jesus’s knowledge was extraordinary in some matters, but definitely limited in others. Some have suggested that he had the same limitations we have with respect to discursive knowledge (knowledge gained by the process of reasoning or by receiving piecemeal information from others), but had complete and immediate perception in matters of intuitive knowledge.[1184] That does not seem to fit the facts completely,

however. It does not explain his knowledge of the past of the Samaritan woman, or the fact that Lazarus was dead. Perhaps we could say that he had such knowledge as was necessary for him to accomplish his mission; in other matters he was as ignorant as we are.[1185]

Ignorance and error, however, are two very different things. Some modern scholars contend that Jesus actually erred in some of his affirmations, such as his attribution of the books of the Pentateuch to Moses (Mark 12:26) and his assertion that he would return within the lifetime of some who heard him. Among the predictions singled out are Mark 9:1 ("some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power"; cf. Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27) and Mark 13:30 ("this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"; cf. Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32). Since these predictions were not fulfilled as he claimed, he obviously erred. In the former case, Jesus's attribution of the Pentateuch to Moses does not conflict with any statement in the Bible itself, but only with the conclusions of critical methodologies, which many evangelical scholars reject. In the latter case, it is not clear that the reference is to the time of his return. His statement in Mark 9:1, for example, precedes the transfiguration by just six days, and in the Mark 13 passage Jesus interweaves references to the second coming and the destruction of Jerusalem. While he confessed ignorance, he never made an erroneous statement.

As James Orr has pointed out: "Ignorance is not error nor does the one thing necessarily imply the other. That Jesus should use language of His time on things indifferent, where no judgment or pronouncement of His own was involved, is readily understood; that He should be the victim of illusion, or false judgment, on any subject on which He was called to pronounce, is a perilous assertion."[1186] Of course, we humans not only are subject to ignorance, but also commit errors. Part of the wonder of the incarnation is that although Jesus's humanity involved his not knowing certain things, he was aware of this limitation and did not venture assertions on those matters. We must be careful to avoid the assumption that his humanity involved all of our shortcomings. Rather, as Leonard Hodgson has observed, "it is Christ who is the one perfect man, and we must measure our manhood by the standard of His."[1187]

We must note also the "human religious life" of Jesus. While that may sound strange and perhaps even a bit blasphemous to some, it is nonetheless accurate. He attended worship in the synagogue, and did so on a regular or habitual basis (Luke 4:16). His prayer life was a clear indication of human dependence upon the Father. Jesus prayed regularly. At times he prayed at great length and with great intensity, as in the garden of Gethsemane. Before the important step of

choosing his twelve disciples, Jesus prayed all night (Luke 6:12). Jesus felt himself dependent upon the Father for guidance, for strength, and for preservation from evil.

Further, we note that Jesus used of himself terminology denoting humanity. When tempted by Satan, Jesus replies, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus is applying this quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 to himself. A clearer statement is found in John 8:40, where Jesus says to the Jews, “You are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.” Others also use such language in reference to Jesus. In his Pentecost sermon Peter says, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). Paul, in his argument regarding original sin, compares Jesus and Adam and uses the expression “one man” of Jesus three times (Rom. 5:15, 17, 19). We find a similar thought and expression in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 47–49. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul emphasizes the practical significance of Jesus’s humanity: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

Scripture also refers to Christ’s taking on flesh, that is, becoming human. Paul says Jesus “appeared in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). John said, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). John was particularly emphatic on this matter in his first letter, one of the purposes of which was to combat a heresy that denied that Jesus had been genuinely human: “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2–3). In these cases, it is apparent that “flesh” is used in the basic sense of physical nature. The same idea is found in Hebrews 10:5: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.” Paul expresses the same thought in more implicit fashion in Galatians 4:4: “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”

It is apparent, then, that for the disciples and the authors of the New Testament books, there was no question about Jesus’s humanity. The point was not really argued, for it was scarcely disputed (with the exception of the situation to which 1 John was addressed). It was simply assumed. Those closest to Jesus, who lived with him every day, regarded him as being as fully human as themselves. They were able to verify for themselves that he was human; and when, on one occasion after Jesus’s resurrection, there was some question whether he might be a spirit, he invited them to ascertain the genuineness of his humanity for themselves: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a

ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). He did everything they did, except sin and pray for forgiveness. He ate with them, he bled, he slept, he cried. If Jesus was not human, then surely no one ever has been.

Early Heresies regarding the Humanity of Jesus

Early in the life of the church, however, there came several departures from the understanding of Jesus as fully human. These heresies forced the church to think through thoroughly and enunciate carefully its understanding of this matter.

Docetism

We see such a denial of the reality of Jesus's humanity already in the situation John's first letter vigorously opposed. In addition to a specific group of Christians known as Docetists, a basic denial of Jesus's humanity permeated many other movements within Christianity, including Gnosticism and Marcionism.[1188] In many ways, it was the first full-fledged heresy, with the possible exception of the Judaizing legalism Paul had to combat in Galatia. Whereas Ebionism denied the actuality of the deity of Christ, Docetism denied his humanity.

Docetism is in essence a Christology heavily influenced by basic Greek assumptions of both the Platonic and Aristotelian varieties. Plato taught the idea of gradations of reality. Spirit or mind or thought is the highest. Matter or the material is less real. With this distinction of ontological gradations of reality, there came to be ethical gradations as well. Thus, matter came to be thought of as morally bad. Aristotle emphasized the idea of divine impassibility, according to which God cannot change, suffer, or even be affected by anything that happens in the world. While these two streams of thought have significant differences, both maintain that the visible, physical, material world is somehow inherently evil. Both emphasize God's transcendence and absolute difference from and independence of the material world.[1189]

Docetism takes its name from the Greek verb δοκέω (*dokeō*), which means "to seem or appear." Docetism's central thesis is that Jesus only seemed to be human. God could not really have become material, since all matter is evil, and he is perfectly pure and holy. The transcendent God could not possibly have united with such a corrupting influence. Being impassible and unchangeable, God could not have undergone the modifications in his nature that would

necessarily have occurred with a genuine incarnation. He could not have exposed himself to the experiences of human life. Jesus's humanity, his physical nature, was simply an illusion, not a reality. Jesus was more like a ghost, an apparition, than a human being.[1190]

Like the Ebionites, the Docetists had difficulty with the idea of the virgin birth, but at a different point. The Docetists had no problem with the belief that Mary was a virgin; it was the belief that Jesus had been born to her which was unacceptable to them. For if Mary had truly borne Jesus, as other mothers do, she would have contributed something material to him, and that would have been a perversion of the moral goodness of deity. Consequently, Docetism thought more in terms of a transmission through Mary than a birth to her. Jesus merely passed through her, like water passing through a tube. She was only a vehicle, contributing nothing.[1191]

This particular Christology resolved the tension in the idea that deity and humanity were united in one person. It did so by saying that while the deity was real and complete, the humanity was only appearance. But the church recognized that this solution had been achieved at too great a price, the loss of Jesus's humanity and thus of any real connection between him and us. Ignatius and Irenaeus attacked the various forms of Docetism, while Tertullian gave particular attention to the teachings of Marcion, which included docetic elements. It is difficult today to find pure instances of Docetism, although docetic tendencies occur in varied schemes of thought.

Apollinarianism

Docetism is a denial of the reality of Jesus's humanity. Apollinarianism, by contrast, is a truncation of Jesus's humanity. Jesus took on genuine but not complete human nature.

Apollinarianism is an example of taking a good thing too far. Apollinarius was a close friend and associate of Athanasius, the leading champion of orthodox Christology against Arianism at the Council of Nicea. As so often happens, however, the reaction against heresy became an overreaction. Apollinarius was very concerned to maintain the unity of the Son, Jesus Christ. Now if Jesus, reasoned Apollinarius, had two complete natures, he must have had a human νοῦς (*nous*—soul, mind, reason) as well as a divine νοῦς. Apollinarius thought this duality absurd. So he constructed a Christology based upon an extremely narrow reading of John 1:14 ("the Word became flesh"; i.e., flesh was the only aspect of human nature involved).[1192] According to Apollinarius, Jesus was a compound unity; part of the composite (some elements of Jesus) was human, the

rest divine. What he (the Word) took was not the whole of humanity, but only flesh, that is, the body. This flesh could not, however, be animated by itself. There had to be a "spark of life" animating it. This was the divine Logos; it took the place of the human soul. Thus Jesus was human physically, but not psychologically. He had a human body, but not a human soul. His soul was divine.[1193]

Therefore, Jesus, although human, was a bit different from other human beings, for he lacked something they have (a human νοῦς). Thus in him there was no possibility of any contradiction between the human and the divine. There was only one center of consciousness, and it was divine. Jesus did not have a human will. Consequently, he could not sin, for his person was fully controlled by his divine soul.[1194] Loraine Boettner draws the analogy of a human mind implanted into the body of a lion; the resulting being is governed, not by lion or animal psychology, but by human psychology. That is a rough parallel to the Apollinarian view of the person of Jesus.[1195]

Apollinarius and his followers thought that they had discovered the ideal solution to the orthodox view of Jesus, which appeared to them to be grotesque. As Apollinarius interpreted orthodoxy's Christology, Jesus consisted of two parts humanity (a body and a soul [this is an oversimplification]) and one part deity (a soul). But 2 + 1 = 3, as everyone knows. Thus, as a two-souled person, Jesus would have been some sort of freak, for we have only one soul and one body (1 + 1 = 2). As Apollinarius saw his own view, Jesus was a composite of one part humanity (a body) and one part deity (a soul). Since 1 + 1 = 2, there was nothing bizarre about him. The divine soul simply took the place occupied by the human soul in ordinary human beings. As orthodoxy saw its own Christology, however, Jesus did in fact consist of two parts humanity (a body and a soul) and one part deity (a soul), but the resulting formula is 2 + 1 = 2. The orthodox felt constrained to accept this paradox as a divine truth beyond their human capacity to understand. The underlying idea is that Jesus lacked nothing of humanity, which means that he had a human soul as well as a divine soul, but that fact did not make him a double or divided personality.[1196]

Apollinarianism proved to be an ingenious but unacceptable solution to the problem. For since the divine element in Jesus not only was ontologically superior to the human element, but also constituted the more important part of his person (the soul rather than the body), the divine was doubly superior. Thus, the dual nature of Jesus tended to become one nature in practice, the divine swallowing up the human. The church concluded that while not as thoroughgoing a denial of the humanity of Jesus as Docetism, Apollinarianism had the same practical effect. The church's theologians challenged the

assumption that the human and the divine, as two complete entities, cannot combine in such a way as to form a real unity. They noted that if, as Apollinarius claimed, Christ lacked the most characteristic part of humanity (human will, reason, mind), it hardly seemed correct to call him human at all. And specifically, they concluded that the Apollinarian rejection of the belief that Jesus took on the psychological components of human nature clashed with the accounts in the Gospels.[1197] Consequently, the Apollinarian doctrine was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Modern Depreciations of the Humanity of Jesus

We noted earlier that outright theoretical denials of Jesus's humanity tend to be quite rare in our time. In fact, Donald Baillie refers to "the end of Docetism."[1198] There are, however, Christologies that, in one way or another, minimize the significance of the humanity of Jesus.

Karl Barth

As developed in his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth's Christology is related to his view of revelation as well as to his Kierkegaardian understanding of the role of history for faith.[1199] Kierkegaard maintained that from the standpoint of Christian faith, it is believers, not eyewitnesses, who are Jesus's real contemporaries. Thus, there was no advantage in being an eyewitness to what Jesus did and said. Kierkegaard spoke of the "divine incognito," meaning that the deity of Christ was thoroughly hidden in the humanity. As a result, observation and even detailed description of the man Jesus and what he did and said yield no revelation of his deity.[1200]

Barth fully grants the humanity of Jesus, though he sees nothing remarkable about it. He observes that it is difficult to get historical information about Jesus, and even when we do, it has no real significance for faith: "Jesus Christ in fact is also the Rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is got, one whose activity is so easily a little commonplace alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of His own 'religion.'"[1201] To Barth, the human life of Jesus, what he both said and did, is not very revealing of the nature of God. Indeed, the information we obtain about Jesus by the use of the historical method serves more to conceal than to reveal his deity. This is, of course, consistent with Barth's view of revelation, according to which the events reported in Scripture

are not revelatory per se. Each event is revelatory only when God manifests himself in an encounter with someone who is reading or hearing about it. The events and the words recording them are the vehicle by which revelation occurs; they are not objective revelation.[1202]

According to Barth, then, even if we were to ascertain correctly everything Jesus said and did, we would not thereby know God. Some popular forms of apologetics attempt to argue from Jesus's miracles, conduct, and unusual teachings that he must have been God. These items are set forth as indisputable proofs of his deity, if one will but examine the evidence. In Barth's view, however, even if a complete chronicle of Jesus's life could be constructed, it would be more opaque than transparent. Evidence of this appeared within Jesus's own lifetime.[1203] Many of those who saw what he did and who heard what he said were not thereby convinced of his deity. Some were merely amazed that he, the son of Joseph the carpenter, could speak as he did. Some acknowledged that what he did was supernatural, but they did not meet God through what they observed. On the contrary, they concluded that what Jesus did, he did by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. Flesh and blood did not reveal to Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; rather, it was the Father in heaven who convicted Peter of this truth. And so it must also be with us. We cannot know God through knowledge of the Jesus of history.

Rudolf Bultmann

With regard to the significance of the history of the earthly Jesus for faith, the thought of Rudolf Bultmann is even more radical than that of Barth. Following the lead of Martin Kähler, Bultmann divides the history of Jesus into *Historie* (the actual events of his life) and *Geschichte* (significant history, i.e., the impact Christ made upon believers). Bultmann believes that we have very little chance of getting back to the *Historie* through the use of the normal methods of historiography. That does not really matter, however, for faith is not primarily concerned with either cosmology, the nature of things, or with history in the usual sense of what actually happened. Faith is not built upon a chronicle of events, but upon the record of the early believers' preaching, the expression of their creed.[1204]

Bultmann's Christology, therefore, does not focus on an objective set of facts about Jesus, but on his existential significance. The crucial matter is what he does to us, how he transforms our lives. Thus, for example, the meaning of Jesus's crucifixion is not that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, was put to death on a cross outside Jerusalem. It is rather to be found in Galatians 6:14—"the world

has been crucified to me, and I to the world."[1205] The question faith asks is not whether the execution of Jesus actually took place, but whether we have crucified our old nature, its lusts and earthbound striving for security. Similarly, the real significance of the resurrection has to do with us, not the historical Jesus. The question is not whether Jesus came to life again, but whether we have been resurrected—lifted from our old, self-centered life to an openness in faith to the future.

The views of Barth and Bultmann have characteristic features that distinguish them from each other. But both agree that the historical facts of the earthly life of the man Jesus are not significant for faith. Then what is significant or determinative for faith? Barth says it is the supernatural revelation; Bultmann says it is the existential content of the preaching of the early church.

We should note that Barth's Christology suffers at this point from the same difficulties as does his doctrine of revelation. The basic criticisms are well known and were summarized in an earlier chapter of this work.[1206] In Barth's Christology there are, in terms of accessibility and objectivity, problems concerning our knowledge and experience of Christ's deity. Further, the force of the statement "God became a human" is severely diminished.

In the case of Bultmann, there is a separation of *Historie* and *Geschichte* that scarcely seems justified on biblical grounds. Paul's statements connecting the fact and impact of Christ's resurrection are especially pointed (1 Cor. 15:12–19). And both Bultmann and Barth appear to disregard Jesus's post-resurrection statements calling direct attention to his humanity (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:24–29).

A different type of concern has been expressed by some Latin American evangelical theologians. From their perspective, it appears that even traditional orthodox theology has concerned itself too much with philosophical issues, thus emphasizing the deity of Christ. The result, in their judgment, has been a depreciation of the historical considerations and the humanity of Jesus, thus removing the dogma too far from the social problems the church must wrestle with.[1207]

The Sinlessness of Jesus

One further important issue concerning Jesus's humanity is the question of whether he sinned or, indeed, whether he could have sinned. In both didactic passages and narrative materials, the Bible is quite clear that he did not sin.

Among didactic or directly declaratory passages, the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (4:15). Jesus is described as "a high priest [who] truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (7:26), and as "unblemished" (9:14). Peter, who of course knew Jesus well, declared him to be "the Holy One of God" (John 6:69), and taught that Jesus "committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). John said, "In him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Paul also affirmed that Christ "had no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus himself both explicitly and implicitly claimed to be righteous. He asked his hearers, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46); no one replied. He also maintained, "I always do what pleases him [who sent me]" (John 8:29). Again, "I have kept my Father's commands" (John 15:10). He taught his disciples to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness, but there is no report of his ever confessing sin and asking forgiveness on his own behalf. Although he went to the temple, we have no record of his ever offering sacrifice for himself and his sins. Other than blasphemy, no charge of sin was brought against him; and, of course, if he was God, then what he did (e.g., his declaring sins to be forgiven) was not blasphemy. While not absolute proof of Jesus's sinlessness, there are ample testimonies of his innocence of the charges for which he was crucified. Pilate's wife warned, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man" (Matt. 27:19); the thief on the cross said, "This man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41); and even Judas said, "I have sinned . . . for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4).

Jesus's sinlessness is confirmed by the narratives in the Gospels. There are reports of temptation, but none of sin. Nothing reported of him is in conflict with God's revealed law of right and wrong; everything he did was in conjunction with the Father. Thus, on the basis of both direct affirmation and silence on certain points, we must conclude that the Bible uniformly witnesses to the sinlessness of Jesus.[1208]

One problem arises from this consideration, however. Was Jesus fully human if he never sinned? Or to put it another way, was the humanity of Jesus, if free from all sin of nature and of active performance, the same as our humanity? For some this seems to be a serious problem. For to be human, by their definition, is to be tempted and to sin. Does not sinlessness then take Jesus completely out of our class of humanity? This question casts doubt on the genuineness of the temptations of Jesus.

A. E. Taylor has stated the case directly and clearly: "If a man does not commit certain transgressions . . . it must be because he never felt the appeal of

them."[1209] But is this really so? The underlying assumption seems to be that if something is possible, it must become actual, and that, conversely, something that never occurs or never becomes actual must not really have been possible. Yet we have the statement of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus was indeed tempted in every respect as we are (4:15). Beyond that, the descriptions of Jesus's temptations indicate great intensity. For example, think of his agony in Gethsemane when he struggled to do the Father's will (Luke 22:44).

But could Jesus have sinned? Scripture tells us that God does no evil and cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Was it really possible, then, for Jesus, inasmuch as he is God, to sin? And if not, was his temptation genuine? Here we are encountering one of the great mysteries of the faith, Jesus's two natures, which will be more closely examined in the next chapter. Nonetheless, it is fitting for us to point out here that while he could have sinned, it was certain that he would not.[1210] There were genuine struggles and temptations, but the outcome was always certain.

Does a person who does not succumb to temptation really feel it, or does that person not, as Taylor has contended? Leon Morris argues that the reverse of Taylor's contention is true. The person who resists knows the full force of temptation. Sinlessness points to a more intense rather than less intense temptation. "The man who yields to a particular temptation has not felt its full power. He has given in while the temptation has yet something in reserve. Only the man who does not yield to a temptation, who, as regards that particular temptation, is sinless, knows the full extent of that temptation."[1211]

One might have questions about some points of Morris's argument. For example, "Is the strength of temptation measured by some objective standard or by its subjective effect?" "Is it not possible that someone who has yielded to temptation may have yielded at the point of its maximum force?" But the argument that he is making is nonetheless valid. One simply cannot conclude that where sin has not been committed, temptation has not been experienced; the contrary may very well be true.

But the question remains, "Is a person who does not sin truly human?" If we say no, we are maintaining that sin is part of the essence of human nature. Such a view must be considered a serious heresy by anyone who believes that the human has been created by God, since God would then be the cause of sin, the creator of a nature that is essentially evil. Inasmuch as we hold that, on the contrary, sin is not part of the essence of human nature, instead of asking, "Is Jesus as human as we are?" we might better ask, "Are we as human as Jesus?" For the type of human nature that each of us possesses is not pure human nature. The true humanity created by God has in our case been corrupted and spoiled.

There have been only three pure human beings: Adam and Eve (before the fall), and Jesus. All the rest of us are but broken, corrupted versions of humanity. Jesus is not only as human as we are; he is more human. Our humanity is not a standard by which we are to measure his. His humanity, true and unadulterated, is the standard by which we are to be measured.

Implications of the Humanity of Jesus

The doctrine of the full humanity of Jesus has great significance for Christian faith and theology:

1. The atoning death of Jesus can truly avail for us. It was not some outsider to the human race who died on the cross. He was one of us, and thus could truly offer a sacrifice on our behalf. Just like the Old Testament priest, Jesus was a human who offered a sacrifice on behalf of his fellows.

2. Jesus can truly sympathize with and intercede for us. He has experienced all that we might undergo. When we are hungry, weary, lonely, he fully understands, for he has gone through it all himself (Heb. 4:15).

3. Jesus manifests the true nature of humanity. While we are sometimes inclined to draw our conclusions as to what humanity is from an inductive examination of ourselves and those around us, these are but imperfect instances of humanity. Jesus has not only told us what perfect humanity is; he has exhibited it.

4. Jesus can be our example. He is not some celestial superstar but one who has lived where we live. We can therefore look to him as a model of the Christian life. The biblical standards for human behavior, which seem to us to be so hard to attain, are seen in him to be within human possibility. Of course, there must be full dependence upon the grace of God. The fact that Jesus found it necessary to pray and depend upon the Father is indication that we must be similarly reliant upon him.

5. Human nature is good. When we tend toward asceticism—regarding human nature, and particularly physical nature, as somehow inherently evil or at least inferior to the spiritual and immaterial—the fact that Jesus took upon himself our full human nature is a reminder that to be human is not evil; it is good.

6. God is not totally transcendent. He is not so far removed from the human race. If he could actually live among us at one time as a real human person, it is not surprising that he can and does act within the human realm today as well.

With John we rejoice that the incarnation was real and complete: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory

of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

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The Unity of the Person of Christ

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the significance of the unity of two natures, divine and human, in one person, Jesus, and the complexities involved with this unity.
2. Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of the biblical material related to the unity of the person of Jesus Christ.
3. Identify and explain the view that the natures, divine and human, were distinct (Nestorianism), and the view that at the point that the incarnation occurred, only one nature existed (Eutychianism).
4. Recognize and describe four other attempts to explain the person of Jesus Christ.
5. Express a full understanding of the doctrine of two natures in the one person, Jesus Christ, and the relevance it has for Christian theology.

Chapter Summary

The doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ does not end at the point of describing his divine and human natures. The unity of these two natures has extensive implications for the understanding of Christian theology. Through anthropological understanding, humans have attempted to disclaim or overemphasize the view of the unity of Jesus Christ. However, the biblical and historical material supports the view that

Christ has both a human and divine nature united in one person. This does not come directly from a human perspective, for humanity cannot comprehend such a joining of two natures.

Study Questions

- How is it possible to bring together a human and divine nature into one person, and why is it necessary?
- How does the Bible explain the unity of the person of Jesus Christ?
- What do Nestorianism and Eutychianism have to say about the person of Jesus Christ, and how are they different from each other?
- How has Philippians 2:7 been misused concerning the person of Jesus Christ, and how would you respond to that interpretation?
- What elements are necessary for understanding the doctrine of two natures in one person?

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The Importance and Difficulty of the Issue

Having concluded that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, we still face a large issue: the relationship between these two natures in the one person, Jesus. This is one of the most difficult of all theological problems, ranking with the Trinity and the relationship of human free will and divine sovereignty. It is also an issue of the greatest importance. We have already explained that Christology in general is important because the incarnation involved a bridging of the metaphysical, moral, and spiritual gap between God and the human race. The bridging of this gap depended upon the unity of deity and humanity within Jesus Christ. For if Jesus was both God and a human but the two natures were not united, then, although smaller, the gap remains. The separation of God and the human race is still a difficulty that has not been overcome. If the redemption accomplished on the cross is to avail for humankind, it must be the work of the human Jesus. But if it is to have the infinite value necessary to atone for the sins of all human beings in relationship to an infinite and perfectly holy God, then it must be the work of the divine Christ as well. If the death of the Savior is not the work of a unified God-man, it will be deficient at one point or the other.

The doctrine of the unification of divine and human within Jesus is difficult to comprehend because it posits the combination of two natures that by definition have contradictory attributes. As deity, Christ is infinite in knowledge, power, and presence. If he is God, he must know all things. He can do all things that are proper objects of his power. He can be everywhere at once. But, on the other hand, if he was a human, he was limited in knowledge. He could not do everything. And he certainly was limited to being in one place at a time.

The issue is further complicated by the relative paucity of biblical material with which to work. We have in the Bible no direct statements about the relationship of the two natures. What we must do is draw inferences from Jesus's self-concept, his actions, and various didactic statements about him.

In view of what we have said, it will be necessary to work with particular care and thoroughness. We will have to examine very meticulously the statements that we do have, and note the various ways different theologians and schools of thought have sought to deal with the issue. Here theology's historical laboratory will be of particular significance.[1212]

The Biblical Material

We begin by noting the absence of any references to duality in Jesus's thought, action, and purpose. There are, by contrast, indications of multiplicity within the Godhead as a whole, for example, in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said [singular],

‘Let us make [plural] mankind in our [plural] image.’” Similar references, without a shift in number, are found in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7. There are instances of one member of the Trinity addressing another in Psalms 2:7 and 40:7–8, as well as Jesus’s prayers to the Father. Yet Jesus always spoke of himself in the singular: this is particularly notable in the prayer in John 17, where Jesus says that he and the Father are one (vv. 21–22), yet makes no reference to any type of complexity within himself.

There are references in Scripture that allude to both the deity and humanity of Jesus, yet clearly refer to a single subject. Among these are John 1:14 (“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, . . . full of grace and truth”); Galatians 4:4 (“God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law”); and 1 Timothy 3:16 (“He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory”). The last text is particularly significant, for it refers to both Jesus’s earthly incarnation and his presence in heaven before and after that.

There are other references that focus upon the work of Jesus in such a way as to make it clear that it is the function not of either the human or the divine exclusively, but of one unified subject. For example, Paul says of the atoning work of Christ that it unites Jew and Gentile and “in one body [reconciles] both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph. 2:16–18). And in reference to the work of Christ, John says, “But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2). This work of Jesus, which assumes both his humanity (4:2) and deity (4:15; 5:5), is the work of one person, who is described in the same epistle as the Son whom the Father has sent as the Savior of the world (4:14).

Further, several passages in which Jesus is designated by one of his titles are highly revealing. For example, we have situations in Scripture where a divine title is used in a reference to Jesus’s human activity. Paul says, “None of the rulers of this age understood it [the secret and hidden wisdom of God], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). In Colossians 1:13–14, Paul writes, “For he [the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Here the kingly status of the Son of God is juxtaposed with the redemptive work of his bodily crucifixion and resurrection. Conversely, the title “Son of Man,” which Jesus often used of

himself during his earthly ministry, appears in passages pointing to his heavenly status; for instance, in John 3:13, “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.” Another reference of the same type is John 6:62: “What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?” Nothing in any of these references contradicts the position that the one person, Jesus Christ, was both an earthly human and a preexistent divine being who became incarnate. Nor is there any suggestion that these two natures took turns directing his activity.[1213]

Early Misunderstandings

Reflection upon the relationship between the two natures arose comparatively late in church history. Logically prior were the discussions about the genuineness and completeness of the two natures. Once the church had settled these questions, at the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381), it was appropriate to inquire into the precise relationship between the two natures. In effect, the matter at issue was, “What is really meant by declaring that Jesus was fully God and fully human?” In the process of suggesting and examining possible answers, the church rejected some of them as inadequate.

Nestorianism

One of the answers was offered by Nestorius and those who followed his teachings. Nestorianism is particularly difficult to understand and to evaluate. One reason is that this movement arose in a period of intense political rivalry in the church.[1214] Consequently, it is not always clear whether the church rejected a view because of its ideas or because of political considerations. Further, Nestorius’s language was somewhat ambiguous and inconsistent. It is clear that the view condemned by the church as Nestorian fell short of the full orthodox position, and was probably held by some of Nestorius’s followers.[1215] It is the judgment of leading scholars, however, that Nestorius himself was not a “Nestorian,” but that some poorly chosen terminology, coupled with the opposition of an aggressive opponent, led to an unjust condemnation of his views.[1216]

Two main types of Christology had emerged in the fourth century—the “Word-flesh” and “Word-man” Christologies. The former regarded the Word as the major element in the God-man and the human soul as relatively unimportant. The latter, less sure that the Word occupied a dominant position in the God-man,

affirmed that Jesus assumed complete human nature. This difference in views is the ideological background to the Nestorian affair.

Soon after Nestorius was installed as the patriarch of Constantinople in 428, he was obliged to rule upon the suitability of referring to Mary as *theotokos* ("God-bearing"). Nestorius was reluctant to do this, unless *theotokos* was accompanied by the term *anthropotokos* ("human-bearing"). While his ideas were not unique in that time, the choice of some rather unfortunate language caused problems for Nestorius. He observed that God cannot have a mother and certainly no creature could have generated a member of the Godhead. Mary, therefore, did not bear God; she bore a man who was a vehicle for God. God simply could not have been borne for nine months in a mother's womb, nor been wrapped in baby clothes; he could not have suffered, died, and been buried. Nestorius felt that the term *theotokos* contained implicitly either the Arian view of the Son as a creature, or the Apollinarian concept of the incompleteness of Jesus's humanity.[1217]

The statement of Nestorius alarmed other theologians, among them Cyril of Alexandria, who was Nestorius's rival. Eusebius, later bishop of Dorylaeum, upon hearing that Mary was reputed to have borne a mere man, concluded that Nestorius was an adoptionist (i.e., one who believed that the man Jesus became divine at some point in his life after birth, probably at his baptism). From the statements of Nestorius and the reactions to his views came the traditional picture of Nestorianism as a heresy that split the God-man into two distinct persons. It was this heresy that was condemned. Cyril was the leader of the opposition, and at the Council of Ephesus (431) proved his skill in political maneuvering. The papal legates approved the position of the group of bishops dominated by Cyril.[1218]

It is virtually impossible to determine exactly what Nestorius's view was. This is particularly so in light of the twentieth-century discovery of the *Book of Heracleides*, which Nestorius apparently wrote some twenty years after his condemnation. In this book he professed to agree with the Chalcedonian formulation (two natures united in one person). It is true, however, that he was impatient with the "hypostatic union" Cyril taught, feeling that this concept eliminated the distinctness of the two natures. Nestorius preferred to think in terms of a "conjunction" (συνάφεια—*sunapheia*) rather than a union (ἕνωσις—*henōsis*) between the two. Perhaps the best possible summation of Nestorius's thought is to say that while he did not consciously hold or overtly teach that there was a split in the person of Christ, what he said seemed to imply it.[1219]

Eutychianism

Similarly difficult to ascertain is the Christology of Eutychianism. After the Council of Ephesus (431), a document was produced in an attempt to arrive at healing within the church. Actually originating with the Oriental (Antiochene) bishops who had supported Nestorius at Ephesus, this document was sent by John of Antioch to Cyril. Cyril accepted it in 433, although it contained some language favorable to the Nestorian position. Thus, something of a compromise appeared to have been reached.

Some of the right-wing supporters and allies of Cyril felt, however, that he had conceded too much to Nestorianism. The compromise's strong emphasis upon two natures seemed to them to undermine the unity of the person of Jesus. As a result, the idea that he did not possess two natures, a divine and a human, but only one nature, began to grow in popularity among them. After Cyril's death in 444, the disaffected group launched an attack upon the teachings of Theodoret, who had probably drafted the compromise document, and who was now the leading theologian of the Antiochene school. Dioscorus, Cyril's successor, led the opposition to the teaching that Jesus had two natures. Dioscorus believed that the church fathers overwhelmingly supported the idea of but one nature in the person of Jesus and that Cyril had compromised it in a moment of weakness. Whether this was a correct understanding of Cyril's position or whether he himself had actually espoused the belief that Jesus had only one nature is debatable. In any event, there was a growing insistence upon the "one-nature formula."

An elderly archimandrite named Eutyches became the focus of the controversy. All who had been displeased with the compromise agreement of 433 and who rejected the idea of two natures in Jesus made Eutyches the symbol of their position. He was denounced at a meeting of the standing Synod of Constantinople. This led to formal discussions culminating in the condemnation and deposition of Eutyches. At this final session Eutyches did not defend himself, but only heard his sentence pronounced.[1220]

It is not easy to ascertain exactly Eutyches's doctrine. At a preliminary examination before the synod, he declared that the Lord Jesus Christ after his birth possessed only one nature, that of God made flesh and become human. Eutyches rejected the idea of two natures as contrary to the Scripture and to the opinions of the fathers. He did, however, subscribe to the virgin birth and affirmed that Christ was simultaneously perfect God and perfect human. His basic contention seems to have been that there were two natures before the incarnation, one after.[1221]

Eutyches was apparently not a very precise or clear thinker. Historically, however, his views constituted the foundation of a movement that taught that the humanity of Jesus was so absorbed into the deity as to be virtually eliminated. In effect, Eutychianism was a form of Docetism. There was a variant interpretation of the nature as a fusion of Jesus's deity and humanity into something quite different, a third substance, a hybrid as it were. It may be that this is what Eutyches himself held, although his thought was confused (at least in the way he expressed it). In 449, a council meeting at Ephesus reinstated Eutyches and declared him orthodox. At the same time, the idea that there were two natures after the incarnation was anathematized. This council has come to be known as the "Robber Synod."[1222]

The Robber Synod had not been held under proper imperial authority, however. The succession of a new emperor sympathetic to the position that Jesus had two natures led to the convening of yet another council, in Chalcedon in 451. This council affirmed the Nicene Creed and issued a statement that was to become the standard for all of Christendom. Regarding the relationship between the two natures, this statement speaks of

> one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;* the distinction of natures being by no means removed by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence—not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of our holy Fathers has handed down to us.[1223]

This statement avoids both the heresy of Nestorianism and that of Eutychianism, insisting on both the unity of the person and the integrity and separateness of the two natures. But this only serves to heighten the tension. For what is the precise relationship between the two natures? How can both be maintained without splitting Jesus into two persons, each having a separate and unique set of attributes? And how can we maintain that Jesus is one person, with one center of consciousness, without fusing the two natures into a mixture or hybrid?

We should note that the Chalcedonian conclusion is essentially negative —"without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." It tells us what "two natures in one person" does not mean. In a sense, Chalcedon is not the answer; it is the question. We must ask further what is to be understood by the formula.

Other Attempts to Solve the Problem

Before we attempt to elucidate the formula "two natures in one person," we need to note some of the other attempts at understanding this union that have been made since the Council of Chalcedon. Once again, the verdict of history will be helpful to us. Four attempts or strategies are representative: (1) the idea that the man Jesus became God (adoptionism); (2) the idea that the divine being, God, took on impersonal humanity rather than an individual human personality (anhypostatic Christology); (3) the idea that the Second Person of the Trinity exchanged his deity for humanity (kenoticism); and (4) the idea that the incarnation was the power of God present in a human being (the doctrine of dynamic incarnation).

Adoptionism

An early and recurrent attempt to solve the problem of "two natures in one person" is adoptionism. Put in its simplest form, this is the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was merely a human during the early years of his life. At some point, however, probably Jesus's baptism (or perhaps his resurrection), God "adopted" him as his Son. Whether this adoption was an act of pure grace on the part of God, or a promotion in status for which Jesus had qualified by virtue of his personal attributes, it was more a case of a human's becoming God than of God's becoming human.[1224]

In support of their position, adoptionists concentrate on the scriptural idea that Jesus was begotten by God. He is even referred to as the "only begotten" (μονογενής—*monogenēs*, John 3:16). When did this "begetting" take place? Adoptionists point out that the writer to the Hebrews twice quotes Psalm 2:7, "You are my son; today I have become your Father," and applies it to the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:5; 5:5). They note the considerable similarity between this statement and that of the Father at Jesus's baptism: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). So it is assumed that the Spirit's descent upon the Son at this point represents the coming of deity upon the man Jesus.

This position gives the human Jesus an independent status. He would simply have lived on as Jesus of Nazareth if the special adoption by God had not occurred. This was more a matter of God's entering an existent human being than of a true incarnation. Sometimes this event is regarded as unique to the life of Jesus; sometimes it is compared to the adoption of other human beings as children of God.

Adoptionism has made recurrent appearances during the history of Christianity.[1225] Those who take seriously the full teaching of Scripture, however, are aware of major obstacles to this view, including the preexistence of Christ, the prebirth narrative, and the virgin birth.

Anhypostatic Christology

Another attempt to clarify the relationship between the two natures might be termed "anhypostatic Christology." This view insists that the humanity of Jesus was impersonal and had no independent subsistence, that is, the divine Word was not united with an individual human person. Originally, anhypostatic Christology was intended to guard against the Nestorian division of Jesus into two persons and the related belief that Mary was mother of only the human person. It also served to negate adoptionism, which posited that Jesus as a human being with independent existence was elevated to deity. The major point of anhypostatic Christology is that the man Jesus had no subsistence apart from the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. It supports this thesis by denying that Jesus had any individual human personality.[1226]

The problem with this position is that to think of Jesus as not being a specific human individual suggests that the divine Word became united with the whole human race or with human nature; taken literally, this idea is absurd. It is true that we occasionally say that Jesus was united with the whole of the human race, but we do so figuratively on the grounds of basic characteristics shared by all its members. We do not have in mind a literal physical uniting with the whole human race. In attempting to avoid one heresy, anhypostatic Christology may fall into another. The insistence that Jesus is personal only in his divine dimension manifestly excludes something vital from his humanity. Denying the individual humanness of Jesus intimates that he was predominantly divine. And that smacks of Apollinarianism.[1227]

Kenoticism

The modern period has produced one distinctive attempt to solve the problem of the relationship between the two natures. Particularly in the nineteenth century, some propounded that the key to understanding the incarnation is to be found in the expression "[Jesus] made himself nothing" (Phil. 2:7). According to this view, what Jesus emptied himself of was the form of God (μορφὴ θεοῦ—*morphē theou*, v. 6). The Second Person of the Trinity laid aside his distinctly divine attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) and took on human qualities

instead. In effect, the incarnation consisted of an exchange of part of the divine nature for human characteristics.[1228] His moral qualities, such as love and mercy, were maintained. While this may seem like an act of the Son alone, it actually involved the Father as well. The Father, in sending forth his Son, was like a father who sends his son to the mission field. A part of him went forth as well.[1229]

What we have here is a parallel in the realm of Christology to the solution offered by modalistic monarchianism to the problem of the Trinity. Jesus is not God and man simultaneously, but successively. With respect to certain attributes, he is God, then he is a human, then God again. The solution to the Chalcedonian formula is to maintain that Jesus is God and a human in the same respect, but not at the same time. While this view solves some of the difficulty, it does not account for the evidence we cited earlier to the effect that the biblical writers regarded Jesus as both God and human. Moreover, the indications of an apparent continuing incarnation (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16) militate against the maintenance of this theory, innovative though it may be.

The Doctrine of Dynamic Incarnation

A final attempt to resolve the problem of two natures in one person might be termed the doctrine of dynamic incarnation. This holds that the presence of God in the divine-human Jesus was not in the form of a personal hypostatic union between the Second Person of the Trinity and an individual human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, the incarnation should be thought of as the active presence of the power of God within the person Jesus.

This view is akin to dynamic monarchianism. The power of God entered into the man Jesus. Thus, the incarnation was not so much a case of Jesus's being united with God in some sort of hypostatic union as it was an indwelling in him of the power of God.

A twentieth-century form of this view is found in Donald Baillie's *God Was in Christ*. Baillie bases his theology upon 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." Note that instead of saying, "Christ was God," this verse emphasizes that "God was in Christ."

To explain the paradox of the incarnation, Baillie uses the model of God's indwelling the believer in what is called the paradox of grace. When the believer does the right thing, or makes the right choice, he or she typically says, "It was not I, but God that did it." In Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 2:12–13 Paul speaks of the internal working of God. Baillie's statements imply that the incarnation of

Jesus is actually an instance, albeit the most complete one, of the paradox of indwelling grace:

> This paradox in its fragmentary form in our own Christian lives is a reflection of that perfect union of God and man in the Incarnation on which our whole Christian life depends, and may therefore be our best clue to the understanding of it. In the New Testament we see the man in whom God was incarnate surpassing all other men in refusing to claim anything for Himself independently and ascribing all the goodness to God.[1230]

Given this interpretation of the incarnation, the difference between Christ and us is only quantitative, not qualitative. But, it must be noted, this interpretation conflicts with several emphases of Scripture: the fullness (πλήρωμα—*plērōma*) of God dwelling in Jesus bodily (Col. 2:9); the preexistence of Christ (John 1:18; 8:58); and the uniqueness of his sonship (μονογενής—*monogenēs*, John 3:16). While the doctrine of dynamic incarnation lessens the tension suggested by the Chalcedonian formula, it encounters difficulty because of its implicit reduction of the deity.

Basic Tenets of the Doctrine of Two Natures in One Person

We have reviewed several attempts to resolve the difficult christological problem of two natures in one person and noted the deficiencies of each. We must, then, present an alternative statement. What are the essential principles of the doctrine of the incarnation, and how are they to be understood? Several crucial points will help us understand this great mystery.

1. The incarnation was more an addition of human attributes than a loss of divine attributes. Philippians 2:6–7 is often conceived of as meaning that Jesus emptied himself of some of his divine attributes, perhaps even his deity itself. According to this interpretation, he became human by becoming something less than God. Part of his divinity was surrendered and displaced by human qualities. The incarnation, then, is more a subtraction from his divine nature than an addition to it.

In our interpretation of Philippians 2:6–7, however, what Jesus emptied himself of was not the divine μορφή, the nature of God. At no point does this passage say that he ceased to possess the divine nature. This becomes clearer when we take Colossians 2:9 into account: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” The kenosis of Philippians 2:7 must be understood in the light of the *plērōma* of Colossians 2:9. What does it mean, then, to say that Jesus “made himself nothing”? Some have suggested that he emptied himself by

pouring his divinity into his humanity as one pours the contents of one cup into another. This, however, fails to identify the vessel from which Jesus poured out his divine nature when he emptied it into his humanity.

A better approach to Philippians 2:6–7 is to think of the phrase "taking the very nature of a servant" as a circumstantial explanation of the kenosis. Since λαβών (*labōn*) is an aorist participle adverbial in function, we would render the first part of verse 7 "he made himself nothing by taking the very form of a servant." The participial phrase is an explanation of how Jesus emptied himself, or what he did that constituted kenosis. While the text does not specify of what he emptied himself, it is noteworthy that "the very nature of a servant" contrasts sharply with "equality with God" (v. 6). We conclude that it is equality with God, not the form of God, of which Jesus emptied himself. While he did not cease to be in nature what the Father was, he became functionally subordinated to the Father for the period of his earthly life. Jesus did this for the purposes of revealing God and redeeming humanity. By taking on human nature, he accepted certain limitations upon the functioning of his divine attributes. These limitations were not the result of a loss of divine attributes but of the addition of human attributes.

2. The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not exercise his deity at times and his humanity at other times. His actions were always those of divinity-humanity. This is the key to understanding the functional limitations the humanity imposed upon the divinity. For example, he still had the power to be everywhere (omnipresence). However, as an incarnate being, he was limited in the exercise of that power by possession of a human body. Similarly, he was still omniscient, but he possessed and exercised knowledge in connection with a human organism that grew gradually in terms of consciousness, whether of the physical environment or eternal truths. Thus, only gradually did his limited human psyche become aware of who he was and what he had come to accomplish. Yet this should not be considered a reduction of the power and capacities of the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather a circumstance-induced limitation on the exercise of his power and capacities.

Picture the following analogy. The world's fastest sprinter is entered in a three-legged race, where he must run with one of his legs tied to a leg of a partner. Although his physical capacity is not diminished, the conditions under which he exercises it are severely circumscribed. Even if his partner in the race is the world's second fastest sprinter, their time will be much slower than if they competed separately; for that matter it will be slower than the time of most other human beings running unencumbered. Or think of the world's greatest boxer

fighting with one hand tied behind his back. Or a softball game in which parents, competing with their children, reverse their usual batting stance (i.e., right-handed batters bat left-handed, and left-handed batters bat right-handed). In each of these cases, ability is not in essence diminished, but the conditions imposed on its exercise limit actual performance.

This is the situation of the incarnate Christ. Just as the runner or the boxer could unloose the tie, but chooses to restrict himself for the duration of the event, so Christ's incarnation was a voluntary, self-chosen limitation. He did not have to take on humanity, but he chose to do so for the period of the incarnation. During that time his deity always functioned in conjunction with his humanity.

3. In thinking about the incarnation, we must begin not with the traditional conceptions of humanity and deity, but with the recognition that the two are most fully known in Jesus Christ. We sometimes approach the incarnation with an antecedent assumption that it is virtually impossible. We know what humanity is and what deity is, and they are, of course, by definition incompatible. They are, respectively, the finite and the infinite. But this is to begin in the wrong place—with a conception of humanity drawn from our knowledge of existential rather than essential humanity. Our understanding of human nature has been formed by an inductive investigation of both ourselves and other humans as we find them about us. But none of us is humanity as God intended it to be or as it came from his hand. Humanity was spoiled and corrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve. Consequently, we are not true human beings, but impaired, broken-down vestiges of essential humanity, and it is difficult to imagine this kind of humanity united with deity. But when we say that in the incarnation Jesus took on humanity, we are not talking about this kind of humanity. For Jesus's humanity was not the humanity of sinful human beings, but that possessed by Adam and Eve from their creation and before their fall. He was not merely as human as we are; he was more human than we are. His was, spiritually, the type of humanity that we will possess when we are glorified. His humanity was certainly more compatible with deity than is the type of humanity that we now observe. We should define humanity, not by integrating our present empirical observations, but by examining the human nature of Jesus, for he most fully reveals the true nature of humanity.

Jesus Christ is also our best source for knowledge of deity. We assume that we know what God is really like. But it is in Jesus that God is most fully revealed and known. As John said, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). Thus, our picture of what deity is like comes primarily through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

We sometimes assume that divine nature simply cannot be assimilated with human nature, but that assumption is based on the Greek conception of the impassibility of deity rather than upon the Bible. If, however, we begin with the reality of the incarnation in Jesus Christ, we not only see better what the two natures are like, but recognize that whatever they are, they are not incompatible, for they once did coexist in one person.[1231]

In connection with the possibility of unity between deity and humanity, we need to bear in mind the distinctive picture of humanity given us in the Bible. As the image of God, the human is already the creature most like God. The assumption that humans are so dissimilar from God that the two cannot coexist in one person is probably based upon some other model of human nature. It may result from thinking of the human as basically an animal that has evolved from lower forms of life. We know from the Bible, however, that God chose to become incarnate in a creature very much like himself. It is quite possible that part of God's purpose in making humanity in his own image was to facilitate the incarnation that would someday take place.

4. It is important to think of the initiative of the incarnation as coming from above, as it were, rather than from below. Part of our problem in understanding the incarnation may come from the fact that we view it from the human perspective. From this standpoint, incarnation seems very unlikely, perhaps even impossible. The difficulty lies in the fact that we are in effect asking ourselves how a human being could ever be God, as if it were a matter of a human being's becoming God or somehow adding deity to one's humanity. We are keenly aware of our own limits, and know how hard or even impossible it would be to go beyond them, particularly to the extent of deification. For God to become a human (or, more correctly, to add humanity to his deity), however, is not impossible. He is unlimited and therefore able to condescend to the lesser, whereas the lesser cannot ascend to the greater or higher. (It is possible for us as human beings to do many things a cat or a dog does; for instance, to imitate its sounds or behavior. To be sure, we do not actually take on feline or canine nature, and there are certain limitations, such as a less acute sense of sight or smell; but it is still much easier for us to imitate animals than for them to imitate human behavior.) The fact that a human did not ascend to divinity, nor did God elevate a human to divinity, but, rather, God condescended to take on humanity, facilitates our ability to conceive of the incarnation and also effectively excludes adoptionism. It will be helpful to keep in mind here that the heavenly Second Person of the Trinity antedated the earthly Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, there was no such being as the earthly Jesus of Nazareth prior to the moment he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

5. It is also helpful to think of Jesus as a very complex person. We know some people who have straightforward personalities. One comes to know them fairly quickly, and they may therefore be quite predictable. Other persons have much more complex personalities. They may have a wider range of experience, a more varied educational background, or a more complex emotional makeup. When we think we know them quite well, another facet of their personalities appears that we did not previously know existed. Now if we imagine complexity expanded to an infinite degree, then we have a bit of a glimpse into the "personality of Jesus," as it were, his two natures in one person. For Jesus's personality included the qualities and attributes that constitute deity. There were within his person dimensions of experience, knowledge, and love not found in human beings. This point serves to remind us that the person of Jesus was not simply an amalgam of human and divine qualities merged into some sort of *tertium quid.* Rather, his was a personality that in addition to the characteristics of divine nature had all the qualities or attributes of perfect, sinless human nature as well.

We have noted several dimensions of biblical truth that will help us better understand the incarnation. It has sometimes been said that there are only seven basic jokes, and every joke is merely a variation on one of them. A similar statement can be made about heresies regarding the person of Christ. There are basically six, all of which appeared within the first four Christian centuries. They either deny the genuineness (Ebionism) or the completeness (Arianism) of Jesus's deity, deny the genuineness (Docetism) or the completeness (Apollinarianism) of his humanity, divide his person (Nestorianism), or confuse his natures (Eutychianism). All departures from the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ are simply variations of one of these heresies. While we may have difficulty specifying exactly the content of the doctrine of incarnation, full fidelity to teaching of Scripture will carefully avoid each of these distortions.

34
The Virgin Birth

Chapter Objectives

Following this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Illustrate the significance of the virgin birth for developing an understanding of the supernatural, Jesus Christ, and Christian theology as a whole.
2. Identify and describe the biblical and historical evidence, specifically from the early church, for the virgin birth.
3. Recognize and understand five objections to the virgin birth.
4. Refute five objections to the virgin birth, using biblical and rational evidence.
5. Formulate a theological doctrine about the virgin birth based on the evidence presented, both pro and con.

Chapter Summary

After the resurrection, the virgin birth is the most contested event in the life of Jesus Christ. Near the turn of the twentieth century, the virgin birth became an issue that tested people's belief in the supernatural. While the terminology "virginal conception" more accurately explains the meaning of a conception that is supernatural than does "virgin birth," the latter has become the most common expression in referring to this doctrine. The two biblical references that discuss the virgin birth,

Matthew 1 and Luke 1, satisfy Scripture's consistency in the belief of the virgin birth. As a key element of Christology, belief in the virgin birth is necessary for Christian theology.

Study Questions

- Why is the virgin birth important to Christian theology?
- What evidence is found for belief in the virgin birth from the early church?
- What objections have been raised against the virgin birth, and how would you respond to them?
- How would you defend the belief in the virgin birth, using Matthew 1 and Luke 1?
- How does belief in the virgin birth contribute to Christology?

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The Significance of the Issue

Next to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, perhaps the one event of his life that has received the greatest amount of attention is the virgin birth. Certainly, next to the resurrection, it is the most debated and controversial.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the virgin birth was at the forefront of debate between the fundamentalists and modernists. The fundamentalists insisted upon the doctrine as an essential belief. The modernists either rejected it as unessential or untenable, or reinterpreted it in some nonliteral fashion. To the former it was a guarantee of the qualitative uniqueness and deity of Christ, while to the latter it seemed to shift attention from his spiritual reality to a biological issue.[1232]

One reason why there was so much emphasis upon this teaching that is mentioned only twice in Scripture is that there were shifting conceptions of various other doctrines. The liberals tended to redefine doctrines without changing the terminology, as John Herman Randall Jr. observed.[1233] As a result, subscription to those doctrines was no longer positive proof of orthodoxy. Thus it was no longer possible to assume that what a theologian meant by the "divinity" or "deity" of Christ was a qualitative uniqueness distinguishing him from other humans. W. Robertson Smith, a nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, when accused of denying the divinity of Christ, reportedly said, "How can they accuse me of that? I've never denied the divinity of any man, let alone Jesus!" In the face of such views, assent to the doctrine of Jesus's deity did not necessarily entail the traditional meaning—that Jesus was divine in the same sense and to the same degree as the Father, and in a way that is not true of any other person who has ever lived. Thus, not surprisingly, the deity of Christ does not appear in some lists of the fundamentals of orthodoxy. Instead, the bodily resurrection and the virgin birth are found there. The fundamentalists reasoned that one who could subscribe to the virgin birth probably accepted other evidences of Jesus's deity, as these are generally less difficult to accept than the virgin birth. That is why one's position on the virgin birth was asked of candidates for ordination, for it was a relatively quick and efficient way of determining whether they held Christ to be supernatural. In more recent times, the Asian theologian Choan-Seng Song has interpreted Christ's incarnation to mean that God is at work in every situation of suffering, diminishing the uniqueness of the person Jesus.[1234] Thus the virgin birth is still important to the uniqueness of Christ's incarnation at a specific point in time.

An even larger issue was involved, however. For the virgin birth became a test of one's position on the miraculous. Anyone who could subscribe to the virgin birth probably could accept the other miracles reported in the Bible. Thus, this became a convenient way of determining one's attitude toward the supernatural in general. But even beyond that, it was a test of one's worldview and, specifically, of one's view of God's relationship to the world.

As we noted earlier, the liberal or modernist tended to see God as everywhere present and active. God was believed to be at work accomplishing his purposes through natural law and everyday processes rather than in direct and unique fashion.[1235] According to the conservative or fundamentalist, on the other hand, God is outside the world, but intervenes miraculously from time to time to perform a special work. The fundamentalist saw the virgin birth as a sign of God's miraculous working,[1236] whereas the liberal saw every birth as a miracle. The virgin birth was, then, a primary battleground between the supernaturalistic and naturalistic views of God's relationship to the world.

The virgin birth means different things to different theologians. What we are speaking of here is really the "virgin conception." By this we mean that Jesus's conception in the womb of Mary was not the result of sexual relationship. Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus's conception and continued so up to the point of his birth, for Scripture indicates that Joseph did not have sexual intercourse with her until after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). Mary became pregnant through a supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon her, but that does not mean that Jesus was the result of copulation between God and Mary. It also does not mean that there was not a normal birth. Some theologians, particularly Catholics, interpret the virgin birth as meaning that Jesus was not born in normal fashion. In their view, he simply passed through the wall of Mary's uterus instead of being delivered through the normal birth canal, so that Mary's hymen was not ruptured. This was a sort of miraculous Caesarean section. According to the related Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, she at no point engaged in sexual intercourse, so that there were no natural sons and daughters born to Joseph and Mary.[1237] Certain theologians, for example, Dale Moody, in order to distinguish their interpretation of the virgin birth from that of traditional Catholicism, have proposed the use of the expression "virginal conception" or "miraculous conception" in place of "virgin birth."[1238] However, because of the common usage of the expression "virgin birth," we will employ it here, with the understanding that our interpretation differs from the traditional Roman Catholic dogma.

There are also disagreements regarding the importance of the virgin birth, even among those who insist that belief in the doctrine must be maintained. Some have argued that the virgin birth was essential to the incarnation.[1239] If there had been both a human mother and a human father, Jesus would have been only a man. Others feel that the virgin birth was indispensable to the sinlessness of Christ.[1240] Had there been two human parents, Jesus would have inherited a depraved or corrupted human nature in its fullness; there would have been no possibility of sinlessness. Yet others feel that the virgin birth was not essential

for either of these considerations, but that it has great value in terms of symbolizing the reality of the incarnation.[1241] It is an evidential factor, in much the same way that the other miracles and particularly the resurrection function to certify the supernaturalness of Christ. On this basis, the virgin birth was not necessary ontologically; that is, the virgin birth was not necessary for Jesus to be God. It is, however, necessary epistemologically, that is, in order for us to know that he is God.

On the other hand, some have contended that the doctrine of the virgin birth is dispensable.[1242] It could be omitted with no disruption of the essential meaning of Christianity. While few evangelicals take this position actively, it is interesting to note that some evangelical systematic theology texts make little or no mention of the virgin birth in their treatment of Christology.[1243] In fact, much of the discussion of the virgin birth has come in separate works that deal at length with the subject.

It will be necessary for us, once we have examined the positive arguments or evidence for the virgin birth, to ask what the real meaning and importance of the doctrine is. Only then will we be able to draw its practical implications.

Evidence for the Virgin Birth

Biblical Evidence

The doctrine of the virgin birth is based on just two explicit biblical references —Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–38. There are other passages in the New Testament that some have argued refer to or at least allude to or presuppose the virgin birth, and there is the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, which is cited by Matthew (1:23). But even when these passages are taken into consideration, the number of relevant references is quite few.

We might simply stop at this point and assert that since the Bible affirms the virgin birth not once but twice, that is sufficient proof. Since we believe that the Bible is inspired and authoritative, Matthew 1 and Luke 1 convince us that the virgin birth is fact. However, we must also be mindful that inasmuch as a claim of historical truthfulness is made for the virgin birth, that is, it is represented as an event occurring within time and space, it is in principle capable of being confirmed or falsified by the data of historical research.

We note, first, the basic integrity of the two pertinent passages. Both of the explicit references, and specifically Matthew 1:20–21 and Luke 1:34, are integral parts of the narrative in which they occur; they are not insertions or

interpolations. Moreover, Raymond Brown finds that between each of the infancy narratives and the rest of the book in which it appears, there is a continuity in style (e.g., the vocabulary, the general formula of citation) and subject matter.[1244]

In addition, it can be argued that the two accounts of Jesus's birth, although clearly independent of one another, are similar on so many points (including Mary's virginity) that we must conclude that for those points both draw independently upon a common narrative earlier than either of them; having greater antiquity, it also has a stronger claim to historicity. Brown has compiled a list of eleven points that the accounts in Matthew and Luke have in common.[1245] Among the significant items in which they differ, Brown notes Luke's references to the story of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist, the census, the shepherds, the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple, and Jesus's teaching there at age twelve. Matthew, on the other hand, has the story of the Magi's being guided to the child by the star, the slaughter of the infants by Herod, and the flight into Egypt.[1246] That despite this diversity both accounts specifically refer to the virginal conception is a strong hint that for this particular item both depended on a single earlier tradition. An additional point of authentication relates to the Jewish character of these portions of the two Gospels. From the perspective of form criticism, then, the tradition of the virgin birth appeared within the church at an early point in its history, when it was under primarily Jewish, rather than Greek, influence.[1247]

Whence did this tradition derive? One answer that has been given is that it arose from extrabiblical, extra-Christian sources, such as myths found in pagan religions and pre-Christian Judaism. We will examine these suggestions a little later (pp. 680–81). We note here, however, that the parallels with other religions are rather superficial and the alleged sources differ from the biblical accounts in very significant ways. Further, there is real doubt whether most of them would have been known or acceptable to early Christians. Thus, this theory must be discarded.

In the past it was common to attribute the tradition to Joseph and Mary, who, after all, would have been the only ones with firsthand knowledge. Thus, Matthew's account was attributed to Joseph, and Luke's to Mary.[1248] When looked at from the perspective of what is mentioned and what omitted, this hypothesis makes considerable sense. But Brown argues that Joseph, who was apparently dead by the time of Jesus's public ministry, cannot be considered a source for the tradition. And Mary does not seem to have been close to the disciples during Jesus's ministry, although she apparently was part of the post-resurrection community. Brown states that while it is not impossible that she was

the source of the material in Luke's infancy narrative, it is most unlikely that she supplied the material for Matthew's account, since it does not seem to be told from her standpoint. So Brown concludes, "we have no real knowledge that any or all of the infancy material came from a tradition for which there was a corroborating witness."[1249]

Despite Brown's arguments, it is difficult to accept his conclusion. The argument that Joseph cannot be considered a source of the tradition of the virgin birth because he was already dead by the time of Jesus's ministry, while an argument from silence, is probably technically correct. He was not a direct source. It does not follow, however, that there is no way in which his personal experiences in connection with Jesus's birth could have become known to the early community. Did Joseph have no acquaintances in whom he might have confided and who might have eventually become believers and part of the Christian community? And did he and Mary never talk with one another? There also is a too hasty dismissal of the role of Mary. If, as Brown concedes, there is New Testament evidence that she was part of the post-resurrection community (Acts 1:14), is she not a likely source of the tradition?

Nor should we too easily dismiss the possibility that other members of Jesus's family may have played a role. It has been observed that the *Protevangelium of James*, supposedly an account of Jesus's birth written by one of his brothers, is highly folkloric and makes elementary mistakes about matters of temple procedure. But does it follow from the undependability of this apocryphal writing that the actual James, who is conceded by Brown to have survived into the 60s,[1250] could not have been a reliable source of an accurate tradition? Brown himself made a cogent suggestion in this regard in an earlier writing:

> A family tradition about the manner of Jesus's conception may have lent support to the theological solution [to the problem of how Jesus could have been free from sin]. While there is no way of proving the existence of such a private tradition, the prominence of Jesus's relatives in the Jerusalem church—e.g., James, the brother of the Lord—should caution us about the extent to which Christians were free, at least up through the 60s, to invent family traditions about Jesus.[1251]

If we exclude the family as the source of the tradition, we have the knotty problem as to where it in fact did come from. We have noted that the hypothesis of an extrabiblical source will not suffice. We therefore conclude that "it is difficult to explain how the idea arose if not from fact."[1252] While it is not necessary for us to establish the exact source of the tradition, Jesus's family still seems to be a very likely possibility.

Apparently there was an early questioning of Jesus's legitimacy. Celsus's anti-Christian polemic (about 177–80) contains a charge that Jesus was the

illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera, and that Jesus had himself created the story of his virgin birth.[1253] That Celsus's work is believed to be based upon Jewish sources argues for an early tradition of the virgin birth.

Even within the New Testament, however, there are indications of a questioning of Jesus's legitimacy. In Mark 6:3 Jesus is identified by his fellow townspeople as "Mary's son" whereas we would expect to find the designation "Joseph's son." This is considered by some to be a reference to a tradition that Joseph was not Jesus's father; their view is fortified by the statement that the townspeople took offense at Jesus. Generally, when a man in those times was being identified, it was in terms of who his father was. A man was identified in terms of who his mother was only if his paternity was uncertain or unknown.[1254] Brown argues that the fact that Jesus's brothers are also mentioned in Mark 6:3 as a sign of his ordinariness militates against understanding the designation "the son of Mary" as evidence that Jesus was regarded as illegitimate, for the legitimacy of his brothers and sisters would thus be called into question as well.[1255] Whether or not Brown's inference is valid, it is apparent that the evidence of the text is not conclusive. The existence of variant readings (e.g., "the son of the carpenter") is another warning against drawing hasty conclusions.

One other text bearing upon this issue is John 8:41, where the Jews say to Jesus, "We are not illegitimate children." The use of the emphatic pronoun ἡμεῖς (*hēmeis*) could be construed as an innuendo: "It is not *we* who are illegitimate."

It would not be surprising if there was a rumor that Jesus was illegitimate, for according to both Matthew's and Luke's accounts, Jesus was conceived after Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they had officially come together. Therefore, he was born embarrassingly early. Matthew in particular may have included the story found in 1:18–25 because a rumor of illegitimacy was in circulation. He may well have been motivated by a desire to preserve both respect for Jesus's parents and the conviction of Jesus's sinlessness. Certainly the indications that Jesus may have been thought illegitimate cohere with the virgin conception. They do not, of course, verify it, since another option consistent with those indications would be that he indeed was illegitimate. But at the very least we can assert that all the biblical evidence makes it clear that Joseph was not the natural father of Jesus.

Early Church Tradition

Another evidence of the virgin birth is its strong tradition in the early church. While this tradition does not in itself establish the virgin birth as a fact, it is the

type of evidence we would expect if the doctrine is true.

A beginning point is the Apostles' Creed. The form we now use was produced in Gaul in the fifth or sixth century, but its roots go back much farther, to an old Roman baptismal confession. The virgin birth is affirmed in the earlier as well as the later form.[1256] By shortly after the middle of the second century, the early form was already in use, not only in Rome, but by Tertullian in North Africa and Irenaeus in Gaul and Asia Minor. The presence of the doctrine of the virgin birth in an early confession of the important church of Rome is highly significant, especially since such a creed would not have incorporated any new doctrine.[1257]

One other important early testimony is that of Ignatius, bishop of Syrian Antioch, who was martyred not later than 117. Arguing against Docetists, he produced a summary of the chief facts about Christ. Adolf von Harnack called Ignatius's summary a kerygma of Christ.[1258] It included a reference to the virginity of Mary as one of the "mysteries to be shouted about."[1259] Several observations make this reference the more impressive: (1) inasmuch as Ignatius was writing against Docetism, the expression "born of a woman" (as in Gal. 4:4) would have been more to his purpose than was "born of a virgin"; (2) it was written not by a novice, but by the bishop of the mother church of Gentile Christianity; (3) it was written no later than 117. As J. Gresham Machen has observed, "when we find [Ignatius] attesting the virgin birth not as a novelty but altogether as a matter of course, as one of the accepted facts about Christ, it becomes evident that the belief in the virgin birth must have been prevalent long before the close of the first century."[1260]

Of course, there is also early evidence of denials of the virgin birth, some of them, naturally, by pagans. More significant, however, are the objections from Jews, who were in a better position to be aware of the facts and might reflect a more accurate picture of the tradition. Some who claimed to be Christian believers also raised objections. Among these various types of opponents of the doctrine were Celsus, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and the Ebionites. Significantly, we do not find anyone who is otherwise orthodox denying the virgin birth. Machen aptly summarizes the negative testimony from the second century: "The denials of the virgin birth which appear in that century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession, much more probably than upon genuine historical tradition."[1261]

By contrast, the existence of strong positive testimony from the second century, coupled with the other types of evidence already cited, argues forcefully for the historicity and factuality of the virgin birth. While not unambiguous or overwhelming, the evidence is sufficient to support belief in the biblical testimony on this important topic.

Objections to the Virgin Birth

Unexpected Ignorance regarding the Virgin Birth[1262]

One of many objections raised to the virgin birth is the argument that persons close to Jesus, most especially Mary, but also his brothers, had no knowledge of a miraculous birth. On the basis of Mark 3:21, 31, it is assumed that they were the ones who came to take him away, believing that he was beside himself. Awareness of a miraculous birth would certainly have gone a long way toward explaining his behavior, which appeared so bizarre to them here.

It has also been pointed out that most of the New Testament is silent on the subject of the virgin birth. How could Mark, the author of the earliest and most basic of the Gospels, omit mentioning this subject if he was aware of it? And why would John's Gospel, the most theological of the four, be silent on an important issue like this? Further, it is incredible that Paul, with all of his exposition of the significance of Christ and with his strong orientation toward doctrine, should be ignorant of this matter if it really was a fact and part of the early church tradition. For that matter, the preaching of the early church, recorded in the book of Acts, is strangely silent on this subject. Is it not peculiar that only two books make mention of the virgin birth, and then only in brief accounts? Even Matthew and Luke do not make any further use of or reference to the virgin birth. If taken at face value, these objections undercut or neutralize the claim that there was early testimony to the virgin birth.

We must look first at Mark 3. There is no assurance that Mary and Jesus's brothers (v. 31) were the persons who thought him to be beside himself (v. 21). Literally, the Greek reads "the ones from his," presumably a reference to persons from his own home. Just who these individuals were, however, is by no means clear. And it is noteworthy that in verse 31 there is no mention of the incident of verse 21. It is likely, then, that the one is not a sequel to the other. Rather the two verses are reporting disconnected occurrences. There is no indication that when Mary and Jesus's brothers came seeking him, they were concerned about his mental condition or the stability of his actions. No connection is established with the terminology of verse 21, nor is there any hint that this was a second approach by Jesus's mother and brothers. Moreover, a verbal exchange with scribes from Jerusalem intervenes between the two verses. And Jesus's reference to "my mother and my brothers" contains no hint of an unfavorable reflection upon them (vv. 33–35).

Even if Mary had been among those who thought Jesus to be beside himself, however, that surely would not be incompatible with knowledge of the virgin

birth. If Mary had expected that Jesus was someday to sit upon the throne of David, there might easily have been perplexity on her part. For the ministry in which Jesus was now engaged seemed to produce opposition and rejection. Yet she may also have been mindful of the fact that, during the period from Jesus's infancy to adulthood, she had been in a position of superiority over him—caring for him, training him, teaching and counseling him. She may have regarded this episode as simply another occasion when her guidance was needed.

Regarding the brothers, some of the same considerations apply. In their case, however, we also have an explicit indication that they did not believe in Jesus during his ministry, or at least at some point during his ministry (John 7:5). Their lack of belief has been cited as evidence that they had no knowledge of a virgin birth and therefore it had not occurred. But we have no reason to assume that they had in fact been told of the virgin birth by Mary and Joseph. While that truth may well have been shared with them at a later point, and may even have had something to do with their coming to faith in him, it is quite possible that they, being younger than Jesus, at the time of their unbelief knew nothing of his unusual birth.

But what of the silence of the other books of the New Testament? The Gospel according to Mark is thought to be particularly significant in this respect, since it presumably is an early and basic document upon which the other Synoptic Gospels build. Mark, however, does not give any account of Jesus's birth and infancy. The very design of the book seems to have been to provide a report of the events that had been a matter of public observation, not the intimate details of Jesus's life. In writing as relatively compact a book as he did, Mark inevitably had to make selections from the material available. Mark reports no extended discourses such as we find in Matthew or the type of incident that would be known and reportable by only one or two persons. The tradition that Mark based his Gospel upon information supplied by Peter suggests that Mark may have chosen to include only what the apostle had personally observed. These considerations, if accurate, would account for the absence of any reference to the virgin birth. They do not imply either that Mark did not know of it or that the tradition was spurious.

There is, indeed, one item in Mark's Gospel that some see as a hint that the author did know about the virgin birth. That occurs in 6:3. In the parallel passage, Matthew reports that the people of Nazareth asked, "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55); and Luke has, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (4:22). However, the report in Mark reads, "Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" It is as if Mark is taking pains to avoid referring to Jesus as the son of Joseph. Unlike

Matthew's and Luke's readers, who had been made aware of the virgin birth in the opening chapter of each of those Gospels, Mark's readers would have no way of knowing about it. So he chose his words very carefully in order not to give the wrong impression. The crucial point for us is that Mark's account gives no basis for concluding that Joseph was the father of Jesus. Thus, although Mark does not tell us of the virgin birth, he certainly does not contradict it either.

John also makes no mention of the virgin birth in his Gospel. As with Mark, it should be observed that the nature of John's Gospel is such that there is no birth narrative. True, the prologue does speak of Jesus's origin, but this passage is theologically oriented rather than historical, and is followed immediately by a picture of Jesus and John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. There is nothing even approaching a narrative account of the events of Jesus's life prior to the age of thirty. While some have sought to find an allusion to the virgin birth in John 1:13, that interpretation depends upon a disputed textual reading.

As we observed earlier, there are no references to the virgin birth in the sermons in the book of Acts. We should note, however, that those sermons were delivered to hostile or uninformed audiences. It would therefore have been unnatural to include references to the virgin birth, for they might introduce an unnecessary obstacle to acceptance of the message and the one on whom it centered.

The remaining consideration is Paul's writing. Because of his dominant role in the formulation of the theology of the early church, what he says or does not say is of considerable importance. A close reading will find nothing in Paul's writings or speeches that deals directly with the question of the virgin birth, from either a positive or a negative perspective. Some have seen evidence for and others evidence against the virgin birth in Galatians 4:4, but their arguments do not carry much weight. Some have found Romans 1:3 to be inconsistent with the idea of virgin conception, but it is hard to see any definite contradiction.

The absence of any reference to the virgin birth is nonetheless of concern to us, for if it is a matter of great importance, it seems strange that Paul did not make more of it. We need to see Paul's writings for what they were, however: not general discourses of a catechetical nature, but treatments of particular problems in the life of a church or an individual. If the occasion did not call for exposition or argument on a particular topic, Paul did not deal with it. Among the great issues about which he did argue are grace and the law, the nature of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ, and personal morality. He did not go into detail on issues concerning the person of Christ, for they were evidently not matters of dispute in the churches or for the individuals to whom he wrote.

To sum up our point: there is nothing in the silence of many New Testament writers on the subject of the virgin birth to militate against it. Somewhat later, however, in view of all this silence, we may have to ask about the exact importance of the doctrine. Is it indispensable to Christian faith, and, if so, in what way?

The Possibility of the Virgin Birth Precluding Full Humanity

Some have questioned whether Jesus was fully human if he had but one human parent.[1263] But this confuses the essence of humanity with the process that transfers it from one generation to another. Adam and Eve did not have a human father or mother yet were fully human; and in the case of Adam, there was no prior human from whom his human nature could in any sense have been taken.

It may be objected that the absence of the male factor would somehow preclude full humanity. This, however, with its implicit chauvinism, does not follow. Jesus was not produced after the genetic pattern of Mary alone, for in that case he would in effect have been a clone of her and would necessarily have been female. Rather, a male component was contributed. In other words, a sperm was united with the ovum provided by Mary, but it was specially created for the occasion instead of being supplied by an existent male human.

Parallels in Other Religions

Some have suggested that the biblical accounts of the virgin birth are nothing more than an adaptation of similar accounts occurring in the literature of other religions. Plutarch suggests that a woman can be impregnated when approached by a divine pneuma.[1264] This remark occurs in his retelling of the legend of Numa, who after the death of his wife withdrew into solitude to have intercourse with the divine being Egeria. There are stories of how Zeus begat Hercules, Perseus, and Alexander and of Apollo's begetting Ion, Asclepius, Pythagoras, Plato, and Augustus. These myths, however, are nothing more than stories about fornication between divine and human beings, which is something radically different from the biblical accounts of the virgin birth. Dale Moody comments: "The yawning chasm between these pagan myths of polytheistic promiscuity and the lofty monotheism of the virgin birth of Jesus is too wide for careful research to cross."[1265] The similarity is far less than the differences. Therefore, the idea that pagan myths might have been incorporated into the Gospel accounts must be rejected.

A variation of this view connects the biblical accounts with Judaism instead of with pagan religion. The accounts in Matthew and Luke are considered too Jewish to have allowed any direct pagan influence. What we must recognize, however, say proponents of this variant theory, is that in Judaism there was an expectation of a virgin birth. Somehow Judaism had picked up this idea from paganism and incorporated it. It then was transmitted into the Christian documents in its Judaized form.

The problem with this theory is that there is no substantive evidence that Judaism espoused a belief in a virgin birth. It appears that the theory has been constructed on the presupposition that virgin birth is a pagan idea and that, since it would not have been accepted directly, it must have come to Christianity through Judaism. Therefore, it is assumed that such a belief must have existed within Judaism.

Incompatibility with the Preexistence of Christ

An additional major objection to the idea of virgin birth is that it cannot be reconciled with the clear and definite evidence of the preexistence of Christ. If we hold the one, it is claimed, we cannot hold the other. They are mutually exclusive, not complementary. The most articulate recent statement of this objection is that of Wolfhart Pannenberg.[1266]

Is this objection valid, however? In the orthodox Christian understanding, Jesus is fully divine and fully human. His preexistence relates to his divinity and the virgin birth to his humanity. The Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, always has been. At a finite point in time he assumed humanity, however, and was born as the man Jesus of Nazareth. There is no reason why the preexistence and virgin birth should be in conflict if one believes that there was a genuine incarnation at the beginning of Jesus's earthly life.[1267]

Conflict with Natural Law

A final objection to the virgin birth results from a fundamental resistance to the possibility of miracles and the intrusion of the supernatural into the realm of history. This objection may actually lie behind some of the others. Here, however, it can be seen overtly: normal human birth always requires sexual reproduction involving both a male and a female parent.

We considered the subject of miracles in our chapter on God's providence.[1268] We will here simply point out that one's position on the possibility of miracles is largely a matter of basic worldview. If one believes that all that happens is a

result of natural forces, and that the system of nature is the whole of reality, then there *cannot* be any "miraculous" occurrences. If, on the other hand, one is open to the possibility of a reality outside our closed system, then there is also the possibility that a supernatural power can intervene and counter the normal functioning of immanent laws. In an open universe, or one that is regarded as open, any event and its contradictory have an equal possibility of occurring. In such a situation, one's position on particular issues like the virgin birth is a matter of determining on historical grounds what actually happened, not a theorizing as to what can or cannot happen. Our contention is that there is an adequate amount of historical evidence that Jesus was indeed the son of a virgin who conceived without the normal human sexual relationship. If we have no antecedent objection to the possibility of such an event, we are driven to the conclusion that it did indeed occur.

The Theological Meaning of the Virgin Birth

Having examined the evidence for and against the virgin birth and concluded that there is adequate basis for holding to the doctrine, we must now ask what it means. Why is it important?

On one level, of course, the virgin birth is important simply because we are told that it occurred. Whether or not we can see a necessity for the virgin birth, if the Bible tells us that it happened, it is important to believe that it did because not to do so is a tacit repudiation of the authority of the Bible. There is then in principle no reason why we should hold to its other teachings. Thus, rejecting the virgin birth has implications reaching far beyond the doctrine itself.

But, we must ask, is not the virgin birth important in some more specific way? Some have argued that the doctrine is indispensable to the incarnation. Without the virgin birth there would have been no union of God and man.[1269] If Jesus had been simply the product of a normal sexual union of man and woman, he would have been only a human being, not a God-man. But is this really true? Could he not have been God and a man if he had had two human parents, or none? Just as Adam was created directly by God, so Jesus could also have been a direct special creation. And accordingly, it should have been possible for Jesus to have two human parents and to be fully the God-man nonetheless. To insist that having a human male parent would have excluded the possibility of deity has some common elements with Apollinarianism, according to which the divine Logos took the place of one of the normal components of human nature (the soul). But Jesus was fully human, including everything that both a male and a

female parent would ordinarily contribute. In addition, there was the element of deity. What God did was to supply, by a special creation, both the human component ordinarily contributed by the male (and thus we have the virgin birth) and, in addition, a divine factor (and thus we have the incarnation). The virgin birth requires only that a normal human being was brought into existence without a human male parent. This could have occurred without an incarnation, and there could have been an incarnation without a virgin birth. Some have called the latter concept "instant adoptionism," since presumably the human involved would have existed on his own apart from the addition of the divine nature. The point here, however is that, with the incarnation occurring at the moment of conception or birth, there would never have been a moment when Jesus was not both fully human and fully divine. In other words, his being both divine and human did not depend on the virgin birth.

A second suggestion frequently made is that the virgin birth was indispensable to the sinlessness of Jesus.[1270] If he had possessed both that which the mother contributes and what the father ordinarily contributes, he would have had a depraved and hence sinful nature, like the rest of us. But this argument seems to suggest that we too would be sinless if we did not have a male parent. And this in turn would mean one of two things: either (1) the father, not the mother, is the source of depravity, a notion that in effect implies that women do not have a depraved nature (or if they do, they do not transmit it), or (2) depravity comes not from the nature of our parents, but from the sexual act by which reproduction takes place. But there is nothing in the Scripture to support the latter alternative. The statement in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me," simply means that the psalmist was sinful from the very beginning of life. It does not mean that the act of conception is sinful in and of itself.

We are left, then, with the former alternative, namely, that the transmission of sin is related to the father. But this has no scriptural grounding either. While some support might be found in Paul's statement that it was the sin of *Adam* (Rom. 5:12) that made all humans sinners, Paul also indicates that Eve, not Adam, "was the [one] who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Tim. 2:14). There are no signs of greater sinfulness among men than among women.

The question arises, If all of the human race is tainted by the original sin, would not Mary have contributed some of its consequences to Jesus? It has been argued that Jesus did have a depraved nature, but he committed no *actual* sin.[1271] We would point out in reply that the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). It seems likely that

the influence of the Holy Spirit was so powerful and sanctifying in its effect that there was no conveyance of depravity or of guilt from Mary to Jesus. Without that special sanctifying influence, he would have possessed the same depraved nature that all of us have. Now if the Holy Spirit prevented corruption from being passed from Mary to Jesus, could he not have prevented it from being passed on by Joseph as well? We conclude that Jesus's sinlessness was not dependent on the virginal conception.

We noted earlier that the virgin birth is not mentioned in the evangelistic sermons in the book of Acts. It may well be, then, that it is not one of the primary doctrines (i.e., indispensable to salvation). It is a subsidiary or supporting doctrine; it helps create or sustain belief in the indispensable doctrines, or reinforces truths found in other doctrines. Like the resurrection, it is at once a historical event, a doctrine, and an evidence. It is quite possible to be unaware or ignorant of the virgin birth and yet be saved. Indeed, a rather large number of persons evidently were. But what, then, is the significance of this teaching?

1. The doctrine of the virgin birth is a reminder that our salvation is supernatural. Jesus, in telling Nicodemus about the necessity of new birth, said, "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:5–6). John stated that those who believe and receive authority to become children of God are born "not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13). The emphasis is that salvation does not come through human effort, nor is it a human accomplishment. So also the virgin birth points to the helplessness of humans to initiate even the first step in the process. Not only is humanity unable to secure its own salvation; it could not even introduce the Savior into human society.

The virgin birth is, or at least should be, a check on our natural human tendency toward pride. While Mary was the one who gave birth to the Savior, she would never have been able to do so, even with the aid of Joseph, if the Holy Spirit had not been present and at work. The virgin birth is evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity. Paul wrote in another connection, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). The virgin birth is a reminder that our salvation, though it came through humanity, is totally of God.

2. The virgin birth is also a reminder that God's salvation is fully a gift of grace. There was nothing particularly deserving about Mary. Probably countless Jewish girls could have served to give birth to the Son of God. Certainly Mary manifested qualities that God could use, such as faith and dedication (Luke 1:38,

46–55). But she really had nothing special to offer, not even a husband. That someone who thus could not have a child on her own should be chosen to bear God's Son is a reminder that salvation is not a human accomplishment but a gift from God, and an undeserved one at that.

3. The virgin birth is evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus the Savior. Although there could have been an incarnation without a virgin birth, the miraculous nature of the birth (or at least the conception) serves to show that Jesus was, at the very least, a highly unusual human singled out by God in particular ways.

4. Here is another evidence of God's power and sovereignty over nature. On several occasions (e.g., the births of Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist) God had provided a child when the mother was barren or past the age of childbearing. Surely these were miraculous births. Even more amazing, however, was this birth. God had pointed to his tremendous power when, in promising a child to Abraham and Sarah, he had asked rhetorically, "Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son" (Gen. 18:14). God is all-powerful, able to alter and supersede the path of nature to accomplish his purposes. That God was able to work the seemingly impossible in the matter of the virgin birth symbolizes his ability to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of granting a new birth to sinners. As Jesus himself said in regard to salvation: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

PART 8
THE WORK OF CHRIST

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35

Introduction to the Work of Christ

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to achieve the following:

1. Identify and describe the prophetic or revelatory function of Jesus Christ through eternity and here on earth.
2. Identify and describe the kingly or ruling function of Jesus Christ over all of the universe.
3. Identify and describe the priestly or reconciling function of Jesus Christ for all believers.
4. Recognize and explain the humiliation stage of Christ's work, which involves the incarnation and death, and, in the understanding of some, the descent into Hades.
5. Recognize and explain the exaltation stage of Christ's work, which involves the resurrection, ascension, session at the Father's right hand, and the second coming.

Chapter Summary

Christ's work is uniquely suited for the role that he maintains in the Trinity. Traditionally, the work of Jesus has been classified in terms of three basic functions he performs: his revelatory role, his rule, and his reconciling work. Sequentially, there are two main stages of Christ's

work: the humiliation and the exaltation. The work of Christ is not limited to these areas, but these titles for the work of Christ help us identify and give meaning to what Christ has done for humanity.

Study Questions

- Do you judge the identification of the functions of Christ, as revealing, ruling, and reconciling, to be an adequate explanation? Explain your answer.
- What have you learned about Christ's role as a prophet, and how do you think that it applies in your own life?
- In light of Scripture's revelation, what does it mean for Christ to be king and priest? Are these two wholly different functions?
- When attempting to understand the work of Christ, what did it mean for him to humiliate himself in becoming incarnate and what does that mean for the believer today?
- Why is there controversy surrounding the resurrection? How would you present evidence for the resurrection to a person who does not believe?

Outline

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The Revelatory Role of Christ

The Rule of Christ

The Reconciling Work of Christ

The Stages of Christ's Work 703

The Humiliation

Incarnation

Death

Descent into Hades

The Exaltation

Resurrection

Ascension and Session at the Father's Right Hand

Second Coming

A thorough study of Christ's person, his deity and humanity, enables us to better understand what his unique nature enabled him to do for us. He always was, of course, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity. He became incarnate, however, because of the task that he had to accomplish—saving us from our sin. While some have argued that Jesus would have become incarnate whether humanity sinned or not, that seems rather unlikely.

We have chosen, in this treatment, to regard the person of Christ as not only ontologically, but also epistemologically, prior to his work. Because he has revealed himself both through his acts and through the direct word of revealed interpretation, we need not infer the meaning of Jesus's acts from their basic character. Who he was especially fitted him for what he was to do.

The Functions of Christ

Historically, it has been customary to categorize the work of Christ in terms of three "offices": prophet, priest, and king. While some church fathers spoke of the offices of Christ, it was John Calvin who gave special attention to this concept.[1272] The concept of offices then came to be commonly employed in dealing with the work of Christ.

However, many recent treatments of Christology do not categorize the many-faceted work of Jesus as that of prophet, priest, and king. In part this is because some modern theologies have a different perspective on one or more of the types of work so characterized. Whether or not we retain the exact titles, however, it is important to retain the truths that Jesus reveals God to humanity, reconciles God and humanity to one another, and rules and will rule over the whole of the creation, including humanity.

There are several reasons for this hesitancy to use the term "offices of Christ" in recent theology. One reason is the tendency, particularly in Protestant scholasticism, to view the offices in sharp distinction or isolation from one another. Sometimes, as G. C. Berkouwer points out, there has been objection to the concept of offices on the grounds that distinctions of any kind are artificial and scholastic.[1273] Another reason for the hesitation is that occasionally the idea of office has been taken in too formal a fashion.[1274] This stems from particular connotations that the term "office" carries outside the Scriptures. The result is a clouding over of the dynamic and personal character of Christ's work.

Behind the concept of the offices of Christ is the basic idea that Jesus was commissioned to a task. The dimensions of that task (prophetic, priestly, kingly) are biblical, not an imposition on the biblical material of a foreign set of

categories. In order to preserve a unified view of the work of Christ, Berkouwer has referred to the office (singular) of Christ.[1275] Dale Moody refers to the offices, using the terms “prophet,” “priest,” and “potentate.”[1276] In so doing, he expands upon the office of king, while retaining the general idea.

We have chosen to speak of the three functions of Christ—revealing, ruling, and reconciling. It is appropriate to think of these aspects of Christ’s work as his commission, for Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One. In the Old Testament, people were anointed to particular roles (e.g., priest or king). So when we speak of Jesus as the Christ, or Anointed One, we must ask to what role(s) he was anointed. It will be important to maintain all three aspects of his work, not stressing one so that the others are diminished, nor splitting them too sharply from one another as if they were separate actions of Christ.

The Revelatory Role of Christ

Many references to Christ’s ministry stress his revelation of the Father and of heavenly truth. And indeed, Jesus clearly understood himself to be a prophet, for when his ministry in Nazareth was not received, he said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home” (Matt. 13:57). That he was a prophet was recognized by those who heard him preach, at least by his followers. Moreover, at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the crowds said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (Matt. 21:11). When, at the end of a discourse later that week, the Pharisees wanted to arrest him, they feared to do so because the multitudes held him to be a prophet (Matt. 21:46). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus referred to Jesus as “a prophet, powerful in word and deed” (Luke 24:19). The Gospel of John tells us that the people spoke of Jesus as “the Prophet” (6:14; 7:40). The blind man whom Jesus has healed identifies him as a prophet (9:17). And the Pharisees responded to Nicodemus, “Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee” (7:52). They were evidently trying to refute the opinion that Jesus was a prophet.

That Jesus was a prophet was in itself a fulfillment of prophecy. Peter specifically identifies him with Moses’s prediction in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people” (Acts 3:22). Thus the prophecies about Jesus spoke of him as the successor not only to David as king but also to Moses as prophet.

Jesus’s prophetic ministry was like that of the other prophets in that he was sent from God. Yet there was a significant difference between him and them. He had come from the very presence of God, and thus could especially reveal the

Father, for he had been with him. So John says, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship to the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18). Jesus himself made the claim of preexistence: “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58). When Philip requested that the disciples be shown the Father, Jesus answered, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). He told Nicodemus, “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man” (John 3:13).

The uniqueness of Jesus’s prophetic ministry notwithstanding, in a number of respects it was similar to the work of the Old Testament prophets. His message in many ways resembled theirs. There was declaration of doom and judgment, and there was proclamation of good news and salvation. In Matthew 11:20–24 Jesus declares woes upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, much like those of Amos against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Moab, and other places, finally culminating in the denunciation of Israel (Amos 1–3). In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounces judgments upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, serpents, vipers. Certainly the prophetic message of condemnation of sin was prominent in his preaching.

Jesus also proclaimed good news. Among the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah in particular had spoken of the good tidings from God (40:9; 52:7). Similarly, in Matthew 13 Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in terms that make it indeed good news: the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field (v. 44) and like a pearl of great price (v. 46). But even in the midst of these glad tidings there is a word of warning, for the kingdom is also like a net that gathers all kinds of fish to be sorted, the good being kept in the boat, but the bad thrown away (vv. 47–50).

There is also good news in Jesus’s comforting message in John 14: after going to prepare a place, he will come and take his followers to be with him (vv. 1–3); those who believe in him will do greater works than he does (v. 12); he will do whatever they ask in his name (vv. 13–14); he and the Father will come to those who believe (vv. 18–24); he will give them his peace (v. 27). The tone of this passage is very much like that of Isaiah 40, which begins with “Comfort, comfort my people,” and goes on to assure them of the Lord’s presence, blessing, and care.

Some have noted a similarity of style and type of material between Jesus’s teaching and the utterances of the Old Testament prophets. Much Old Testament prophecy is in poetry rather than prose. C. F. Burney, Joachim Jeremias, and others have pointed out the poetic structure of much of Jesus’s teaching, and in many cases have been able to get behind the Greek text to the underlying

Aramaic, which was the language in which Jesus undoubtedly spoke.[1277] Jesus also followed and went beyond the Old Testament prophets in the use of parables. In one case he even adapted a parable of Isaiah for his own use (cf. Isa. 5:1–7; Matt. 21:33–41).

Christ's revealing work covers a wide span of time and forms. It began even before his incarnation. As the Logos, he is the light that has enlightened everyone coming into the world; thus, in a sense all truth has come from and through him (John 1:9). There are indications that Christ himself was at work through the prophets who bore a message about him. Peter writes that the prophets who foretold a coming salvation were "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). Christ was already making the truth known. It is also quite possible that the Second Person of the Trinity was involved in (or may have been manifested in) the theophanies of the Old Testament.

A second and most obvious period of Jesus's revelatory work was, of course, his prophetic ministry during his stay on earth. Here two forms of revelation come together. He spoke the divine word of truth. Beyond that, however, he was the truth and he was God, and so what he did was an exhibition, not merely a proclamation, of the truth and reality of God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declares that Jesus is the highest of all the revelations of God (1:1–3). God, who had spoken by the prophets, had now in the last days spoken by his Son, who is superior to angels (v. 4) and even to Moses (3:3–6). For Jesus not only has a word from God, but bears the very stamp of his nature, reflecting the glory of God (1:3).

There is, third, Christ's continuing revealing ministry through his church.[1278] He promised them his presence in the ongoing task (Matt. 28:20). In many ways his ministry would be continued and completed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would be sent in Jesus's name, and would teach his followers all things and bring to remembrance all that Jesus had said to them (John 14:26). The Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). But the revealing work of the Holy Spirit would not be independent of the work of Jesus. "The Spirit of truth," Jesus said, "will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you" (vv. 13–15). Perhaps this is why Luke makes the somewhat puzzling statement that his first book pertained to all that Jesus "began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). Another suggestion of Jesus's continuing revelatory work is

to be found in assertions like “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), which occurs in connection with the imagery of Jesus as the vine and his disciples as the branches. We conclude that when the apostles proclaimed the truth, Jesus was carrying out his work of revelation through them.

The final and most complete revelatory work of Jesus lies in the future. A time is coming when he will return; one of the words for the second coming of Christ is “revelation” (ἀποκάλυψις—*apokalupsis*).[1279] At that time we will see clearly and directly (1 Cor. 13:12); we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Then all barriers to a full knowledge of God and of the truths of which Christ spoke will be removed.

The revelatory work of Jesus Christ is a teaching that has persisted through varying fortunes of Christology. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries some theologians made it serve as virtually the entire doctrine of the work of Christ and thus of his person or nature as well. While liberalism has had various ways of understanding Jesus’s nature and work, its central thrust is that Jesus was basically a highly significant revealer of the Father and of spiritual truth. This does not necessarily mean that there was some sort of special or miraculous communication of unknown truth to him. More radical liberals have generally regarded him as merely a spiritual genius who was to religion what Einstein was to theoretical physics. Thus, Jesus was able to discover more about God than had anyone before him.[1280]

Often correlated with the view that Christ’s work is essentially revelatory is the theory that the atonement is to be understood in terms of its moral influence on humans (see pp. 717–20). According to this theory, humans’ problem is that they are alienated from God. They have quarreled with God and believe that God is angry with them. They may also feel that God has mistreated them, sending undeserved evils into their lives; consequently, humans may look upon God as a malevolent, not a benevolent, being. The purpose of Christ’s death was to demonstrate the greatness of God’s love—he sent his Son to die. Shown this proof of God’s love and impressed by this demonstration of its depth, humans are moved to respond to him. Whoever has heard the teachings of Jesus, understood his death to be a sign of God’s great love, and responded appropriately has fully experienced Christ’s work, a work that is primarily revelatory.

In the view of those who hold Jesus’s work to be primarily revelatory, his message consists of (1) basic truths about the Father, the kingdom of God, and the value of the human soul, and (2) ethical teachings.[1281] This concentration on the revelatory role of Christ neglects his kingly and priestly roles, and is therefore unacceptable. All three roles belong inseparably together. For if one

examines with care the content of Jesus's revelatory teaching, it becomes apparent that much of it deals with his own person and ministry, and specifically with either his kingdom or the reconciling death he was to undergo. At his trial he spoke of his kingdom (John 18:36). Throughout his ministry he had proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 4:17). He said that he had come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Thus, in Jesus's own view his revelatory function is inextricably bound with his ruling and reconciling functions. While some teachings of Jesus do not deal directly with his kingdom or his atoning death (e.g., the parable of the prodigal son speaks primarily of the Father's love), when the whole biblical picture of Jesus is taken into account, his work as revealer cannot be split from his work as ruler and reconciler.

The Rule of Christ

The Gospels picture Jesus as a king, the ruler over the entire universe. Isaiah had anticipated a future ruler who would sit on David's throne (Isa. 9:7). The writer to the Hebrews applies Psalm 45:6–7 to the Son of God: "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom" (Heb. 1:8). Jesus himself said that in the new world the Son of Man would sit on a glorious throne (Matt. 19:28). He claimed that the kingdom of heaven was his (Matt. 13:41).[1282]

A problem arises here. Just as there is a tendency to think of Jesus's work of revelation as being in the past, there is also a tendency to think of his rule as being almost exclusively in the future. For as we look about us at the present time, we do not see him ruling very actively. True, the Bible states that he is a king, and the Jerusalem crowd so hailed him on what we now call Palm Sunday. It is as if the door of heaven was opened a bit so that for a brief time his true status was seen. Despite this, at the present time there seems to be little empirical evidence that our Lord rules over the entire creation and particularly the human race.

First of all, we need to note that, on the contrary, there is evidence that Christ is ruling today. In particular, the natural universe obeys him. Since Christ is the one through whom all things came into being (John 1:3) and through whom all things continue (Col. 1:17), he is in control of the natural universe. It was therefore appropriate for him to say that, had the people kept silent on Palm Sunday, the stones would have cried out; this is but another form of the truth expressed in the psalmist's affirmation that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1).

But is there evidence of a reign of Christ over modern-day humans? Indeed there is. The kingdom of God, over which Christ reigns, is present in the church. He is the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). When he was on earth, his kingdom was present in his disciples' hearts. And wherever believers today are following the lordship of Christ, the Savior is exercising his ruling or kingly function.

In light of the foregoing, we can see that Jesus Christ's rule is not a matter merely of his final exaltation. It is in connection with the final step in his exaltation, when he returns in power, that his rule will be complete. The hymn in Philippians 2 emphasizes that Christ has been given a "name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 9–11). A time is coming when all will be under his rule, whether willingly and eagerly, or unwillingly and reluctantly.

The Reconciling Work of Christ

Finally, there is Christ's work as reconciler, which is the theme of the following chapters. For the moment we will confine our discussion to the topic of his intercessory ministry.

The Bible records numerous instances of Jesus's interceding for his disciples while he was here on earth. The most extended is his high priestly prayer for the group (John 17), where he prayed that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves (v. 13). He did not pray that they be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the evil one (v. 15). He also prayed that they might all be one (v. 21). In addition, this last prayer was for those who would believe through the disciples' word (v. 20). Also, on the occasion of the Last Supper, Jesus mentioned specifically that Satan desired to have Peter (and apparently the other disciples as well) "to sift [them] as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Jesus, however, had prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail, and that when he had turned again (or converted), he might strengthen his brethren (v. 32).

Jesus continues this intercession for all believers during his heavenly presence with the Father. In Romans 8:33–34 Paul raises the question of who might be condemning us or bringing a charge against us. Surely it cannot be Christ, for he is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. In Hebrews 7:25 we are told that he ever lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him, and in 9:24 we are told that he appears in the presence of God on our behalf.

What is the focus of this intercession? On the one hand, it is justificatory. Jesus presents his righteousness to the Father for our justification. He also pleads the cause of his righteousness for believers who, while previously justified, continue to sin. And finally, it appears, particularly from the instances during his earthly ministry, that Christ beseeches the Father that believers might be sanctified and kept from the power of the evil tempter.

The Stages of Christ's Work

When we delve more deeply into Jesus's work, we find that it was done in two basic stages, traditionally referred to as the state of his humiliation and the state of exaltation. Each of these stages in turn consists of a series of steps. What we have are a series of steps down from his glory, then a series of steps back up to his previous glory, and even something beyond that.

The Humiliation

INCARNATION

The fact of Jesus's incarnation is sometimes stated in straightforward fashion, as in John 1:14, where the apostle says simply, "The Word became flesh." At other times there is emphasis on either what Jesus left behind or what he took upon himself. An instance of the former is Philippians 2:6–7: Jesus Christ "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." An example of the latter is Galatians 4:4: "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law."

What Jesus gave up in coming to earth was immense. From a position of "equality with God," which entailed the immediate presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit as well as the continuous praise of the angels, he came to earth, where he had none of these. The magnitude of what he gave up is beyond our power even to imagine, for we have never seen what heaven is like. When we arrive there, we will probably be overwhelmed by the splendor of what he left. He who became a pauper was the highest prince.

Even if Christ had come to the highest splendor that earth could afford, the descent would still have been immense. The greatest of riches, the highest of honors in any potentate's court, would be as nothing compared to the conditions he left. But it was not to the highest of human circumstances that he came. Rather, he took the form of a servant, a slave. He came into a very common

family. He was born in the very obscure little town of Bethlehem. And even more striking, he was born in the very humble setting of a stable and laid in a manger. The circumstances of his birth seem to symbolize the lowliness of estate to which he came.

He was born under the law. He who had originated the law and was the Lord of it became subject to the law, fulfilling all of it. It was as if an official, having enacted a statute that those under him had to follow, himself stepped down to a lower position where he too had to obey. Jesus's becoming subject to the law was complete. Thus he was circumcised at the age of eight days, and at the proper time he was brought to the temple for the rite of the mother's purification (Luke 2:22–40). By becoming subject to the law, says Paul, Jesus was able to redeem those who are under the law (Gal. 4:5).

What of the attributes of deity during the period of the humiliation? We have already suggested (p. 670) that the Second Person of the Trinity emptied himself of equality with God by adding or taking on humanity. There are several possible positions as to what Jesus did with his divine attributes during that time:

1. The Lord gave up his divine attributes. In effect, he ceased to be God, changing from God into a human.[1283] The divine attributes were replaced by human attributes. But this amounts to metamorphosis rather than incarnation and is contradicted by various affirmations of Jesus's deity during the time of his earthly residence.

2. The Lord gave up certain divine attributes, either the natural attributes or the relative attributes.[1284] To say that Jesus gave up his natural divine attributes means that he retained the moral attributes, such as love, mercy, and truth. What he gave up included omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. To say that Jesus gave up his relative divine attributes means that he retained the absolute qualities he possessed in and of himself, such as immutability and self-existence, but relinquished the qualities that related to the creation, such as omnipotence and omniscience. But this likewise seems to make him, at least partially, no longer God. If the nature of something is the sum of the attributes composing it, it is difficult to conceive of how Jesus could actually have given up some of his divine attributes without ceasing to be God.

3. Jesus gave up the independent exercise of his divine attributes. This does not mean that he surrendered some (or all) of his divine attributes, but that he voluntarily gave up the ability to exercise them on his own. He could exercise them only in dependence on the Father and in connection with possession of a fully human nature.[1285] Thus, he was able to utilize his divine power, and did so on numerous occasions, such as performing miracles and reading the thoughts of others. But in exercising his own power he had to call on the Father to enable

him to do so. Both wills, the Father's and his, were necessary for him to utilize his divine attributes. A fair analogy is a safe-deposit box; two keys are necessary to open it—the bank's and the depositor's. In like manner, if Jesus was to exercise divine power, both wills had to agree upon an action for it to take place. We might say, then, that Jesus still possessed omniscience, but it was within the unconscious part of his personality; he could not bring it back into conscious awareness without the assistance of the Father. An analogy here is a psychologist's enabling a counselee (through the administration of drugs, hypnosis, or other techniques) to recall material buried in the subconscious.

4. Christ gave up the use of his divine attributes.[1286] This means that Jesus continued to possess his divine attributes and the power to exercise them independently, but chose not to use them. He was not, then, dependent on the Father for their use. But if this is the case, how do we explain his prayers to and apparent dependence on the Father?

5. Although Jesus still possessed his divine attributes, he acted as if he did not.[1287] He pretended to have limitations. If this were the case, however, then Jesus was guilty of misrepresentation or outright dishonesty when, for example, he claimed ignorance of the time of his second coming (Mark 13:32).

Of these various views of what Jesus did with his attributes during the period of his humanity, the third one is most in keeping with all the data—he surrendered his ability to exercise divine power independently. An immeasurable humiliation was, then, involved in assuming human nature. He could not freely and independently exercise all of the capabilities he had when he was in heaven.

The humiliation entailed all of the conditions of humanity. Thus, Jesus was capable of feeling fatigue and weariness, pain and suffering, hunger, even the anguish of betrayal, denial, and abandonment by those closest to him. He experienced the disappointment, discouragement, and distress of soul that go with being fully human. His humanity was complete.

Death

The ultimate step downward in Jesus's humiliation was his death. He who was "the life" (John 14:6), the Creator, the giver of life and of the new life that constitutes victory over death, became subject to death. He who had committed no sin suffered death, the consequence or "wages" of sin. By becoming human, Jesus became subject to the possibility of death, that is, he became mortal; and death was not merely a possibility, but became an actuality.

Furthermore, Jesus suffered not only death, but a humiliating one at that! He experienced a type of execution reserved by the Roman Empire for grievous

criminals. It was a slow, painful death, virtually death by torture. Add to this the ignominy of the circumstances. The mockery and taunting by the crowds, the abuse by the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers, and the challenges to each of his functions compounded the humiliation. His status as a prophet was challenged during his appearance before the high priest: "Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?" (Matt. 26:68). His kingship and rule were mocked by the inscription put on the cross ("The King of the Jews") and by the taunts of the soldiers ("If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself"—Luke 23:37). His priestly role was called into question by the scoffing remarks of the rulers: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One" (Luke 23:35). Thus the crucifixion was a contradiction to everything he claimed for himself.

Sin seemed to have won; the powers of evil appeared to have defeated Jesus. Death seemed to be the end of his mission; he had failed in his task. No longer would disciples heed his teachings and carry out his commands, for they were all scattered and defeated. His voice was stilled, so that he could no longer preach and teach, and his body was lifeless, unable to heal, raise from the dead, and quiet the storms.

Descent into Hades

Some theologians believe that there was another step in the humiliation. Not only was Jesus buried, and in a borrowed tomb (an indication of his poverty), but there is, in the Apostles' Creed, a reference to a descent into hell or Hades. On the basis of certain biblical texts, primarily Psalm 16:10; Ephesians 4:8–10; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18–19 and 4:4–6, and the statement in the creed, it is maintained that part of the humiliation involved an actual descent by Jesus into hell or Hades during the period between his death on the cross on Friday and his resurrection from the tomb on Sunday morning. This is a point of considerable controversy; indeed, certain theologians categorically reject it. Among them are Rudolf Bultmann, who objects to the belief on the grounds that it implies an obsolete cosmology (i.e., a three-tiered universe).[1288]

Among the reasons for the controversy is the fact that there is no single biblical text that treats the doctrine of a descent into hell completely, or states the issue clearly and unambiguously. Furthermore, the doctrine is not found in the earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed, but first appeared in the Aquileian form of it, which dates from about AD 390.[1289] The belief was formulated by piecing the several biblical texts into a composite picture: Jesus descended into Hades; there he preached to the imprisoned spirits before he was removed on the third

day. Note that in this version of the doctrine the descent into Hades is both the final step of the humiliation and the first step of the exaltation, since it involves a triumphant proclamation to spirits enslaved by sin, death, and hell that Jesus has vanquished those oppressive forces.

Just what do the relevant passages say? The first passage to be considered, and the only one in the Old Testament, is Psalm 16:10: "You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay" (cf. Ps. 30:3). Some have seen this as a prophecy that Jesus would descend to and return from hell. However, when closely examined, this verse appears to be a reference merely to deliverance from death, not from hell. "Sheol" was frequently used simply of the state of death, to which it was presumed that all persons go. Both Peter and Paul interpreted Psalm 16:10 as meaning that the Father would not leave Jesus under the powers of death so that he would see corruption, or, in other words, his body would decompose (Acts 2:27–31; 13:34–35). Rather than teaching that Jesus would descend into and then be delivered from some place called Hades, the psalmist was stating that death would have no permanent power over Jesus.

The second passage is Ephesians 4:8–10. Verses 8 and 9 read, "This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)" Verse 10 makes it clear that the ascent was to "higher than all the heavens," that is, it was a return from earth to heaven. The descent, therefore, was from heaven to earth, not to somewhere beneath the earth. Thus, "the lower, earthly regions" (v. 9) is to be understood as a simple appositive —"he had also descended into the lower regions [of the universe], that is, the earthly."

First Timothy 3:16 reads, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory." It has been suggested that the angels in view are fallen angels who saw Jesus when he descended into hell. It should be noted, however, that unless some qualification attaches to the word "angels," it always refers to good angels. It would seem more in keeping with the remainder of the passage to regard the phrase "seen by angels" as simply part of a list of witnesses, both earthly and heavenly, of the important fact that God was manifested in the flesh, than as evidence that Jesus descended into hell, where he was seen by fallen angels or demons.

The most important and in many ways the most difficult passage is 1 Peter 3:18–19: "For Christ died for sins. . . . He was put to death in the body but made

alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison" (NIV 1984). There are several different interpretations of this passage. (1) The traditional Roman Catholic view is that Jesus went to *limbus patrum*, the abode of saints who had already lived and died; declared to them the good news of his victory over sin, death, and hell; and then led them out of that place.[1290] (2) The Lutheran view is that Jesus descended into Hades not to announce good news and offer deliverance to those who were there, but to declare and complete his victory over Satan and pronounce a sentence of condemnation.[1291] (3) The traditional Anglican view is that Jesus went to Hades, to the specific part called paradise, and there declared to the righteous a fuller exposition of the truth.[1292] None of these interpretations is adequate. (1) The Roman Catholic idea of a second chance to accept the gospel message after death seems inconsistent with other teachings of Scripture (e.g., Luke 16:19–31). (2) Whereas elsewhere in Scripture the word κηρύσσω (*kērussō*—"to preach") consistently refers to proclamation of the gospel, in the Lutheran interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 it apparently refers to a declaration of judgment. (3) The Anglican interpretation has difficulty explaining why the righteous in paradise are described as "imprisoned spirits."[1293]

It is certainly difficult to come up with an interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18–19 that is at once internally consistent and consistent with the teaching of the rest of Scripture. One possibility is to understand this passage in the light of verse 20: Jesus preached to the spirits in prison "who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water." According to this interpretation, Jesus was made alive in the same spirit in which he had preached through Noah to the people who lived in the days before the flood. Those people had failed to heed his message and hence were destroyed. This preaching was an instance of Jesus's preincarnate prophetic ministry. Some expositors would say, on the other hand, that the reference to Noah's day is figurative or illustrative. Jesus had preached in the power of the Spirit to the sinners of his day. They were as inattentive to the message as the sinners in the days of Noah had been, and as unheedful as others will be just before the second coming (Matt. 24:37–39). The same Spirit that had led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt. 4:1), empowered him to cast out demons (Matt. 12:28), and brought him to life again was the source of his preaching during his lifetime to those who were imprisoned in sin. Note that there is no indication of a time sequence with respect to the Spirit's bringing him to life and his preaching to the spirits in prison.

The final passage is 1 Peter 4:4–6, especially verse 6: “For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” It has been suggested that this verse points to a descent by Jesus into hell to preach to the spirits there. However, to suppose that Peter means that the gospel was preached to people who were already physically dead is to encounter one of the same difficulties mentioned in connection with 1 Peter 3:18–19—nowhere else in Scripture is there a hint of a second chance for the dead. In addition, there is no indication that the preaching Peter has in view was done by Christ. It seems best, then, to see in 1 Peter 4:6 a general reference to proclamation of the gospel message either to persons who had since died or to people who were spiritually dead (cf. Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13).

To sum up the passages cited as evidence of a descent into Hades: they are at best vague or ambiguous, and the attempt to piece them together into a doctrine is unconvincing. While they may be interpreted as implying that Jesus descended into hell, there is insufficient evidence here to warrant setting forth a descent into hell as a definite doctrine of Christianity.

The Exaltation

Resurrection

We have seen that the death of Jesus was the low point in his humiliation; the overcoming of death through the resurrection was the first step back in the process of his exaltation. The resurrection is particularly significant, for inflicting death was the worst thing that sin and the powers of sin could do to Christ. Death’s inability to hold him symbolizes the totality of his victory. What more can the forces of evil do if someone whom they have killed does not stay dead? Samuel Rayan regards the resurrection as the beginning of the last days, a period in which Christ is present in a more radical way.[1294]

Because the resurrection is so important, it has occasioned a great deal of controversy. There were, of course, no human witnesses to the actual resurrection, since Jesus was alone in the tomb when it took place. We do find, however, two types of evidence. First, the tomb in which Jesus had been laid was empty, and the body was never produced. Second, a great variety of persons testified that they had seen Jesus alive. He was seen on several different occasions and in various locations. The most natural explanation of these testimonies is that Jesus was indeed alive again. Moreover, there is no other (or

at least, better) way of accounting for the transformation of the disciples from frightened, defeated persons to confident preachers of the resurrection.[1295]

One question deserving special attention is the nature of the resurrection body. There seems to be conflicting evidence on this matter. On the one hand, we are told that flesh and blood are not going to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), and there are other indications that we will not have a material body in heaven. On the other hand, Jesus ate after the resurrection, and apparently he was recognizable. Furthermore, the marks of the nails in his hands and the spear wound in his side suggest that he still had a material body (John 20:25–27). If we are to reconcile this seeming conflict, it is important to bear in mind that Jesus was at this point resurrected, but not ascended. At the time of our resurrection our bodies will be transformed in one step. In the case of Jesus, however, the transformation occurred in two events, resurrection and ascension. So the body that he had at the point of resurrection was yet to undergo a more complete transformation at the point of the ascension. It was yet to become the "spiritual body" of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:44.[1296]

But just as the virgin birth should not be thought of as essentially a biological matter, neither should the resurrection be conceived of as primarily a physical fact. It was Jesus's triumph over sin and death and all of the attendant ramifications. It was the fundamental step in his exaltation—he was freed from the curse brought on him by his voluntary bearing of the sin of the entire human race.

Ascension and Session at the Father's Right Hand

The first step in Jesus's humiliation involved giving up the status he had in heaven and coming to the conditions of earth; the second step in the exaltation involved leaving the conditions of earth and reassuming his place with the Father. Jesus himself on several occasions foretold his return to the Father (John 6:62; 14:2, 12; 16:5, 10, 28; 20:17). Luke gives the most extended accounts of the actual ascension (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:6–11). Paul also writes regarding the ascension (Eph. 1:20; 4:8–10; 1 Tim. 3:16), as does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews (1:3; 4:14; 9:24).

In premodern times the ascension was usually thought of as a transition from one place (earth) to another (heaven). We now know, however, that space is such that heaven is not merely upward from the earth, and it also seems likely that the difference between earth and heaven is not merely geographic. One cannot get to God simply by traveling sufficiently far and fast in a space vehicle of some kind. God is in a different dimension of reality, and the transition from here to there

requires not merely a change of place, but of state. So, at some point, Jesus's ascension was not merely a physical and spatial change, but spiritual as well. At that time Jesus underwent the remainder of the metamorphosis begun with the resurrection of his body.

The significance of the ascension is that Jesus left behind the conditions associated with life on this earth. Thus the pain, both physical and psychological, experienced by persons here is no longer his. The opposition, hostility, unbelief, and unfaithfulness he encountered have been replaced by the praise of the angels and the immediate presence of the Father. God has exalted him and given him a "name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11). The angels have resumed their song of praise, for the Lord of heaven has returned. What a contrast to the abuse and insults he endured while on earth! Yet the song of praise now goes beyond that which was sung before his incarnation. A new stanza has been added. Jesus has done something he had not done previous to his incarnation: personally experienced and overcome death.

There is a difference in another respect as well. For now Jesus is the God-man. There is a continuing incarnation. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." This gives every indication that Jesus currently is a human who mediates between God and us. His, however, is not the type of humanity that we have, or even the humanity that he had while he was here. It is a perfected humanity of the type we will have after our resurrection. Thus, his continuing incarnation imposes no limitation on his deity. Just as our bodies will have their limitations removed, so it has been with the perfect, glorified humanity of Jesus, which continues to be united with the deity, and thus will forever exceed what we will ultimately be.

There were definite reasons why Jesus had to leave the earth. One was in order to prepare a place for our future abode, although he did not specify just what was involved (John 14:2–3). Another reason he had to go is so that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, might come. Again, the disciples were not told why the one was requisite to the other, but Jesus did say that such was the case (John 16:7). The sending of the Holy Spirit was important, for whereas Jesus could work with the disciples only through external teaching and example, the Holy Spirit could work within them (John 14:17). Having more intimate access to the centers of their lives, he would be able to work through them more freely. As a result, the believers would be able to do the works that Jesus did, and even greater ones (John 14:12). And through the Holy Spirit's

ministry, the Triune God would be present with them; thus Jesus could say that he would be with them forever (Matt. 28:20).

Jesus's ascension means that he is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus himself predicted this in his statement before the high priest (Matt. 26:64). Peter referred to the session at the Father's right hand in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:33–36) and before the council (Acts 5:31). It is also mentioned in Ephesians 1:20–22; Hebrews 10:12; 1 Peter 3:22; and Revelation 3:21; 22:1. The significance of all this is that the right hand is the place of distinction and power. Recall how James and John desired to sit at Christ's right hand, and at his left as well (Mark 10:37–40). Jesus's sitting at the right hand of God should not be interpreted as a matter of rest or inactivity. It is a symbol of authority and active rule. The right hand is also the place where Jesus is ever making intercession with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

Second Coming

One dimension of the exaltation remains. Scripture indicates clearly that Christ will return at some point in the future; the exact time is unknown to us. Then his victory will be complete. He will be the conquering Lord, the judge over all. At that point his reign, which at present is in some ways only potential, and which many do not accept, will be total. He himself has said that his second coming will be in glory (Matt. 25:31). The one who came in lowliness, humility, and even humiliation will return in complete exaltation. Then, indeed, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10–11).

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Theories of the Atonement

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and illustrate the significance of the atoning work of Christ.
2. Understand the meaning of the atonement for the believer.
3. Recognize and describe five theories of the atonement.
4. Compare and contrast five theories of the atonement and compile their truths into a comprehensive theory.

Chapter Summary

The most recognizable symbol of Christianity is the cross. Its significance is found in the atoning work of Christ. It is the doctrine of the atonement that becomes the transition point from the objective doctrines of God, humanity, sin, and the person of Christ to the subjective doctrines. This transition point is the key element in balancing Christian theology to make it relevant to the believer. Historically, the meaning of the atonement has been controversial. Differing theories of the atonement have covered different elements. Many of these theories do not integrate all of the elements. The elements or truths that certain theories present include the following: the example of Christ, the demonstration of the extent of God's love, the severity of God's righteousness and the seriousness of sin, the victory over sin and death, and the satisfaction for

our sins. These truths are all evident in the atonement, and should be included in the explanation of the atonement.

Study Questions

- Why is the atonement so vital to Christian theology and to Christian faith?
- How is the atonement to be understood in light of the other doctrines of the Christian faith?
- According to the Socinian understanding of the atonement, what two human needs does Jesus's death fulfill, and why?
- Why must we reject Horace Bushnell's view on the atoning work of Christ?
- How do you respond to the satisfaction theory of the atonement?
- What other theories of the atonement have you examined, and how would you respond to them?

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The Significance of the Atonement

In the atonement, we come to a crucial point of Christian faith, because it is the point of transition, as it were, from the objective to the subjective aspects of Christian theology. Here we shift our focus from the nature of Christ to his active work on our behalf; here systematic theology has direct application to our lives. The atonement has made our salvation possible. It is also the foundation of other major doctrines that await our study: the doctrine of the church deals with the

collective aspects of salvation, the doctrine of the last things with its future aspects.

Most theologians have in one way or another acknowledged the essential nature of the atonement, or, to make a play on words, the "cruciality of the cross." Emil Brunner, for example, said, "He who understands the Cross aright . . . understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ."[1297] Leon Morris wrote, "The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere."[1298]

In the doctrine of the atonement we see perhaps the clearest indication of the organic character of theology; that is, we see that the various doctrines fit together in a cohesive fashion. The position taken on any one of them affects or contributes to the construction of the others. Here the doctrines of God, humanity, sin, and the person of Christ come together to define the human need and the provision that had to be made for that need. And from our understanding of these other doctrines issues our understanding of the various facets of salvation: our being given a righteous standing in God's sight (justification); the instilling of spiritual vitality and direction into our lives (regeneration); the development of godliness (sanctification). Theology, when properly done, possesses an aesthetic quality. There is an impressive symmetry or balance among the different facets of doctrine. There is an interconnectedness reminding us of the beauty of a smoothly functioning machine, or of a painting where each color complements the others, and the lines and shapes are in correct and pleasing proportion to the remainder of the picture.[1299]

Our doctrines of God and of Christ will color our understanding of the atonement. For if God is a very holy, righteous, and demanding being, then humans will not be able to satisfy him easily, and it is quite likely that something will have to be done on humans' behalf to satisfy God. If, on the other hand, God is an indulgent, permissive Father who says, "We have to allow humans to have a little fun sometimes," then it may be sufficient simply to give them a little encouragement and instruction. If Christ is merely a human being, then the work that he did serves only as an example; he was not able to offer anything on our behalf. If, however, he is God, his work for us went immeasurably beyond what we are able to do for ourselves; he served not only as an example but as a sacrifice for us. The doctrine of humanity, broadly defined to include the doctrine of sin, also affects the picture. If humans are basically spiritually intact, they probably can, with a bit of effort, fulfill what God wants of them. Thus, instruction, inspiration, and motivation constitute what humans need and hence the essence of the atonement. If, however, humanity is totally depraved and

consequently unable to do what is right no matter how much they wish to or how hard they try, then a more radical work had to be done on their behalf.

The Manifold Theories of the Atonement

The meaning and impact of the atonement are rich and complex. Consequently, various theories of the atonement have arisen. Given the abundance of biblical testimony to the fact of atonement, different theologians choose to emphasize different texts. Their choice of texts reflects their views on other areas of doctrine. We will examine several of the theories, thus gaining an appreciation for the complexity of the atonement's meaning. At the same time we will come to see the incompleteness and inadequacy of any single one by itself.[1300]

The Socinian Theory: The Atonement as Example

Faustus and Laelius Socinus, who lived in the sixteenth century, developed a teaching that is best represented today by the Unitarians. They rejected any idea of vicarious satisfaction.[1301] They made a formal acknowledgment of the threefold offices of Christ, but in practice neutralized the priestly office in two ways. First, they maintained that the ministry of Jesus during his earthly days was prophetic rather than priestly. Second, they contended that his priestly role, the seat of which is in heaven, is coincident with his kingly office rather than distinct from it. The new covenant of which Jesus spoke involves an absolute forgiveness rather than some sort of substitutionary sacrifice. The real value of Jesus's death lies in the beautiful and perfect example of the type of dedication we are to practice. Jesus's resurrection is important because it is the confirmation of his teachings and promises. For proof that the meaning of Christ's death rests in its effect as an example to us, the Socinians pointed to 1 Peter 2:21: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Other passages appealed to include 1 John 2:6: "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." Only in 1 Peter 2:21, however, do we find an explicit connection drawn between Christ's example and his death.[1302]

Several conceptions feed into the Socinian understanding of the atonement. One is the Pelagian view of the human condition as spiritually and morally capable of fulfilling God's expectations. Another is that God is not a God of retributive justice, and therefore he does not demand some form of satisfaction from or on behalf of those who sin against him. Finally, there is the conception

of Jesus as merely human. His death was simply that of an ordinary human being. It is important, not in some supernatural way, but as the ultimate extension of his role as the great teacher of righteousness. His death was the supreme example of a human's fulfilling what Jehovah requires—"To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8). Jesus did not simply tell us that the first and great commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27); he also demonstrated what that involves, and has proven that a human being can do it. The death of Jesus is, then, the perfect illustration and realization of what he sought to teach throughout his life. As an extension of his teachings, it is only quantitatively different from them.

From the Socinian perspective, Jesus's death fills two human needs. First, it fills the need for an example of that total love for God that we must display if we are to experience salvation. Second, the death of Jesus gives us inspiration. The ideal of total love for God is so lofty as to seem virtually unattainable. The death of Jesus is proof that such love does lie within the sphere of human accomplishment. What he could do, we can also!

The Socinian view, of course, must come to grips with the fact that numerous portions of Scripture seem to regard Jesus's death quite differently. They speak of ransom, sacrifice, priesthood, sin bearing, and the like. Note, in fact, the statement that follows just three verses after the Socinians' favorite text (1 Peter 2:21): "'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'" (v. 24). The usual reply of the Socinians and others of their conviction is that atonement is only a metaphorical concept.[1303] All that is necessary, according to them, for God and a human to have fellowship is that the human have faith in and love for God. For God to have required something more would have been contrary to his nature, and to have punished the innocent (Jesus) in place of the guilty would have been contrary to justice. Rather, God and humans are restored to their intended relationship by our personal adoption of both the teachings of Jesus and the example he set in life and especially in death.

The Moral-Influence Theory: The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love

Another view that emphasizes that the primary effect of Christ's death is on humans is termed the "moral-influence theory" of the atonement. Unlike the Socinian view, however, which emphasizes the human nature of Christ and

regards his death as an example of the love we are to show for God, the moral-influence theory sees Christ's death as a demonstration of God's love; it emphasizes Christ's divine dimension.

The moral-influence theory was first developed by Peter Abelard in reaction to the view of Anselm. Anselm thought of the incarnation as necessitated by the fact that our sin is an offense against God's moral dignity and, consequently, there must be some form of compensation to God. Abelard, on the other side, emphasized the primacy of God's love and insisted that Christ did not make some sort of sacrificial payment to the Father to satisfy his offended dignity. Rather, Jesus demonstrated to humanity the full extent of God's love for them. It was humans' fear and ignorance of God that needed to be rectified. This was accomplished by Christ's death. So the major effect of Christ's death was on humans rather than on God.[1304]

This theory did not receive much immediate support. Long afterward, however, it gained popularity. Horace Bushnell (1802–76) popularized it in the United States, while its leading proponent in Great Britain was probably Hastings Rashdall. Our exposition will be drawn especially from the thought of these men.

The advocates of the moral-influence theory hold that God's nature is essentially love. They minimize such qualities as justice, holiness, and righteousness. Accordingly, humans need not fear God's justice and punishment. Thus, their problem is not that they have violated God's law and that God will (indeed, must) punish them. Rather, human attitudes keep them apart from God.

Our separation and alienation from God may take many different forms. We may not realize that our disobedience is a source of pain to God. Or we may not realize that despite all that has transpired, God still loves us. We may fear God, or we may blame him for the problems in our relationship with him, or even for the problems of the world in general. If we were to repent and turn to God in trust and faith, however, there would be reconciliation, for the difficulty does not lie with God's ability to forgive. Nothing in his nature requires satisfaction for or rectification of our sins. The difficulty lies in us.[1305] Bushnell regards sin as a type of sickness from which we must be healed. Christ came to correct this defect in us.

Bushnell strongly stresses Christ's empathy. It is proper to think of Christ as having great love for humans even before the incarnation; he already had their burden upon him. Whereas the more objective theories of the atonement (i.e., those theories that emphasize that the primary effect of Christ's death is on something external to the human) understand Jesus's death as being the reason for his coming, Bushnell holds that Jesus came to demonstrate divine love. His

death was merely one of the modes (albeit the most impressive one) in which his love was expressed. Thus, Jesus's death was an incident or circumstance that allowed him to demonstrate his love. As Bushnell puts it, "[Jesus's] sacrifice, taken as a fact in time, was not set before him as the end, or object, of his ministry—that would make it a mere pageant of suffering, without rational dignity, or character—but, when it came, it was simply the bad fortune such a work, prosecuted with such devotion, must encounter on its way."[1306] His death was not the purpose but a consequence of his coming.

In Bushnell's view, the end or object of Jesus's coming was not to "square up the account of our sin" or to "satisfy the divine justice for us." He notes that, although presented in various contexts and in association with diverse images and ideas, the purpose of the death as well as the life of Jesus is explained in a consistent fashion throughout Scripture. Jesus's aim is found in his own words: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10); "In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). Paul said, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). While the form of expression varies, all of these passages bear a common idea. Bushnell summarizes: "Taking hold of these and all such varieties of Scripture, we conceive a transaction moving on character in souls; a regenerative, saving, truth-subjecting, all-restoring, inward change of the life—in one word the establishing of the kingdom of God, or of heaven, among men, and the gathering finally of a new-born world into it."[1307]

Healing souls is the real work that Jesus came to do. Humanity is in dire need of such healing. This need is greater than the need of those who came to Jesus during his lifetime with their physical ailments. Humans need not only absolution from sin, but deliverance from it. Humans can be healed and reconstituted, as it were, because of the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus. His death has brought fulfillment of humanity's three most basic needs into the realm of possibility:

1. Humanity needs an openness to God, an inclination to respond to his call to repentance. Think of the situation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden after they had sinned. They did not want to see God; they were afraid of him and tried to hide from or escape him. This is the natural response of a sinner to the approach of God: dread, fear, avoidance. Understanding our response, Christ does not show us foremost his infinite holiness and purity, but enters into our situation, dying the bitterest conceivable death. Bushnell describes its powerful effect upon us: "In a word we see him entered so deeply into our lot, that we are softened and drawn by him, and even begin to want him entered more deeply, that we may feel him more constrainingly. In this way a great point is turned in

our recovery. Our heart is engaged before it is broken. We like the Friend before we love the Savior."[1308] Thus Jesus through his death has fulfilled the first need of us sinful human beings—removal of our fear of God.

2. The second human need is for a genuine and deep conviction of personal sin and a resultant repentance. We have, to be sure, a surface feeling of regret whenever we do wrong. We also know that God's law passes a rugged and blunt sentence on sin. What is needed, however, is a better, more tender, and so more penetrating conviction of sin. In addition to the objective, intellectual awareness of wrongdoing such as the law gives, what we need is a profound internal conviction that leads to a genuine sense of sorrow for what we have done to God. When we see him whom we have pierced by our sin, then we are softened. Unlike Judas, who went out and committed suicide, we will not be chilled, hardened, or repelled by the pain that accompanies recognition of our sin; rather, we will welcome the anguish. Like Paul upon hearing the words, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5), we will find our resistance to God gone. We will turn to Jesus in love.[1309]

3. Humanity also needs inspiration. While we have abstract descriptions of the holiness we are to embody, it is when we see it in a practical and personal exposition that it becomes real for us. We do not want theological definitions of God, says Bushnell. Rather, "we want a friend, whom we can feel as a man, and whom it will be sufficiently accurate for us to accept and love."[1310]

Bushnell speaks much of the change that needs to be made in us.[1311] He speaks of our being reborn, created new, quickened. This change was made possible through the work done by Christ especially in his death. He humanized God, bringing him onto our plane. We know Jesus in just the same way we know one another.[1312]

According to Bushnell, one of the most powerful inducements to love for and trust in God is the realization that he also has suffered on account of evil. There is a human tendency to ask why God does not remove the evil in the world, or perhaps even to blame him for it. The knowledge that God is great and all-sufficient leads us in this direction and also to the assumption that God cannot suffer, being infinite and unchangeable. The death of Christ, however, is evidence that the sin of the world does not meet God's eye in the way a disgusting spectacle would meet a glass eye. Christ's death makes it clear that God has a sensitivity to the pain that sin brings upon us. God is not to be blamed for the suffering in the world, for he feels the power and the tragedy of it. His basic response is not condemnation, but compassion.[1313] Such a God elicits our love and trust.

The Governmental Theory: The Atonement as a Demonstration of Divine Justice

The preceding views of the atonement have pictured God as basically a sympathetic, indulgent being. They hold that in order to be restored to God's favor, it is necessary only to do one's best or to respond to God's love. Embracing such a view might lead one to antinomianism. The law of God, however, is a serious matter, and violation or disregard of it is not to be taken lightly. The so-called governmental theory emphasizes the seriousness of sin. It is a mediating view with both objective elements (the atonement is regarded as satisfying the demands of justice) and subjective elements (Christ's death is seen as a deterrent to sin by impressing on the sinner the gravity of what is involved in sin).

The major proponent of the governmental view was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), by training a lawyer rather than a clergyman. Consequently, he brought to his examination of the atonement the type of considerations that would be important to a jurist. He developed his theory in response to the Socinians, whose view of the atonement he regarded as much too human-centered.[1314] He had been brought up in the Calvinistic teaching, but became an Arminian.[1315]

The key to Grotius's view is his conception of the nature of God. God is a very holy and righteous being who has established certain laws. Sin is a violation of those laws. These violations, however, are not to be thought of as attacks on the person of God as a private individual. Rather, as a ruler, his concern with the law is as its administrator. The right to punish attaches to the office of ruler. Thus God as ruler has the right to punish sin, for sin inherently deserves punishment.[1316]

God's actions must be understood, however, in light of his dominant attribute, namely, love. God loves the human race. Although he has the right to punish it for its sin, it is not necessary or mandatory that he do so. He can forgive sin and absolve humans of guilt. The way in which he has done this, however, is the issue. He has chosen to do it in such a way that it manifests at once both his clemency and severity. God can forgive sin, but he also takes into consideration the interests of his moral government.[1317]

According to Grotius, it is possible for God to relax the law so that he need not exact a specific punishment or penalty for each violation. He has, however, acted in such a way as to maintain the interests of government. The role of God here is as a ruler rather than as a creditor or a master. A creditor may cancel a debt if he so chooses. A master may punish or not punish, according to his will. A ruler, however, may not simply ignore or overlook violations of the rules. He

cannot act on his own caprice, his personal feelings at the time. He must, rather, act with a view to the best interests of those under his authority.[1318]

It was in the best interests of humankind for Christ to die. Forgiveness of their sins, if too freely given, would have resulted in undermining the law's authority and effectiveness. It was necessary, therefore, to have an atonement that would provide grounds for forgiveness and simultaneously retain the structure of moral government. What God did through Christ's death was to demonstrate what God's justice will require us to suffer if we continue in sin. Underscoring the seriousness of breaking God's law, the heinousness of sin, this demonstration of God's justice is all the more impressive in view of who and what Christ was. The spectacle of the sufferings Christ bore is enough to deter us from sin. And if we turn from sin, we can be forgiven and God's moral government preserved. Because of Christ's death, then, it is possible for God to forgive sins without a breakdown of the moral fiber of the universe.[1319]

According to the governmental theory, the sufferings of Christ are an atonement for sin. However, Grotius's interpretation of this statement is far different from that of someone like Anselm. In Anselm's view, which is sometimes called the "satisfaction theory" of the atonement, the death of Christ was an actual penalty inflicted on him as a substitute for the penalty that should have attached to the breaking of the law by individual sinners. Grotius disagrees. He believes that the death of Christ was not a punishment; on the contrary, it made punishment unnecessary. In fact, according to Grotius, no penalty could be attached or transferred to Christ, for punishment cannot be transferred from one person to another. Punishment is personal to the individual. If it could be transferred, the connection between sin and guilt would be severed. Christ's suffering, then, was not a vicarious bearing of our punishment, but a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, a demonstration intended to induce in us a horror of sin. As we turn from sin, we can be forgiven. Thus, even in the absence of punishment, justice and morality are maintained.[1320]

One implication of Grotius's view is that God does not inflict punishment as a matter of strict retribution. Sin is not punished simply because it deserves to be, but because of the demands of moral government. The point of punishment is not retribution, but deterrence of further commission of sins, either by the one punished or by third parties who have observed the punishment. Sin, to be sure, is deserving of punishment (indeed, it is the only grounds for punishment), and God would not be unjust to apply the penalty for sin in every case. So it is not an injustice when someone is punished. But punishment need not be applied in every case nor to the fullest extent.

It should be apparent from the foregoing that Grotius was an active opponent of antinomianism in all its forms, as have been the later advocates of the governmental view. As he saw it, the Socinian theory that the atonement is essentially a beautiful example of how we should live is an insufficient basis for genuinely godly living, for no consequences are attached to failure to live a holy life. There have to be both encouragement to goodness and deterrence from evil. Even the satisfaction theory fosters a disregard for the law. For if Christ's death is an exact equivalent of the penalty for all our sins, then there is no real possibility of future punishment for us and we can do whatever we want. Once Christ died on our behalf, there was no longer a need to punish us. Grotius felt that his scheme, to the contrary, had the advantage of impressing on humankind the seriousness of all sin.[1321]

There is in the governmental theory an objective element. The death was a real offering made by Christ to God. By this act God was once and for all made able to deal mercifully with humanity. The atonement had an impact on God. But in the main, the governmental theory is a subjective theory of the atonement—the chief impact was on human beings. Christ's suffering serves as a deterrent to sin by impressing on us the gravity of sin. As we then turn from sin, we can be forgiven. The need for us to be punished has been eliminated, and yet, at the same time, moral government and the authority of the law have been upheld. Thus, in the long run, the chief impact of the atonement is on humans.[1322]

In Grotius's view Christ's offering of himself was a satisfaction sufficient to uphold moral government, and thus God was enabled to remit sin in such a way that there were no adverse consequences for humanity. The Socinians objected that satisfaction and remission are mutually exclusive. If God requires or accepts satisfaction for sins, there is no real mercy or grace. But Grotius distinguished between full payment of a debt and satisfaction. He studiously avoided the legalistic notion that God in every case requires a penalty equivalent to the offense. If there were full and complete payment, there would be no actual pardon. But a satisfaction accepted as sufficient for purposes of government does not exclude and preclude clemency on God's part. He does not exact the full penalty. There is therefore true remission. Instead of insisting on the payment of every ounce of every penalty, God's loving nature wishes to forgive. It is almost as if, in his desire to forgive sin, God was looking for an excuse not to enforce the full consequences. He found his opportunity in the death of Christ, regarding it as sufficient to preserve his moral government.[1323]

As we examine the governmental theory, we are struck by its lack of explicit scriptural basis. Although Grotius's work contains numerous biblical references, we search in vain for specific biblical texts setting forth his major point. Rather,

we see the lawyer's mind at work, focusing on general principles of Scripture and drawing certain inferences from them. The one verse that is cited as a direct support of the theory that the death of Christ was demanded by God's concern to preserve his moral government and law as he forgives sin is Isaiah 42:21: "It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious." Other Scriptures are cited as evidence of the background elements of the governmental theory of the atonement. In this respect, John Miley's exposition of the atonement is quite revealing. He lists texts that speak of divine wrath, divine righteousness, and atonement through suffering, but he does not mention texts that deal with the idea of atonement in itself or, more correctly, that define atonement.[1324] The verses he cites describe various aspects (e.g., the suffering of Christ), but do not get into the essential character of the atonement or the way in which it works. Thus, whereas other theories take an explicit biblical statement concerning the nature of the atonement and emphasize it more than others, the governmental theory works inferentially from some of the general teachings and principles of Scripture.

The Ransom Theory: The Atonement as Victory over the Forces of Sin and Evil

The theory with the greatest claim to having been the standard view in the early history of the church is probably the so-called ransom theory. Gustaf Aulén has called it the classic view,[1325] and in many ways that designation is correct, for in various forms it dominated the church's thinking until the time of Anselm and Abelard. It was even the primary way in which Augustine understood the atonement, and thus it enjoyed the immense prestige that his name accorded.

The two major early developers of the ransom theory were Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Origen saw biblical history as the depiction of a great cosmic drama. For this reason his view of the atonement has also been termed the "dramatic" view. In the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, Satan established control over humanity. Irenaeus, among others, suggested that it was by an act of unjust aggression that this control was established.[1326] But regardless of how it was gained, Satan now is the governing power in the world. As world ruler, he has rights that cannot simply be set aside, for God will not stoop to using techniques employed by the devil; God will not "steal" humanity back, as it were. Humans' major problem, then, is their enslavement to an unfit owner, namely, Satan.

Origen makes much of Paul's statement that we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). But, Origen asks, from whom were we bought? It must certainly have been from the one whose servants we were. He would have named the price.

> Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ. But until the blood of Jesus, which was so precious that alone it sufficed for the redemption of all, was given, it was necessary that those who were established in the law should give each for himself his blood (i.e., in circumcision) as it were in imitation of the redemption that was to be.[1327]

The text on which Origen and others who hold the ransom theory rely most heavily is Jesus's statement that he had come to offer his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). To whom was this ransom paid? Certainly God would not pay a ransom to himself. Rather, it must have been paid to the evil one, for it was he who held us captive until the ransom, namely, the soul of Jesus, was paid.[1328]

Note that in Origen's formulation of the doctrine, it was Satan rather than God who demanded Christ's blood, thus initiating this aspect of the transaction. So the ransom was determined by, paid to, and accepted by Satan. This mitigates to some extent the charge that the ransom theory makes God a somewhat dishonest dealer. True, Satan was deceived, but it is more correct to say he deceived himself, and that in two ways, according to Origen. First, Satan thought that he could be the lord of the soul of Jesus; Jesus's resurrection proved otherwise. Second, Origen suggests elsewhere that the devil did not perceive that humankind, partially freed by Christ's teachings and miracles, would be completely delivered by his death and resurrection. So Satan released the human race, only to find that he could not hold Christ, whom he had accepted in exchange for humanity.[1329]

A century later, Gregory of Nyssa fleshed out Origen's view of the atonement. Gregory's prime concern was to maintain God's justice. He reasoned that since the slavery in which we find ourselves is our own doing, our own free choice, it would have been unjust to deprive Satan of his captives by some arbitrary method.[1330] That would have been to steal from Satan what was rightfully his. So a transaction had to take place. Because of his own pride and greed, Satan was quick to accept a prize he perceived to be far more valuable than the souls he held captive, namely, the life of Christ. Satan did not realize, however, that the deity of Christ was enveloped in his human flesh.[1331] Christ's deity was deliberately concealed from Satan so that he would accept Jesus as the ransom.

Gregory acknowledges that God deceived Satan: “The Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh.”[1332] Beyond acknowledging the deception, Gregory justifies it. He argues that two things are requisite for an act to be just. One is that all should have their due; the other is that the motivation behind the act should be love of humanity. In the redemption accomplished by God both conditions were met. It is fitting that deception should have been used on Satan, for he gained his power over humanity by deception, using the bait of sensual pleasure. While there may seem to be a problem in that God’s use of deception is condoned while Satan’s is condemned, Gregory emphasizes the difference in aim and purpose:

> But as regards the aim and purpose of what took place, a change in the direction of the nobler is involved; for whereas he, the enemy, effected his deception for the ruin of our nature, He who is at once the just, and good, and wise one, used His device, in which there was deception, for the salvation of him who had perished, and thus not only conferred benefit on the lost one, but on him too who had wrought our ruin.[1333]

God’s deception of Satan is justified on the grounds of its being for a good purpose, which almost seems to suggest that “the end justifies the means.” The cryptic remark that the act of deception was for Satan’s benefit as well as ours is not explained further.

Gregory and Rufinus particularly liked the image of the fishhook and the bait. They even thought that Job 41:1 (“Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope?”) may have been an anticipation of the atonement.[1334] Gregory the Great compared the cross to a net for catching birds,[1335] and even Augustine likened the cross to a mousetrap, with Christ’s blood serving as the bait.[1336]

As Western theology developed, the idea of justice was worked out more thoroughly. This is not surprising, given the pervasive influence of the Roman judicial system. By maintaining that the deception of Satan should not be thought of as something that God did, but rather as something that he justly permitted, Augustine disarmed the charge that God had been unjust or dishonest.[1337] There is in Augustine no hint that Christ’s deity had been veiled in order to trick Satan. Rather, Satan was a victim of his own pride, for he thought that he could overcome and hold Christ, when in reality he had no such power. Because Jesus had never sinned, and therefore was not liable to death, he was not under Satan’s control.[1338]

In whatever form the theory was expressed in this early period, the dominant theme was victory over Satan and deliverance of humankind from bondage to

him. The only notable theologians of this period who did not adopt the ransom theory were Gregory of Nazianzus and Athanasius. A somewhat later figure who also felt the incongruity of the idea that God would make such a deal with Satan was John of Damascus. He found repugnant the belief that God would offer Christ to the enemy. Having no other theory to fall back on, John agreed that the atonement was in essence a triumph of God, but he held that the power that had ensnared humanity and was then in turn ensnared by God was death rather than the devil. God, by offering his Son, destroyed death:

> God forbid that the blood of the Lord should have been offered to the tyrant. Wherefore death approaches, and swallowing up the body as a bait is transfixed on the hook of divinity, and after tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, perishes, and brings up again all whom of old he swallowed up. For just as darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, which brings life to all, but death to the destroyer.[1339]

With the rise of the theories of Anselm and Abelard, the ransom theory, at least in the form in which we have stated it, lost its large following. In the twentieth century, Gustaf Aulén reinstated it. He terms it the "classic view," maintaining that, whatever the form in which the theory is expressed, the essential point is God's triumph.[1340]

Inasmuch as the ransom theory holds that Christ's atoning work was not directed primarily toward humanity, it is an objective theory of the atonement. To be sure, the ultimate purpose of Christ's death was the liberation of the human race. This, however, was accomplished through a work that related primarily to another party; as a result of that work, there was an alteration of the human condition. The ransom theory is unique among the theories of the atonement in contending that the direct effects of Christ's atoning death were neither on God nor on humans. Rather, in the earliest and most common form of the view it was the devil toward whom Christ's death was directed. Christ's work in relationship to God was secondary at this point.

The Satisfaction Theory: The Atonement as Compensation to the Father

Of all of the theories that we are examining in this chapter, the one that most clearly regards the major effect of Christ's death as objective is usually termed the commercial or satisfaction theory. It emphasizes that Christ died to satisfy a principle in the very nature of God the Father. Not only was the atonement not primarily directed at humanity, but it also did not involve any sort of payment to Satan.

Some of the later Latin theologians had anticipated the satisfaction theory. For in maintaining that the transaction with Satan served the cause of (or at least was not inconsistent with) God's justice, they recognized a Godward dimension in the atonement. Augustine and Gregory the Great had even argued that something in the very nature of God required the atonement, but they did not develop this thought.[1341]

It should be noted that the Latin theologians worked in the setting of Roman law, which gave to their statements a judicial cast. Anselm (1033–1109), archbishop of Canterbury, lived in a different milieu. By the time of his writing, the political structure had changed. The feudal system, not the Roman Empire, was the most powerful force in the structuring of society. Justice and law had become more of a personal matter; violations of the law were now thought of as offenses against the person of the feudal overlord.

In addition, there was a growing emphasis on the concept of satisfaction. The Catholic Church had been gradually developing its penitential system—by rendering some form of satisfaction, one could avoid punishment for one's offenses. This was in keeping with a legal principle of the time: in matters of private offense, various forms of satisfaction could be substituted for punishment. By Anselm's time the concept of satisfaction had become an integral part of the feudal structure. We therefore find in Anselm's thought a shift in imagery from the earlier treatments of the atonement. He pictures God as a feudal overlord who, to maintain his honor, insists that there be adequate satisfaction for any encroachment upon it.[1342]

Anselm deals with the atonement in his major work, *Cur Deus Homo?* The title (literally, "why God human?") indicates the basic direction of the treatise. Anselm attempts to discover why God took on human nature in the first place. The method he employs is to show that there was a logical necessity for the atonement, and therefore also for the incarnation.

Anselm clearly and definitely rejects the standard form of the ransom theory, and even Augustine's modification of it. The problem lay in the contention that Satan had a "right of possession" over humans. Anselm denies this supposed right. Humans belong to God and to no one but God. Even the devil belongs to God. Neither humans nor the devil have any power apart from him. Therefore, God did not have to purchase humanity from Satan. God's only obligation was to punish his former servant who had persuaded a fellow servant to follow him in leaving their common Lord. There was absolutely no necessity to pay ransom to the devil.[1343]

Anselm's understanding of the atonement builds fundamentally on his doctrine of sin, for what sin is understood to be will strongly influence one's

view of what must be done to counter it. To Anselm, sin is basically failure to render God his due. By failing to give God his due, we take from God what is rightfully his and dishonor him. We sinners must restore to God what we have taken from him. But it is not sufficient merely to restore to God what we have taken away. For in taking from God what is his, we have injured him; and even after what we have taken has been returned, there must be some additional compensation or reparation for the injury that has been done.[1344] A good comparison is modern judicial rulings that stipulate that a thief, in addition to restoring the victim's property, must pay punitive damages or serve a prison sentence.

God being God, he not only may act to preserve his own honor; he must do so. He cannot simply disregard it. Thus, he cannot merely forgive or remit sin without punishing it. Nor is it enough for us to restore to God his due. There must be additional reparation. Only with some form of added compensation can the things that have been disturbed by sin be restored to equilibrium. Sin left unpunished would leave God's economy out of order.[1345]

God's violated honor can be put right again either by his punishing humans (condemning them) or by accepting satisfaction made on their behalf.[1346] Anselm carefully distinguishes the two concepts. Why did God not simply inflict punishment? Some theologians would say that because God is love, he would rather receive satisfaction than condemn humans. That is not Anselm's approach, however. Remember that he is trying to demonstrate the necessity of the incarnation. Following Augustine's argument, he contends that some humans must necessarily be saved, to compensate God for the loss of the fallen angels. Because fallen angels cannot be restored or saved, they must be replaced by an equal number of humans. Thus, God cannot inflict punishment on all humans; at least some of them must be restored. Satisfaction has to be rendered on their behalf.[1347]

But what of the nature and means of accomplishing this satisfaction? Humans could not possibly have rendered satisfaction on their own behalf, for even if they were to do their best, that would only be giving God his due. Since God had been wronged, some greater compensation was required. Further, humans had permitted themselves to be overcome by the devil, God's enemy. This was an especially grievous offense. The satisfaction also had to include some special compensation for this wrong, namely, the defeat of the devil. How could this have been rendered by any humans, weakened as they were by sin and already defeated by Satan? For things to be set right in the economy of God's kingdom, something had to be done for human beings by someone qualified to represent

them. Note how closely Anselm's doctrine of humanity and sin is related to his doctrine of atonement.

This, then, was the human predicament. Humans were made for God and were intended to choose, love, and serve the highest good, God. This, however, they did not do; consequently, death came upon them. God, however, necessarily had to save at least some of fallen humanity. This required a satisfaction greater than what all created beings are capable of doing, since they can do only what is already required of them. This being the case, only God could make satisfaction. However, if it was to avail for humanity in relationship to God, it had to be made by a human. Therefore, the satisfaction had to be rendered by someone who is both God and a human being. Consequently, the incarnation is a logical necessity. Without it there could be no satisfaction and, therefore, no remission of punishment.[1348]

Christ, being both God and sinless human, did not deserve death. Therefore, his offering his life to God on behalf of the human race of which he was a part went beyond what was required of him. Thus, it could serve as a genuine satisfaction to God for humanity's sins. But was it sufficient to accomplish what was needed? Yes, it was. For the death of the God-man himself, inasmuch as he, being God, had power over his own life (John 10:18) and did not have to die, has infinite value. Indeed, for his body to have suffered even the slightest harm would have been a matter of infinite value.[1349]

Anselm's argument was heavily based on logic. We have noted this fact only at a few points. It is important to keep in mind, however, that he believed and represented each point in his theological system—the atonement, the incarnation—to be a matter of logical necessity.

We have seen that Christ's death is interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Each of the theories we have examined seizes on a significant aspect of his work. While we may have major objections to some of the theories, we recognize that each one possesses a dimension of the truth. In his death Christ (1) gave us a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of us, (2) demonstrated the great extent of God's love, (3) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God's righteousness, (4) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power, and (5) rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. We humans needed all of these things done for us, and Christ did them all. Now we must ask, Which of these is the most basic? Which one makes the others possible? We will turn to that question in the next chapter. As we do so, it will be with a profound appreciation for the full measure of what Christ did to bring us into fellowship with the Father.

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Charles Wesley, 1738

37

The Central Theme of the Atonement

Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, the learner should be able to do the following:

1. Recall five background factors of the atonement and show how they influence a view of the atonement.
2. Recognize and explain the teaching of the New Testament that discusses the atonement.
3. Identify and describe the basic meaning of the atonement and the import of that meaning to the believer.
4. List and describe five objections to the penal substitution theory, then demonstrate the biblical and rational problems with these objections.
5. Relate and compare the penal substitution theory to four other theories of the atonement.
6. Identify and describe the implications of the substitutionary atonement for all of humanity.

Chapter Summary

The doctrine of the atonement relies heavily upon the perspective of several background doctrines. The doctrines of the nature of God, the status of the law, the human condition, Christ, and the Old Testament

sacrificial system have great influence on a view of the atonement. In the New Testament Gospels, Jesus Christ refers to himself as a ransom, a substitute, and the giver of life to humanity. Paul describes Christ's work of the atonement as propitiation or the appeasement of God's wrath for the sins of humanity. Therefore, we may understand the atonement to involve sacrifice, propitiation, substitution, and reconciliation in the relationship of God to humanity. It is the penal substitution theory that best describes this relationship for the atonement.

Study Questions

- Why is it important to know what a person's perspective is on the human condition in order to understand his or her view of the atonement?
- How does Paul regard Christ's death in his New Testament writings?
- What elements are involved in the basic meaning of the atonement and why?
- What are the objections to the penal substitution theory of the atonement, and how would you respond to them?
- How can the atonement be a demonstration of God's love and justice at the same time?
- What significance may be drawn from the penal substitution theory of the atonement for Christian theology?

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In examining the several theories of the atonement in the preceding chapter, we noted that each seizes on a significant aspect of Christ's atoning work. We must now ask which of those aspects is the primary or most basic dimension of that work, the one to which the others adhere, or on which they depend.

Background Factors

As we indicated at the beginning of chapter 36, the doctrine of the atonement is the point at which the organic character of theology is most apparent. Our views on the other doctrines influence strongly our conclusions in this area. So we begin by reviewing the background against which we will construct our doctrine of the atonement.

The Nature of God

Just as biblical passages appear in contexts, so also do doctrines. Abstracting a doctrine from its context results in distortion. In every matter for theological study, the broadest context is, of course, the doctrine of God, especially where a relationship with God is involved, such as the atonement.

The nature of God is perfect and complete holiness. This is not an optional or arbitrary matter; it is the way God is by nature. Being contrary to God's nature, sin is repulsive to him. He is allergic to sin, so to speak. He cannot look upon it. Yet God is a loving God, who yearns for his human creatures to enjoy fellowship with him. These two attributes are not in competition with each other. God is characterized by a loving holiness, or a holy love.

Status of the Law

The second major factor to be considered as we construct our theory of the atonement is the status of God's moral and spiritual law. The law should not be thought of as something impersonal and foreign to God, but as the expression of God's person and will. He does not command love and forbid murder simply because he decides to do so. God pronounces love good because he himself is love. Lying is wrong because God himself cannot lie.

In effect, then, the law is something of a transcript of the nature of God. When we relate to it, whether positively or negatively, we are not relating to an impersonal document or set of regulations, but rather to God himself. Disobeying the law is serious, not because the law has some inherent value or dignity that must be preserved, but because disobeying it is actually an attack on the very nature of God himself. Thus, legalism—the attitude that the law is to be obeyed for its own sake—is unacceptable. Rather, the law is to be understood as a means of relating to a personal God.

Some have objected to the idea that God's nature can be expressed in propositional form, that God's will is somehow codifiable. Behind this objection there seems to lie Kant's skepticism or Schleiermacher's conception of religion as feeling. But if we hold that God is an objective reality, and that he has revealed rational, objective truth about himself, there is also room for the law as an objective representation of his will and, even more, of his nature.

Thus violation of the law, whether by transgressing or by failing to fulfill it, carries the serious consequences of liability to punishment, and especially death. Adam and Eve were told that in the day that they ate of the fruit of the tree they would surely die (Gen. 2:15–17). The Lord told Ezekiel that "the one who sins is the one who will die" (Ezek. 18:20). According to Paul, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and "whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will

reap destruction" (Gal. 6:8). There is a definite link between sin and liability to punishment. Particularly in the last of the citations (Gal. 6:7–8) a virtual cause-effect connection between sin and punishment is in evidence. In each case, however, it is understood that punishment is an inevitability rather than a possibility.

The Human Condition

Another crucial factor in our understanding of the atonement is the nature and condition of humanity. We noted earlier (pp. 572–75) the fact of total depravity, by which we meant not that humans are as wicked as they can possibly be, but rather that they are utterly unable to do anything to save themselves or to extricate themselves from their condition of sinfulness. It follows from this that the atonement, to accomplish for humanity what needed to be done, had to be made by someone else on humanity's behalf.

Christ

Our understanding of Christ's nature is crucial here. Earlier we stated that Christ is both God and human (chaps. 31–33). He is the eternal, preexistent, Second Person of the Trinity. He is God in the same sense and to the same degree as is the Father, a sense in which no other human has ever been or will ever be divine. To his deity he added humanity.

In our understanding, Jesus's humanity means that his atoning death is applicable to human beings. Because Jesus was really one of us, he was able to redeem us. He was not an outsider attempting to do something for us, but a genuine human being representing the rest of us. This is implied in what Paul says in Galatians 4:4–5: "God sent his Son . . . born under law, to redeem those under law."

Not only is Jesus human; he is *completely* human. He took not merely the physical nature of a human being, but the full psychological makeup of humanity as well. He felt the full gamut of normal human emotions. Thus he was able to redeem all of human nature, for he assumed all of what it means to be truly human.

In addition, Jesus's death is of sufficient value to atone for the entire human race. The death of an ordinary human could scarcely have sufficient value to cover his or her own sins, let alone those of the whole race. But Jesus's death is of infinite worth. As God, Jesus did not have to die. In dying he did something God would never have to do. Because he was sinless, he did not have to die in

payment for his own sins. Thus his death can atone for the sins of all of humankind.

The Old Testament Sacrificial System

Christ's atoning death must also be seen against the background of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Before Christ's atoning death, it was necessary for sacrifices to be regularly offered to compensate for the sins that had been committed. These sacrifices were necessary, not to work a reformation in the sinner, nor to deter the sinner or others from committing further sin, but to atone for the sin, which inherently deserved punishment. There had been offense against God's law and hence against God himself, and this had to be set right.

The Hebrew word most commonly used in the Old Testament for the various types of atonement is כִּפֶּר (*kaphar*) and its derivatives. The word literally means "to cover."[1350] One was delivered from punishment by the interposing of something between one's sin and God. God then saw the atoning sacrifice rather than the sin. The covering of the sin meant that the penalty no longer had to be exacted from the sinner.[1351]

It should be noted that the sacrifice had an objective effect. Sacrifices were offered to appease God. Job's friends, for example, were instructed to bring a sacrifice so that God would not deal with them according to their folly. God had been angered by the fact that they had not spoken of him what is right (Job 42:8). Further, a sacrifice was offered as a substitute for the sinner.[1352] It bore the sinner's guilt. For the sacrifice to be effective, there had to be some connection, some point of commonality, between the victim and the sinner for whom it was offered.

Several other factors were necessary for the sacrifice to accomplish its intended effect. The sacrificial animal had to be spotless, without blemish. The one for whom atonement was being made had to present the animal and lay his hands on it: "You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. . . . You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you" (Lev. 1:3–4). This bringing of the animal and laying on of hands constituted a confession of guilt on the part of the sinner. The laying on of hands symbolized a transfer of the guilt from the sinner to the victim.[1353] Then the offering or sacrifice was accepted by the priest.

While the legal portions of the Old Testament typify with considerable clarity the sacrificial and substitutionary character of Christ's death, the prophetic passages go even further. They establish the connection between the Old Testament sacrifices and Christ's death. Isaiah 53 is the clearest of all. Having

described the person of the Messiah and indicated the nature and extent of sinners' iniquity, the prophet makes an allusion to Christ's sacrifice: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). The iniquity of sinners is transferred to the suffering servant, just as in the Old Testament rites the sins were transferred to the sacrificial animal. The laying on of hands was an anticipation of the believer's active acceptance of Christ's atoning work.

The New Testament Teaching

The Gospels

The New Testament is much more detailed on the subject of Christ's atonement. We will look first at our Lord's own testimony regarding the nature and purpose of his death. Although Jesus did not have a great deal to say about this death during the first part of his ministry, toward the end he began to speak about it quite explicitly and clearly. These teachings were not elicited by chance questions from Jesus's disciples or challenges by his enemies, but were delivered purposely, at his own initiative.

Jesus strongly believed that the Father had sent him to do the Father's work. He declares in John 10:36 that the Father has sent him into the world. In John 6:38 he says, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." The apostle John expressly relates the sending by the Father to the Son's redemptive and atoning work: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). The point in stressing that the Son was sent by the Father is to make it clear that the Son's work is not independent of, or in contrast to, what the Father does. Nor was Christ's death a punishment administered by an impassive judge on an innocent third party. The Father was personally involved, for the penalty fell on his own Son, whom he had voluntarily sent and who had voluntarily gone.

Jesus had a powerful conviction that his life and death constituted a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In particular, he interpreted his own life and death as a clear fulfillment of Isaiah 53. At the Last Supper he said, "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37). By citing Isaiah 53:12, he identified himself as the suffering servant. His frequent references to his suffering make it clear that he saw his

death as the primary reason for his having come. He plainly told his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the religious authorities, and be killed (Mark 8:31). Even early in his ministry he alluded to his suffering by speaking of the time when the bridegroom would be taken away (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19–20). And indeed, upon descending from the mount of transfiguration, at one of the high points in his ministry, he said, "In the same way [like Elijah] the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands" (Matt. 17:12).

Without specifying to whom the ransom was to be paid, or from whose control the enslaved were to be freed, Jesus indicated that his giving of his life was to be the means by which many would be freed from bondage (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). The word λύτρον (*lutron*—"ransom") with its cognates is used nearly 140 times in the Septuagint, usually with the thought of deliverance from some sort of bondage in exchange for the payment of compensation or the offering of a substitute.[1354]

Christ also saw himself as our *substitute*. This concept is particularly prominent in the Gospel of John. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). He was, of course, stating a principle of broad application; he was commending to his disciples that they show to one another such love as he had shown them. But inasmuch as he was speaking on the eve of his crucifixion, there can be little doubt of what was on his mind.

There are other indications that Jesus saw himself in the role of a sacrifice. He said in his great high priestly prayer: "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:19). The verb here is ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*), a term common in sacrificial contexts. C. K. Barrett says, "The language is equally appropriate to the preparation of a priest and the preparation of a sacrifice; it is therefore doubly appropriate to Christ."[1355]

John the Baptist's statement at the beginning of Jesus's ministry carries similar connotations—"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The apostle John also records Caiaphas's sneering remark to the Sanhedrin: "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:49–50). The point of interest is not the attitude of Caiaphas, but the deep truth Caiaphas had unknowingly spoken. Jesus would die not merely in the place of the nation, but of the entire world. Significantly, John calls attention to this remark of Caiaphas a second time (18:14).

Jesus had a profound sense that he was the source and giver of true life. He says in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." The giving of eternal life is here

linked to both the Father and the Son. We can receive this life through an especially close relationship to the Son, which he also symbolically referred to as "eating his flesh." In John 6 he speaks of "the true bread" (v. 32), "the bread of life" (vv. 35, 48), "the bread that comes down from heaven" (v. 50). He then makes clear what he has been talking about: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). To have eternal life, we must eat his flesh and drink his blood (vv. 52–58). Jesus saw a definite connection between our having life and his giving his life for us.

To sum up what Jesus and the Gospel writers said about his death: Jesus saw a close identification between himself and his Father. He spoke regularly of the Father's having sent him. He and the Father are one, and so the work that the Son did was also the work of the Father. Jesus came for the purpose of giving his life as a *ransom*, a means of liberating those people who were enslaved to sin. He offered himself as a *substitute* for them. Paradoxically, his death gives life; we obtain it by taking him into ourselves. His death was a *sacrifice* typified by the Old Testament sacrificial system. These various motifs are vital elements in our construction of the doctrine of the atonement.

The Pauline Writings

When we turn to Paul's writings, we find a rich collection of teachings on the atonement, teachings that agree with what the Gospels say on the subject. Paul also identifies and equates Jesus's love and working with that of the Father. Numerous texts can be cited: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19); "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3); "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Thus, like the Gospel writers and Jesus himself, Paul does not view the atonement as something Jesus did independently of the Father; it is the work of both. Furthermore, what Paul says of the Father's love, he also says of the Son's: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14); "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2). The love of the Father and that of the Son are interchangeable. George Ladd comments: "The idea that the cross expresses the love of Christ for us while he wrings atonement from a stern and unwilling

Father, perfectly just, but perfectly inflexible, is a perversion of New Testament theology."[1356]

Having said this, however, we must note that the theme of divine wrath on sin is also prominent in Paul. It is important to realize, for example, that Romans 3:21–26, a passage about the redemption God has provided in Jesus Christ, is the culmination of a process of reasoning that began with the pronouncement of God's wrath against sin: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom. 1:18). God's holiness requires that there be atonement if the condemned condition of sinners is to be overcome. The love of God provides that atonement.

Paul frequently thought of and referred to the death of Christ as a sacrifice. In Ephesians 5:2 he describes it as "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In 1 Corinthians 5:7 he writes, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." His numerous references to Christ's blood also suggest a sacrifice: there was "a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:25); "we have now been justified by his blood" (Rom. 5:9); "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7); we "have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13); he has reconciled to himself all things, "making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:20). Ladd has pointed out, however, that there was very little actual shedding of Christ's blood as such.[1357] While there was a loss of blood when the crown of thorns was put on his head and when the nails were driven into his flesh, it was not until after he had died that blood (mixed with water) gushed forth (John 19:34). So the references to Christ's blood are not to his actual physical blood per se, but to his death as a sacrificial provision for our sins.

The apostle Paul also maintains that Christ died for us or on our behalf. God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32); "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2); Christ became a "curse for us" (Gal. 3:13); he "died for us" (1 Thess. 5:10). Later in this chapter we will inquire whether Christ's death was merely for our sakes, that is, on our behalf, or actually substitutionary, that is, in our place.

Finally, Paul regards Christ's death as propitiatory, that is, Christ died to appease God's wrath against sin. This point has been questioned, especially by C. H. Dodd in his book *The Bible and the Greeks*. Dodd bases his argument on the way the verb ἱλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*) and its cognates are used in the Septuagint. He contends that it is not propitiation but expiation that is in view in verses like Romans 3:25: "The meaning conveyed (in accordance with LXX

usage which is constantly determinative for Paul) is that of expiation, not that of propitiation. Most translators and commentators are wrong."[1358] God was not appeased by the death of Christ. Rather, what Christ accomplished in dying was to cleanse sinners of their sin, to cover their sin and uncleanness. Dodd builds his case not only upon linguistic but also upon more generally theological considerations. A. G. Hebert adds that "it cannot be right to think of God's wrath as being 'appeased' by the sacrifice of Christ, as some 'transactional' theories of the atonement have done because it is God who in Christ reconciles the world to himself. . . . It cannot be right to make any opposition between the wrath of the Father and the love of the Son."[1359]

Despite the position taken by Dodd, Ladd has argued that ἱλάσκομαι does indeed refer to propitiation. He makes four points in rebuttal:[1360]

1. In nonbiblical Hellenistic Greek authors such as Josephus and Philo, the word uniformly means "to propitiate." This is also true of its use in the apostolic fathers. Leon Morris has said, "If the translators and the New Testament writers evolved an entirely new meaning of the word group, it perished with them and was not resurrected until our own day."[1361]

2. In three places in the Septuagint ἐξιλάσκομαι (*exilaskomai*) refers to propitiating or appeasing God (Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9). Dodd's comment on these passages is that there appears to be something exceptional about the usage of the word here.[1362]

3. While the word is seldom used in the Septuagint with "God" as its direct object, it must also be noted that it is *never* used in the Old Testament with the word *sin* as its direct object.

4. There are many places in the Old Testament where, while not actually used of appeasing the wrath of God, the word appears in a context in which the wrath of God is in view.

From the foregoing considerations, it appears questionable whether Dodd's conclusions, influential though they have been, are accurate. His conclusions may well have resulted from an inaccurate conception of the Trinity, a misconception that betrays itself in his failure to take very seriously the contrary evidence in such passages as Zechariah 7:2; 8:22; and Malachi 1:9.

In contradiction to Dodd, we note that there are passages in Paul's writings that cannot be satisfactorily interpreted if we deny that God's wrath needed to be appeased. This is particularly true of Romans 3:25–26. In the past, God had left sins unpunished. He could conceivably be accused of overlooking sin since he had not required punishment for it. Now, however, he has put forth Jesus as ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*). This proves both that God is just (his wrath required

the sacrifice) and that he is the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (his love provided the sacrifice for them).

The numerous passages that speak of the wrath (ὀργή—*orgē*) of God against sin are evidence that Christ's death was necessarily propitiatory: Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5; Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; and 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:16; 5:9. So then, Paul's idea of the atoning death (Christ as ἱλαστήριον—*hilastērion*) is not simply that it covers sin and cleanses from its corruption (expiation), but that the sacrifice also appeases a God who hates sin and is radically opposed to it (propitiation).

The Basic Meaning of Atonement

Having reviewed the Bible's direct teaching on the subject of the atonement, we need now to concentrate on its basic motifs.

Sacrifice

We have already noted several references to the death of Christ as a sacrifice. These occur in the Old Testament (specifically Isa. 53), in Christ's teachings and the Gospel narratives, and in Paul. We will now supplement our understanding of this concept by noting particularly what the book of Hebrews says on the subject. In Hebrews 9:6–15 the work of Christ is likened to the Old Testament Day of Atonement. Christ is depicted as the high priest who entered into the Holy Place to offer sacrifice. But the sacrifice Christ offered was not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood (v. 12). Thus he secured "eternal redemption." A vivid contrast is drawn between the sacrifice of animals, which had only a limited effect, and of Christ, whose death has eternal effect. Whereas the Mosaic sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, Christ's death was a once-for-all atonement for the sins of all humankind (v. 12).

A similar thought is expressed in Hebrews 10:5–18. Here again the idea is that instead of burnt offerings, the body of Christ was sacrificed (v. 5). This was a once-for-all offering (v. 10). Instead of the daily offering by the priest (v. 11), Christ "offered for all time one sacrifice for sins" (v. 12). In chapter 13, the writer likens the death of Christ to the sin offering of the Old Testament. Christ died to sanctify the people through his blood. We are therefore exhorted to go to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured (vv. 10–13).

What is unique about Christ's sacrifice, and very important to keep in mind, is that Christ is both the victim and the priest who offers it. What were two parties

in the Levitical system are combined in Christ. The mediation Christ began with his death continues even now in the form of his priestly intercession for us.

Propitiation

In our discussion of the Pauline material on the atonement, we noted the controversy over whether Christ's death was propitiatory. Here we must note that the concept of propitiation is not limited to Paul's writings. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the offering was made before the Lord, and there it took effect as well: "The priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for [the sinners] for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven" (Lev. 4:35). In view of God's anger against sin and the statement that the offering should be made to the Lord and forgiveness would follow, it follows that this verse points to an appeasement of God.[1363]

Substitution

We observed that Christ died for our sake or on our behalf. But is it proper to speak of his death as substitutionary; that is, did he actually die in our place?

Several considerations indicate that Christ did indeed take our place. First there is a whole set of passages that tell us that our sins were "laid upon" Christ, he "bore" our iniquity, he "was made sin" for us. One prominent instance is in Isaiah 53: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6); he "was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12). On seeing Jesus, John the Baptist exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul said, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21), and "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28). And evidently having Isaiah 53:5–6, 12 in mind, Peter wrote, "'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'" (1 Pet. 2:24). The common idea in these passages is that Jesus bore our sins—they were laid on him or transferred from us to him. Because he has come to be sin, we have ceased to be sin or sinners.

A further line of evidence is the prepositions used to designate the precise relationship between Christ's work and us. The preposition that most clearly suggests substitution is ἀντί (*anti*). This word in nonsoteriological contexts clearly means "instead of" or "in the place of." For example, Jesus asked, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?" (Luke 11:11). In Matthew 2:22 the word is used in connection with a son's succeeding his father: "Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod." And in 1 Corinthians 11:15 Paul observes that, it being improper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered (v. 13), she has been given her hair in place of a covering. When we look at passages where the preposition ἀντί is used to specify the relationship between Christ's death and sinners, this same idea of substitution is clearly present. A. T. Robertson observes that ἀντί means "in place of" or "instead of" when it occurs in contexts where "two substantives placed opposite to each other are equivalent and so may be exchanged."[1364] Thus, just as substitution is in view in the "eye for an eye" statement of Matthew 5:38, it is also in view in cases like Matthew 20:28: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Robertson says that important doctrinal passages like Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 "teach the substitutionary conception of Christ's death, not because ἀντί of itself means 'instead,' which is not true, but because the context renders any other resultant idea out of the question."[1365] The same idea emerges in 1 Timothy 2:6, where a different preposition (ὑπέρ—*huper*) is used, but ἀντί appears in a compounded form in the noun ἀντίλυτρον (*antilutron*—"ransom").

The other pertinent preposition is ὑπέρ. It has a variety of meanings, depending in part on the case with which it is used. The instances of ὑπέρ with the genitive case are of particular interest to us here. It has been asserted that ἀντί literally means "instead of" and ὑπέρ means "on behalf of." G. B. Winer, however, has said, "In most cases one who acts in behalf of another appears for him [1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:15], and hence ὑπέρ sometimes borders on ἀντί, instead of."[1366] On this idea that one who acts on behalf of another appears for the person, Robertson comments: "Whether he does or not depends on the nature of the action, not on ἀντί or ὑπέρ."[1367] Yet in the case of ostraca and papyri, the word ὑπέρ clearly means "instead of."[1368]

In some biblical passages—for example, Romans 5:6–8; 8:32; Galatians 2:20; and Hebrews 2:9—ὑπέρ may be taken in the sense of "on behalf of," although it probably means "instead of." In several other passages, however, notably John 11:50; 2 Corinthians 5:15; and Galatians 3:13, the meaning is more obvious. Regarding these verses Robertson says, "ὑπέρ has the resultant notion of

‘instead’ and only violence to the context can get rid of it.”[1369] It is not necessary that the meaning “instead of” be overt in every instance. For there is sufficient scriptural evidence that Christ’s death was substitutionary. Leon Morris comments:

> Christ took our place, as the sacrificial victim took the place of the worshipper. I realize that the significance of sacrifice is widely disputed, and that there are some who reject any substitutionary aspect. Here there is no space to go into the matter fully. I can only state dogmatically that in my judgment sacrifice cannot be satisfactorily understood without including an aspect of substitution. And Christ died as our sacrifice. He died accordingly as our substitute.[1370]

Reconciliation

The death of Christ also brings to an end the enmity and estrangement that exist between God and humankind. Our hostility toward God is removed. The emphasis in Scripture is usually that we are reconciled to God, that is, he plays the active role; he reconciles us to himself. On this basis, the advocates of the moral-influence theory have contended that such reconciliation is strictly God’s work.[1371] Are they right?

To answer, we need to note, first, that when the Bible entreats someone to be reconciled to another, the hostility does not necessarily lie with the person who is being addressed.[1372] Jesus’s statement in Matthew 5:23–24 bears out this contention: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift.” Note that the other person is the one who feels wronged and bears the animosity; there is no indication that the one who is offering the gift feels any such hostility. Yet it is the latter who is urged to be reconciled to the other. Similarly, although God is not the one bearing animosity, it is he who works to bring about reconciliation.

Another notable biblical reference in this regard is the word of Paul in Romans 11:15. The reconciliation of the world is now possible because of the casting off of the Jews. God takes the initiative, rejecting Israel from divine favor and the grace of the gospel. The reconciliation of the world (Gentiles) stands in contrast to the rejection of Israel. Reconciliation, then, is presumably God’s act as well, his act of receiving the world into his favor and of dealing specially with them. As important as it is for humans to turn to God, the process of reconciliation primarily involves God’s turning in favor toward them.

Objections to the Penal Substitution Theory

Over the years, a number of objections have been raised to the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. In recent years, the objections have been expanded and sharpened.[1373]

Distortion of the Nature of the Godhead

To some theologians, the idea of the wrath of God obscures the fundamental nature of God, namely, that he is love. An emphatic form of this criticism was given by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann: "The cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith."[1374] There is a dual criticism here, that the picture of a wrathful, judgmental God is unfaithful to the biblical picture, and that this is unjust, punishing an innocent person for the sins of others. This is a god who is angry, bloodthirsty, and must be appeased, a picture derived from pre-Christian views.[1375] A further dimension of the theological problem is the apparent division that it introduces between a gentle, loving Son, and a violent, judgmental Father. In reply we must note that the idea of a God seething with anger is a caricature of an anthropopathic depiction. Another facet of the objection relates to the concept of propitiation. That the loving Son wins over the Father from his anger and wrath against sin to a loving, forgiving spirit is seen as an indication of internal conflict within the mind of God or between the persons of the Trinity.[1376]

In answering this objection it is helpful to recall the numerous references indicating that the Father sent the Son to atone for sin. Christ was sent by the *Father's* love. So it is not the case that the propitiation changed a wrathful God into a loving God. As John Murray puts it, "It is one thing to say that the wrathful God is made loving. That would be entirely false. It is another thing to say the wrathful God is loving. That is profoundly true."[1377] The love that prompted God to send his Son was always there. While the Father's holiness and righteousness and justice required that there be a payment for sin, his love provided it. The propitiation is a fruit of the Father's divine love. This is indicated quite clearly in 1 John 4:10: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Propitiation therefore does not detract from God's love and mercy. It rather shows how great that love is. He could not overlook sin and still be God. But he

was willing to go as far as to offer his own Son in order to appease his wrath against sin. Had this wrath not been appeased, there would be no remission of sins. Thus, by requiring the payment of the penalty, God demonstrated how great are his holiness and justice. By providing that payment himself, he manifested the extent of his love. As Paul puts it in Romans 3:26, “He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” The cross is a fitting symbol of the atonement, for it represents the intersection of two attributes or facets of God’s nature. Here it is that God’s love meets his holiness. The holiness requires payment of the penalty, and the love provides that payment.

The Morality or Rightness of Substitution

The whole idea of the Father’s substituting his Son to bear our penalty is said to smack of unfairness and injustice. To use a courtroom analogy: suppose that a judge, upon finding a defendant guilty, proceeds to punish not the defendant, but an innocent party. Would this not be improper?[1378]

We should also observe that the one who provides the payment is the same one who requires it. This criticism is based on an unbiblical separation of the persons of the Trinity. The punishment for human sins is not something forced on an innocent and unwilling Son. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). He put it in even more explicit fashion in John 10:17–18: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” Jesus was not compelled by the Father to lay down his life. He did so voluntarily and thus pleased the Father. Taking someone who willingly volunteers is certainly preferable to conscripting someone for punishment.

The second answer is that the work of Jesus Christ in giving his life also involved the Father. Several texts indicate that because the Father and the Son are one, Christ’s work is also the Father’s (John 5:17–19; 10:27–29; 14:7–11, 23, 30; Rom. 8:35, 39). Thus, the Father did not place the punishment on someone other than himself. It is clear that God is both the judge and the person paying the penalty. In terms of our courtroom analogy, it is not as if the judge passes sentence on the defendant, and some innocent and hitherto uninvolved party then volunteers to pay the fine or serve the sentence. Rather, it is as if the judge passes sentence on the defendant, then removes his robes and goes off to serve the sentence in the defendant’s place.

Divine Hypocrisy

Further, some argue that God is guilty of saying, in effect, "Do as I say, not as I do." Although believers are expected to forgive without exacting punishment for wrongs done to them, God does not do so. Why does God not simply forgive sins? Why does he require payment of a pound of flesh, as it were?[1379]

Those who raise this objection have failed to consider who God really is. God is not merely a private person who has been wronged but is also the official administrator of the judicial system. As a private person he could in a sense forgive offenses against himself, just as humans forgive one another. But for God to remove or ignore the guilt of sin without requiring a payment would in effect destroy the very moral fiber of the universe, the distinction between right and wrong. An additional problem is that God is a being of infinite or perfect holiness and goodness. An offense against him is much more serious than an offense against an ordinary sinful human. When someone sins against us, we are aware that the fault may at least in part be ours, and that we have on numerous other occasions sinned against others, and probably against the very person who is presently wronging us. But with God, who does not tempt or do wrong, there is no such element of imperfection to make our sin seem less dreadful.

The Culturally Conditioned Nature of the Theory

Although those who hold the view believe that this is clearly taught by the Scriptures, it actually grew up in a period in which society was structured on the basis of feudalism. In Anselm's version, from which the modern penal satisfaction views are derived, the owing of honor to the feudal lord became a very important matter. Thus, Anselm came to conceive of the individual's relationship to God on that model.[1380] Although he lived in a different era, Charles Hodge's penal substitution view draws heavily on Anselm's assumptions.[1381] The view hinders the church's mission. The whole idea of a vengeful God is offensive to persons today. Some critics contend that the popularity of the penal substitutionary view is tied to a modern view, and as such has little to say to a postmodern world.[1382]

There is an element of truth in this criticism. It does offer at least a partial explanation of why certain views of the atonement gained popular acceptance at a particular time and situation. However, it confuses the explanation of something occurring with the reason for its truth. The alternative is to say that all views of the atonement are simply conditioned. On this interpretation, any view of the atonement is valid in a certain context, but not in others. The critics,

however, seem to direct their criticism almost exclusively against just one view of the atonement. Further, like most postmodern criticisms of this type, they do not consider the implications of this criticism for the criticism itself. Green and Baker, for example, speak of their own view as "the biblical view," not acknowledging any element of conditionedness in their position.[1383]

It is true that this conception of a holy God is unacceptable to many persons today. It should be noted, however, that to some extent this has always been the case. There is and will always be a scandal to the gospel. While we must be careful not to state the doctrine in an unnecessarily offensive fashion, we also cannot accommodate the biblical view to an anthropocentric and in some ways libertarian culture without in the process making it something less than God's revealed truth.

Too Individualistic a View

Some criticize the emphasis on the individual's relationship to God, and individual sins, to the neglect of the broader societal dimensions of sin. Beyond that, it is far too Western in its origins and its tone to be acceptable to persons in other parts of the world, particular those in shame-based, rather than guilt-based, societies.[1384] To be sure, just as a missionary must begin with the recipient's language, so certain aspects of the multifaceted explanation of the atonement may need to be used as the beginning of the conversation. Yet the penal substitution dimension of the atonement is more than just a Western concept; it is based on the Scripture itself.

The Penal Substitution Theory in Relation to the Other Theories

We observed, in the preceding chapter, that each of the theories of the atonement contains a valid insight. It is our contention that the penal substitution theory maintains those valid insights. Beyond that, we would argue that those other insights bear force only on the basis of the substitutionary view.

The Atonement as Example

The Socinian view of the atonement contends that the value of Christ's death is in giving us an example of the kind of life that we should live, and especially the type of dedication that should characterize us; but would that example have

any real validity if Christ had not died *for us*? Suppose that we could have been saved apart from his substitutionary death. What, then, would have been the purpose of his dying? Would it not have been a foolish thing for Christ to do? And what of the moral character of the Father, if he had required Christ to die even though humans owed no payment for sin?

Consider this illustration. Suppose that a house is on fire. The parents have escaped, only to discover that their infant child is still within the burning house. Physically overcome, they are unable to reenter the home. A firefighter, however, rushes into the house, saves the child, but in the process is himself overcome and dies. This would certainly be considered a beautiful example of love for one's fellow human at a disregard for one's own safety. It would indeed be inspiring to others. But suppose there is no child in the house, and the parents insist that there is no child, and the firefighter himself believes that no one is in the house. If he nonetheless rushed into the house and died, would we be impressed by the example, or would we consider it a case of foolhardiness? No one would want to emulate such an example and, indeed, no one ought to. And what of a superior who would order a firefighter into the flames just to give an example of how dedicated firefighters should be and to what lengths they should be willing to go in the call of duty? Should anyone follow such an order? Yet Christ's death represents this type of situation if the purpose of the atonement was not to pay the penalty for our sins but simply to give us an example. On the other hand, if there really is a child in the house, not only is the child saved, but we are given an example of bravery and unselfishness. Similarly, if humanity is guilty of sin and condemned to death, and Christ has laid down his life in the place of the human race, not only are we saved, but we are given an example of how to live. The death of Christ is an example, but only if it also is a substitutionary sacrifice.

The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love

A similar argument holds with respect to the moral-influence theory of the atonement. It is true that Christ's death is a powerful demonstration of the love of God and therefore a strong motivating incentive to us to love God and be reconciled to him. But, once again, the valid insight of the theory is dependent on the fact that he died *for us*.

According to the moral-influence theory, Christ's death was not necessary in an objective sense. That is to say, God could have forgiven us our sins without the death of Jesus. There was no inherent obstacle to his simply forgiving us or, more correctly, simply accepting us back into fellowship with him. There was no

need for retribution. But in that case, would we look upon Christ's death as a demonstration of love or an act of foolishness?

If you and I are having an argument on the bank of a stream, and you fall into the water and are in danger of drowning, and I, at great danger to my life, leap into the water to rescue you, my action will be regarded as a demonstration of love. But if you are standing safely on the bank of the stream, and I say, "See how much I love you!" and leap into the water and begin to thrash around, my action will not move you to love me or forgive me or be reconciled to me. You may well conclude that I am emotionally and mentally unstable.

So it is with the atonement. Christ's death is a beautiful demonstration of God's love and thus a powerful incentive to us to abandon our hostility toward God and respond in repentance and faith to the offer of grace. But it is effective as a demonstration of love precisely because we were lost and God cared enough about our condition to offer his Son as a sacrifice. If the atonement were not needed to rescue us from our sins, then it would be less of a demonstration of God's concern for humans than of concern for himself. For in that case its major purpose would be to put an end to our grudges.

The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Justice

The prime concern of the governmental theory is to maintain the justice of God. It sees the atonement as essentially a demonstration of God's justice. To establish that the law is righteous and that violation of the law has serious consequences, God had to make an example of someone. Hence the death of Christ. It was not that Christ in any sense took our place or offered a sacrifice that had to be made. Nor was any element of punishment involved. It was simply to demonstrate the serious consequences of sin and thus to move us to repentance that Christ was put to death.

But, we must ask, is violation of the law or, in other words, sin, really so serious if God can forgive without requiring some form of penalty or punishment? And if he can, was Christ's death really necessary? It would seem, rather, that a great and unnecessary injustice has been done, and Christ was the victim. Would anyone really be moved to love and serve such a God? If Christ's death did not involve his bearing our punishment in order to redeem us, there was no justice in it!

In the substitutionary theory, by contrast, there is no such problem, because it sees the death of Christ as something required by the law, unless, of course, the law was to be carried out in the strictest sense, namely, the suffering and death of all sinners. Here the seriousness of the law is seen in the fact that it required

something as radical as the death of the very Son of God. Would Christ have offered himself to death if there had been any other way of resolving humanity's problems? Thus, the substitutionary theory puts heavy emphasis on God's righteousness and holiness. But the fullness of his love is also clearly seen in what God was willing to do to redeem us.

The Atonement as Triumph over Evil

Finally, we note that the theme of God's triumph over Satan and the forces of evil is also preserved by the penal substitution theory. According to the ransom or classic theory, this victory was obtained by offering Jesus as a ransom to Satan, who, under the self-delusion that he could hold the Son of God, agreed to release humankind. The penal substitution theory likewise affirms that victory over evil was won by Christ's giving of himself as a ransom—but to the requirements of God's justice, not to Satan.

Would the payment of Jesus as a ransom to Satan have in itself been sufficient to break the evil one's power? To answer that question, it is necessary (1) to determine the root of Satan's power, what it is that enabled him to hold humanity under his control and domination, and (2) to specify what had to be done to liberate humans from his grasp. We note that the name *Satan* literally means "accuser." He induces us to sin so that he can lay accusations against us and bring us under the condemnation and curse of the law. This is the essence of his power over us. Accordingly, if we are to be liberated from his power, we must be freed from the condemnation of the law.

Now the message of the cross is that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and thus freed us from the slavery in which Satan held us. The Bible makes it clear that we are freed from the curse of the law precisely because Christ took our place; in him our penalty has been paid; in him we have died and been made alive again. In dying with Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6–8). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). There is no one (including Satan) who can condemn, for God justifies us, and Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, intercedes for us (vv. 31–34). Thus, Paul can challenge the power of death and sin (1 Cor. 15:55–57). Christ has fulfilled the law for us, and therefore sin no longer has the power of death.

If Christ's death, on the other hand, had been nothing more than the payment of a ransom to Satan, the law would not have been fulfilled in the process and Satan would not have been defeated. It was not the payment of a ransom to Satan

that ensured his defeat and the triumph of God, but Christ's taking our place to free us from the curse of the law. By bearing the penalty of our sin and thus satisfying once and for all the just requirements of the law, Christ nullified Satan's control over us at its root—the power to bring us under the curse and condemnation of the law. Christ's death, then, was indeed God's triumph over the forces of evil, but only because it was a substitutionary sacrifice.[1385]

The Implications of Substitutionary Atonement

The substitutionary theory of the atoning death of Christ, when grasped in all its complexity, is a rich and meaningful truth. It carries several major implications for our understanding of salvation:

1. The penal substitution theory confirms the biblical teaching of the total depravity of all humans. God would not have gone so far as to put his precious Son to death had it not been absolutely necessary. Humans are totally unable to meet their own need.

2. God's nature is not one-sided, nor is there any tension between its different aspects. He is not merely righteous and demanding, nor merely loving and giving. He is righteous, so much so that sacrifice for sin had to be provided. He is loving, so much so that he provided that sacrifice himself.

3. There is no other way of salvation but by grace and, specifically, the death of Christ. It has an infinite value and thus covers the sins of all humankind for all time. A finite sacrifice, by contrast, cannot even fully cover the sins of the individual offering it.

4. There is security for the believer in his or her relationship to God. For the basis of the relationship, Christ's sacrificial death, is complete and permanent. Although our feelings might change, the ground of our relationship to God remains unshaken.

5. We must never take lightly the salvation we have. Although it is free, it is also costly, for it cost God the ultimate sacrifice. We must therefore always be grateful for what he has done; we must love him in return and emulate his giving character.

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

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The Extent of the Atonement

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and determine the extent of the atonement for humanity.
2. Identify and describe the view of particular atonement.
3. Identify and describe the view of universal atonement.
4. Explain how the tension between particular and universal atonement might be resolved.
5. Identify and determine the extent for which the atonement was intended.

Chapter Summary

There has been some disagreement over the extent of the atonement. For some, the atonement has an intent to those whom God had chosen to be saved. The conflicting view states that salvation is available for all through the atonement. In light of the evidence for both arguments, it seems most reasonable to suggest that God logically decides first to provide salvation for all of humanity, then elects some to receive it. The question of what the atonement was intended to accomplish became more prominent in the twentieth century. It is important to note, in discussing the atonement, that sickness and sin were not both borne by Christ on the cross. Rather, healing is a supernatural act introduced like

any other miracle. It cannot be expected that each instance of a request for healing will be granted in the same manner as the forgiveness of sins. For the believer, the earthly body is temporary.

Study Questions

- What scriptural evidence do proponents of particular and universal atonement present?
- What is the view of particular atonement, and what problems can be drawn from its conclusions?
- What is the view of universal atonement, and what problems can be drawn from its conclusions?
- How would you explain a resolution to the alternative views of atonement?
- What relationship may be found between sickness and sin regarding the atonement?

Outline

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Having arrived at our conclusion regarding the nature of the atonement, we still have a determination to make as to its extent. There are two issues here. The first is a classical issue: For whom did Christ die? Did he die for the sins of the entire world, or only for those of the select group chosen by God to be recipients of his saving grace, namely, the elect? The second is an issue that attained some prominence in the twentieth century; namely, For what did Christ die? Was the purpose of his death solely to deliver us from our sins, from spiritual evils? Or did he die to deliver us from sickness as well? That is, did he die to remove physical as well as spiritual evils?

For Whom Did Christ Die?

When evangelicals ask the question “For whom did Christ die?” they are not asking whether the death of Christ has value sufficient to cover the sins of all persons. There is total agreement on this matter.[1386] Since the death of Christ was of infinite value, it is sufficient regardless of the number of elect. Rather, the question is whether God sent Christ to die to provide salvation for all persons or simply for those whom he had chosen.

Particular Atonement

Many Calvinists believe that the purpose of Christ’s coming was not to make possible the salvation of all humans, but to render certain the salvation of the elect. There are several elements in their argument.

First, there are Scripture passages that teach that Christ’s death was “for his people”; from such passages particularists infer that Christ did not die for everyone. One of these is the angel’s promise to Joseph in Matthew 1:21: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” There is also a whole collection of statements by Jesus regarding his sheep, his people, his friends. In John 10 Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11); “I lay down my life for the sheep” (v. 15). In verses 26–27 Jesus makes clear who “the sheep” are: “but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Jesus gives his life for those who respond to him. This does not say that he is giving his life for any others, for those who are not numbered among his sheep. Moreover, in urging his disciples to emulate his love, Jesus does not speak of dying for the whole world, but for one’s friends: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

The imagery varies. Christ is also spoken of as having died for the church or for his church. Paul urged the Ephesian elders: “Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The same apostle encouraged husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). And Paul wrote to the Romans that God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32). It is apparent from both the preceding (vv. 28–29) and the following (v. 33) contexts that those for whom God gave up his Son are those who believe in him, that is, the elect.

Particularists also deduce the concept of limited atonement from other doctrines, for example, the doctrine of Christ’s intercessory work. R. B. Kuiper

argues that John 17:9, which deliberately limits to the elect the focus of Christ's high priestly prayer ("I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours"), sheds a great deal of light on the issue currently under discussion. Kuiper contends that inasmuch as Christ's intercession and sacrifice are both priestly activities, two aspects of his atoning work, the one cannot apply to more people than does the other. Since Christ prayed exclusively for those whom the Father had given him, it follows that they are the only ones for whom he died.[1387] Thus Kuiper maintains that what is taught explicitly in the other passages cited is implicit within this passage, namely, that Christ died only for the elect.

Louis Berkhof takes this argument even further, stressing that atonement is the basis of Christ's intercessory work, part of which consisted of the presentation of his atoning sacrifice to the Father. It was on the basis of the atonement that he expected all of the blessings of salvation to be applied to those for whom he was praying. And his prayers were always effective (see John 11:42—"I knew that you always hear me"). In John 17:9 he is praying that the work of redemption will be realized in all those for whom he will make atonement. The intercession being dependent on the atonement, he does not pray for those not covered by the atonement. Since the intercession is limited in extent, the atonement must be too. Similarly, in John 17:24 he prays, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am." Here again we must conclude that since Christ prays only for those whom the Father has given him, it must be only for them that he died.[1388] Charles Hodge advances a similar argument based on Jesus's fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood. Jesus prays only for those for whom he atones, and atones only for those for whom he prays.[1389]

A second inferential argument is from the nature of the atonement. The nature of a ransom (Matt. 20:28 and Mark 10:45) is such that, when paid and accepted, it automatically frees those for whom it is intended. No further obligation can be charged against them. Now if the death of Christ was a ransom for all alike, not just for the elect, then it must be the case that all are set free by the work of the Holy Spirit.[1390] Yet Scripture tells us that those who do not accept Christ are not redeemed from the curse of the law. If the death of Christ was a universal ransom, it seems that in their case a double payment for sin is required.

An additional consideration is that the doctrines of limited atonement and election have historically been linked together. According to Hodge, the two were never separated, going at least as far back as Augustine. A similar statement can be made about the Lutheran theologians during and after the Reformation, many of whom were also Augustinian. These historical

considerations suggest to Hodge that being a consistent Augustinian requires a Calvinist to hold to particular or limited atonement.[1391]

Recent advocates of particular atonement contend that the connection is not merely one of historical fact, but also of logical necessity. As Hodge puts it, "if God from eternity determined to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a contradiction to say that the plan of salvation had equal reference to both portions; that the Father sent His Son to die for those whom He had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense that He gave Him up for those whom He had chosen to make the heirs of salvation."[1392] The argument almost seems to be that it would have been a waste and a lack of foresight on the part of God to have Christ die for those whom he had not chosen to salvation. This assumes that separating particular election from limited atonement involves an inherent contradiction.

Universal Atonement

In contrast with the foregoing position is the contention that God intended the atonement to make salvation possible for all persons. Christ died for all persons, but his atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual. While this is the view of all Arminians, it is also the position of some Calvinists.

Those who hold this theory also appeal to Scripture for support. They point first of all to various passages that speak of the death of Christ or the atonement in universal terms, in particular, those that speak of Christ as dying for the sins "of the world." John the Baptist introduced Jesus with the words, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The apostle John explains the coming of Christ in universal terms: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16–17). Paul speaks in a similar fashion of Jesus's dying for all: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14–15). In 1 Timothy 4:10 he speaks of the living God, "who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe." This is a particularly interesting and significant verse, since it seems to indicate a difference in the salvation accomplished for believers and for others.[1393]

The General Epistles likewise speak of Christ's death as universal in intent. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus "was made a little lower than the

angels, . . . so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). There are in 1 John two statements reminiscent of the Gospel of John in that they refer to Christ's death as being for the world: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:1–2); "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (4:14).

Two additional passages are especially significant. The first is the prophetic passage in Isaiah 53:6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." This passage is especially powerful from a logical standpoint. It is clear that the extent of sin is universal; it is specified that *every one* of us has sinned. It should also be noticed that the extent of what will be laid on the suffering servant exactly parallels the extent of sin. It is difficult to read this passage and not conclude that just as everyone sins, everyone is also atoned for.

Equally compelling is 1 Timothy 2:6, where Paul says that Christ Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all people." This is to be compared with the original statement in Matthew 20:28, where Jesus had said that the Son of Man came "to give his life as a ransom for many." In 1 Timothy, Paul makes a significant advance upon the words of Jesus. "His life" (τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ—*tēn psuchēn autou*) becomes "himself" (ἑαυτὸν—*heauton*); the word for "ransom" (λύτρον—*lutron*) appears in compound form (ἀντίλυτρον—*antilutron*). But most significantly here, "for many" (ἀντὶ πολλῶν—*anti pollōn*) becomes "for all" (ὑπὲρ πάντων—*huper pantōn*). When Paul wrote, the words of the tradition (i.e., as they appear in Matthew) may well have been familiar to him. If so, he made a deliberate point of emphasizing that the ransom was universal in its purpose.

A second class of biblical material is those passages that seem to indicate that some of those for whom Christ died will perish. Two passages speak of a brother's being injured or ruined or destroyed by the actions of a believer. In Romans 14:15 Paul says, "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:11 he concludes, "So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge." An even stronger statement is Hebrews 10:29: "How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" While there may be

some dispute as to both the exact spiritual condition of the persons referred to in these verses and the precise results for them of the acts therein described, 2 Peter 2:1 seems to point out most clearly that people for whom Christ died may be lost: “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.” Taken together, these texts make an impressive presentation that those for whom Christ died and those who are finally saved are not coextensive.[1394]

The third class of Scripture passages sometimes cited consists of passages indicating that the gospel is to be universally proclaimed. Prominent examples are Matthew 24:14 (“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”) and 28:19 (“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”). In Acts, two significant passages bear upon this issue: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8); and “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (17:30). Paul affirms that “the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people” (Titus 2:11).

Citing such texts, the proponents of universal atonement ask, If Christ died only for the elect, how can the offer of salvation be made to all persons without some sort of insincerity, artificiality, or dishonesty being involved? Is it not improper to offer salvation to everyone if in fact Christ did not die to save everyone?[1395] The problem is intensified when one observes the number of passages in which the offer of salvation is clearly unrestricted. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Peter describes the Lord as “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But how can this be if Christ died only for the elect? It scarcely can be the case that he is unwilling for the nonelect to perish, or that his invitation to all to come is sincere, if some are not really intended to come.

Finally, there seems to be a contradiction between the scriptural indications of God’s love for the world, for all persons, and the belief that Christ did not die for all of them. The best-known passage is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Moreover, Jesus’s statement that we are to love not only our friends (those who love us) but also our enemies (those who do evil to us)

would seem rather empty if Jesus were here requiring of his disciples what is not true of God himself. But Paul assures us that God does indeed love his enemies: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This love for one's enemies is seen particularly in Christ's conduct on the cross when he implored the Father, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). How can it be that Jesus was not dying for those people who actually crucified and tormented him, many of whom presumably never became believers in him?

One problem that plagues those who hold to universal atonement is the danger that their position on this matter might lead to belief in universal salvation. If Christ atoned for all persons, will not all humans be saved? This seems logical, especially in view of certain statements where the concepts of atonement and salvation are juxtaposed, for example, Romans 5:18: "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." The usual response is to say that Christ's death does not lead to "acquittal and life" in every case, but only for those who accept him.[1396] This particular passage must be understood in the light of Scripture's other teachings on the subject.

Evaluation and the Search for a Resolution

When we examine and evaluate the claims and arguments advanced by the two parties in this discussion, we note that much of what they say is not fully persuasive. One of the arguments for universal atonement consists of those verses stating that Christ died for "the world," or for "all people," or something similar. But such statements have to be interpreted in the light of their contexts. For example, the context of Romans 8:32, a verse stating that God gave up his Son "for us all," makes it clear that Paul actually has in view all those "who have been called according to his [God's] purpose" (v. 28), the predestined.

Conversely, the statements about Jesus's loving and dying for his church or his sheep need not be understood as confining his special love and salvific death strictly to them. Here, also, the context is important. Whenever Jesus is talking about his sheep and his relationship to them, it is only to be expected that he will connect his death specifically with their salvation; he will not comment on his relationship to those who are not his sheep. Similarly, when he is discussing the church and its Lord, it is to be expected that he will speak of his love for the church, not of his love for the world outside. Thus, it does not follow from a statement that Christ died for his church, for his sheep, that he did not die for

anyone else, unless, of course, the passage specifically states that it was *only* for them that he died.

The advocates of unlimited atonement also appeal to various passages suggesting that some of those for whom Christ died shall perish. Many of those passages, however, are ambiguous. This is particularly true of Romans 14:15, where it is not at all clear what is meant by the brother's "being distressed" or "destroyed." This does not necessarily entail actually being lost or failing to come to salvation. The meaning of the statement in 1 Corinthians 8:11 is not obvious either.

On the other side of the ledger, the attempt to establish limited atonement by deduction from other doctrines is not very persuasive either. From the fact that both Christ's intercessory work and his sacrificial work are aspects of the priestly function, it does not follow (as Kuiper contends) that they are simply two aspects of atonement. And while Christ's intercession in John 17 did, to a large extent, focus on concern that his atoning work be applied to those whom the Father had given him, it does not follow that this was his sole concern. Intercession is not limited to prayers that the work of redemption be realized, nor is it always dependent on atonement. Believers are urged to intercede for one another, apparently without having to make some form of atonement as well. In other words, there is a suppressed (and unsubstantiated) assumption present in Berkhof's argument.

Nor is the attempt to deduce limited atonement from the doctrine of election successful. For even if one holds that God has from all eternity chosen some members of the human race to be saved and others to be lost, it does not follow that the decision as to who are to be saved is logically prior to the decision to provide salvation in the person of Christ. It is generally assumed that all Calvinists regard the decision to save certain persons as logically prior to the decision to provide salvation. Berkhof, for example, takes this position when he writes, "What consistency would there be in God's electing certain persons unto life everlasting, then sending Christ into the world to make salvation possible for all men but certain for none?"[1397] On the other hand, Augustus Strong contests the assumption that all Calvinists regard the decision to elect as logically prior. He himself holds that the decision to provide salvation is prior, and he maintains that Calvin in his commentaries took a similar position.[1398] Unless it can be proved that the decision to elect is prior, limited atonement cannot be inferred from the doctrine of election.

Further, the argument from history is not persuasive. A historical link between the doctrines of election and limited atonement does not establish an indisputable logical connection between the two. At least in practice Calvin

himself separated the two when he was interpreting relevant passages of Scripture.[1399]

Having eliminated those unpersuasive considerations, we must now attempt to sift through the remaining arguments. We find that some of the verses that teach a universal atonement simply cannot be ignored. Among the most impressive is 1 Timothy 4:10, which affirms that the living God "is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe." Apparently the Savior has done something for all persons, though in lesser degree than what he has done for those who believe. Among the other texts that argue for the universality of Christ's saving work and which cannot be ignored are 1 John 2:2 and Isaiah 53:6.[1400] We must also consider statements like 2 Peter 2:1, which affirms that some for whom Christ died do perish.

To be sure, there are also those texts that speak of Christ's dying for his sheep and for the church. These texts, however, present no problem if we regard the universal passages as normative or determinative. Certainly if Christ died for the whole, there is no problem in asserting that he died for a specific part of the whole. To insist that those passages that focus on his dying for his people require the understanding that he died only for them and not for any others contradicts the universal passages. We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement.

The underlying issue here is the question of the efficacy of the atonement. Those who hold to limited atonement assume that if Christ died for someone, that person will actually be saved. By extension they reason that if Christ in fact died for all persons, all would come to salvation; hence the concept of universal atonement is viewed as leading to the universal-salvation trap. The basic assumption here, however, is that our inheriting eternal life does involve two separate factors: an objective factor (Christ's provision of salvation) and a subjective factor (our acceptance of that salvation). Those who hold to unlimited atonement see a possibility that someone for whom salvation is available may fail to accept it. Those who hold to limited atonement, however, see no such possibility. Although John Murray wrote a book titled *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, in actuality he and others of his doctrinal persuasion collapse the latter part, the application, into the accomplishment. This leads in turn to the conception that God regenerates the elect person, who then consequently believes.

Advocates of limited atonement face the somewhat awkward situation of contending that while the atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the non-elect, Christ did not die for them. It is as if God, in giving a dinner, prepared far

more food than was needed, yet refused to consider the possibility of inviting additional guests. Advocates of unlimited atonement, on the other hand, have no difficulty with the fact that Christ's death is sufficient for everyone, for, in their view, Christ died for all persons.

Is there some approach that can combine the insights of both of these positions into a coherent synthesis? I believe that such a position not only exists, but has existed for a long time, in the formula "sufficient for all; efficient only for the elect." First used by Peter Lombard, it reflects what was widely held during the Middle Ages and can be traced as far back as Prosper of Aquitaine (d. ca. 460). There is evidence that Calvin's view was something like this.[1401] P. L. Rouwendal terms this the universal component and the particular component in Calvin's thought, corresponding to the classical formula. Calvin did not really address the issues formulated in later debates, and what we know as the limited or particular atonement view was first really propounded by Beza in 1588, some twenty-four years after Calvin's death.[1402]

The issue is sometimes put in terms of God's intention in the death of Christ, or for whom Christ thought of himself as dying. This, however, confuses the question of the logical order of the eternal decrees with what was in Jesus's (and the Father's) mind at the time of Jesus's death, which took place in time, when they certainly knew whom they had elected to eternal life, and who would actually come to saving faith, and thus knew that Jesus's atoning death would have value only for these.

Interestingly, some Calvinists who identify their view as that of particular atonement now state it in a formula that acknowledges something quite similar to what we have just been describing, as "Jesus died for all people, but not for all people in the same way," which seems to draw support from 1 Timothy 4:10. Although it is not always clear what the different ways are, it appears that what is meant is that the death of Jesus provided salvation for all people, but actually accomplished it for the elect. For them, he did not merely make salvation available, but actually saved them: "When Christ died for these, he did not just create the opportunity for them to save themselves, but really purchased for them all that was necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith."[1403] This, however, appears to fuse what have traditionally been termed the doctrines of justification and regeneration with the doctrine of atonement, or to fuse the decree to provide atonement with the decree to elect some to salvation.

In reality, the question pertains more to the order of the decrees. If the decree to elect some to salvation is logically prior to the decree to provide salvation, then there is no need for that atonement to be for any other than the elect. If, on

the other hand, the decree to provide redemption logically precedes the decree to choose some to receive salvation, then the former is the intent that Christ would die for the sins of all humans.

For What Did Christ Atone?

The discussion to this point has assumed that the purpose of Christ's death was to remove the effects of sin, that is, guilt and condemnation. Thus, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation are the major results when the atonement is accepted and applied. But are these the only results that the atonement was intended to accomplish? In the twentieth century, another emphasis emerged.

There has been a remarkable growth of interest in the subject of spiritual healing of the body. This has come in three related but distinct stages of movements. The Pentecostal movement, which arose and grew in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, emphasized the return of certain of the more spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then, at about the middle of the century, the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement began; it had many of the same emphases. In the 1980s and 1990s, the "third wave" arose. These movements put greater stress on miracles of spiritual healing than does Christianity in general. In many cases they make no real attempt to give a theological explanation or basis for these healings. But when this question is raised, one answer often given is that healing, no less than forgiveness of sins and salvation, is to be found within the atonement. Christ died to carry away not only sin, but sickness as well. Among the major advocates of this view was A. B. Simpson, founder of what is today known as the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

One salient feature of the view that Christ's death brings healing for the body is the idea that the presence of illness in the world is a result of the fall. When sin entered the human race, a curse (actually a series of curses) was pronounced on humanity; diseases were part of that curse. According to Simpson and others, since illness is a result of the fall, not simply of the natural constitution of things, it cannot be combated solely by natural means. Being of spiritual origin, it must be combated in the same way as the rest of the effects of the fall: by spiritual means, and specifically by Christ's work of atonement. Intended to counter the effects of the fall, his death covers not only guilt for sin but sickness as well. Healing of the body is therefore part of our great redemption right.[1404]

Certain biblical texts are used to support this view, most notably Matthew 8:17. After the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, many sick people were brought

to Jesus. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. Matthew informs us, “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” It appears that in quoting Isaiah 53:4 Matthew is tying Christ’s healings to his death, for the following verse in Isaiah clearly refers to the atoning death of the Savior. On this basis it is concluded that Christ’s death, in addition to reversing the curse of sin, reversed the curse of disease as well, a curse that had been occasioned by the fall.

Matthew 8:17 has been interpreted in several ways:

1. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses. Matthew interprets Isaiah’s statement literally and sees its fulfillment in Christ’s work on the cross.[1405]
2. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of figurative sicknesses (our sins). Matthew interprets literally what was intended figuratively by Isaiah, applying to Jesus’s healing ministry an Old Testament passage concerning his bearing our sins.[1406]
3. Both Isaiah and Matthew are thinking of actual physical illnesses. In this respect both references are to be understood literally. In each case, however, what is in view is not a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses, a taking away of disease. Rather, the reference is to an empathy with our illnesses, a sharing in our hardships. There is a figurative element—but it has to do with Christ’s bearing of our diseases, not the diseases themselves.[1407]

Before we attempt to evaluate the position that Christ’s death covered sickness as well as sin, some basic issues must be resolved: What is the origin and cause of sickness? Further, is there some intrinsic connection between sickness and sin, and thus between Jesus’s healing of physical ailments and forgiveness of sin?

It appears that the origin of sickness in general was the fall, as a result of which a whole host of evils entered the world. Illnesses were among the curses God pronounced upon the people of Israel for their evildoing (Deut. 28:22). The whole creation was subjected to bondage and futility because of sin (Rom. 8:20–23). While some of the biblical descriptions of the curse on sin are not specific, it seems reasonable to trace the troubles now found among humans, including illness or disease, to this source.

In the ancient world there was a widespread belief that illness was either sent by the deity or caused by evil spirits. Even the people of Israel were subject to this superstition and took to the wearing of amulets to ward off sickness. Some

of them also believed that disease was a specific sign of divine disapproval, punishment for the individual's sin. Jesus did not accept or endorse this view. When, in the case of the man born blind, the disciples raised the question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus gave a straightforward reply: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:2–3). Obviously Jesus did not believe that illness is caused by an individual's sin—at least not in this particular instance.

Nor did Jesus link his healings of physical ailments to forgiveness of sin. In the instance mentioned, nothing is said about forgiveness. Jesus simply healed the blind man. To be sure, in many cases Jesus did correlate healing with forgiveness of sin, but it certainly cannot be said that he saw an intrinsic connection between sin and sickness.

What was the basis of Jesus's healings? In many cases, faith was required. This is what we would expect if sickness is the result of individual sin, for in that case physical healing would require forgiveness of the sin causing the sickness. Since faith is necessary for sins to be forgiven, faith would also be necessary for healing to occur. And indeed there are many cases where Jesus's act of healing depends on an exercise of faith by the person to be healed: the woman with an issue of blood for twelve years (Matt. 9:20–22), the ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19), and Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10:46–52). Occasionally, however, healing occurs upon the exercise of faith by some third party: the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24–30), of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5–13), and of the demoniac boy (Mark 9:14–29). In some of these cases, the person healed was capable of exercising faith himself or herself. In the matter of forgiveness of sin, however, the faith required is always that of the subject, not some other party. It therefore seems unlikely that the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, the centurion's servant, and the demoniac boy was connected with forgiveness of sins.

Let us now summarize what we have said to this point. The contention of Simpson and others of his persuasion is that diseases are a result of the fall and that Jesus by his atoning death negated not only the spiritual but also the physical consequences of sin. The underlying assumption seems to be that there is an intricate connection between sickness and sin, and hence they are to be combated in the same way. We have noted, however, that Jesus did not attribute every instance of disease to individual sin, nor were his acts of healing always connected with forgiveness of sin. For while faith appears to have been just as necessary for healing as for forgiveness, in the case of healing, unlike that of forgiveness, it did not always have to be faith on the part of the recipient of the

blessing. Apparently there is not as intimate a connection between sickness and individual sin, and hence between Jesus's acts of healing and forgiveness of sins, as Simpson assumed.

All of this, however, is merely preliminary to our examination of Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53:4. If the Bible teaches that Jesus by his death bore and took away our diseases, then healing is a blessing to which we are entitled, a gift we should claim. We begin our investigation with the passage in Isaiah: "Surely he took up our pain and carried our suffering." The first noun is חֳלָי (*chali*). The predominant meaning of the word is "physical sicknesses," although it can be used metaphorically, as in Isaiah 1:5 and Hosea 5:13.[1408] Isaiah placed it in an emphatic position in the sentence. The basic meaning of the verb נָשָׂא (*nasa'*) is "to lift (up)." Brown, Driver, and Briggs list almost two hundred instances in which the word has this meaning. They also list about sixty cases in which the word means "to take (away)" and nearly one hundred verses where it means "to bear, carry." Of those one hundred verses, only about thirty have reference to the bearing of guilt, and only six have reference to a vicarious bearing of guilt, one of them being the twelfth verse of Isaiah 53.[1409] So while נָשָׂא can refer to vicarious bearing, the more likely rendering in Isaiah 53:4 would be "has taken." It should also be noted that Isaiah did not put the verb in an emphatic position; it seems that what is really important is what the suffering servant has taken, not how he has taken it. The second substantive, מַכְאֹב (*mak'ob*), appears only fifteen times in the Old Testament; in three of those cases it seems to refer to physical pain.[1410] The basic idea conveyed by the word is mental pain, sorrow, or distress resulting from the toilsomeness of life, including its physical burdens. The likeliest meaning here, then, is mental sickness or distress (sorrow), perhaps as a result of physical infirmities. The second verb is סָבַל (*sabal*). It means basically "to carry a heavy load."[1411] Of nine occurrences in the Old Testament, two, Isaiah 53:11 and Lamentations 5:7, convey the idea of vicarious bearing, the former being the clearer. In the remaining instances, סָבַל means merely "carrying a load"; there is no connotation of vicariousness. Here again, just as in the first clause, the emphasis is on what the suffering servant has carried rather than on how he has carried it.

To summarize Isaiah 53:4: while several interpretations can be justified, the one that seems to suit the linguistic data best is that the prophet is referring to actual physical and mental illnesses and distresses, but not necessarily to a vicarious bearing of them. In Matthew's quotation of this passage, we find something very similar. The two nouns are ἀσθενείας (*astheneias*) and νόσους (*nosous*), both of which refer to physical conditions, the former emphasizing

especially the idea of weakness. The first verb, λαμβάνω (*lambanō*), is very common and colorless.[1412] It basically means "to take, lay hold of; to receive."[1413] Nowhere is it used in connection with vicarious bearing of guilt or anything similar. The second verb, βαστάζω (*bastazō*), is very close in meaning to סָבַל. It means "to bear or carry"; in none of its usages does it signify "to bear vicariously." In Galatians 6:2 it has the sense of "bearing one another's burdens sympathetically," and this is the likeliest meaning in Matthew 8:17 as well.[1414] Matthew, who frequently quoted from the Septuagint, has here changed the verbs, substituting the neutral λαμβάνω for φέρω (*pherō*), which could conceivably be translated "bore vicariously."

What we are suggesting here, then, is that both Matthew and Isaiah are referring to actual physical sicknesses and mental distresses rather than sins. They do not have in view, however, a vicarious bearing of these maladies. It seems likelier that they are referring to a sympathetic bearing of the troubles of this life. If this is the proper interpretation, Jesus "took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" by becoming incarnate rather than by offering atonement. By coming to earth, he entered into the very conditions that we find here, including sorrow, sickness, and suffering. Experiencing sickness and sorrow himself, and sympathizing as he did (σπλαγχνίζομαι—*splanchnizomai*) with human suffering, he was moved to alleviate the miseries of this life.

Note that this explanation of how Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled entails no chronological difficulties. On the other hand, there is a problem if we believe that the atonement is in view in the prophecy. For in that case it is hard to explain why Matthew quotes this verse in a context where he is describing acts of healing that occurred some time before Christ's death.

One other question that remains to be dealt with is the relationship of 1 Peter 2:24 to the passages that we have been discussing. This text reads: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross." It is clear that Peter is here speaking of sins, because he uses the most common word for sin, ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*), which is also the first noun in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 53:4. And the verb he chooses, ἀναφέρω, can definitely be used of substitutionary bearing. It is not at all clear, however, as some have supposed, that Peter is quoting Isaiah 53:4. He gives no indication that he is quoting. We do not find here the words "it is written" or any similar formula. It seems likelier that he is referring to the whole of Isaiah 53, particularly to verse 12.

To summarize: Jesus healed during his ministry on earth, and he heals today. That healing, however, is not to be thought of as a manifestation or application of a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses in the same fashion that he bore our sins.

Rather, his healing miracles are simply a matter of introducing a supernatural force into the realm of nature, just like any other miracle. In a general sense, of course, the atonement cancels all the effects of the fall. But some of the benefits will not be realized until the end of time (Rom. 8:19–25). We cannot expect, then, that in every case healing is to be granted upon request, as is forgiveness of sins. Paul learned this lesson (2 Cor. 12:1–10), and we must learn it as well. It is not always God's plan to heal. That fact will not trouble us if we but remember that we are not intended to live forever in this earthly body (Heb. 9:27).

PART 9
THE HOLY SPIRIT

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The Person of the Holy Spirit

Chapter Objectives

Following the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Express at least three reasons why the study of the Holy Spirit is important.
2. Cite reasons why understanding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been and continues to be difficult.
3. Trace the history of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the early church to the present.
4. Understand the nature (the deity and personality) of the Holy Spirit.
5. Assess the implications of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Summary

Because the Holy Spirit is not systematically described in Scripture, the doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity has been controversial. The Spirit is important, since he provides contact between the believer and God. This has led to difficulties in understanding him and his work. At various stages in history the doctrine of the Spirit has ascended or waned in prominence. From the biblical evidence, we can discover his deity and personality. Several conclusions about the person and work of the Holy Spirit may be drawn from our study.

Study Questions

- As you consider the Holy Spirit, what reasons can you give for studying his person and work?
- What particular difficulties are related to consideration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit?
- How would you describe the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the early church, through the Middle Ages, into the Reformation, through the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and into the twentieth century, and to the present?
- What have you learned about the Holy Spirit?

Outline

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The culminating parts of our survey of systematic theology should be seen in the context of the doctrines we have already examined. We began with God, the Supreme Being, and his work in planning, creating, and caring for all that is. We then examined the highest of the creatures, humans, in terms of their divinely intended destiny and their departure from that divine plan. We saw as well the consequences that came upon the human race and the provision that God made for their redemption and restoration. Creation, providence, and the provision of salvation are the objective work of God. We come now to the subjective work of God—the application of his divine saving work to humans. We will be examining the actual character of the salvation received and experienced by human beings. Next we will investigate the collective form faith takes, that is,

the church. And we will be looking, finally, at the completion of God's plan, that is, the last things.

Another way of viewing our survey of systematic theology is to see it as focusing on the work of the different members of the Trinity. The Father is highlighted in the work of creation and providence (parts 1–4), the Son has effected redemption for sinful humanity (parts 5–8), and the Holy Spirit applies this redemptive work to God's human creatures, thus making salvation real (parts 9–11). An understanding of the Third Person of the Trinity will illumine the doctrine of salvation.

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

There are several reasons why the study of the Holy Spirit is of special significance for us. One is that the Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer. We often tend to think of the Father as transcendent and far off in heaven; similarly, the Son may seem far removed in history and thus also relatively unknowable. But the Holy Spirit is active within the lives of believers; he is resident within us. He is the particular person of the Trinity through whom the entire Triune Godhead currently works in us.

A second reason why the study of the Holy Spirit is especially important is that we live in the period in which the Holy Spirit's work is more prominent than that of the other members of the Trinity. The Father's work was the most conspicuous within the Old Testament period, as was the Son's within the period covered by the Gospels and up to the ascension. The Holy Spirit has occupied the center of the stage from the time of Pentecost on, that is, the period covered by the book of Acts and the Epistles, and the ensuing periods of church history.

A third reason for the importance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that in a culture that stresses the experiential, it is primarily through the Holy Spirit's work that we feel God's presence within and the Christian life is given a special tangibility.

Difficulties in Understanding the Holy Spirit

While study of the Holy Spirit is especially important, it is also quite difficult. Understanding is often more incomplete and confused here than with most of the other doctrines. Among the reasons for this is that we have less explicit revelation in the Bible regarding the Holy Spirit than about either the Father or

the Son. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that a large share of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to declare and glorify the Son (John 16:14). Unlike other doctrines, there are no systematic discussions regarding the Holy Spirit. Virtually the only extended treatment is Jesus's discourse in John 14–16. On most of the occasions, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in connection with another issue.

A further problem is the lack of concrete imagery. God the Father is understood fairly well because the figure of a father is familiar to practically everyone. The Son is not hard to conceptualize, for he actually appeared in human form and was observed and reported on. But the Spirit is intangible and difficult to visualize. Complicating this matter is the unfortunate (though then current and correct) terminology of the King James Version and other older English translations, which refer to the Holy Spirit as the "Holy Ghost."

In addition, a problem arises from the fact that during the present era, the Spirit performs a ministry of serving the Father and Son, carrying out their will (which of course is also his). Now this temporary subordination of function—the Son's during his earthly ministry and the Spirit's during the present era—must not lead us to draw the conclusion that there is an inferiority in essence as well. Yet in practice many of us have an unofficial theology that looks upon the Spirit as being of a lower essence than are the Father and the Son. In effect the Trinity is visualized as FATHER, SON, and holy spirit, or as

Father Son

Holy Spirit

This error is similar to that of the Arians. From the biblical passages that speak of the Son's subordination to the Father during his earthly ministry, they concluded that the Son is of a lesser status and essence than is the Father.

In the last half of the twentieth century, on the popular or lay level, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit became the most controversial of all doctrines. As a result, there has been some reluctance to discuss the Spirit, for fear that such discussion might lead to dissension. While in certain circles "charismatic Christian" is a badge of prestige, in others it is a stigma.

The History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

It will be easier to see the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in contemporary context if we examine its earlier history. Particular doctrines have developed at varying

rates[1415] because controversy provokes fuller elaboration. This has been especially true of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

In the earliest period of the church, relatively little was said about the Holy Spirit. One early emphasis was on the Spirit as the guiding, moving force that produced the Bible, the Word of God. Origen, for example, spoke of the Bible as "written by the Holy Spirit."[1416] At that time it was assumed that everything within the Bible had been delivered by a special working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture contained no errors, and nothing superfluous. Although no complete theory of inspiration was propounded, a number of Christian theologians endorsed the view of Philo and the other Alexandrian Jews that the Scripture writers were virtually seized by the Holy Spirit in their writing. The apologist Athenagoras, for example, depicts the prophets as caught up in a state of ecstasy, with the Holy Spirit breathing through them as a musician breathes through a pipe.[1417] Most of the Fathers, however, were careful to avoid any suggestion of a purely passive role for the writers. Augustine, for example, emphasized that the authors used their own recollections of the events that had occurred. The Holy Spirit's role was to stimulate those recollections and preserve them from error.[1418]

By the late second century there was a growing emphasis on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Clement of Rome coordinated the three members of the Trinity in an oath—"as God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit lives."[1419] In a similar way he asked, "Have we not one God, and one Christ, and one Spirit of grace poured upon us?"[1420] Tertullian called the Holy Spirit God, stressing that there is one substance that the Son and the Spirit hold jointly, as it were, with the Father.[1421] In Paul of Samosata, however, we encounter the teaching that the Spirit was merely a name for the grace God poured out on the apostles.[1422] Irenaeus, in the second century, regarded the Spirit as virtually an attribute of God, identifying him as the divine Wisdom.[1423] He was the one through whom the prophets prophesied and through whom people were made righteous.[1424] Origen moved even further away from the conception that the Holy Spirit is part of an ontological Trinity. He affirmed that the Holy Spirit is "the most honorable of all the beings brought into existence through the Word, the chief in rank of all the beings originated by the Father through Christ,"[1425] a view not unlike the later Arian belief regarding the Son. While insisting on a Trinity and emphasizing that there are three distinct hypostases, Origen distinguished them so sharply that some thought his view approximated tritheism.[1426] In addition, he spoke of a subordination of both the Son and the Spirit to the Father, who transcends them as much as, if not more than, they transcend the realm of inferior beings.[1427]

In a sense, the working out of a full doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit, especially in relationship to the Father and the Son, was an accompaniment and a by-product of the christological work done in the fourth and fifth centuries. This was natural, since the question of the deity of the Spirit is in a sense contained within that of the deity of the Son. For if there can be a second divine person, there can as easily be a third.

Since the time of Origen, theological reflection on the nature of the Holy Spirit had lagged behind devotional practice. The Spirit was revered, but his exact status remained unclear. Arius had spoken of the Holy Spirit as a hypostasis, but considered his essence to be as utterly unlike that of the Son as the Son's is utterly unlike that of the Father.[1428] Eusebius of Caesarea spoke of the Spirit as "in the third rank," "a third power," and "third from the Supreme Cause."[1429] He followed Origen's exegesis of John 1:3, arguing that the Spirit is "one of the things which have come into existence through the Son."[1430]

Athanasius was inspired to expound his ideas particularly because of the writings of some whom he called "Tropici," the name deriving from the Greek word τρόπος (*tropos*), which means "figure."[1431] These persons were engaged in figurative exegesis of Scripture, not unusual at that time. They maintained that the Spirit is a creature brought into existence out of nothingness. Specifically, they regarded him as an angel, the highest in rank of the angels to be sure, but nonetheless one of the "ministering spirits" referred to in Hebrews 1:14. He was to be thought of as "different [other] in substance" (ἑτεροούσιος—*heteroousios*) from the Father and the Son. The Tropici cited proof texts to support their views —Amos 4:13 ("Lo, I who establish thunder and create Spirit"); Zechariah 1:9 ("These things says the angel that speaks within me"); and 1 Timothy 5:21 ("I charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels").[1432]

Athanasius responded vigorously to the view of the Tropici, insisting that the Spirit is fully divine, consubstantial with the Father and the Son. His argument contained several elements. First was a refutation of the incorrect exegesis of the Tropici. He then proceeded to show that Scripture clearly teaches that the Spirit "belongs to and is one with the Godhead which is in the Triad." He argued that since the Triad is eternal, homogeneous, and indivisible, the Spirit, as a member of it, must be consubstantial with the Father and the Son. Further, because of the close relationship between the Spirit and the Son, the Spirit must belong in essence to the Son, just as does the Son to the Father. Finally, the Spirit must be divine because it is he who makes us all "partakers of God" (1 Cor. 3:16–17—the Spirit's indwelling us makes us God's temple). Consequently, the Spirit is to be recognized as of the same nature as the Father and the Son, and given the same honor and worship as they.[1433]

There was still a diversity of views, however. As late as 380, Gregory of Nazianzus reported in a sermon that a variety of beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit existed. Some, he said, consider the Holy Spirit to be a force; others perceive him as a creature; still others think of him as God. And because of the vagueness of Scripture on the subject, some decline to commit themselves. Even among those who consider the Spirit to be God, some hold it as a private opinion, others declare it openly, while still others maintain that the three persons of the Trinity possess deity in varying degrees.[1434]

Among the more radical Christian groups on this subject were the Macedonians or Pneumatomachians ("Spirit-fighters"). These people opposed the doctrine of the full deity of the Holy Spirit. Basil, however, in *De Spiritu Sancto* in 375 insisted that the same glory, honor, and worship given to the Father and the Son must also be given to the Spirit. He must be "reckoned with" them, Basil insisted, not "reckoned below" them. He did not call the Spirit God in so many words, but he did say that "we glorify the Spirit with the Father and the Son because we believe that he is not alien to the divine nature." In Basil's view, the greatness of the Spirit's action and the closeness of his relationship and working with the Father and the Son are major keys to understanding his status.[1435]

There were charismatic groups during this early period of church history. The most prominent was the Montanists, who flourished in the latter half of the second century. At his baptism Montanus spoke in tongues and began prophesying. He declared that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, was giving utterance through him. Montanus and two of his female disciples were believed to be spokespersons of the Holy Spirit. Among their numerous prophecies were warnings that the second coming of Christ was at hand. The Montanists believed and taught that their prophecies clarified the Scriptures and that Spirit-inspired prophets would continue to arise within the Christian community.[1436] At a time when the practices of the church were beginning to become lax, there was within the Montanist movement an emphasis on a high standard of Christian living. They secured their most famous convert when Tertullian became a Montanist. A later movement of a somewhat similar character was Novatianism; it flourished in the middle of the third century and onward. This group shared with Montanism a deep concern for moral living. It did not have the same emphasis on prophecy, however. Neither of these groups had much lasting effect on the church.

During the medieval period there was little emphasis on the Holy Spirit. In part this was due to relative disinterest in the experiential aspect of the Christian life, the special domain of the Holy Spirit. The one major issue that did arise

within this period concerned the insertion of the word *filioque* into the creeds. This addition had originally been seen as a way of taking a stand against Arianism—the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*. Gradually it was made official, the process becoming virtually complete in the West by the ninth century. The Eastern churches, however, found this word objectionable. They noted that John 15:26 speaks of the Spirit as proceeding from only the Father, not from the Son also. The original form of the Nicene Creed had not contained the words "and the Son," which were a Western addition. Furthermore, the Eastern churches based their rejection of the word *filioque* on the concept of the μοναρχία (*monarchia*—"sole rule") of the Father—he is the sole fountain, root, and cause of deity. They could subscribe to a statement that the Spirit proceeds "from the Father through the Son," but not to a statement that he proceeds "from the Son."[1437] Consequently, they eventually separated themselves from the Western churches. Although the *filioque* controversy was the one doctrinal point cited, in all likelihood it was not the really significant issue dividing the East from the West.

The Reformation did not produce any major changes in the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Spirit. What we do find are elaborations and expansions on the previous formulation. For example, in its early formulations, Luther's idea, as an Augustinian monk, was quite similar to that of Augustine. Here we find the idea of the Holy Spirit's "infusion of love-grace" into the heart of the believer. He works when and where he pleases. The Spirit's work points, on one hand, to God's presence in the life of the individual, the result being a conformity between the will of God and the will of the human. On the other hand there is the Holy Spirit's struggle against the old sinful nature that is still within the individual.[1438]

John Calvin's unique contribution to the discussion of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit lay in the area of the authority of the Scriptures. How do we know that they are really divinely inspired, and thus a message from God? The answer of the Catholic Church is that the church certifies the divinity of Scripture. While Calvin's reply took a number of forms, the testimony of the Spirit was his central point. Neither the testimony of the church, nor the force of other external evidences, but the inward witness of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate basis for our confidence in the divine nature of the Bible.

Calvin insisted that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to reason. It is an inward work that captures the minds of those who hear or read Scripture, producing conviction or certainty that it is the Word of God with which they are dealing. This is a second work of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Scriptures. He who had originally inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures

now penetrates our hearts, convincing us that these Scriptures are indeed the Word of God and thus the truth. He creates certainty, removing any doubt that we might have.[1439]

Calvin was very careful to stress the union of the Word and the Spirit. Some expected the Holy Spirit to function independently of Scripture, and were anticipating new revelations from the Spirit. But Calvin reminded his readers of Jesus's words in John 14:26—the Spirit would not instill some new truth into the disciples, but would illuminate and impress Jesus's words on them.[1440]

John Wesley's major emphasis regarding the Holy Spirit was with respect to the matter of sanctification. He spoke of a special instantaneous work of sanctification.[1441] This work of sanctification, which is something totally different from the conversion/regeneration occurrence at the beginning of the Christian life, is to be expected and sought for. While Wesley did not use the terminology "baptism of the Holy Spirit," he did see this event as a special act of the Holy Spirit quite similar to what Pentecostalists were later to term "the baptism." Unlike Luther and Calvin, Wesley spoke of what believers themselves can do to help bring about the Spirit's working.

The church's interest in the Holy Spirit underwent a long period of decline during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was due to a variety of movements, each of which in its own way regarded the Spirit and his work as either superfluous or incredible. One of those movements was Protestant scholasticism. It was found in Lutheranism, and particularly the branch that derived its inspiration from the writings of Philipp Melanchthon. As a series of doctrinal disputes took place, it became necessary to define and refine beliefs more specifically. Consequently, faith came increasingly to be thought of as *rechte Lehre* (correct doctrine). A more mechanical view of the role of the Scriptures was developed, and, as a result, the witness of the Spirit tended to be bypassed. Now the Word alone, without the Spirit, was regarded as the basis of authority. Since belief rather than experience came to be viewed as the essence of the Christian religion, the Holy Spirit was increasingly neglected. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was seldom treated as a distinct topic. His work was frequently dealt with in a few brief remarks appended to discussions of Christ's person and work.[1442]

A second major force in this period was rationalism. Human reason was set up as the supreme standard. Initially, it was felt that reason could justify all of the beliefs of Christianity. Gradually, however, that idea was modified to the principle that only those things that can be established by rational proof are credible. This new emphasis on reason meant that the conception of God, for example, became considerably more general than was previously the case. What

can be known about God from natural religion (i.e., without special revelation) is quite devoid of detail. That God is triune, that there is a divine Holy Spirit, cannot be proved from an examination of nature. A further aspect here is that God came to be viewed as very far removed from human life. As this Deism grew, it directly contradicted or at least de-emphasized the biblical picture of God as very much involved with humanity. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who is the particular channel of God's relating to humans, was rather neglected.[1443]

The third movement of this period that tended to stifle inquiry regarding the Holy Spirit was Romanticism. Although Romanticism gives much attention to the realm of the spirit as over against the strictly intellectual, the *doctrine* of the Holy Spirit suffered from the rise of Romanticism. For Romanticism in religion, particularly as espoused by Friedrich Schleiermacher, insisted that religion is not a matter either of beliefs (doctrines) or of behavior (ethics). It is not a matter of receiving and examining doctrines delivered by an external authority. Rather, *feeling* constitutes the essence of religion, and, especially, the feeling of absolute dependence.[1444] With this shift of the focus of religion from belief to feeling, doctrines as such tended to become lost or redefined. For example, Schleiermacher defined the Holy Spirit as "the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality."[1445]

In spite of these movements, there were segments of Christianity that gave great attention to the Holy Spirit. In particular, the revivalism of the American western frontier placed great stress on conversion and an immediacy of experience. The necessity of making a definite decision to accept Christ was kept foremost in the minds of those who heard the revivalists. Repentance and conversion were key words in this approach to the Christian faith. And since the Holy Spirit is the one who brings about repentance and the new birth, he could not be overlooked in this form of personal religion. In these revival meetings, however, one ordinarily did not find special works of the Holy Spirit such as are reported in the book of Acts. Nevertheless, a rather strong emotional coloration did mark these evangelistic meetings.

At the close of the nineteenth century, however, a development occurred which was to give the Holy Spirit, in some circles at least, virtually the preeminent role in theology. There were some outbursts of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, in North Carolina as early as 1896. In Topeka, Kansas, Charles Parham, the head of a small Bible school, assigned his students to study the baptism of the Holy Spirit during his absence. When Parham returned, their unanimous conclusion was that the Bible teaches that there is to be a baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion and new birth, and that speaking in

tongues is the sign that one has received this gift. On January 1, 1901, a student, Agnes Ozman, requested that Parham lay his hands on her in the biblical fashion. When he did this and prayed, according to her own testimony, the Holy Spirit fell upon her and she prayed successively in several tongues unknown to her.[1446] Others in the group received the gift as well. This, in the judgment of some church historians, was the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement.

The real outbreak of Pentecostalism, however, occurred in meetings organized by a black holiness preacher, William J. Seymour, beginning in 1906. Because these meetings were held in a former Methodist church at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, they came to be referred to as the Azusa Street meetings.[1447] From this beginning, the Pentecostal phenomenon spread throughout the United States and to other countries, although it seems to have had earlier independent occurrences in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. In recent years, Pentecostalism of this type has become a powerful force in Latin America and other third world countries.

For many years the Pentecostal movement was a relatively isolated factor within Christianity. It was found mostly in denominations composed heavily of persons from the lower socioeconomic classes. Sometimes their practices were quite spectacular, including not only speaking in tongues by a large number of persons within a given group, but also faith healing and exorcism of demons. Such practices were in rather sharp contrast to the worship services of the major denominations.

In the early 1950s, however, this began to change. In some previously unlikely places, glossolalia began to be practiced. In Episcopal, Lutheran, and even Catholic churches, there was an emphasis on special manifestations of the Holy Spirit's work. There were significant differences between this movement, which could be called neo-Pentecostal or charismatic, and the old-line Pentecostalism that had sprung up at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues to this day. Whereas the latter had formed definite denominational groups whose members were largely from the lower socioeconomic classes, neo-Pentecostalism was more of a transdenominational movement, drawing many of its participants from the middle and upper-middle classes.[1448] In terms of H. Richard Niebuhr's classifications, Pentecostalism would probably be designated a "sect" and neo-Pentecostalism a "church."[1449] The two groups also differ in the way they practice their charismatic gifts. In the old-line Pentecostal groups, a number of members might speak or pray aloud at once. Such is not the case with charismatic Christians, some of whom use the gift only in their own private prayer time. Public manifestations of the gift are usually in special groups rather than in the plenary worship service of the congregation.

In the 1980s another movement began, referring to itself as the "third wave" and placing more emphasis on the gifts of healing and spiritual discernment. It also insists on the evidential value of the miracles. This is referred to as "power evangelism." The movement began with a class on "Signs and Wonders" taught at Fuller Seminary School of World Mission by John Wimber. It took institutional form in a network of churches referred to as "the Vineyard."[1450]

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

The Deity of the Holy Spirit

The deity of the Holy Spirit is not as easily established as is the deity of the Father and the Son. It might well be said that the deity of the Father is simply assumed in Scripture, that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture. There are, however, several bases on which one may conclude that the Holy Spirit is God in the same fashion and to the same degree as are the Father and the Son.

First, we should note that various references to the Holy Spirit are interchangeable with references to God. In effect, then, these passages speak of him as God. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira had sold a piece of property and represented the money they brought as the whole of what they had received. In rebuking Ananias, Peter asks, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?" (v. 3). In the next verse he asserts, "You have not lied just to human beings but to God." It seems that in Peter's mind "lying to the Holy Spirit" and "lying to God" were interchangeable expressions. It could, of course, be argued that two different referents were in view so that Peter was actually saying, "You have lied both to the Holy Spirit and to God." The statement in verse 4, however, was apparently intended to make it clear that the lie was told not to humans, to someone less than God, but to God himself. Thus the second statement is an elaboration of the first, emphasizing that the Spirit to whom Ananias had lied was God.

Another passage where "Holy Spirit" and "God" are used interchangeably is Paul's discussion of the Christian's body. In 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 he writes, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." In 6:19–20

he uses almost identical language: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” It is clear that, to Paul, to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to be inhabited by God. By equating the phrase “God’s temple” with the phrase “a temple of the Holy Spirit,” Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God.

Further, the Holy Spirit possesses the attributes or qualities of God. One of these is omniscience: “These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10–11). Also observe Jesus’s statement in John 16:13: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

The power of the Holy Spirit is also spoken of prominently in the New Testament. In Luke 1:35 the phrases “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the Most High” are in parallel or synonymous construction. This is, of course, a reference to the virgin conception, a miracle of the first magnitude. Paul acknowledged that the accomplishments of his ministry were achieved “by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:19). Moreover, Jesus attributed to the Holy Spirit the ability to change human hearts and personalities: it is the Spirit who works conviction (John 16:8–11) and regeneration (John 3:5–8) within us. Jesus had elsewhere said with respect to this ability to change human hearts, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26; see vv. 16–25). While these texts do not specifically affirm that the Spirit is omnipotent, they certainly indicate that he has power that presumably only God has.

Yet another attribute of the Spirit that brackets him with the Father and the Son is his eternality. In Hebrews 9:14 he is spoken of as “the eternal Spirit” through whom Jesus offered himself up. Only God, however, is eternal (Heb. 1:10–12), all creatures being temporal. So the Holy Spirit must be God.

In addition to having divine attributes, the Holy Spirit performs certain works that are commonly ascribed to God. He was and continues to be involved with the creation, in both originating it and providentially keeping and directing it. In Genesis 1:2 we read that the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters. Job 26:13 notes that the heavens were made fair by the Spirit [or “breath”] of God. The psalmist says, “When you send your Spirit, they [all the parts of the creation previously enumerated] are created, and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps. 104:30).

The most abundant biblical testimony regarding the Holy Spirit's role concerns his spiritual working upon or within humans. We have already noted Jesus's attribution of regeneration to the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8). This is confirmed by Paul's statement in Titus 3:5: "[God our Savior] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." In addition, the Spirit raised Christ from the dead and will also raise us; that is, God will raise us through the Spirit: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you" (Rom. 8:11).

Giving the Scriptures is another divine work of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes, " All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." Peter also speaks of the Spirit's role in giving us the Scriptures, but emphasizes the influence on the writer rather than the end product: "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Our final consideration arguing for the deity of the Holy Spirit is his association with the Father and the Son on a basis of apparent equality. One of the best-known evidences is the baptismal formula prescribed in the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The Pauline benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is another evidence: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." And in 1 Corinthians 12, as Paul discusses spiritual gifts, he coordinates the three members of the Godhead: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (vv. 4–6). Peter likewise, in the salutation of his first epistle, links the three together, noting their respective roles in the process of salvation: "[To the exiles of the dispersion] who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood . . ." (1 Pet. 1:2).

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force. This point is especially important at a time when pantheistic tendencies are entering Western culture

through the influence of Eastern religions. The Bible makes clear in several ways that the Holy Spirit is a person and possesses all the qualities that implies.

The first evidence of the Spirit's personality is the use of the masculine pronoun in representing him. Since the word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) is neuter and since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender, we would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. Yet in John 16:13–14 we find an unusual phenomenon. As Jesus describes the Holy Spirit's ministry, he uses a masculine pronoun (ἐκεῖνος—*ekeinos*) where we would expect a neuter pronoun. The only possible antecedent in the immediate context is "Spirit of truth" (v. 13).[1451] Either John in reporting Jesus's discourse made a grammatical error at this point (this is unlikely since we do not find any similar error elsewhere in the Gospel), or he deliberately chose to use the masculine to convey to us the fact that Jesus is referring to a person, not a thing. A similar reference is Ephesians 1:14, where, in a relative clause modifying "Holy Spirit," the preferred textual reading is ὅς (*hos*)—"[who] is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

A second line of evidence of the Holy Spirit's personality is a number of passages where he and his work are, in one way or another, closely identified with various persons and their work. The term παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) is applied to the Holy Spirit in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. In each of these contexts it is obvious that it is not some sort of abstract influence that is in view. Jesus is also expressly spoken of as a παράκλητος (1 John 2:1). Most significant are his words in John 14:16, where he says that he will pray to the Father who will give the disciples another παράκλητος. The word for "another" here is ἄλλος (*allos*), which means "another of the same kind."[1452] In view of Jesus's statements linking the Spirit's coming with his own going away (e.g., 16:7), this means that the Spirit is a replacement for Jesus and will carry on the same role. The similarity in their function is an indication that the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, must be a person.

Another function that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit perform, and that accordingly serves as an indication of the Spirit's personality, is glorifying another member of the Trinity. In John 16:14 Jesus says that the Spirit "will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." A parallel is found in John 17:4, where in his high priestly prayer Jesus states that during his ministry on earth he glorified the Father.

The most interesting groupings of the Holy Spirit with personal agents are those in which he is linked with both the Father and the Son. Among the best

known of these are the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 and the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14. There are other instances, however. Jude enjoins, "But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (vv. 20–21). Peter addresses his readers as those who are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood" (1 Pet. 1:2). Earlier in his message at Pentecost, he had proclaimed, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . . Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33, 38). Paul also coordinates the working of the three, for example, in Galatians 4:6: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, *'Abba*, Father.'" A similar reference is 2 Corinthians 1:21–22: "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Other examples are Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 12:4–6; Ephesians 3:14–17; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14.

The Holy Spirit is also linked with the Father and the Son in various events of Jesus's ministry. At the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17), all three persons of the Trinity were present. As the Son was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven in commendation of the Son, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in visible form. Jesus said his casting out of demons was related to the Father and the Spirit: "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). The conjunction of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son in these events is an indication that he is personal, just as are they.

The Holy Spirit's personality can also be seen in passages that group him with humans. We will cite but one example. The letter from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch contained a very unusual expression: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements" (Acts 15:28). This coordinated working of the Spirit and Christian leaders is an indication that the Spirit possesses some of the very qualities found in human personality.

And, as a matter of fact, the Spirit's possession of certain personal characteristics is our third indication of his personality. Among the most notable are intelligence, will, and emotions, traditionally regarded as the three fundamental elements of personhood. Of various references to the Spirit's

intelligence and knowledge, we cite here John 14:26, where Jesus promises that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." The will of the Spirit is attested in 1 Corinthians 12:11, which states that the recipients of the various spiritual gifts are "the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." That the Spirit has emotions is evident in Ephesians 4:30, where Paul warns against grieving the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can also be affected as is a person, thus displaying personality passively. It is possible to lie to the Holy Spirit, as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:3–4). Paul speaks of the sins of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Stephen accuses his adversaries of always resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). While it is possible to resist a mere force, one cannot lie to or grieve something impersonal. And then, most notably, there is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29). This sin, which Jesus suggests is more serious than blasphemy against the Son, surely cannot be committed against something impersonal.

In addition, the Holy Spirit engages in moral actions and ministries that can be performed only by a person. Among these activities are teaching, regenerating, searching, speaking, interceding, commanding, testifying, guiding, illuminating, and revealing. One interesting and unusual passage is Romans 8:26: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with wordless groans." Surely, Paul has a person in view. And so does Jesus whenever he speaks of the Holy Spirit, as, for example, in John 16:8: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

All of the foregoing considerations lead to one conclusion. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force, and that person is God, just as fully and in the same way as are the Father and the Son.

Implications of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

A correct understanding of who and what the Holy Spirit is carries certain implications:

1. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a vague force. Thus, he is someone with whom we can have a personal relationship, someone to whom we can and should pray.

2. The Holy Spirit, being fully divine, is to be accorded the same honor and respect that we give to the Father and the Son. It is appropriate to worship him as we do them. He should not be thought of as in any sense inferior in essence to them, although his role may sometimes be subordinated to theirs.
3. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. His work is the expression and execution of what the three of them have planned together. There is no tension among their persons and activities.
4. God is not far off. In the Holy Spirit, the Triune God comes close, so close as to actually enter into each believer. He is even more intimately involved with us now than in the incarnation. Through the operation of the Spirit he has truly become Immanuel, “God with us.”

Praise ye the Spirit! Comforter of Israel,
Sent of the Father and the Son to bless us;
Praise ye the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Praise ye the Triune God.

Elizabeth Rundle Charles

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The Work of the Holy Spirit

Chapter Objectives

After you have carefully studied this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Examine the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.
2. Describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus.
3. Show how the work of the Holy Spirit affects the life of the believer at the beginning of the Christian life and throughout.
4. Evaluate the occurrence of the miraculous gifts today.
5. Draw several conclusions about the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit today.

Chapter Summary

While there has been some controversy over the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, it is evident that the Spirit was at work throughout the Old Testament era. He was particularly evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. He continues to work in the lives of persons whom God calls to repentance and faith. He guides the believer from spiritual birth to maturity. With the changes in attitude toward the gifts of the Spirit in recent years, the miraculous gifts have assumed a significant role in some circles. Some assessment needs to be made regarding how one should view these gifts.

Study Questions

- Trace the work of the Holy Spirit during the Old Testament era. What do you learn about the Spirit from his action during that era?
- How did the Holy Spirit minister in the life of Jesus? What can be learned about his work?
- How does the Holy Spirit work in the life of the Christian believer? Consider the experience of the new birth and the growth toward maturity.
- What is the purpose for which the gifts were bestowed upon the church?
- As you consider the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, what role should the gifts play in the life of the believer and the church? Defend your position.
- From your study, how would you summarize what you know about the Spirit?

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The work of the Holy Spirit is of special interest to Christians, for it is particularly through this work that God is personally involved and active in the life of the believer. Moreover, in the recent past this facet of the doctrine has been the subject of the greatest controversy regarding the Holy Spirit. While this controversy centers on certain of his more spectacular special gifts, that is too narrow a basis on which to construct our basic discussion here. For the work of the Spirit is a broad matter covering a variety of areas. The controversial issues must be seen against the backdrop of the Spirit's more general activity.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

It is often difficult to identify the Holy Spirit within the Old Testament, which reflects the earliest stages of progressive revelation. In fact, the term "Holy Spirit" is rarely employed here. Rather, the usual expression is "the Spirit of God." Hebrew is a concrete language with a relative scarcity of adjectives. Where in English we might use a noun and an adjective, Hebrew tends to use two nouns, one of them functioning as a genitive.[1453] For example, where in English we might speak of "a righteous man," what we typically find in Hebrew is "a man of righteousness." Similarly, most Old Testament references to the Third Person of the Trinity consist of the two nouns *Spirit* and *God*. It is not apparent from this construction that a separate person is involved. The expression "Spirit of God" could well be understood as being simply a reference to the will, mind, or activity of God.[1454] There are, however, some cases where the New Testament makes it clear that an Old Testament reference to the "Spirit of God" is a reference to the Holy Spirit. One of the most prominent of these New Testament passages is Acts 2:16–21, where Peter explains that what is occurring at Pentecost is the fulfillment of the prophet Joel's statement, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (2:17). Surely the events of Pentecost were the realization of Jesus's promise, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). In short, the Old Testament "Spirit of God" is synonymous with the Holy Spirit.[1455]

There are several major areas of the Holy Spirit's working in Old Testament times. First is the creation. We find in the creation account a reference to the presence and activity of the Spirit of God: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). God's continued working with the creation is attributed to the Spirit. Job writes, "By his breath [or spirit] the skies became fair; his hand pierced the gliding serpent" (26:13). Isaiah looks to a future outpouring of the Spirit as a time of productivity within the creation: there will be desolation "till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest" (32:15).

Another general area of the Spirit's work is the giving of prophecy and Scripture.[1456] The Old Testament prophets testified that their speaking and writing were a result of the Spirit's coming upon them. Ezekiel offers the clearest example: "As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me" (2:2; cf. 8:3; 11:1, 24). The Spirit even entered such unlikely persons as Balaam (Num. 24:2). As a sign that Saul was God's anointed, the Spirit came mightily on him and he prophesied (1 Sam. 10:6,

10). Peter confirmed the testimony of the prophets regarding their experience: "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). In addition, the book of Acts gives witness that the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David (Acts 1:16; 4:25). Since the Holy Spirit produced the Scriptures, they can be referred to as "God-breathed" (θεόπνευστος—*theopneustos*—2 Tim. 3:16).

Yet another work of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament was in conveying certain necessary skills for various tasks.[1457] For example, we read that in appointing Bezalel to construct and furnish the tabernacle, God said, "and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts" (Exod. 31:3–5). It is not clear whether Bezalel had previously possessed this set of abilities or whether they were suddenly bestowed upon him for this particular task. Nor is it clear whether he continued to possess them afterward. When the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity, there was a similar endowment: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 4:6).

Administration also seems to have been a gift of the Spirit. Even Pharaoh recognized the Spirit's presence in Joseph: "So Pharaoh asked them, 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?'" (Gen. 41:38). When Moses needed assistance in leading the people of Israel, part of the Spirit was taken from him and given to others: "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but they did not do so again" (Num. 11:25). Here the gift of administration was accompanied by or involved the gift of prophesying. While it is not clear whether Joshua's capacity for leadership was especially related to the working of the Spirit of God, there does seem to be an allusion to that effect: "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9).

In the time of the judges, administration by the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit was especially dramatic.[1458] Much of what was done was accomplished by what we would today call "charismatic leadership." Of Othniel it is said, "The Spirit of the LORD came on him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him" (Judg. 3:10). There is a similar description of the call of

Gideon: “Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him” (Judg. 6:34). The Spirit’s working at the time of the judges consisted largely of granting skill in waging war, for example, with Othniel and Gideon. Gideon’s soldiers proved unusually effective, out of all proportion to their numbers. Similarly, Samson was filled with extraordinary strength when the Spirit came upon him, and he was able to perform supernatural feats: “Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle” (Judg. 14:19).

The Spirit also endowed the early kings of Israel with special capabilities. We have already noted that Saul prophesied when the Spirit came upon him (1 Sam. 10:10). David’s anointing was likewise accompanied by the coming of the Spirit of God: “So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David” (1 Sam. 16:13).

The Spirit is seen not only in dramatic incidents, however. In addition to the qualities of national leadership and the heroics of war he was present in Israel’s spiritual life. In this connection he is referred to as a “good Spirit.” Addressing God, Ezra reminded the people of Israel of the provision made for their ancestors in the wilderness: “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst” (Neh. 9:20). The psalmist beseeches God: “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Ps. 143:10). The goodness of the Spirit is seen also in two references to him as a “holy Spirit.” In each of these instances there is a contrast between sinful human actions and the holiness of God. Asking that his sins be blotted out, David prays, “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11). And Isaiah refers to the people who have “rebelled and grieved [the Lord’s] Holy Spirit” (Isa. 63:10).

The good and holy quality of the Spirit becomes clearer yet in light of the work he does and its results. He is described as producing the fear of the Lord and various qualities of righteousness and judgment in the promised Messiah (Isa. 11:2–5). When the Spirit is poured out (Isa. 32:15), the result is justice, righteousness, and peace (vv. 16–20). Devotion to the Lord results from outpouring of the Spirit (Isa. 44:3–5). Ezekiel 36:26–28, a passage that adumbrates the New Testament doctrine of regeneration, speaks of a careful obedience and a new heart as accompaniments of God’s giving his Spirit.

The foregoing considerations from the Old Testament depict the Holy Spirit as producing the moral and spiritual qualities of holiness and goodness in the person upon whom he comes or in whom he dwells. In cases in the book of Judges, his presence seems to be intermittent and related to a particular activity or ministry.

The Old Testament witness to the Spirit anticipates a coming time when the ministry of the Spirit is to be more complete.[1459] Part of this relates to the coming Messiah, upon whom the Spirit is to rest in an unusual degree and fashion, as noted in Isaiah 11:1–5. Similar passages include Isaiah 42:1–4 and 61:1–3 ("The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners . . ."). Jesus quotes the opening verses of Isaiah 61 and indicates that they are now being fulfilled in him (Luke 4:18–21). There is a more generalized promise, however, not restricted to the Messiah. This is found in Joel 2:28–29: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." At Pentecost Peter quoted this prophecy, indicating that it had now been fulfilled.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus

In Jesus's life we find a pervasive and powerful presence and activity of the Spirit. Even the very beginning of his incarnate existence was a work of the Holy Spirit.[1460] Both the prediction and the record of Jesus's birth point to a special working of the Spirit. After informing Mary that she was to have a child, the angel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). After the conception had taken place, the angel appeared to Joseph, who was understandably troubled, and explained, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). The opening words of the narrative are: "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18).[1461]

John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus's ministry also highlights the place of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist had himself been filled with the Holy Spirit, even

from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). His message emphasized that, unlike his own baptism, which was merely with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Matthew (3:11) and Luke (3:16) add "and with fire." John does not himself claim to have the Spirit; and, in particular, he makes no claim to give the Spirit. He attributes to the coming Messiah the giving of the Spirit.

The Spirit is present in dramatic form from the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry, when there was a perceivable coming of the Holy Spirit upon him at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). John makes clear that John the Baptist also saw the Spirit and bore witness to the fact. None of the accounts mention any particular immediate manifestations, that is, visible effects or anything similar. We do know, however, that immediately afterward, Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). The writers in effect leave us to infer from ensuing events just what the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus were.

The immediate result of Jesus's being filled with the Spirit was the major temptation, or series of temptations, at the inception of his public ministry.[1462] Jesus was directed by the Holy Spirit into the situation where the temptation took place. In Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1–2 Jesus is described as being led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark's statement is more forceful: "At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness" (1:12). Jesus is virtually "expelled" (*ekballō*) by the Spirit. What is noteworthy here is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus's life brings him into direct and immediate conflict with the forces of evil.

The rest of Jesus's ministry as well was conducted through the Spirit's power and direction. This was obviously true of Jesus's teaching.[1463] Luke tells us that following the temptation "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside" (4:14). He proceeded then to teach in all the synagogues. Coming to his hometown of Nazareth, he went into the synagogue and stood up to read. He read from Isaiah 61:1–2, and asserted that it was now fulfilled in him (Luke 4:18–21), thus claiming that this ministry was a result of the working of the Holy Spirit in and upon him.

What is true of Jesus's teaching is also true of his miracles, particularly his exorcism of demons. Here the confrontation between the Holy Spirit and the unholy forces at work in the world is manifest. On one occasion the Pharisees claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons. Jesus pointed out the internal contradiction within this statement (Matt. 12:25–27) and then countered, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 28). His condemnation of the Pharisees' words as "blasphemy against the Spirit" (v. 31) and his warning that

“anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (v. 32) are evidence that what he had just done was done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was apparently disavowing personal causation of his miracles, attributing them instead to the Holy Spirit.

Not only his teaching and miracles, but Jesus’s whole life at this point was “in the Holy Spirit.” When the seventy returned from their mission and reported that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus’s name (Luke 10:17), Jesus was “full of joy through the Holy Spirit” (v. 21). Even his emotions were “in the Holy Spirit.” This is a description of someone completely filled with the Spirit.

There is no evidence of growth of the Holy Spirit’s presence in Jesus’s life. There is no series of experiences of the coming of the Holy Spirit, just the conception and the baptism. There is, however, a growing implementation of the Spirit’s presence. Nor does one find evidence of any type of ecstatic phenomena in Jesus’s life. There certainly were times when he was seized by a sense of the urgency of the task that was his (as when he said, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” [John 9:4]). But we do not find in Jesus’s life the type of charismatic phenomena reported in Acts and discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Not only is there no report of such phenomena in his own experience, but we have no teaching of his on the subject either. In light of the problems the church encountered in Corinth, and the phenomena of Pentecost and later experiences recorded in Acts, it is surprising, especially for those who hold that the existential *Sitz im Leben* was the prime determinant of what materials were incorporated in the Gospels, that neither the Savior’s personal life nor his teaching gives any hint of such charismata.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

The Beginning of the Christian Life

In Jesus’s teaching we find an especially strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in initiating persons into the Christian life. Jesus taught that the Spirit’s activity is essential in both conversion, which from the human perspective is the beginning of the Christian life, and regeneration, which from God’s perspective is its beginning.

Conversion is the human’s turning to God. It consists of a negative and a positive element: repentance, that is, abandonment of sin; and faith, that is, acceptance of the promises and the work of Christ. Jesus spoke especially of

repentance, and specifically of conviction of sin, which is the prerequisite of repentance. He said, “When he [the Counselor or Advocate] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because people do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned” (John 16:8–11). Without this work of the Holy Spirit, there can be no conversion.

Regeneration is the miraculous transformation of the individual and implantation of spiritual energy. Jesus made very clear to Nicodemus that regeneration is essential to acceptance by the Father: “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. . . . No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:3, 5–6). Clearly, regeneration is a supernatural occurrence, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who produces it. The flesh (i.e., human effort) is not capable of effecting this transformation. Nor can this transformation even be comprehended by the human intellect. Jesus in fact likened this work of the Spirit to the blowing of the wind: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (v. 8).[1464]

The Continuation of the Christian Life

The work of the Spirit is not completed when one becomes a believer; on the contrary, it is just beginning. He performs a number of other roles in the ongoing Christian life.

One of the Spirit’s other roles is empowering. Jesus probably left his disciples flabbergasted when he said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). These greater works were apparently dependent on both his going and the Holy Spirit’s coming, for the two events were closely linked. Indeed, when the disciples were evidently grieved at the thought of his leaving, Jesus said: “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). It probably seemed incredible to the disciples, who by now were very much aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings, that they would do greater works than the Master himself had done. Yet Peter preached on Pentecost Sunday and three thousand believed. Jesus himself never had that type of response, as far as we know.

Perhaps he did not gather that many genuine converts in his entire ministry! The key to the disciples' success was not in their abilities and strengths, however. Jesus had told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5), who would give them the power that he had promised, the ability to do the things that he had predicted: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v. 8).

Another element of Jesus's promise was that the Holy Spirit would indwell and illuminate the believer: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:16–17). Jesus had been a teacher and leader, but his influence was that of external word and example. The Spirit, however, is able to affect one more intensely because, dwelling within, he can get to the very center of one's thinking and emotions, and lead one into all truth, as Jesus promised. Even the name used for the Spirit in this context suggests this role: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" (John 16:13–14).

The Spirit evidently has a teaching role. Earlier in the same discourse we read that he would bring to mind and clarify for the disciples the words Jesus had already given to them: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Jesus also pledged that "when the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me" (John 15:26). This ministry of illumination by the Holy Spirit was not merely for that first generation of disciples, but also includes helping believers today to understand Scripture. Illumining us is a role that falls to the Spirit, for Jesus is now permanently at work carrying out other functions mentioned in this same passage (e.g., he is preparing a place for believers [14:2–3]).

Another point of particular interest is the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. We are familiar with Jesus's intercession, as the High Priest, on our behalf. Paul also speaks of a similar intercessory prayer by the Holy Spirit: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes

for God's people in accordance with the will of God" (Rom. 8:26–27). Thus believers have the assurance that when they do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit wisely intercedes for them that the Lord's will be done.

The Holy Spirit also works sanctification in the life of the believer. By sanctification is meant the continued transformation of moral and spiritual character so that the believer's life actually comes to mirror the standing he or she already has in God's sight. In the earlier part of Romans 8, Paul dwells on this work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has liberated us from the law (v. 2). Henceforth believers do not walk and live according to the flesh, their old nature, but according to the Spirit (v. 4), having their minds set on the Spirit (v. 5). Christians are in the Spirit (v. 9), and the Spirit dwells in them, a thought that is repeated three times (vv. 9, 11 twice). As the Spirit indwells believers, he guides and leads them, and the deeds of the flesh are, accordingly, put to death (v. 13). All those who are thus "led by the Spirit of God are the children of God" (v. 14). The Spirit is now at work giving them life, witnessing that they are children rather than slaves, and thus supplying clear evidence that they are truly in Christ (vv. 15–17).

This life in the Spirit is what God intends for the Christian. Paul in Galatians 5 contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. He instructs his readers to walk by the Spirit instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh (v. 16). If they heed this instruction, the Spirit will produce in them a set of qualities collectively referred to as the "fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22). Paul lists nine of these qualities: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (vv. 22–23). These qualities cannot in their entirety be produced in human lives by unaided self-effort. They are a supernatural work. They are opposed to the works of the flesh—a list of sins in verses 19–21—just as the Spirit himself is in opposition to the flesh. The work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, then, is not merely the negative work of mortification of the flesh (Rom. 8:13), but also the production of a positive likeness to Christ.

The Spirit also bestows certain special gifts on believers within the body of Christ. In Paul's writings there are three different lists of such gifts; there is also a brief one in 1 Peter (see figure 5). Certain observations need to be made regarding these lists. First, while all of them have reference to the gifts of the Spirit, their basic orientations differ. Ephesians 4:11 is really a listing of various offices in the church, or of persons who are God's gifts to the church. Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Peter 4:11 catalog several basic functions performed in the church. The list in 1 Corinthians is more a matter of special abilities. It is likely that

when these passages speak of the “gifts of the Spirit,” they have different meanings in view.

FIGURE 5

The Gifts of the Spirit

Romans 12:6–8	1 Corinthians 12:4–11	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
prophecy	wisdom	apostles	speaking
service	knowledge	prophets	service
teaching	faith	evangelists	
exhortation	healing	pastors and teachers	
generosity	working of miracles		
leading	prophecy		
acts of mercy	ability to distinguish spirits		
	various tongues		
	interpretation of tongues		

Hence no attempt should be made to reduce this expression to a unitary concept or definition. Second, it is not clear whether these gifts are endowments from birth, special enablements received at some later point, or a combination of the two. Third, some gifts, such as faith and service, are qualities or activities expected of every Christian; in such cases it is likely that the writer has in mind an unusual capability in that area. Fourth, since none of the four lists includes all of the gifts found in the other lists, it is quite conceivable that collectively they do not exhaust all possible gifts of the Spirit. These lists, then, individually and collectively, are illustrative of the various gifts with which God has endowed the church.

It is also important at this point to note several observations Paul made regarding both the nature of the gifts and the way in which they are to be exercised. These observations appear in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

1. The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church). They are for the edification of the whole body, not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individual members possessing them (12:7; 14:5, 12).

2. No one person has all the gifts (12:14–21), nor is any one of the gifts bestowed on all persons (12:28–30). Consequently, the individual members of the church need each other.
3. Although not equally conspicuous, all gifts are important (12:22–26).
4. The Holy Spirit apportions the various gifts to whom and as he wills (12:11).

The Miraculous Gifts Today

Certain of the more spectacular gifts have attracted particular attention and stirred considerable controversy in recent years. These are sometimes referred to as remarkable gifts, miraculous gifts, special gifts, sign gifts, or charismatic gifts, the last being a somewhat redundant expression, since χαρίσματα (*charismata*) basically means gifts. Most frequently mentioned are faith healing, exorcism of demons, and especially glossolalia or speaking in tongues. The question that has occasioned the most controversy is whether the Holy Spirit is still dispensing these gifts in the church today, and, if so, whether they are normative (i.e., whether every Christian can and should receive and exercise them). Because glossolalia is the most prominent of these gifts, we will concentrate on it. Our conclusions will serve to evaluate the other gifts as well.

We need to examine both sides of this controversial issue if it is to be correctly understood and dealt with. The case for glossolalia, relying heavily on the narrative passages in the book of Acts, is a rather straightforward one. The argument usually begins with the observation that subsequent to the episodes of conversion and regeneration recorded in Acts, there customarily came a special filling or baptism with the Holy Spirit, and that its usual manifestation was speaking in an unknown tongue. There is no indication that the Holy Spirit would cease to bestow this gift on the church.[1465] Indeed, there are evidences that the gift continued throughout the history of the church to the present. Although it often occurred only in small, relatively isolated groups, it fueled those groups with a special spiritual vitality.

Often an experiential argument is also employed in support of glossolalia. People who have experienced the gift themselves or have observed others practicing it have a subjective certainty about the experience. They emphasize the benefits that it produces in the Christian's spiritual life, especially vitalizing one's prayer life.[1466]

In addition, the advocates of glossolalia argue that the practice is nowhere forbidden in Scripture. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul does not censure proper use of the gift, but only perversions of it. In fact, he said, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (1 Cor. 14:18). Further he urged that his readers “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31) and “eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 14:1). Identifying “higher gifts” and “spiritual gifts” with tongues, the advocate of glossolalia concludes that the gift of speaking in tongues is both possible and desirable for the Christian.

Those who reject the idea that the Holy Spirit is still dispensing the charismatic gifts argue that historically the miraculous gifts ceased; they were virtually unknown throughout most of the history of the church.[1467] When they were present, it was generally in isolated groups characterized by unorthodox beliefs on a number of other major doctrines. A few who reject the possibility of contemporary glossolalia utilize 1 Corinthians 13:8 as evidence: “where there are tongues, they will be stilled.” They note the distinction in that verse between the verb used with “tongues” and the verb used with “prophecy” and “knowledge.” Not only is a different word involved, but the middle voice is used in the former instance and the passive in the latter. On this basis it is argued that tongues, unlike prophecy and knowledge, were not intended to be continually given until the end time, but have already ceased. Therefore, tongues are not included in the reference to the imperfect gifts, which will pass away when the perfect comes (vv. 9–10).[1468] Some theologians would argue for the passing of the miraculous gifts on the basis of Hebrews 2:3–4: “Salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” The thrust of this argument is that the purpose of the miraculous gifts was to attest to and thus authenticate the revelation and the incarnation. When that purpose had been fulfilled, the miracles, being unnecessary, simply faded away.[1469]

A second aspect of the negative argument is the existence of parallels to glossolalia that are obviously not to be interpreted as special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is noted, for example, that similar phenomena are found in other religions. The practices of certain voodoo witch doctors are a case in point. Further, the phenomenon was not unique to Christianity even in biblical times. The oracle of Delphi, not far from Corinth, made ecstatic utterances not unlike the glossolalia found in the Corinthian church.[1470] Psychology, too, finds parallels between speaking in tongues and certain cases of heightened suggestibility caused by brainwashing or electroshock therapy.[1471]

One particular point of interest has been the study of glossolalia by linguists. Some advocates of glossolalia maintain that the tongues of Corinth were, like those at Pentecost, actual languages. They likewise maintain that tongues today are actual languages, and anyone familiar with the particular language being spoken would be able to understand without the aid of an interpreter. Others, however, say that, unlike the tongues at Pentecost, the tongues of Corinth and those today are utterances of apparently unrelated syllables and therefore do not display the characteristics of any known human language. The latter group are not affected by the research of linguists. However, those who hold that modern-day tongues do represent existing human languages must answer scientific charges that many cases of glossolalia simply do not display a sufficient number of the characteristics of language to be classified as such.[1472]

Is there a way to deal responsibly with the considerations raised by both sides of this dispute? Because the issue has a significant effect on how one conducts one's Christian life, and even on the very style or tone of the Christian life, the question cannot simply be ignored. While few dogmatic conclusions can be drawn in this area, a number of significant observations can be made.

Regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we note first that the book of Acts speaks of a special work of the Spirit subsequent to new birth. It appears, however, that the book of Acts covers a transitional period. Since that time the normal pattern has been for conversion/regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to coincide. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." From verse 12 it is very clear that this "one body" is Christ. Thus Paul appears to be saying in verse 13 that we become members of Christ's body by being baptized into it by the Spirit. Baptism by the Spirit appears to be, if not equivalent to conversion and new birth, at least simultaneous with them.

But what of the cases in Acts where there clearly was a separation between conversion/regeneration and the baptism of the Spirit? In keeping with the observation in the preceding paragraph that Acts covers a transitional period, it is my interpretation that these cases did indeed involve people who were regenerated before they received the Holy Spirit. They were the last of the Old Testament believers.[1473] They were regenerate because they believed the revelation they had received and feared God. They had not received the Spirit, however, for the promise of his coming could not be fulfilled until Jesus had ascended. (Keep in mind that even the disciples of Jesus, who were certainly already regenerate under the New Testament system, were not filled with the Spirit until Pentecost.) But when on Pentecost those who were already

regenerate under the Old Testament system received Christ, they were filled with the Spirit. As soon as that happened, there were no longer any regenerate Old Testament believers. After the events of Pentecost we find no other clear cases of such a postconversion experience among Jews. What happened to the Jews as a group (Acts 2) also happened to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Thereafter, regeneration and the baptism of the Spirit were simultaneous. The case of the disciples of Apollos in Acts 19 appears to be a matter of incompletely evangelized believers, for they had been baptized only into the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance, and had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. In none of these four cases was the baptism of the Holy Spirit sought by the recipients, nor is there any indication that the gift did not fall upon every member of the group. This interpretive scheme seems to fit well with the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13, with the fact that Scripture nowhere commands us to be baptized in or by the Holy Spirit, and with the record in Acts.

In my judgment it is not possible to determine with any certainty whether the contemporary charismatic phenomena are indeed gifts of the Holy Spirit. There simply is no biblical evidence indicating the time of fulfillment of the prediction that tongues will cease. It is questionable at best to conclude on the basis of the differences between the verbs in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that tongues will cease at one time, and prophecy and knowledge at another. Nor is the historical evidence clear and conclusive. The situation here is somewhat like the situation with respect to the doctrine of apostolic succession. There is a great deal of evidence on both sides. Each group is able to cite an impressive number of data that are to its advantage, bypassing the data presented by the other group. This lack of historical conclusiveness is not a problem, however. For even if history proved that the gift of tongues has ceased, there is nothing to prevent God from reestablishing it. On the other hand, historical proof that the gift has been present through the various eras of the church would not validate the present phenomena.

What we must do, then, is to evaluate each case on its own merits. This does not mean that we are to sit in judgment on the spiritual experience or the spiritual life of other professing Christians. What it does mean is that we cannot assume that everyone who claims to have had a special experience of the Holy Spirit's working has really had one. Scientific studies have discovered enough non-Spirit-caused parallels to warn us against being naively credulous about every claim. Certainly not every exceptional religious experience can be of divine origin, unless God is a very broadly ecumenical and tolerant being indeed, who even grants special manifestations of his Spirit to some who make no claim

to Christian faith and may actually be opposed to it. Certainly if demonic forces could produce imitations of divine miracles in biblical times (e.g., the magicians in Egypt were able to imitate the plagues up to a certain point), the same may be true today as well. Conversely, however, no conclusive case can be made for the contention that such gifts are not for today and cannot occur at the present time. Consequently, one cannot rule in a priori and categorical fashion that a claim of glossolalia is spurious. In fact, it may be downright dangerous, in the light of Jesus's warnings regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, to attribute specific phenomena to demonic activity.

In the final analysis, whether the Bible teaches that the Spirit dispenses special gifts today is not an issue of great practical consequence. For even if he does, we are not to set our lives to seeking them. He bestows them sovereignly; he alone determines the recipients (1 Cor. 12:11). If he chooses to give us a special gift, he will do so regardless of whether we expect it or seek it. What we are commanded to do (Eph. 5:18) is be filled with the Holy Spirit (a present imperative, suggesting ongoing action). This is not so much a matter of our getting more of the Holy Spirit; presumably all Christians possess the Spirit completely. It is, rather, a matter of his possessing more of our lives. Each of us is to aspire to giving the Holy Spirit full control of his or her life. When that happens, our lives will manifest whatever gifts God intends for us to have, along with all the fruit and acts of his empowering that he wishes to display through us. It is to be remembered, as we noted earlier, that no one gift is for every Christian, nor is any gift more significant than the others.

Of more importance, in many ways, than receiving certain gifts is the fruit of the Spirit. These virtues are, in Paul's estimation, the real evidence of the Spirit at work in Christians. Love, joy, and peace in an individual's life are among the surest signs of a vital experience with the Spirit. In particular, Paul stresses love as more desirable than any gifts, no matter how spectacular (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

But what is proper procedure with regard to an actual case of modern-day public practice of what is claimed to be the biblical gift of glossolalia? First, no conclusions should be drawn in advance as to whether it is genuine or not. Then, the procedure laid down by Paul so long ago should be followed. Thus, if one speaks in tongues, there should be an interpreter so that the group as a whole may be edified. Only one should speak at a time and no more than two or three at a session (1 Cor. 14:27). If no one is present to interpret, whether the speaker or some other person, then the would-be speaker should keep silent in the church and restrict the use of tongues to personal devotional practice (v. 28). We must not prohibit speaking in tongues (v. 39); on the other hand, we are nowhere commanded to seek this gift.

Finally, we should note that the emphasis in Scripture is on the one who bestows the gifts rather than on those who receive them. God frequently performs miraculous works without involving human agents. We read, for example, in James 5:14–15, that the elders of the church are to pray for the sick. It is the prayer of faith, not a human miracle-worker, that is said to save them. Whatever be the gift, it is the edification of the church and the glorification of God that are of ultimate importance.

Implications of the Work of the Spirit

1. The gifts that we have are bestowals upon us by the Holy Spirit. We should recognize that they are not our own accomplishments. They are intended to be used in the fulfillment of his plan.
2. The Holy Spirit empowers believers in their Christian life and service. Personal inadequacies should not deter or discourage us.
3. The Holy Spirit dispenses his gifts to the church wisely and sovereignly. Possession or lack of a particular gift is no cause for pride or regret. His gifts are not rewards to those who seek or qualify for them.
4. No one gift is for everyone, and no one person has every gift. The fellowship of the body is needed for full spiritual development of the individual believer.
5. We may rely on the Holy Spirit to give us understanding of the Word of God and to guide us into his will for us.
6. It is appropriate to direct prayer to the Holy Spirit, just as to the Father and the Son, as well as to the Triune God. In such prayers we will thank him for and especially ask him to continue the unique work that he does in us.

Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With light and comfort from above;
Be Thou our Guardian, Thou our Guide;
O’er every thought and step preside.
The light of truth to us display,
And make us know and choose Thy way;
Plant holy fear in every heart,
That we from God may ne’er depart.

Lead us to holiness, the road
Which we must take to dwell with God;
Lead us to Christ, the living Way,
Nor let us from His presence stray.

Simon Browne

41

Recent Issues regarding the Holy Spirit

Chapter Objectives

After completing the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the various ways in which prophecy recently has been related to the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. Express Wolfhart Pannenberg's conception of the Holy Spirit as force field.
3. Explain and assess the activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions, particularly found in the writings of Amos Yong.
4. Evaluate the activity of other spirits, especially as understood by the spiritual warfare movement.

Chapter Summary

The recent revival of interest in the activity of the Holy Spirit has taken several forms, each of which may provide valuable insights, but which also include certain difficulties. Some affirm that, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, any believer with a gift of prophecy may speak words from God. Wolfhart Pannenberg, borrowing from modern physics, proposes that the Holy Spirit is the force field of God's presence. Others, such as Amos Yong, assert that the Holy Spirit may be active in other

religions beyond Christianity. There are also those who hold that there are other spirits active in the world. In various forms, the spiritual warfare movement asserts that evil spirits oppose God and intend harm to his people. A more positive approach to the idea of other spirits, but not acceptable to evangelicals, is that of ecofeminist Chung Hyun Kyung.

Study Questions

- How is prophecy defined by those who affirm the present-day manifestations of the gift of prophecy?
- What are some problems for the recent gift-of-prophecy approach?
- How would you assess the value of Pannenberg's attempt to relate science to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit?
- What are the implications for missionary strategy of Yong's pneumatological approach?
- How does Scripture support and challenge the views of the spiritual warfare movement?

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In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as we noted earlier, there has been a revival of interest and activity relative to the Holy Spirit. Some of this has been the resurgence of older issues, but some has been concerned with issues unique to cultural and general theological factors of the times.

This period in some significant ways is more conducive to an interest in the Holy Spirit. For one thing, postmodernism has brought an emphasis on the subjective and experiential dimension of life. Since the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who particularly relates to Christians in the actual living of their

Christian lives, this has compensated for the relatively lesser amount of biblical material on the Holy Spirit, as compared to the references to the Father and the Son. It also means that the doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit has tended to focus more on humans' personal experiences than on biblical sources.

The Holy Spirit and Prophecy Today

One area of interest in the Holy Spirit has been the appearance of present-day manifestations of the gift of prophecy. While this has been especially associated with the third wave, it has not been restricted to that movement. Basically it is the contention that the New Testament phenomenon of prophetic speaking not only did not cease with the closing of the New Testament canon but is occurring in the church today, is a desirable element of church life, and should be encouraged and fostered.

The first consideration is the definition of prophecy. According to this view, a distinction needs to be drawn between what is designated as prophecy in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Basically, says this approach, Old Testament prophecy involved divinely inspired forth telling, some of it predictive of the future, but all of it representing a specially revealed message from God. As such, it is authoritative, infallible, and when recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, becomes Scripture. In the New Testament, however, this role of declaring authoritative specially revealed truth from God is played not by the prophet but by the apostle, the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament prophet. The status of the teachings and writings of the New Testament apostles, rather than of the New Testament prophets, is to be likened to the status of the Old Testament prophets' teachings and writings. In the New Testament church, prophecy was more generalized, that is, conferred on and practiced by potentially any believer.

Most advocates of the practice of the gift of prophecy for today insist that it is not to be regarded as equal in authority to Scripture. Whereas Scripture is regarded by virtually all of these persons as fully God's Word and therefore authoritative and even inerrant, the word of prophecy is imperfect and impure, containing elements that are not to be trusted and obeyed. Thus Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21, speaking of prophesying, tells his readers to test everything, holding fast to what is good.[1474] This implies that there were prophecies that were not good, true, or authoritative. The prophecy is a human response to a revelation, or a report of the revelation.[1475]

Wayne Grudem says that the Bible identifies as prophets "ordinary Christians who spoke not with absolute divine authority but simply to report something that God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. There are many indications in the New Testament that this ordinary gift of prophecy had authority less than that of the Bible, and even less than that of recognized Bible teaching in the early church."[1476] This distinction between teaching, which is authoritative, and prophecy, which is not necessarily so, means that women should not teach in the church, even though they are allowed to prophesy, as was the case in the New Testament.[1477]

There are both more moderate and more radical forms of proprophecy in contemporary evangelicalism. Grudem represents a more modest version of the view. He sees the gift as "something that God may suddenly bring to mind, or something that God may impress on someone's heart or thoughts in such a way that the person has a sense that it is from God."[1478] An example is where someone feels especially led to pray for someone, and later learns that there was a special need of which the person praying was not specifically aware.

A more radical approach to the contemporary gift of prophecy is that of Jack Deere. Once a professor at Dallas Seminary and a convinced cessationist, he came to a more charismatic approach, and became associated with the Vineyard movement and even some of the Kansas City prophets. He stresses the importance of experience, rather than just theoretical knowledge, such as that restricted to the Scriptures. There is a danger of knowledge of the Bible serving as a filter, interpreting and restricting experience.[1479] He believes God speaks through dreams, visions, a voice audible to one alone, an internal audible voice, and ordinary experiences.[1480] He especially emphasizes knowing particular events in advance, and knowing the presence of sin in persons' hearts, unknown to others. He recognizes the dangers that can come from this approach, including the "God told me to tell you . . ." type of ministry. There are several guidelines to avoid these dangers, such as seeking permission from God to speak, speaking with humility, and distinguishing between revelation, interpretation, and illumination.[1481]

By way of evaluation, these promoters of present-day prophecies have correctly pointed out the danger of allowing presuppositions or preconceptions to control our beliefs and practices. It is indeed true that our Christianity can be a matter of a sort of naturalism, dressed in some "sanctified language." The accommodation can be to a rather naturalistic worldview, where we really do not look for or pray to God to work in any way that would not be predictable on a natural basis.

Some of the types of experiences that these theologians describe are also familiar to many non-charismatics. Many of us have times when we had what we felt were insights into situations and persons that went beyond pure objective knowledge of information. As a pastor, for example, I remember one woman saying to me, “When you preach, it is as if you look right down into my soul and see what is there.” Another time, I served for several months as temporary pastor of a new congregation that had not yet called its first permanent pastor but was in constant imminent danger of disintegration. When I finished there, one member said to me, “You were like a man walking through a field filled with land mines and you never stepped on one of them.” My reply was, “I did not know where the mines were.” Some church-growth specialists speak and write as if church growth is both programmable and predictable on the basis of the methodology used. The same is true with respect to knowing God’s will. Many of us, however, have had strong convictions that God was leading us in a certain way, sometimes in contradiction to what purely rational considerations would be. As my neo-orthodox doctoral mentor once said somewhat satirically in class: “For nineteen hundred years we relied on the Holy Spirit to tell us who was called to ministry. Now that we have the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, we don’t need the Holy Spirit anymore.” Non-charismatics often refer to this as illumination (especially into understanding the meaning and application of Scripture), discernment, or something of the type. Basically, the difference is that non-charismatics see these as less dramatic or crisis-oriented than do the charismatics. They also usually tend to think in terms of applying biblical principles to contemporary situations, rather than more literally applying of biblical teachings and events to the contemporary.

To be sure, this reminder that the Holy Spirit is personal and active in the life of the Christian and the church is an important and needed one. There are, however, certain problems and dangers within this approach. One is that as with other pneumatological issues, the subjective and experiential dimension is often appealed to. There is no clear biblical evidence that the role of prophecy was to continue beyond the New Testament. Admittedly this is an argument from silence, but in this case, the burden of proof is on the affirmative, and, therefore, the absence may be significant. The argument that this is intended to be a permanent gift is not really made biblically. Rather, cases of purported prophecy are the norm, together with a simple assumption that being a New Testament Christian means a rather literal repetition of New Testament instances.

There also sometimes is little real consideration of the difference between the context of the New Testament churches and today’s church. The churches in the book of Acts did not have ready access to the New Testament writings. Indeed,

many of those were in the process of being written. God has now made a permanent provision for some of what prophecy was needed for. There seems to me to be inadequate appreciation of God's indirect processes or secondary causes. Interestingly, Deere recognizes this possible problem in his reference to the man who was waiting for God to rescue him, but declined to accept rescue from persons in a boat and a helicopter.[1482]

There is a problem with a word of prophecy being in error. Most persons advocating this view acknowledge the problem of error. To make this a matter of a report of the revelation, rather than being revelation itself, is, to say the least, interesting. It bears some resemblance to the neo-orthodox view of revelation, but in this case applied to postbiblical, rather than biblical revelations. A major difference, of course, is that this usually involves a more cognitive or informational dimension than did the neo-orthodox view, but there is an echo of Brunner's "no revelation without response." Even making it a matter of group judgment does not completely solve the problem, for there are shifting and overlapping subgroups within the larger group, such as when the majority shifts in terms of what it believes. The difficulty of possible conflicting prophecies is solved by saying that when a second prophecy comes, the first prophet is to yield to him or her. Here there is something of the same sort of difficulty all views of this type have; namely, what if I have a prophecy that your prophecy is wrong? This should not be the case; at least it was not within the church in Acts.

The prophetic movement gives scant attention to Jesus's promises regarding the later work of the Holy Spirit related to the revelation Jesus had given. Note, for example, the following: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26); "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me" (John 15:26); "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you" (John 16:13–15). Some of these statements pertain primarily to the original hearers, but some apply to subsequent generations of Jesus's followers. This is the fusion of Word and Spirit of which Calvin and other reformers made much. Perhaps we should think of this as illumination of the Scriptures that were given by inspiration by the Holy Spirit, rather than as revelation. It is a matter of insight, rather than new truth.

It certainly is appropriate to speak of God leading or guiding in a personal and subjective and even surprising way. This, however, is a message for me, not for others, and should not be applied to others. While there certainly are cases in Scripture of persons advising others, in general God reveals his will for a person to that person, not to someone else.

There is such a thing as God "revealing" his will for a group. This, however, when based on the pattern in Acts, is a matter of the group receiving the communication as a group. While there may be a leader who persuades the others, it is a matter of persuasion, not of mere proclamation. The Spirit is the one who convinces, who brings about conviction, as Jesus pointed out: "When he [the Advocate] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). While his reference here is specifically to conviction of sin, in light of the other statements in this discourse, it seems to have broader application.

This prophetic movement's approach fails to take account of some post-biblical insights of psychology and sociology. This actually occurs both from modern and postmodern perspectives. From the modern perspective, psychology offers alternative explanations of some things that some claim as spiritual working. Some of it may be a matter of subjective psychological phenomena, rather than of an objective connection with the Holy Spirit. From a postmodern perspective, we are reminded that all our knowledge is conditioned by our cultural and historical situation. It may be that what is perceived as such a powerful impression by the Holy Spirit is actually our own personality or biases. One pastor presented to his church a set of five initiatives that he felt God had led him to propose, suggesting that if the congregation did not adopt them, he was not sure he would remain with that church. He commented, "I just like change—any kind of change," without realizing that perhaps what he was convinced was God's leading was a manifestation of his own personality characteristics. The church did approve all of his proposals, but within two years he left for a different type of ministry nonetheless.

The valid insights of this prophetic movement may be incorporated without falling into some of its pitfalls. Experience is a suspect criterion, in part because some of us have had experiences that contradict the experiences marshaled here. For example, I have found that the working of the Spirit is something of which I am not conscious, but pray for. I have found that persons were blessed from a sermon that I thought I had done poorly, or even in a way that I had not consciously intended. In other words, the "prophetic" dimension is sometimes in the reception more than in the declaration. I am not certain that the apostles at the Pentecost gathering spoke multiple languages. They may have spoken their

own language, presumably Aramaic, and the hearers heard different languages. This may be the best interpretation of the account: “Utterly amazed, they asked, ‘Aren’t all of these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia. Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:7–12).

I often pray for people when I do not know the exact need rather than when their situation is clear to me. This may well be what Paul was referring to when he wrote, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God” (Rom. 8:26–27). It is probably significant that this passage immediately precedes the statement “and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (v. 28).

The Holy Spirit and Science

A very different construction is found in Wolfhart Pannenberg’s conception of the Holy Spirit as force field. This concept, difficult to grasp, must be set within the larger context of his whole theology and theological method. His goal is a rational theology, one that does not rely on pietism or fideism. Thus, the Spirit is not to be thought of as a merely subjective factor, a rationale for faith. He says, “The Spirit of which the New Testament speaks is no ‘haven of ignorance’ (*asylum ignorantiae*) for pious experience, which exempts one from all obligation to account for its contents. The Christian message will not regain its missionary power . . . unless this falsification of the Holy Spirit is set aside which has developed in the history of piety.”[1483]

Pannenberg wants to give the Spirit a role beyond the merely epistemological (convicting of the truth) and the soteriological. His theology emphasizes the ontological dimension. His doctrine of creation is framed within a trinitarian view. He says, “According to the biblical testimony, the Spirit of God is the life-giving principle, to which all creatures owe life, movement, and activity.”[1484] He sees this principle taught positively in Genesis 2:7, and negatively in Psalm 104:29 and Job 34:14–15. He recognizes of course that such a view contradicts

modern biology, according to which life is a function of living cells or the living creature. He poses the question, however, of whether it is possible "to reconcile the statements about the Spirit of God as the origin of life with the modern understanding."[1485]

Pannenberg believes that a fruitful model for investigating this lies in the concept of force fields. Whereas classical physics had thought of all forces as coming from bodies or masses, Michael Faraday "regarded bodies themselves as forms of forces that for their part are no longer qualities of bodies but independent realities that are 'givens' for bodily phenomena. He now viewed these forces as fields that occupy space in order to avoid the problems involved in the idea of force working at a distance, and he hoped that ultimately all these fields would be reducible to a single all-embracing field of force."[1486]

Pannenberg then applies this concept to explicating the relationship of the Spirit to the creation: "Insofar as the field concept corresponds to the older doctrines it is not a mistake, but does justice to the history and concept of spirit, if we relate the field theories of modern physics to the Christian doctrine of the dynamic work of the divine Spirit in creation."[1487]

Pannenberg's doctrine of the Spirit is in turn part of his broader conception of the relationship of God to the world, in which God is the "creative and life-giving dynamic," a view that some have labeled panentheism. He says, "The Spirit is the force field of God's mighty presence (Ps. 139:7)."[1488]

Because of the differences between physics' way of describing reality and that of theology, there cannot be a "direct theological interpretation of the field theories of physics."[1489] The theological development of the concept does, however, have room for the physical description, for which there is empirical demonstration. Thus, Pannenberg's coherence view of truth comes into play.

We should not, however, assume that Pannenberg is simply saying that the Holy Spirit is a force field. Rather, he asserts that the Spirit is "a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality."[1490] He also says, "The deity as field can find equal manifestation in all three persons."[1491] Beyond that, however, he states, "The idea of the divine life as a dynamic field sees the divine Spirit who unites the three persons as proceeding from the Father, received by the Son, and common to both, so that precisely in this way he is the force field of their fellowship that is distinct from them both."[1492]

Perhaps Pannenberg's view can be summarized in part and in oversimplified fashion as follows:

1. The Trinity is to be thought of as a force field, manifested equally in three persons.

2. The Holy Spirit is the force field that unites the three persons, while yet being a third person, distinct from the other two.
3. The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who uniquely mediates their relationship to the creation, in a fashion that can be thought of as a force field.[1493] Space and time are aspects of the Spirit's working in relationship to the world.[1494]

Pannenberg is to be commended for creatively attempting to relate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to modern scientific theory. There is widespread uncertainty regarding the extent to which he is using the concept analogically versus meaning something more by it.[1495] A number of commentators, even some sympathetic to his theology in general, suspect that he may have blurred the line between theological and scientific concepts. Ted Peters, for example, warns of the "dangers of trying to float a theological assertion aboard a scientific ship" in the waters where "intellectual weather can change suddenly."[1496] There appears to be something of a dilemma here, whether for Pannenberg or for the interpreter. To the extent that this terminology of force field is taken more literally, an explanation of how God relates to the world is given, but has the tendency to make God material, or a manifestation of the material. The result is ambiguity regarding how personal God can be thought to be. That problem is avoided by considering the terminology analogical or figurative, but the question of how the spiritual interfaces with material processes is heightened. Probably this should be best thought of as a fruitful avenue of thought, but in need of further exploration.

The Holy Spirit and Other World Religions

Traditionally, the question of Christianity's relationship to other world religions has been an important one. It has been especially urgent at times when contact between these different religions has been most prevalent, such as when Christianity expanded into other cultures. In recent years, the discussion of such relationships has been accelerated because on the one hand, migration from Latin America, Africa, and Asia to Europe and North America has increased, and on the other hand, Christianity's most rapid growth has been taking place in parts of the world where other religions have a strong or even dominant presence. In addition, increased travel and communication have made Christians more directly aware of non-Christian religions than they had previously been. In the past, the issues usually fell in the area of Christology and soteriology, that is,

whether Christ is the exclusive means of salvation. Three positions were defined. Exclusivism is the view that Christianity is true and that only those who overtly subscribe to its beliefs and practices receive salvation. Inclusivism insists that salvation is only through Jesus Christ or the church, but there may be people who are Christians without being consciously involved in Christianity. Pluralism teaches that all religions are actually speaking of the same thing, so that the different religions are simply alternate routes, leading to the same goal.

Now, however, the discussion is also being pursued in terms of pneumatology, that is, whether and to what extent and in what form the Holy Spirit may be active in other religions than overt Christianity. One who has devoted virtually all of his research and writing to the role of the Spirit is Amos Yong, an Asian-American Pentecostal. With respect to the specific issue before us, he believes that a pneumatological approach to theology of religions "not only helps with our understanding of religious pluralism (the theological or theoretical dimensions) but enables our engaging with religious otherness (the practical or intersubjective dimension). . . . [It] begins with the universal presence of the Holy Spirit as the universal presence and activity of God."[1497]

Yong bases this starting point on the reference to the Spirit being poured out "on all people" in Acts 2:17, which he understands "to have universal application on the one hand and to include the world of the religions on the other."[1498] The fact that the hearers all heard the message being spoken in their own language must be seen in connection with the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis. This means that this "outpouring of the Spirit redeems the diversity of languages." This diversity of languages is also connected with the diversity of cultures, and since culture is inseparably connected with religion, "the principle of linguistic and cultural diversity necessarily includes that of religious diversity. Hence, the Pentecost narrative can be understood to redeem not only human language and culture, but also human religiosity."[1499] This does not mean that all human religiousness is sanctified any more than are all human words or every aspect of culture. It does mean, however, that there is a narrative ground for "understanding the world of the religions in pneumatological perspective."[1500]

Yong's view contains several key elements. One is the dynamic nature of religion. Conversion should be understood not as a point but as an ongoing process. This is true of traditions as well. So Yong says that his pneumatological approach makes it possible "to recognize 'religions' and 'religious traditions' not as nouns but as verbs: they are formed by the processes of human 'traditioning,' and, therefore, shaped by the various human responses and activities to realities considered transcendent."[1501] In this pneumatological approach, "praxis becomes just as, if not more, important than beliefs (doctrines) and that precisely

because pneumatology calls attention to divine activity rather than divine being."[1502] Rather than being subordinated to doctrines, praxis (ritual, piety, devotion, morality, and the like) becomes equal to or even more important than doctrines.[1503]

Yong faces the question of interreligious dialogue. The more recent approach of postmodernism regards meaning as a function of a given community, in which case there is an incommensurability between different religions. On the other hand, entering into the semiotic system of another religion compromises the objectivity of the theologian of religion. Yong, however, believes that the Holy Spirit who enables Christians to speak in other tongues can also enable one to understand another religion from within it.[1504]

This has significant implications for missionary strategy. Whereas traditionally missionaries had engaged both in dialogue and proclamation in relation to those of other faiths, the pneumatological approach provides not only a practical but a theological basis for such action. This means entering into the situation of the person from another religion, with the benefits of removing misunderstandings of the other's faith, while experiencing a deepening of one's own commitment, and recognizing erroneous elements of one's own faith.[1505] He urges a type of dialogue in which one does not simply pretend to listen to the other in order to gain an opportunity to proclaim one's own faith, but rather attempts to so enter into the other's faith that one sees the world and life as a Buddhist or Hindu sees it. While recognizing that this sort of dialogical "conversion" (which is simply a case of incarnating one's own faith in another culture) could result in actually becoming converted to the other faith in the full religious sense, Yong is confident that this is not likely to happen, because this whole pneumatological theology of religions is based on belief in the working of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ.[1506]

Some have raised questions as to the uniqueness of Christianity in a scheme in which the Holy Spirit is seen as present and active in other religions. Yong is concerned to understand the term "unique" properly. In a sense, all religions are unique, just as every particular thing is unique. That simply means that everything that exists is not something else, but that it is itself. The question of qualitative uniqueness, however, means that each religion has characteristics that are different from other religions. He is concerned about the attempt to judge that true revelation is found only in Christianity. He contends that there is a human craving for security that seeks to erect standards to judge the authenticity of revelation. We must remember, however, that "if there is one consistent feature of the scriptural narratives about the Spirit, it is that the Spirit cannot be controlled by human ideologies; rather, like the wind, the Spirit's comings and

going cannot be predicted. This unpredictability applies not only to human interpretation of divine revelation but also to the norms and criteria with which we attempt to discern the presence and activity of the Spirit and of other spirits."[1507] We cannot judge in advance what is genuine revelation and what is not, just as the formation of the canon was an ex post facto conclusion.

There is much that is commendable about Yong's position. It indeed is the case that effective mission activity must involve sympathetic inquiry and listening. Further, just as the fall did not obliterate the image of God in humans, the Spirit is not necessarily totally absent in any but Christian circles. There is such a thing as common grace, and the Holy Spirit's work is a part of that. Once we have acknowledged these valuable elements within this pneumatology, however, there is much that should give us pause about his contentions. For one thing, the process by which he gets from the Pentecost passage in Acts 2 to this fully developed pneumatology contains a number of gaps, both exegetical and logical. Further, he seems to assume several elements of recent and present culture without acknowledging or perhaps even recognizing them. A prominent example would be his preference for verbs over nouns in the discussion of religion. The twentieth century displayed a marked disdain for substantives, preferring verbs or adjectives. This assumption may be valid, but that needs to be justified, if such extensive conclusions are to rest upon it. He uses behavioral sciences selectively to bolster his case, for example, in appealing to the desire for security. Finally, there seems to be real ambiguity or perhaps even ambivalence regarding spelling out more exactly the degree of singularity of Christianity as a channel of God's grace.

The Holy Spirit and Other "Spirits"

In recent years there has been a marked increase in interest in the presence and activity of other spirits in the world. There is both a negative and a positive version of this, with respect to the assessment of these other spirits.

The negative view can be found exemplified in the spiritual warfare movement. This has taken a variety of forms. It has been prominent within the third wave. It also is a vivid feature of much African Christianity, where there is a strong sense of the presence of evil spirits. Charles Kraft and C. Peter Wagner —two Fuller Theological Seminary professors who, as former missionaries and students of worldwide Christianity, came in contact with the struggle of Christians with evil—helped to popularize it in the United States.

In general, the term “spiritual warfare” refers to the fact that the Christian is involved in the struggle between the forces of God and those of evil, so that Clinton Arnold defines the term as “a way of characterizing our common struggle as Christians.”[1508] As developed by many today, the view features a worldview in which spiritual beings play a very large part in what transpires, both on the earth and on a more cosmic scale. The Christian life is focused on the struggle with the evil beings, whether they are considered angels or spirits. The movement was given widespread exposure through a novel written by Frank Peretti.[1509] Although it is a novel, it is given a specific setting and seems intended to convey the impression that this is representative of what is actually occurring within the world today.

Often this view is seen as the revival of a worldview that has been suppressed by the modernist (by which is meant Enlightenment) worldview that virtually excluded the spiritual world, particularly evil spirits. Gregory Boyd has blended this view with his open theism, to offer a solution to the problem of evil. In his understanding, the classical view of God had allowed Greek philosophical ideas to overwhelm the biblical, thus positing an all-knowing, all-powerful (or all-controlling) God. Since everything that happens is necessarily part of God’s will, somehow evil occurrences must be willed by God, although in some versions human will enters the picture. In contrast, Boyd sees evil as in large part caused by personal evil forces. Thus, there need be no attempt to justify God in light of these evil events. The problem is rather one of engaging in the struggle with the forces of evil. In their battle, the evil spirits employ natural and human agents. They do this in part by actually taking control of humans, whether on the lesser scale of simply influencing their thoughts, or on the more radical scale of demon possession of humans, even of Christians in some cases. They may also utilize nature, including bringing illness upon believers, or working through social and political institutions and processes. The task of believers is to be aware of the activity of these evil forces and to resist them in the spiritual combat that is going on, rebuking the evil spirits, casting them out of those possessed, and engaging in other acts of spiritual warfare.[1510]

Beyond the struggle that goes on here on earth between good and evil forces, there is also a cosmic dimension. In the heavens, as it were, the struggle between evil spirits on the one hand, and the forces of good, including both spirits and Christians, on the other hand, is going on. It is important that Christians be aware of this great struggle, arm themselves for it, and participate in it. Combat on this extraterrestrial level involves what Wagner calls “strategic-level spiritual warfare,” or SLSW.[1511]

Often in the more radical forms of spiritual warfare, the organization of this evil spiritual world is spelled out in considerable detail. There are levels of organization. In addition, based on Daniel 10, spiritual mapping is done, in the belief that there are territorial spirits. There also are spirits who have jurisdiction over particular areas of human temptation and sin.[1512]

Similar movements can be found among Christians in the less developed countries. In Africa, for example, there is a strong belief in evil spirits. Traditional African culture makes much of the power of spirits, and, consequently, when Christians are able to overcome evil spirits, evangelism gains credibility. In addition, traditional African religion believes in the activities of the spirits of one's ancestors on one's behalf.

Spiritual warfare has made a major contribution to Christianity in general by calling attention to the reality of the spiritual struggle that is going on. Modern culture had tended to eliminate or at least ignore the reality of supernatural forces, and had reduced all of the evil in the world to naturalistically explainable causes. Many Christians have tended to be conformed to this same outlook, and have not really considered the possibility of demonic activity. The decline in awareness of sin and temptation have been part of this response. Scripture makes clear that there is a devil, who has a force of demons or evil spirits, and he and his forces are desperately spiritually opposing God and his followers. Christians are repeatedly exhorted by the Scripture writers to engage in this spiritual struggle.

There are, however, a number of points at which this version of the Christian life must be carefully scrutinized and questioned. For one thing, it is important to remember that Christ has decisively overcome the forces of evil in his death and resurrection, and this victory will be finally realized fully in the eschaton. Beyond that, we have gained considerable insight into the role of natural causes of diseases. It is not necessary to automatically assume that a particular illness is the result of satanic oppression. While it may be common to assume that this warfare model is more in keeping with postmodernism than with modernism, it should be noted that much of the description of the spiritual struggle going on has more in common with the premodern than with the postmodern period.[1513] True postmodern thought does not ignore the correct insights of modernity regarding scientific and medical matters. One spiritual warfare leader gave a sermon describing his "black night of the soul," which had required him to take several months leave of absence from his duties. To a person with even a basic understanding of psychology, his description sounded a great deal like the clinical symptoms of depression, yet he seemed not to have considered that possibility. God, we should remember, works both directly and immediately, and

indirectly and through means. It is just as much a case of divine healing when God works through the skilled efforts of a physician as when he intervenes miraculously. While the latter may be the more spectacular, we do not honor God when we neglect the means he may have provided for our welfare. While Boyd claims certain dimensions of quantum mechanics (as interpreted by him) in support of the more open view of reality that he believes supports this spiritual warfare view, he ignores certain other elements of it, such as the possibility of multiple dimensions and time travel, that contradict it. Although quantum mechanics notes the impossibility of predicting certain occurrences on the subatomic level, it finds regularity in the larger patterns of things.

More serious, however, is the discrepancy between some portions of this theory and the New Testament practice, particularly that of Jesus. The rather facile equation of spiritual warfare practices with the New Testament is questionable at best. We have noted the teaching that the victory has in a sense already been won. So, for example, we find that in Jesus's encounters with demons, there was no struggle. As Robert Guelich puts it, "Jesus does not have to subdue the demons. Their behavior from the outset shows them to recognize the hopelessness of their situation before him. They come to him as supplicants rather than negotiators."[1514] Further, the exorcisms found in some of the spiritual warfare literature seem to bear more resemblance to magical formulas than to the biblical incidents of which these are claimed to be modern-day examples.[1515] Beyond that, the emphasis on military-type organization of the forces of evil and of the territorial spirits has little or no precedent in the biblical accounts. As Guelich summarizes his assessment of Peretti's view, the "accent on spiritual warfare as the fundamental description of the Christian life risks turning the 'Prince of peace' into the 'Commander-in-chief,' a role that fits the messianic expectation of Jewish apocalyptic literature more than the Christology of the Gospels and the Pauline corpus. It leads to numerous distortions about the person and work of Christ, the believers' role in proclaiming the gospel with its personal and social implications, Satan and his hosts, and the nature of evil."[1516] Paul Hiebert believes the difficulty comes from reading the Scripture through the lens of a worldview that is foreign to it, such as a tribal worldview of animistic societies, or an Indo-European worldview based on a cosmic dualism, such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, or Hinduism.[1517]

We conclude then that while the spiritual warfare movement has correctly re-emphasized the reality and activity of evil spiritual forces, especially in places such as Africa, it risks seriously distorting the biblical teaching on these matters.[1518] In fact, as Guelich points out, it may lead into the second of the two mistakes C. S. Lewis mentioned regarding devils: "to believe, and to feel an

excessive and unhealthy interest in them."[1519] Thus, paradoxically, it may lead to the Christian becoming a victim of Satan's battle plan.[1520]

There is another view that takes much more positively the idea of other spirits. It has been represented quite emphatically by Chung Hyun Kyung, who terms herself an ecofeminist. She made an unusual presentation at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra, Australia, in 1991. In that presentation she invoked a variety of spirits, including those of the Jews who died in the holocaust of World War 2, those like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. who died in the struggle for liberation of their people, the male babies who died in the slaughter by Herod, the people killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the atomic explosion, and the people in the Amazon rain forest now being murdered every day. All of these spirits and others cry out, and Chung declared that we must all pray a prayer of repentance for the wrongs done to these spirits.

The presentation proved very controversial, in part because of the form in which it was presented. Without written lecture notes or shoes, she appeared on the stage in the role of a Korean shaman, dancing among Korean and aboriginal dancers, dancing an exorcist's dance. She gave an image of the Holy Spirit with Kwan In, a goddess in popular Buddhist religion, whom she identified as a feminine image of Christ.[1521] There was a strong negative reaction from the Orthodox and the evangelicals present. Identifying herself as a "salimist," a Korean ecofeminist, and continuing to develop these themes,[1522] she now teaches at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Chung's view is representative of some liberation theologians who have incorporated ecological concerns into their theology. While the emphasis on concern for oppressed peoples and for the preservation of the creation is both timely and biblically supported, the framework in which it is developed is too far removed from biblical teaching to be a viable option for evangelicals.

PART 10
SALVATION

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42
Conceptions of Salvation

Chapter Objectives

Following this chapter, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain the details on which various conceptions of salvation differ.
2. Identify and describe five different conceptions of salvation.
3. Compare and contrast five different conceptions of salvation and evaluate which one best explains the biblical evidence.

Chapter Summary

Differing conceptions of salvation have developed over many years, emphasizing various aspects of salvation. Five conceptions of salvation are most prominent. Liberation theology emphasizes a new social and economic order. Existential theology emphasizes a change in the individual's outlook on life. Secular theology believes that salvation comes when individuals separate from religion to solve their own problems. Contemporary Roman Catholicism has developed a view of salvation much broader than the traditional view. The evangelical position holds that salvation is a total change in an individual that progresses through sanctification toward glorification.

Study Questions

- Why are there so many details on which conceptions of salvation differ?
- What portions of Scripture has liberation theology emphasized, and why?
- What is Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence?
- According to Bonhoeffer, what is God's relationship to the secular world?
- How has the Catholic position on salvation changed?
- What is involved in salvation, according to the evangelical position?

Outline

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Secular Theology

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Evangelical Theology

Salvation is the application of the work of Christ to the lives of humans. Accordingly, the doctrine of salvation has particular appeal and relevance, since it pertains to the most crucial needs of the human person. This is especially apparent to those who understand the biblical teaching regarding sin. Indeed, because of the primacy of this need within the life of the individual, some recent theologies have dealt first with salvation, and then have turned back to the person and work of Christ.[1523] While this approach has a definite apologetic value in preaching, it has limitations as a format for theology, for it assumes that

the human is the best judge of his or her own problem, and may even lead to a situation in which the world dictates the terms on which its dialogue with the church is conducted.

The meaning of the term “salvation” may seem somewhat obvious to persons familiar with it. Yet even within Christian circles there are rather widely differing conceptions of what salvation entails. Before examining the more prominent of these conceptions, it will be helpful to look briefly at various details on which they differ. This will give us categories we can employ as we analyze the several views.

Details on Which Conceptions of Salvation Differ

The Time Dimension

Salvation is variously thought of as a single occurrence at the beginning of the Christian life, a process continuing throughout the Christian life, or a future event. Some Christians regard salvation as basically complete at the initiation of the Christian life. They tend to say, “We have been saved.” Others see salvation as in process—“we are being saved.” Yet others think of salvation as something that will be received in the future—“we shall be saved.” Two or all three of these views may be combined, in which case the separate aspects of salvation (e.g., justification, sanctification, glorification) are understood as occurring at different times.

We must also determine the kind of time involved. In the Greek language in particular, the verb employed may depict an action as either punctiliar or durative, or it may make no specification whatsoever as to the kind of time involved. Consequently, salvation and its constituent aspects can be conceived of in several different ways:

1. A series of points:
   . . . . . .
2. A series of discontinuous processes:
   _____ _____ _____ _____
3. A series of overlapping processes:
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. A single continuous process with distinguishable components:
   _____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____

Nature and Locus of the Need

A second question relates to the nature and locus of the need that must be dealt with. In the traditional view, the human's basic deficiency is thought of as being vertical, as separation from God. As violation of the will of God, sin results in enmity toward God. What is needed is to restore the broken relationship between God and the creature. This is the evangelical view of salvation. It is characterized by terms like "conversion," "forgiveness," "reconciliation," and "adoption." A second view is that the primary human problem is horizontal. This may mean a deficient individual adjustment to others, or a fundamental lack of harmony within society as a whole. Salvation involves the removal of ruptures within the human race, the healing of personal and social relationships. "Relational theology" is concerned with this process on the level of individual maladjustments and small-group problems. Liberation theologies are concerned with the conflicts between different racial, gender, or economic classes, the fact that the whole of society is so structured as to deny certain of its members some of the basic necessities of life. Finally, the primary human problem is also thought to be internal. The individual is plagued with feelings that must be eradicated—guilt, inferiority, insecurity. "Adjustment," "self-understanding," "self-acceptance," and "growth in self-esteem" are catchwords here.

The Medium of Salvation

The question of how salvation is obtained or transmitted is also highly important. Some views regard the transmission of salvation as virtually a physical process. This is true of certain sacramentalist systems that believe salvation or grace to be obtained by means of a physical object. For example, in traditional Roman Catholicism, grace is believed to be actually transmitted and received by taking the bread of the Eucharist into one's body. While the value of the sacrament depends to some extent on the inward attitude or condition of the communicant, grace is received primarily through the external physical act. Others think that salvation is conveyed by moral action. Here salvation is something created by altering the state of affairs. This idea of salvation is found in the social gospel movement and in liberation theologies. The approach to change advocated by some of these ideologies is sometimes secular in nature,

involving, for example, the use of normal political channels. Evangelical theologies represent a third idea: salvation is mediated by faith. Faith appropriates the work accomplished by Christ. The recipient is, in a sense, passive in this process. (These issues will be examined more fully in chapter 48.)

The Direction of Movement in Salvation

An additional consideration is the direction of movement in salvation. Does God work by saving individuals, effecting a personal transformation that proceeds outward into society and changes the world of which the redeemed are a part? Or does God work by altering the structures of our society and then using these altered structures to change the persons who make it up?

The social gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was convinced that the basic human problem lies not in a perverted human nature, but in an evil social environment. So instead of attempting to cure individuals, who are corrupted by society, we must alter the conditions leading to their illness. We might say that the advocates of the social gospel were proposing a sort of spiritual public health ministry. In another way it paralleled behaviorism's view that the individual personality is little more than a set of behavior patterns determined by one's environment.

The opposite approach has been advocated by those segments of Christianity that emphasize conversion. The evils of society result from the fact that it is composed of evil individuals. Only as these individuals are transformed is there any real hope for changing society. Altered individuals will eventually change society, not simply because the whole is composed of the sum of its parts, but also because supernaturally transformed individuals have the motivation to work for the change of the societal whole.

The Extent of Salvation

The extent of salvation is an issue for those who think of salvation as applying to individual persons rather than to society. The question is, who or how many members of the human race will be saved? The particularist position sees salvation as based on individual responses to the grace of God. It maintains that not all will respond affirmatively to God; consequently, some will be lost and some saved. The universalist position, on the other hand, holds that God will restore all humans to the relationship with him for which they were originally intended. There are two varieties of the universalist position. One might be a universalist by being an optimistic particularist. That is to say, one might hold

both that it is necessary to accept Jesus Christ personally in order to be saved, and that every individual will do so. Unfortunately, however, it does not appear that everyone in the past has accepted Christ; indeed, countless numbers did not even have the opportunity to do so. It consequently is not feasible to think of all as being saved in this fashion, unless there is some sort of unconscious means by which the conditions for salvation can be fulfilled. The more common universalist position is to assume that in the end God will somehow simply accept all persons into eternal fellowship with himself.

The Objects of Salvation

Some hold that only human beings, individually and collectively, are to be saved. This view considers the rest of the creation merely a stage on which the human drama is worked out; it is therefore only incidental to the whole occurrence of salvation. An alternative view, however, maintains that human beings are not alone in having been affected by the presence of sin in the creation. Usually taking its cue from Paul's statements in Romans 8:18–25, the alternative view argues that salvation, in its final form, will include restoration of the entire fallen cosmos, which is now under the bondage of sin, to the pure and glorious condition in which it was created and for which it was destined by its Maker.

Current Conceptions of Salvation

Liberation Theologies

One of the vital movements currently propounding its unique view of salvation is the cluster of theologies that may collectively be referred to as "liberation theologies." We might subdivide this movement into black, feminist, and third world theologies. It is especially the last of these three that is referred to as liberation theology. While some significant differences have occasionally produced conflict among these groups, there is a sufficient commonality among them to enable us to trace some basic features of their view of the nature of salvation.

One of the common emphases is that the basic problem of society is the oppression and exploitation of the powerless classes by the powerful. Salvation consists in deliverance (or liberation) from such oppression. The method of liberation will be appropriate to the nature of the specific situation.

The liberation theologies' analysis of humanity's predicament stems from two sources. On the one hand, there is a consensus that the capitalist or "developmentalist" approach to economic and political matters is inherently both wrong and inept. Capitalists hold that there is one process through which all societies ought ideally to pass. The problem with the undeveloped nations is simply that they are not as far along in the process as are the more industrial nations. As the undeveloped nations advance, their problems will be solved.[1524] To the liberation theologians it is increasingly apparent, however, that the economic development of the advanced nations, as well as the prosperity of the elite social classes, is achieved at the expense of the less fortunate. One sees in Latin American countries the sharp contrast of luxury high-rise apartments adjacent to slums. International corporations succeed because they exploit the cheap labor in banana republics and similar places. Rich nations use military power to keep poor countries subservient. For the poorer nations to emulate the practices of the richer nations will not result in prosperity for all. The underlying reason is that the prosperous nations are prosperous specifically because they keep other nations impoverished. The gap between poor and rich continues to increase. Not only are there large numbers (even in the United States) living under poverty conditions; there are people who literally are unable to live! In addition, millions work under degrading and unfair conditions.[1525]

The other source of this push to see salvation as liberation from exploitation is a sense that the Bible identifies with the oppressed. Liberation theologians acknowledge that their theology is biased in its approach to the Bible, but respond that the biblical writers shared this bias. The history of God's redemptive working is a history of groups of oppressed people. The people of Israel were oppressed in Egypt and in later history as well by more powerful nations. Consider the raids of the Philistines and captivity at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The church, particularly as it expanded into Gentile territory, was made up of powerless, poor, and unimportant persons rather than the elite of society. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez summarize: "First of all, is it true that most of the Bible is written from the perspective of the powerless? Surely this is the case."[1526]

Liberation theology concludes from the fact of God's proclivity for speaking the Word through the powerless that his message of salvation concerns them in particular. Jesus confirmed this in Luke 10:21: "I praise you, Father, . . . because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." Either the wise and powerful must hear God's Word through powerless persons such as Nathan, Amos, Peter, and Jesus, or they will not hear it at all.

But what is the specific nature of salvation as viewed by liberation theologies? These theologies do not claim to be universal theories, but are closely tied in with concrete political realities. Universal theories usually turn out to be the theological conceptions of white middle-class males. Black theology, by contrast, claims to be a way of breaking out of the corrupting influence of white thought to formulate a theology built on norms and drawn from sources appropriate to the black community.[1527]

Correlatively, liberation theologies do not view the Bible as universal in nature. When examined closely, it is seen to be a book not of eternal truths and rules, but of specific history. And the specific history in the Bible is not merely narration of past events. It is also a plan for the redemption of God's creation, a political task to be carried out.[1528]

Although liberation theology relates particularly to concrete historical and political matters, it does not understand itself to be merely a fragmentary theology. It is concerned with and deals with the whole of Christian theology. It is not merely about liberation. It is designed to be a treatment of all the doctrines or topics of traditional theology, but from the perspective of liberation.[1529]

Liberation theology does not understand God to be the impassive, immutable, unknowable being traditionally believed in by most Christians. Rather, God is active. He is involved with the poor in their struggle. An evidence of this is the incarnation, by which God, far from remaining aloof and secure, came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and entered the human struggle. In liberation theology, the unchanging and unchangeable God of traditional theism is actually an idol developed by those who had the most to lose from change. But on the contrary, God is actively involved in change. This means that he is not neutral. If his justice is to be an equalizing justice, it must necessarily work in an unequal or compensating manner in an unequal world. Perhaps the most emphatic statement of this view was made by James Cone: "Black theology cannot accept a view of God which does not represent him as being for blacks and thus against whites. Living in a world of white oppressors, black people have no time for a neutral God."[1530]

Liberation theology's view of salvation assumes a particular view of humanity and of sin. Traditional theology has often emphasized humility and self-abasement as the primary virtues of humankind as designed by God. Pride, correspondingly, is viewed as the cardinal sin. Sin is often considered a matter of inner attitudes or private misdeeds. According to liberationists, however, the Bible does not emphasize humility, an attribute that often leads to acceptance of oppression. Rather, in passages like Psalm 8, the Bible exalts the human creature. Moreover, the Bible does not look upon internal pride as the principal

sin. Serving the interests of the powerful in this respect as in so many others, theology and Christian preaching have tended to ignore the sort of sin most often condemned in the Bible: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isa. 5:8).[1531]

Salvation is not to be thought of primarily as individual life after death, the liberation theologians maintain. The Bible concerns itself much more with the kingdom of God. Even eternal life is usually placed in the context of a new social order and is regarded not so much as being plucked out of history as being a participant in its culmination. This understanding that the goal of history is the realization of justice has never been popular with the powerful. If, as the traditional formulation has it, history and eternity are two parallel (i.e., nonintersecting) realms, our goal within history is to gain access to eternity. This can best be achieved by being meek and accepting. Since the chief concern of the human individual is for his or her soul to go to heaven, those who exploit the body may actually be rendering a service. But as Gonzalez and Gonzalez put it, if history and eternity intersect, “if salvation is moving into a new order which includes the entire human being, then we must strive against everything which at present denies that order.”[1532] The salvation of all persons from oppression is the goal of God’s work in history and must therefore be the task of those who believe in him, utilizing every means possible, including political effort and even revolution if necessary.

Existential Theology

A variety of twentieth-century theologies were existential in the sense of being based on or constructed from existential philosophy. Indeed, to varying degrees probably the majority of twentieth-century theologies incorporated some measure of existentialism into their formulations of doctrine. We have in mind here, however, those that are overtly and avowedly existential in orientation, theologies in which existential philosophy plays a major and significant role. Perhaps the outstanding representative of existential theology in this sense is Rudolf Bultmann and his demythologization program. Bultmann sought to interpret the New Testament and indeed to construct a theology on the basis of the thought of Martin Heidegger.

A first major tenet is the distinction between objective and subjective knowledge. Objective knowledge consists of ideas that correctly reflect or correspond with the object signified. Here the attitude of the subject or knower has no positive contribution to make, rather becoming an obstacle. Subjective knowledge is quite different, however. Here the central concern is not accuracy

of depiction of the object signified, but the subjective involvement or inward passion of the knower regarding the topic of discussion or object of knowledge. Our subjective knowledge of another person is not our fund of objective ideas about that person; it is a matter of our feelings toward him or her. The same is true of our subjective knowledge of ourselves. The truth about ourselves, then, involves far more than objective information. For while we may have all sorts of scientific knowledge about our body, we may know very little about the real self, who we actually are.[1533]

On Bultmann's view, then, the Bible is not essentially a source of objective information about God, about the human person and condition. It gives us *Geschichte* rather than *Historie*. It is not primarily an objective account of factual occurrences, but of the impact that various occurrences had on the disciples. Its aim is not to inform us, but to transform us; not to add to our store of information, but to affect our existence.

Bultmann borrowed from Heidegger the concept of authentic and inauthentic existence. He mentions two tendencies in "modern man." There is, on the one hand, a tendency to be guided in life by a self-orientation, to fulfill one's desires for happiness and security, usefulness and profit. This is selfishness and presumptuousness. Love for others and desire to know, tell, and honor the truth are subservient to the drive for self-aggrandizement. Not only are humans disrespectful of the concerns and needs of others, but they are also disobedient to the commands and claims of God on their lives. They either deny that God exists, or if they do believe, deny that God has legitimate right to their obedience and devotion.[1534]

The other tendency of "modern man" is autonomy. This is the belief that one can gain real security by one's own efforts, through the accumulation of wealth, the proliferation of technology, and the quest to wield influence, either individually or collectively. This is, unfortunately, an unattainable hope, because of insuperable obstacles, like death and natural disasters. The continued human selfish and autonomous action constitutes a rejection or denial of all that the human is intended to be.[1535] What, then, is authentic existence or salvation? The Word of God "calls man away from his selfishness and from the illusory security which he has built up for himself. It calls him to God, who is beyond the world and beyond scientific thinking. At the same time, it calls man to his true self."[1536]

As the Word of God comes to humans personally, it calls them to abandon their attempt to build security through their own efforts and find true security by placing their trust in God. Only through the exercise of faith can the human put an end to his or her inauthentic existence: "To believe in the Word of God means

to abandon all merely human security and thus to overcome the despair which arises from the attempt to find security, an attempt which is always vain."[1537]

Faith means abandoning the quest for tangible realities and transitory objects. The pursuit of such things is sin, for by it we exclude the invisible reality from our lives and refuse God's future, which is offered us as a gift. Faith is an opening of our hearts to the grace of God, allowing him to release us from the past and bring us into his future. It also involves obedience—"turning our backs on self and abandoning all security."

Akin to the view that salvation is merely a stepping into authentic existence by abandoning our selfish strivings for security and putting our confidence in God instead is Bultmann's program of demythologization.[1538] The Bible's assertions are not to be taken as affirmations of objective truth external to ourselves. Rather, they tell us something about ourselves. The cross, for example, is to be understood in light of Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The message of the cross is not that Jesus was put to death as some sort of substitutionary payment made to the Father in a celestial transaction. That is myth. The demythologized meaning of the cross is that each of us must put to death his or her strivings for self-gratification and for security obtained apart from God.[1539] Similarly, the resurrection is to be understood in terms of texts like Romans 6:11: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." This verse is not speaking of some event that occurred to Jesus. It is, rather, expressing the truth that if we place our faith in God and are open to the future, we will be alive in a way we were not before. Salvation, then, is not an alteration in the substance of the soul, as some have tended to understand regeneration, nor is it a forensic declaration that we are righteous in the sight of God, the traditional understanding of justification. Rather, it is a fundamental alteration of our *Existenz*, our whole outlook on and conduct of life.[1540]

While Bultmann's particular existential theology has lost its popularity, together with the program of demythologization on which it rested, elements of existential philosophy live on in many forms in later theology, and in popular religious life, even in evangelical churches. Opposition to "rationalism," preference for the "Hebrew" mentality versus the "Greek," resistance to inclusive explanations, and application of theology to immediate personal concerns are among many evidences of its continued presence.

Secular Theology

The whole cultural milieu within which theology is developed has been changing. God's activity was thought to be the explanation of the existence of the world and of what goes on within it, and he was the solver of the problems that humans faced. Today, however, many people in practice put their trust in the visible, in the here and now, and in explanations that do not assume any transcendent or supersensible entities.

This different outlook came about through several channels. One was the growth in scientific explanations. Whereas previously it seemed necessary to believe that some supernatural being or force had brought this great complex universe into existence, alternative explanations now are available. In times past the complexity of the human physical organism seemed to point to some great, wise, and powerful designer. The theory of evolution, however, attributes human complexity to chance variations combined with a competitive struggle for life in which those better able to adapt survive.

Another reason for the change in outlook is that humanity has developed the ability to solve many of the problems faced in life. In biblical times, if a woman was barren, she prayed to God, and he answered by opening her womb so that a child was born (1 Sam. 1:1–20). God was also believed to be the source of weather. In the time of Elijah, a drought of three and a half years and an ensuing downpour were attributed to God (1 Kings 17–18; James 5:17–18). Now, however, if a woman who desires children is barren, a gynecologist prescribes a fertility pill, and with the addition of sperm, perhaps through artificial insemination, a birth (sometimes multiple) follows! If there is no rain for an extended period, someone seeds the clouds with silver iodide or some similar substance, and it rains. Humanity can control both birth and weather. God is no longer needed. The human race has come of age. It is capable of dealing with its problems without superhuman aid.

In the face of these developments, many modern persons have become secular. It is not primarily that they have consciously adopted a naturalistic worldview, for many of them have no interest in speculative questions. Rather, they have unconsciously adopted a lifestyle that in practice has no place for God. Part of this secular outlook is the result of a basic pragmatism. Scientific endeavor has succeeded in meeting human needs; religion is no longer necessary or effective. This is therefore a post-Christian era.[1541]

There are two possible responses the church can make to this situation. One is to see Christianity and secularism as competitors, alternatives to one another. If this approach is adopted, as it has tended to be through the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries and even to the present day, there will be attempts to resist, avoid, or refute secularism. There will be efforts to show the inadequacy of secularism and its accompanying philosophy, humanism, with its emphasis on the goodness, value, and sufficiency of humans. This is the approach of apologetics. It seeks to show that humanity faces problems with which a secular worldview cannot deal. Only Christian theism can solve them.

In the twentieth century, a different response was increasingly adopted by Christian theologians. That is to regard secularism not as a competitor but as a mature expression of Christian faith. One of the forerunners of this approach was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the final years of his life he developed a position that he referred to as "religionless Christianity."[1542] The human race's coming of age is not rebellion against God, but is God's educating his highest earthly creature to be independent of him. Just as wise parents help their children become independent of them, so in secularization God has been striving to bring the human race to a point of self-sufficiency. The effort to refute secularism is, in Bonhoeffer's view, an attempt to put adults back into adolescence, forcing them to become dependent, exploiting their weaknesses.[1543]

Bonhoeffer did not think of God as absent from the secular world. Rather, he is present within the "irreligion." To be Christian is not to be "religious," but to be human. Those secular members of the human race who have come of age are "unconscious Christians."[1544] We must celebrate humanity's emancipation from God as a gracious gift of God. We must translate Christianity into language that contemporary secular persons can understand. We must help them see that they need not become Christians; they already *are* Christians. Traditional evangelism made the mistake of trying to make people religious rather than Christian (i.e., self-sufficient and fully human). Bonhoeffer was particularly opposed to the inward and personal aspect of traditional Christian faith, the final stage of religion.[1545]

Bonhoeffer's writings on this subject are fragmentary. Had he not been executed, he would doubtless have developed them further. It was left to others to pick up and elaborate on his ideas. John A. T. Robinson[1546] in Great Britain and the Death of God theologians in the United States became the primary proponents of secular theology. Among the latter, Thomas J. J. Altizer contended that secularism has an ontological basis. The primordial or transcendent God has become fully immanent in the world. This was a long process that culminated in the incarnation of Jesus. God now has no independent status outside of the world and the human race.[1547] Consequently, he will not be found in public worship or through personal devotions. He is likelier to be found through involvement in the civil rights movement and similar causes.[1548]

To sum up: secular theology rejects the traditional understanding that salvation consists of removal from the world and reception of supernatural grace from God. Rather, salvation comes in a much more diffuse fashion. Salvation is not so much through religion as from religion. Realizing one's capability and utilizing it, becoming independent of God, coming of age, affirming oneself, and getting involved in the world—this is the true meaning of salvation. Most people, even those outside the church, are already experiencing this salvation. In fact, in view of the church's present "religious" orientation, those outside may be more genuinely Christian than those inside the church. Again, although the direct expression of Bonhoeffer's ideas is seldom heard, the merging of Christian ideals with those that actually presuppose the primacy of the here and now represents a popular adoption of secular conceptions, even when this is clothed in a religious vernacular.

Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology

It is difficult to characterize contemporary Roman Catholic thinking on any subject because, whereas at one time there was a uniform, official position within Roman Catholicism on most issues, now there appears to be only great diversity. Official doctrinal standards still remain, but they are now supplemented, and in some cases are seemingly contradicted, by later statements. Among these later statements are the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council and the published opinions of individual Catholic scholars. It is necessary to see some of these statements against the background of the traditional stance of the church.

The official Catholic position has long been that the church is the only channel of God's grace. This grace is transmitted through the sacraments of the church. Those outside the official or organized church cannot receive it. Basic also to this traditional view is a clear distinction between nature and grace. Nature in humanity consists of two parts, a passive capacity for grace and a desire or longing for grace. Humans, however, are quite unable to satisfy these aspects of their nature by their own accomplishments. That requires the grace of God, which is understood to be divine life imparted to humanity by God.[1549]

This traditional position has been modified at several points. One of these concerns human nature. Here Karl Rahner has done some of the most impressive work. Describing humanity as it is apart from the church and its sacraments, Rahner speaks of the "supernatural existential." By this he means not only that human beings have within them the potential for knowing God, but that this

potential is already being actively exercised. There is no such thing as being totally apart from grace. Grace is present even within nature itself.[1550]

In its discussion of non-Christian religions, the Second Vatican Council seemed to allow that grace may be present in nature. It stressed the common origin and destiny of all human persons. The various religions represent diverse perspectives on the same mystery of life. God's grace is found in all of them, though to differing degrees.[1551] Accordingly, Catholics are instructed to "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods" found among adherents of other religions.[1552]

Does the presence of grace in nature mean that there is grace apart from or outside of the church? This is the dilemma that faces the church. Does not God's command obliging all humans to know him imply that there is some way by which they can do so? The general response of contemporary Catholicism has been both to affirm that all persons can indeed know God and to continue to insist upon the exclusiveness of the church's role in salvation. This response has required a broader conception of the church and its membership.

The traditional Catholic position has been that union with the church is necessary for salvation, because the church possesses the means of salvation. If actual union is not possible, God will accept in its stead a sincere desire for it. While actual union with the church is not indispensable, complete separation is not acceptable. Yves Congar in effect argues for degrees of membership in the church.[1553] While the majority of the human race has no visible and official connection with the church, there is nonetheless such a thing as an invisible membership. Wherever there is salvation, there the church is also. This reverses the traditional formula, according to which the presence of the church actualizes salvation.

The Second Vatican Council adopted a position similar to Congar's: the people of God are not limited to the visible, hierarchical church. The people of God are divided into three categories in accordance with their degree of involvement with the church:

1. Catholics, who are "incorporated" into the church.
2. Non-Catholic Christians, who are "linked" to the church. While their situation is not as secure as that of Roman Catholics, they have genuine churches and are not completely separated from God.
3. Non-Christians, who are "related" to the church.[1554]

The third group includes those whom Rahner refers to as "anonymous Christians."[1555] The fact that people are outside the visible Catholic Church (or

any Christian church for that matter) does not mean that all of them are apart from the grace of God. Christ died for them as well, and we should not deny this grace. The concepts of degrees of membership and anonymous Christians have allowed the church both to grant the possibility of grace apart from its sacraments and to maintain its authority.

There has also been discussion within the church regarding the nature of salvation. There has been a greater openness to the classical Protestant concept of justification. In this regard, Hans Küng's work on Karl Barth's theology has been particularly significant. In the past, Catholicism included what Protestants term justification and sanctification in one concept, sanctifying grace. Küng, however, talks about objective and subjective aspects of justification. The former corresponds to what Protestants usually refer to as justification. In this aspect of salvation the human is passive and God is active. The latter corresponds roughly to what Protestants have usually called sanctification; here the human is active.[1556] Küng observes that Barth emphasized the former whereas the Council of Trent emphasized the latter. Nonetheless, there is no real conflict between Barth and Trent.[1557] In addition to the Protestant concept of justification, the Catholic Church has become more tolerant of Luther's interpretation of grace as well.

To summarize: the Catholic Church has in recent years been more open to the possibility that some outside the visible church, and perhaps some who make absolutely no claim of being Christians, may be recipients of grace. As a result, the Catholic understanding of salvation has become considerably broader than the traditional conception. In addition, the current understanding includes dimensions that have usually been associated with Protestantism.

Evangelical Theology

The traditional orthodox or evangelical position on salvation is correlated closely with the orthodox understanding of the human predicament. In this understanding, the relationship between the human being and God is the primary one. When that is not right, the other dimensions of life are adversely affected as well.[1558]

Evangelicals understand the Scriptures to indicate that there are two major aspects to the human problem of sin. First, sin is a broken relationship with God. The human has failed to fulfill divine expectations, whether by transgressing limitations that God's law has set or by failing to do what is positively commanded there. Deviation from the law results in a state of guilt or liability to punishment. Second, the very nature of the person is spoiled as a result of

deviation from the law. Now there is an inclination toward evil, a propensity for sin. There is a bias, as it were, away from the good, so that the person tends by nature to do evil. Usually termed corruption, this often shows itself in terms of internal disorientation and conflict as well. Beyond that, because we live in the context of a network of interpersonal relationships, the rupture in our relationship with God also results in a disturbance of our relationships with other persons. Sin even takes on collective dimensions: the whole structure of society inflicts hardships and wrongs upon individuals and minority groups.

Certain aspects of the doctrine of salvation relate to the matter of one's standing with God. The individual's legal status must be changed from guilty to not guilty. This is a matter of one's being declared just or righteous in God's sight, of being viewed as fully meeting the divine requirements. The theological term here is "justification." One is justified by being brought into a legal union with Christ. More is necessary, however, than merely remission of guilt, because the warm intimacy that should characterize one's relationship with God has been lost. This problem is rectified by adoption, in which one is restored to favor with God and enabled to claim all the benefits provided by the loving Father.

In addition to the need to reestablish one's relationship with God, there is also a need to alter the condition of one's heart. The basic change in the direction of one's life from an inclination toward sin to a positive desire to live righteously is termed "regeneration" or, literally, new birth. An actual alteration of one's character is involved, an infusion of a positive spiritual energy. This, however, is merely the beginning of the spiritual life. The individual's spiritual condition is progressively altered; one actually becomes holier. This progressive subjective change is referred to as "sanctification" ("making holy"). Sanctification finally comes to completion in the life beyond death, when the spiritual nature of the believer will be perfected. This is termed "glorification." The individual's maintaining faith and commitment to the very end through the grace of God is "perseverance."

As we have done with respect to other issues, we will adopt the evangelical position on salvation. Although God is concerned about every human need, both individual and collective, Jesus made clear that the eternal spiritual welfare of the individual is infinitely more important than the supplying of temporal needs. Note, for example, his advice in Matthew 5:29–30: "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." His rhetorical question in Mark 8:36 makes the same point: "What good is it for

someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" God's preoccupation with humans' eternal spiritual welfare and the biblical picture of sin are compelling evidence for the evangelical view of salvation. We saw in chapter 26 that sin originates in the individual human through personal voluntary choice in response to temptation. And we observed in chapter 28 the radical and thoroughgoing nature of human sin. This "total depravity," as it is termed, means that a radical and supernatural transformation of human nature is necessary for forgiveness and restoration to favor with God.

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The Antecedent to Salvation: *Predestination*

Chapter Objectives

After you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and describe the doctrine of predestination.
2. Trace the development of predestination from Augustine to Wesley.
3. Compare, contrast, and analyze the predestinarian views of the Calvinists, Arminians, and Karl Barth.
4. Construct a meaningful solution to the problem of predestination.
5. Identify at least four conclusions that emanate from the doctrine of predestination.

Chapter Summary

Predestination is God's choice of persons for eternal life or eternal death. Historically the doctrine originated with the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. It received new impetus in the Reformation and continues to the present. A meaningful solution is suggested and four implications of the doctrine are identified.

Study Questions

- How would you distinguish between the views of Augustine and Pelagius?
- What perspective did the medieval theologians take on the doctrine of predestination?
- What are the key differences between the views of predestination of Calvinism and those of Arminians?
- How would you differentiate among the perspectives of the later Calvinists, Arminians, and Karl Barth?
- How would you construct and defend a view of predestination?
- What implications come from the doctrine of predestination, and how would you evaluate them?

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Of all the doctrines of the Christian faith, certainly one of the most puzzling and least understood is the doctrine of predestination. It seems to many to be obscure and even bizarre. It appears to others to be an unnecessary inquiry into something that exceeds the human capacity to understand. Such theological hairsplitting is considered to have little if any practical significance. Perhaps more jokes have been made about this doctrine than about all other Christian doctrines combined. Yet because the biblical revelation mentions it, the Christian has no option but to inquire into its meaning, even if it is difficult and obscure.

What, precisely, do we mean by the term "predestination"? Although some use it interchangeably with "foreordination" and "election,"[1559] for our purposes here "predestination" is midway in specificity between "foreordination" and

“election.” We will regard “foreordination” as the broadest term, denoting God’s will with respect to all matters that occur, whether that be the fate of individual human persons or the falling of a rock. “Predestination” refers to God’s choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death. “Election” is the selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination.

The Historical Development of the Doctrine

Because the different formulations of the doctrine are related to other developments within both theology and culture in general, it may be helpful to survey its elaboration through the centuries of the church to the point where the classic formulations were enunciated. As with other doctrines, the doctrine of predestination was held in somewhat undeveloped form until serious disagreement arose regarding it. There was, particularly in the West, a growing conviction of human sinfulness and of the consequent need for divine transforming grace.[1560] In general, however, the logical implications of this conviction were not worked out until Augustine. His personal experience of God’s grace enabled him to see more clearly than did others the teaching of Scripture on these matters.

Even before encountering the thought of Pelagius, Augustine had developed to a considerable extent his view of the human situation. He stressed that Adam had begun life truly free.[1561] The only limitations on his will and actions were the inherent limitations imposed by the very nature of humanity. Thus there was, for example, the possibility of change, which included the possibility of turning away from the good.[1562] When Adam sinned, his nature became tainted. Now inclined toward doing evil, he transmitted this propensity for sin to his descendants. As a result, the freedom to abstain from evil and do good has been lost. While freedom of will in general is not gone, we now invariably use that freedom in ways contrary to God’s intention for us.[1563] Without divine assistance we are unable to choose and do the good.

The views of Pelagius sharpened Augustine’s thinking, forcing him to extend it beyond its previous bounds. Pelagius, a British monk, had relocated to Rome and become a fashionable teacher there.[1564] He was primarily a moralist rather than a theologian per se. Concerned that people live as virtuously as possible, he considered Augustine’s emphasis on the extreme corruption of human nature and its corollary, human inability, to be both demoralizing to any genuine effort at righteous living and insulting to God as well.[1565] God made humans different from all of the rest of the creation in their not being subject to the laws of nature.

Humans have freedom of choice. This gift of God ought to be used to fulfill God's purposes.[1566]

Pelagius developed his system from this basic principle. His first tenet is that each person enters the world with a will that has no bias in favor of evil. Adam's fall has no direct effect on each human's ability to do the right and the good, for every individual is directly created by God and therefore does not inherit from Adam either evil or a tendency to evil.[1567] Surely the God who forgives each person his or her own sin would not hold any of us responsible for the act of someone else. The only effect of Adam's sin on his descendants, then, is that of a bad example. We do not inherit his corruption and guilt.[1568]

Further, God does not exercise any special force on anyone to choose the good. Such influence as he exerts is through external aids, not internally on the soul.[1569] In particular, he makes no special choice of certain persons to holiness. Grace is available equally to all persons. It consists of free will, apprehension of God through reason, the law of Moses, and the example of Christ. Each person has equal opportunity to benefit from these tokens of grace. Progress in holiness is made by merit alone, and God's predestining of persons is based entirely on his foreseeing the quality of their lives.[1570] Pelagius even held that it is possible to live without sinning. Would God have commanded, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2), and "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), if sinlessness were not a possibility for human beings?[1571]

In response to this position, Augustine developed his view of predestination. He emphasized the seriousness of Adam's sin, blaming it solely on Adam's own act of will. But that sin was not merely Adam's. All of us were one with him and thus participated in his sin. Since the human soul is derived from one's parents through the generative process, we were present in Adam and sinned in and with him.[1572]

This means that all human beings begin life in a seriously marred condition. Augustine does not hold that the image of God has been completely destroyed, but we have lost the liberty Adam had not to sin.[1573] Without God's grace, we are unable to avoid sin, and to do the good requires an even greater grace. This is not to say that humans are not free. They have options, but those options are all sinful in nature. Humans are free to choose, but merely to engage in one sin rather than another.[1574] God's grace restores complete freedom; it returns to us the option of not sinning and of doing good. This grace, while irresistible, does not work against, but in concert with, our wills. God so works in relationship to our wills that we freely choose the good. God, being omniscient, knows precisely under what conditions we will freely choose what he wills, and works

in such a way as to bring about those conditions. While we always have free will, we are free to choose and do good only if and when God grants us that freedom.[1575]

From the foregoing, Augustine concluded that our choosing or doing good is entirely a consequence of what God has already willed to do. It is a matter, then, of God's choosing to give grace to some and not to others. God has made this choice from all eternity, and has chosen exactly the number needed to replace the fallen angels.[1576] His choice of certain people in no way depends on his advance awareness of what they will do, for any good deeds of theirs depend instead on his giving his grace to them.[1577] God simply chooses who will receive his grace and who will be left in their sinful condition. There is, however, no injustice in this, for justice would result in God's condemning all. It is only by an act of great compassion that he saves anyone. The condemned receive just what they deserve. The elect receive more than they deserve.

Augustine's outspoken attacks led to the condemnation of Pelagianism by the Council of Ephesus in 431, one year after Augustine's death. What prevailed afterwards, however, was not really a pure Augustinianism, but a semi-Pelagianism. Despite the acceptance of many of Augustine's terms, the doctrine of synergism, which holds that God and the human together accomplish what must be done in order for the human to be saved, tended to predominate. This position was considered and condemned by the Synod of Orange in 529. The synod spoke in strong terms of human inability and the necessity of divine grace, but did not insist on absolute or unconditional predestination and irresistible grace.[1578]

This milder form of Augustinianism prevailed for several centuries. In the ninth century, Gottschalk defended the doctrine of double predestination—predestination applies equally to the elect and the lost. Gottschalk's views were condemned by a synod of bishops at Mainz in 848. Controversy ensued. One of the most interesting positions was that taken by Johannes Scotus Erigena. While charging Gottschalk with heresy, Erigena agreed with him in rejecting the idea that God's predestination is based on his foreknowledge of what humans will do. That had been a rather common way of dealing with the apparent inconsistency between divine predestination and human freedom. Origen particularly had advanced it as a solution to the problem. Now, however, Erigena contended that since God is eternal, he sees things as neither past nor future. He sees all of us and sees us all at once.[1579] Because God stands outside time, the concept of foreknowledge is alien to him.

In the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, several outstanding theologians advocated the Augustinian position. Anselm reconciled this position

with freedom of the will by insisting that the person who can do only right is freer than one who can do wrong.[1580] The latter is actually a slave to sin. Peter Lombard held a similar view. Thomas Aquinas followed the Augustinian position on these matters, maintaining that God wills that some persons be saved and others not. He drew a distinction between God's general will that all be saved and his special will in electing some and rejecting others: "God wills all men to be saved by His antecedent will, which is to will not simply but relatively; and not by His consequent will, which is to will simply."[1581]

From this time until the Reformation, the dominant trend within Catholic theology was a drift toward Pelagianism. There were some notable exceptions, such as John Wycliffe and Thomas Bradwardine, but for the most part Duns Scotus's emphasis on God's foreknowledge of individual worthiness reflected the position of the church. This was one of the major points against which Martin Luther contended.

So much emphasis has been given in the popular mind to John Calvin's view of predestination that it is scarcely realized how strongly Luther held and taught a similar view. His "spiritual father," Johann von Staupitz, was an Augustinian monk who promoted Augustine's ideas, so much so that the University of Wittenberg became decidedly Augustinian in orientation. When Luther began wrestling with the subject of predestination, he followed the approach of the Ockhamists: predestination is based on God's foreknowledge of what the human will do. As he studied the Scriptures and also the writings of Augustine, however, his views began to change. His *Commentary on Romans*, which consists of notes for lectures given between November 3, 1515, and September 7, 1516, indicates a firm commitment to the Augustinian position. In connection with Romans 8:28, for example, Luther points to God's absolute sovereignty with respect to humans in the Old Testament, particularly his election of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael, and his election of Jacob and rejection of Esau (see Rom. 9:6–18). Luther insists that all objections to the Augustinian position derive from the wisdom of the flesh, which is human reason. His comments on Romans 9 underscore his firm commitment to Augustinianism. Erasmus was urged by the pope to use his rhetorical powers to refute Luther. The result was *The Freedom of the Will*, published in 1524. Luther replied in the following year with *The Bondage of the Will*, a lengthy treatise on the subject.

John Calvin, however, articulated the definitive statement on the subject, making clear that the study of predestination is not merely an academic exercise, but has practical significance as well. He warns against delving too deeply into the subject.[1582] While disagreeing with Ulrich Zwingli's contention that sin was necessary in order that the glory of God might be properly set forth, Calvin does

insist that God has sovereignly and freely chosen to save some and reject others. God is wholly just and blameless in all of this.[1583]

Calvin insists that the doctrine of predestination does not lead to carelessness in morality, to a cavalier attitude that we can continue in sin since our election is sure. Rather, knowledge of our election leads us to pursue a holy life. The way a believer can be sure of election is to see the Word of God transforming his or her life.[1584]

Calvin established a university in Geneva to which candidates for the ministry came to study. He himself occupied the chair of theology. An especially large number came from the Low Countries; as a result, Calvinism became particularly strong there. His successor, Theodore Beza, not only maintained Calvin's teaching of double predestination, but extended it at some points. Not only did he hold that God has decided to send some to hell; he did not hesitate to say that God *causes* humans to sin. Further, he believed that, despite the absence of any specific biblical statements, the logical order of God's decrees can be determined.[1585] He believed that the decree to save some and damn others is logically prior to the decision to create. The conclusion is that God creates some persons *in order* to damn them. This belief—supralapsarianism—in time came to be widely regarded as the official position of Calvinism.

There were at various times disagreements with and departures from this interpretation of the decrees. Probably the most serious occurred in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. James Arminius, a popular pastor in Amsterdam who had studied under Beza, became, as a result of his studies of the Bible and the history of the church, less certain of double predestination and particularly of Beza's supralapsarianism. Installed as a professor of theology at the University of Leyden, he was accused of being a semi-Pelagian and even a Catholic. The dissension at the university became so severe that the government stepped in. Attempts at reconciliation were ended with the death of Arminius in 1609.

The views of Arminius are quite clear and can be readily summarized. God's first absolute decree regarding salvation was not the assignment of certain individuals to eternal life and others to damnation, but the appointment of his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the human race. Second, God decreed that all who repent and believe shall be saved. In addition, God has granted to all persons sufficient grace to enable them to believe. They freely believe or disbelieve on their own. God does not believe for us or compel us to believe. Finally, God predestines those who he foreknows will believe.[1586]

In the eighteenth century, John Wesley popularized Arminianism. For many years he edited a magazine called *The Arminian*. While holding to the freedom

of the will, Wesley went beyond Arminius by emphasizing the idea of prevenient or universal grace. This universal grace is the basis of any human good in the world. This prevenient grace also makes it possible for any person to accept the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.[1587]

Differing Views of Predestination

Calvinism

What is designated Calvinism has taken many different forms over the years. We shall here examine certain common features of them all. A mnemonic aid sometimes used to summarize the complete system is the acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance.[1588] While there are somewhat varying interpretations of these expressions, and not all of these concepts are essential to our current considerations, we will utilize them as the framework for our examination of this view of predestination.

Calvinists think of the whole human race as lost in sin. Total depravity means that every individual is so sinful as to be unable to respond to any offer of grace. This condition, which we fully deserve, involves both moral corruption (and hence moral disability) and liability to punishment (guilt). All persons begin life in this condition. For this reason it is called "original sin." Calvinist theologians disagree as to how Adam's sin produced this effect in us. Some hold that Adam was our representative and that, accordingly, his sin is imputed or charged to us.[1589] We are treated as if we had committed the sin ourselves. Others adopt Augustine's view that the entire human race was actually present in Adam germinally or seminally, so that we did in fact sin. Although we were not personally conscious of sinning, it was our sin nonetheless.[1590]

Sometimes the phrase "total inability" is used, meaning that sinners have lost the ability to do good and are unable to convert themselves.[1591] A key passage often cited is Ephesians 2:1–3: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." Numerous other passages indicate both the universality and the seriousness of this condition (e.g., John 6:44; Rom. 3:1–23; 2 Cor. 4:3–4).

Calvinism's second major concept is the sovereignty of God. He is the Creator and Lord of all things, and consequently he is free to do whatever he wills.[1592] He is not subject to or answerable to anyone. One of the passages frequently cited in this connection is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The master hired some workers early in the morning, some at the third hour, some the sixth, some the ninth, and, finally, some at the eleventh hour. Those who were hired at the eleventh hour were paid the same amount promised to those hired at the beginning of the day. When those hired earlier complained about this seeming injustice, the master replied to one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt. 20:13–15). Another significant passage is Paul's metaphor of the potter and the clay. To the individual who complains that God is unjust, Paul responds: "But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?"' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?" (Rom. 9:20–21). This concept of divine sovereignty, together with human inability, is basic to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. Without these two concepts the remainder of the doctrine makes little sense.

Election, according to Calvinism, is God's choice of certain persons for his special favor. It may refer to the choice of Israel as God's special covenant people or to the choice of individuals to some special office. The sense that primarily concerns us here, however, is the choice of certain persons to be God's spiritual children and thus recipients of eternal life.[1593] One biblical evidence that God has selected certain individuals for salvation is found in Ephesians 1:4–5: "For he [the Father] chose us in him [Jesus Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Jesus indicated that the initiative had been his in the selection of his disciples to eternal life: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you" (John 15:16). The ability to come to Jesus depends on the Father's initiative: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day" (John 6:44; see also v. 65). Conversely, all who are given to Jesus by the Father will come to him: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). Furthermore, in Acts

13:48 we read that “when the Gentiles heard this [the offer of salvation], they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

The interpretation that God’s choice or selection of certain individuals for salvation is absolute or unconditional is in keeping with God’s actions in other contexts, such as his choice of the nation Israel, which followed through on the selection of Jacob and the rejection of Esau. In Romans 9 Paul argues impressively that all of these choices are totally of God and in no way depend on the people chosen. Having quoted God’s statement to Moses in Exodus 33:19, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” Paul comments, “It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:15–16).[1594]

We have already seen several characteristics of election as viewed by Calvinists. One is that election is an expression of God’s sovereign will or good pleasure. It is not based on any merit in the one elected, nor on foreseeing that the individual will believe. It is the cause, not the result, of faith. Second, election is efficacious. Those whom God has chosen will most certainly come to faith in him and, for that matter, will persevere in that faith to the end. All of the elect will certainly be saved. Third, election is from all eternity. It is not a decision made at some point in time when the individual is already existent. It is what God has always purposed to do. Fourth, election is unconditional. It does not depend on humans’ performing a specific action or meeting certain conditions or terms of God. He simply wills to save them and brings it about. Finally, election is immutable. God does not change his mind. Election is from all eternity and out of God’s infinite mercy; he has no reason or occasion to change his mind.[1595]

For the most part, Calvinists insist that election is not inconsistent with free will, that is, as they understand the term. They deny, however, that humans have free will in the Arminian sense. Sin has removed, if not freedom, at least the ability to exercise freedom properly. Loraine Boettner, for example, compares fallen humanity to a bird with a broken wing. The bird is “free” to fly, but is unable to do so. Likewise, “the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates God? This is the inability of the will under which man labors.”[1596] Only when God comes in his special grace to those whom he has chosen are they able to respond. Then, seeing clearly and vividly the nature of their sins and the greatness, glory, and love of God, they will most assuredly and infallibly turn to him.

There are variations among Calvinists. Some hold to double predestination, the belief that God chooses some to be saved and others to be lost. Calvin called this a "horrible decree," but nevertheless held it because he found it in the Bible.[1597] Others say that God actively chooses those who are to receive eternal life, and passes by all the others, leaving them in their self-chosen sins.[1598] While the effect is the same in both cases, the latter view assigns the lostness of the nonelect to their own choice of sin rather than to the active decision of God, or to God's choice by omission rather than commission.

The other major variation among Calvinists has to do with the logical order of God's decrees. Here we distinguish the supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian positions. The terminology relates to whether, logically, the decree to save comes before or after the decree to permit the fall. The positions also differ on whether the atonement was for all or only for those chosen to be saved:

Supralapsarianism

1. The decree to save some and condemn others.
2. The decree to create both the elect and the reprobate.
3. The decree to permit the fall of both classes.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

Infralapsarianism

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to save some and condemn others.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.[1599]

Sublapsarianism (unlimited atonement with a limited application)

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation sufficient for all.
4. The decree to choose some to receive this salvation.[1600]

Arminianism

“Arminianism” is a term that covers a large number of subpositions. It may range all the way from the evangelical views of Arminius himself to left-wing liberalism. Arminius maintained that humans are sinful and unable to do good in their own strength.[1601] Extreme liberalism, however, discounts the human tendency to sin and, consequently, denies that humans need to be regenerated.[1602] In some cases, this type of liberalism is more correctly identified as Pelagianism than Arminianism. Arminianism also includes conventional Roman Catholicism with its emphasis on the necessity of works in the process of salvation. For the most part, we will be considering the more conservative or evangelical form of Arminanism, but we will construe it in a fashion broad enough to encompass the position of most Arminians.

While statements of the view vary to some degree, the logical starting point is the concept that God desires all persons to be saved.[1603] Arminians point to some definite assertions of Scripture. In the Old Testament God made clear that he did not desire the death of anyone, including the wicked: “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’” (Ezek. 33:11). That God finds no pleasure in the death of sinners is also clear from Peter’s statement, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul echoes a similar sentiment: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3–4). This is also precisely what Paul declared to the Athenians: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Note particularly the two occurrences of “all” (πᾶσι—*pasi*).

Not only didactic statements but the universal character of many of God’s commands and exhortations expresses his desire for the salvation of the entire human race. The Old Testament contains universal invitations; for instance, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isa. 55:1). Jesus’s invitation was similarly without restriction: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). These and like passages are so strong and clear that even as staunch a Calvinist as Boettner has to concede, “It is true that some verses taken in themselves do seem to imply the Arminian position.”[1604] If, then, it is not God’s intent that all persons be saved, he must be insincere in his offer.

A second major tenet of Arminianism is that all persons are able to believe or to meet the conditions of salvation. If this were not the case, the universal

invitations to salvation would make little sense. But is there room in this theology for the concept that all persons are able to believe? There is, if we modify or eliminate the idea of the total depravity of sinners. Or, like Wesley and others, we might adopt the concept of "prevenient grace."[1605]

As generally understood, prevenient grace is God's grace given to all humans indiscriminately. It is seen in God's sending the sunshine and the rain upon all. It is also the basis of all the goodness found in humans everywhere. Beyond that, it is universally given to counteract the effect of sin. Henry Thiessen puts it thus: "Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to Him. This is the salvation-bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men."[1606] Since God has given this grace to all, everyone is capable of accepting the offer of salvation; consequently, there is no need for any special application of God's grace to particular individuals.

A third basic concept is the role of foreknowledge in the election of persons to salvation. For the most part, Arminians desire to retain the term "election" and the idea that individuals are foreordained to salvation. This means that God must prefer some people to others. In the Arminian view, he chooses some to receive salvation, whereas he merely passes the others by. Those who are predestined by God are those who in his infinite knowledge he is able to foresee will accept the offer of salvation made in Jesus Christ. This view is based on the close connection in Scripture between foreknowledge and foreordination or predestination. The primary passage appealed to is Romans 8:29: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." A supporting text is 1 Peter 1:1–2, where Peter addresses the "elect, . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." In the former instance, the key word for our consideration is the verb προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*); in the latter, its noun form πρόγνωσις (*prognōsis*). Both references represent foreordination as based on and resulting from foreknowledge.[1607]

Finally, the Arminian raises objections to the Calvinistic understanding of predestination as unconditional or absolute. Some of these are practical rather than theoretical in nature. Many of them reduce down to the idea that Calvinism is fatalistic. If God has determined everything that is to occur, does it really make any difference what humans do? Ethical behavior becomes irrelevant. If we are elect, does it matter how we live? We will be saved regardless of our actions. Mildred Wynkoop sums up Arminianism as "an ethical protest against the antinomian tendencies of Calvinism. If men are in every way determined by

predestination, the ethical demands of holiness are not relevant to the Christian life."[1608]

A further objection is that Calvinism negates any missionary or evangelistic impulse. If God has already chosen who will be saved, and their number cannot be increased, then what is the point of preaching the gospel? The elect will be saved anyway, and neither more nor fewer than the appointed number will come to Christ. So why bother to raise funds, send missionaries, preach the gospel, or pray for the lost? Such activities must surely be exercises in futility.[1609]

The last objection is that the Calvinistic doctrine of decrees is a contradiction to human freedom. Our thoughts, choices, and actions are not really our doing. God has from all eternity foreordained them. If that is the case, we could not have done anything other than what we in fact did. Our actions are not really free; they are caused by an external force, namely, God. And so we are not really human in the traditional sense of that word. We are automatons, robots, or machines. This, however, contradicts everything that we know about ourselves and the way we regard others as well. There is no point in God's commending us for having done good, or rebuking us for having done evil, for we could not have done otherwise.[1610]

Karl Barth

In addition to the two classic views, there have been, down through the years of church history, attempts to formulate a less troublesome position. One of the most interesting was posed in the twentieth century by Karl Barth. As a Reformed theologian, Barth quite naturally desired to treat this puzzling topic, which he regarded as basic and central to all of theology. He felt, however, that his tradition had misunderstood the biblical witness here. Conscious that he was departing from the conventional Reformed position, he followed in his treatment of predestination the fundamental principle of his entire theology, the centrality of Jesus Christ.

Barth regards the traditional Calvinistic position as a misreading of the Bible, based on a metaphysical belief that God's relationship to the universe is static—certain individuals have from all eternity been chosen and others rejected, and this cannot be altered. Barth admits that the older theologians went to the Bible, especially Romans 9 and Ephesians 1, but they did not read the Bible in the right way nor choose the right starting point. What must be done is to read the Bible christologically, making Jesus Christ the starting point for the doctrine.[1611]

If we would formulate a doctrine of predestination, says Barth, we must do so in the light of God's work of revelation and atonement.[1612] Jesus Christ came to

save human beings. There is an intricate connection between the fact that Christ is at the center of God's work within time and the eternal foreordaining of that work in the divine election.[1613] If this is the case, God's will was to elect, not reject human beings. The incarnation is proof that God is for human beings, not against them. He has chosen them, not rejected them.

When Barth comes to ask who has been chosen by God, this christological basis continues. In place of the static, fixed, and absolute decree found in Calvin's thought, Barth substitutes the person of Christ. This is the essential modification he makes in the traditional view of predestination.[1614] God's eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ. We are not to look for some will of God beyond or behind the work that he has done within history through Christ. Barth posits a more dynamic view: God, like a king, is free to correct, suspend, or replace his decree in such a fashion as to lead to virtual deism.[1615] The unchanging element is not, in Barth's view, an eternal choice of some and a rejection of others, but the constancy of God in his triune being as freely chosen love.

The choice of Jesus Christ is not as an isolated individual, however. For in him the entire human race has been chosen.[1616] But even this is not the whole of the doctrine of election, for Christ is not merely the elected man; he is also the electing God. He freely obeyed the Father by electing to become man. Barth speaks of Christ as "the concrete and manifest form of the divine decision—the decision of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in favour of the covenant to be established between Him and us."[1617] By double predestination, Barth means that Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected man. There is also a duality of content that approximates the traditional understanding of double predestination. For in choosing to become a human, Christ chose "reprobation, perdition, and death" in choosing election and life for humanity.[1618] He voluntarily experienced rejection by humanity; this is most vividly seen in the cross.

Orthodox Reformed theology went wrong in part, says Barth, because it began with human individuals rather than with the elected man and electing God, Jesus Christ. Between the election of Christ and of the individual, moreover, there is an intermediate election of the community, which exists to proclaim Jesus Christ and to call the world to faith in him.[1619] When Barth does turn to consider election of the individual as the third step in his discussion, he does not speak of double predestination. Rather, he speaks of a universal election of all human beings in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Barth holds to universal salvation, a subject he deals with very cautiously without ever really committing himself. Although all are elect, not all live as elect. Some live as if they were rejected, but

this is of one's own choosing and doing. The task of the elected community is to proclaim to such a person that "he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and is therefore not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and canceled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision."[1620]

There is no absolute difference between the elect and the rejected, the believers and the unbelievers, according to Barth, for all have been elected. The former have realized the fact of their election and are living in the light of it; the latter are still living as if they were not elect.[1621] Barth will not open the question of whether the rejected ones who are actually elect are also saved. The church should not take too seriously the unbelief of the rejected ones. In the ultimate sense, there is no rejection of humanity by God. God has in Christ chosen rejection for himself, but election for humanity.

A Suggested Solution

Can we now draw some conclusions regarding the nettlesome matter of the decrees of God with respect to salvation? Note that we are not dealing here with the whole matter of the decrees of God in general, or whether God renders certain every event that occurs within all of time and within the entire universe. That question has already been raised and dealt with in chapter 15 of this work. Here we are concerned merely with the issue of whether some are singled out by God to be special recipients of his grace.

Scripture speaks of election in several different senses. Election sometimes refers to God's choice of Israel as his specially favored people. It occasionally points to the selection of individuals to special positions of privilege and service, and, of course, to selection to salvation. In view of the varied meanings of election, any attempt to limit our discussion to only one of them will inevitably result in a truncation of the topic. The cliché that election means election of a group to service is greatly oversimplified. Barth's unique view is not supported biblically.

The vocabulary of predestination needs to be closely examined. There are several relevant terms in both Hebrew and Greek. The Hebrew בָּחַר (*bachar*) and the Greek ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*) are roughly equivalent terms. They refer to God's choosing or selecting from the human race certain persons for a special relationship to himself.[1622] The Greek verb προορίζω (*proorizō*) refers to predetermining or fixing beforehand.[1623] Not all of its occurrences relate to

ultimate destiny, however. The verb προτίθημι (*protithēmi*) and noun πρόθεσις (*prothesis*) refer to planning, purposing, or resolving to do something.[1624] All of these terms convey the idea of initiating an action.

Logically prior to the Bible's teaching that God has specially chosen some to have eternal life is its vivid picture of the natural lostness, blindness, and inability of humans to respond in faith to the opportunity for salvation. In Romans, especially chapter 3, Paul depicts the human race as hopelessly separated from God because of their sin. They are unable to do anything to extricate themselves from this condition, and in fact, being quite blind to their situation, have no desire to do so. Calvinists and conservative Arminians agree on this. It is not merely that humans cannot in their natural state do good works of a type that would justify them in God's sight. Beyond that, they are afflicted with spiritual blindness (Rom. 1:18–23; 2 Cor. 4:3–4) and insensitivity. Jesus described their plight vividly when he explained that he spoke in parables to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them" (Matt. 13:14–15, quoting Isa. 6:9–10). Paul makes clear that spiritual inability is a universal condition true of Jews and Gentiles alike: "What shall we conclude then? Do we [Jews] have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God'" (Rom. 3:9–11).

If this is the case, it follows that no one would ever respond to the gospel call without some special action by God. It is here that many Arminians, recognizing human inability as taught in Scripture, introduce the concept of prevenient grace, which is believed to have a universal effect nullifying the noetic results of sin, thus making belief possible. The problem is that there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for this concept of a universal enablement.

Brought back to the question of why some believe, we do find an impressive collection of texts suggesting that God has selected some to be saved, and that our response to the offer of salvation depends on this prior decision and initiative by God. For example, in connection with Jesus's explaining that he spoke in parables so that some would hear but not understand, we observe that he went on to say to the disciples, "But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear" (Matt. 13:16). One might construe this to mean that they were not as spiritually incapacitated as were the other hearers. We can get a

better grasp of what is entailed here, however, if we look at Matthew 16. Jesus had asked the disciples who people said that he was, and they had recited the varied opinions—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (v. 14). Peter, however, confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus's comment is instructive: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (v. 17). It was a special action of God that made the difference between the disciples and the spiritually blind and deaf. This is in accordance with Jesus's statements, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day" (John 6:44); and "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Jesus also tells us that this drawing and choosing are efficacious: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37); "Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me" (v. 45).

The concept that our belief depends on God's initiative also appears in the book of Acts, where Luke tells us that when the Gentiles at Antioch of Pisidia heard of salvation, "they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Some have attempted to argue that the verb here (τεταγμένοι—*tetagmenoi*) should be understood as being in the middle voice rather than the passive. Their rendition of the last clause in this verse is "as many as appointed themselves to eternal life believed." There are several logical difficulties with such an understanding, however. One's belief is supposedly a result of one's ordaining himself or herself to eternal life. But how can a person who has not believed take such action? Note also the root meaning of the word τάσσω (*tassō*)—"to arrange in an orderly fashion." Can an unregenerate and spiritually impotent person really arrange his or her life in an orderly fashion?

Nor is the argument that God's foreordaining is based on his foreknowledge persuasive. For the word יָדַע (*yada'*), which seems to lie behind Paul's use of προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*), signifies more than an advance knowledge or precognition. It carries the connotation of a very positive and intimate relationship. It suggests looking with favor on or loving someone, and is even used of sexual relations.[1625] This, then, is not a neutral advance knowledge of what someone will do, but an affirmative choice of that person. Against this Hebraic background it appears likely that the references to foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1–2 are presenting foreknowledge not as the grounds for predestination, but as a confirmation of it.

But what of the universal offers of salvation and the general invitations to the hearers to believe? Arminians sometimes argue that, on Calvinistic grounds, someone might choose to accept salvation, but not be permitted to be saved. But according to the Calvinistic understanding, this scenario never takes place, for no one is able to will to be saved, to come to God, to believe, without special enablements. God sincerely offers salvation to all, but all of us are so settled in our sins that we will not respond unless assisted to do so.

Is there real freedom in such a situation? Here we refer the reader to our general discussion of human freedom in relationship to the plan of God (chapter 15). Now, however, we are dealing specifically with spiritual ability or freedom of choice in regard to the critical issue of salvation. And here the chief consideration is depravity. If, as we have argued in chapter 28 and this chapter, humans in the unregenerate state are totally depraved and unable to respond to God's grace, there is no question as to whether they are free to accept the offer of salvation—no one is! Rather, the question to be asked is, Is anyone who is specially called free to reject the offer of grace? The position taken herein is not that those who are called *must* respond, but that God makes his offer so appealing that they *will* respond affirmatively.

Implications of Predestination

Correctly understood, the doctrine of predestination has several significant implications:

1. We can have confidence that what God has decided will come to pass. His plan will be fulfilled, and the elect will come to faith.
2. We need not criticize ourselves when some people reject Christ. Jesus himself did not win everyone in his audience. He understood that all those whom the Father gave to him would come to him (John 6:37) and only they would come (v. 44). When we have done our very best, we can leave the matter with the Lord.
3. Predestination does not nullify incentive for evangelism and missions. We do not know who the elect and the nonelect are, so we must continue to spread the Word. Our evangelistic efforts are God's means to bring the elect to salvation. God's ordaining of the end includes the ordaining of the means to that end as well. The knowledge that missions are God's means is a strong motive for the endeavor and gives us confidence that it will prove successful.

4. Grace is absolutely necessary. While Arminianism often gives strong emphasis to grace, in our Calvinistic scheme there is no basis for God's choice of some to eternal life other than his own sovereign will. There is nothing in the individual that persuades God to grant salvation to him or her.

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The Beginning of Salvation: *Subjective Aspects*

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the necessity of effectual calling to bring about salvation.
2. Express the essential nature of the human response of conversion and distinguish between the related concepts of repentance and faith.
3. Examine the divine work of regeneration, which brings about new life and transformation.
4. State and describe six implications that result from effectual calling, conversion, and regeneration.

Chapter Summary

Salvation consists of three steps: effectual calling, conversion, and regeneration. Through the Holy Spirit, God calls the unbeliever to salvation. The human response to that call involves turning from sin to faith in Christ. Faith also includes belief. God responds by regenerating the person to new life in Christ. We can only stand in awe of God's work of saving us and regenerating us as spiritual beings.

Study Questions

- What is the role of effectual calling in the salvation of an individual? Why is effectual calling essential to salvation?
- Of what significance is the order of effectual calling, conversion, and regeneration? How does this relate to Arminianism and Calvinism?
- What is the meaning of conversion, and how do repentance and faith relate to it?
- What is regeneration, and what is its relationship to the other parts of salvation?
- What did you learn about salvation from this study?

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The doctrine of salvation encompasses a large and complex area of biblical teaching and of human experience. Consequently, it is necessary to draw some distinctions among its various facets. While we could organize the material in many different ways, we have chosen to utilize a temporal scheme, in terms of its beginning, continuation, and completion. Chapters 44 and 45 both deal with the inception of the Christian life. Conversion and regeneration (chapter 44) are subjective aspects of the beginning of the Christian life; they deal with change in our inward nature, our spiritual condition. Conversion is this change as viewed from the human perspective; regeneration is this change as viewed from God's perspective. Union with Christ, justification, and adoption (chapter 45), on the other hand, are objective aspects of the beginning of the Christian life; they refer primarily to the relationship between the individual and God.

Effectual Calling

In the preceding chapter we examined the whole complex of issues involved in predestination, concluding that God chooses some persons to be saved and that their conversion results from that decision on God's part. Because all humans are lost in sin, spiritually blind, and unable to believe, however, some action by God must intervene between his eternal decision and the conversion of the individual within time. This activity of God is termed special or effectual calling.

Scripture speaks of a general calling to salvation, an invitation extended to all persons. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). There is a universal dimension to Isaiah's "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22). This passage combines an emphasis on the exclusiveness of God and the universality of his offer. Further, when Jesus said, "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14), he was probably referring to God's universal invitation. But note the distinction here between calling and choosing. Those who are chosen are the objects of God's special or effectual calling.

Several New Testament references to God's calling imply that not everyone is being called. For example, in Romans 8:30, Paul writes: "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Here the classes of those predestined, called, justified, and glorified seem to be coextensive. If that is the case, the calling must be efficacious—those who are called are actually saved. Paul also alludes to the efficacy of this calling in 1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Other references to God's effectual, special calling include Luke 14:23; Romans 1:7; 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:23–24, 26; Ephesians 1:18; Philippians 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1; and 2 Peter 1:10.

Special calling means that God works in a particularly effective way with the elect, enabling them to respond in repentance and faith, and rendering it certain that they will. The circumstances of special calling can vary widely. We see Jesus issuing special invitations to those who became the inner circle of disciples (see, e.g., Matt. 4:18–22; Mark 1:16– 20; John 1:35–51). He singled out Zacchaeus for particular attention (Luke 19:1–10). In these cases, Jesus established close contact with the individuals called. He no doubt presented his claims in a direct and personal fashion that carried a special persuasiveness not felt by the surrounding crowd. We see another dramatic approach by God in the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–19). In this instance God made a unique entreaty. Sometimes his calling takes a quieter form, as in the case of Lydia: "One of

those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14).

Special calling is in large measure the Holy Spirit's work of illumination, enabling the recipient to understand the true meaning of the gospel. It also involves the Holy Spirit's work of conviction, of which Jesus spoke in John 16:8–10. This working of the Spirit is necessary because the depravity characteristic of all humans prevents them from grasping God's revealed truth. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, George Ladd remarks that

> the first work of the Spirit is to enable men to understand the divine work of redemption. . . . This [the cross] was an event whose meaning was folly to Greeks and an offense to Jews. But to those enlightened by the Spirit, it is the wisdom of God. In other words, Paul recognizes a hidden meaning in the historical event of the death of Christ ("God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," 2 Cor. 5:19) that is not evident to the human eye but which can be accepted only by a supernatural illumination. The Spirit does not reveal heavenly realities but the true meaning of an historical event. He does not impart some kind of "gnostic" esoteric truth but the real meaning of an event in history. Only by the illumination of the Spirit can men understand the meaning of the cross; only by the Spirit can men therefore confess that Jesus who was executed is also the Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).[1626]

Special or effectual calling, then, involves an extraordinary presentation of the message of salvation, sufficiently powerful to counteract the effects of sin and enable the person to believe. It is also so appealing that the person will believe. Special calling is in many ways similar to the prevenient grace of which Arminians speak. It differs from that concept, however, in two respects. It is bestowed only upon the elect, not upon all humans, and it leads infallibly or efficaciously to a positive response by the recipient.

The Logical Order: Effectual Calling, Conversion, Regeneration

Special calling is logically prior to conversion and leads to it. Here we must ask whether regeneration also is logically prior to conversion, or whether the converse is true. This is an issue that has traditionally separated Arminians and Calvinists from one another. Arminians have insisted that conversion is prior.[1627] It is a prerequisite to new birth. One repents and believes, and therefore God saves and transforms. If this were not the case, a rather mechanical situation would prevail: God would do it all; there would really be no human element of response; and the appeals to the hearers of the gospel to be converted would be insincere. Calvinists, on the other hand, have insisted that if all persons are truly

sinners, totally depraved and incapable of responding to God's grace, no one can be converted unless first regenerated. Repentance and faith are not human capabilities.[1628]

We are not talking here about temporal succession. Conversion and new birth occur simultaneously. Rather, the question is whether one is converted because of God's work of regeneration within, or whether God regenerates the individual because of his or her repentance and belief. It must be acknowledged that, from a logical standpoint, the usual Calvinistic position makes good sense. If we sinful humans are unable to believe and respond to God's gospel without some special working of his within us, how can anyone, even the elect, believe unless first rendered capable of belief through regeneration? To say that conversion is prior to regeneration would seem to be a denial of total depravity.

Nonetheless, the biblical evidence favors the position that conversion is logically prior to regeneration. Various appeals to respond to the gospel imply that conversion results in regeneration. Among them is Paul's reply to the Philippian jailor (we are here assuming that regeneration is part of the process of being saved): "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Peter makes a similar statement in his Pentecost sermon: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This appears to be the pattern throughout the New Testament. Even John Murray, who unequivocally regards regeneration as prior, appears to deny his own position when he says, "The faith of which we are now speaking is not the belief that we have been saved, but trust in Christ in order that we may be saved."[1629] Unless Murray does not consider regeneration to be part of the process of being saved, he seems to be saying that faith is instrumental to regeneration and thus logically prior to it.

The conclusion here, then, is that God regenerates those who repent and believe. But this conclusion seems inconsistent with the doctrine of total inability. Are we torn between Scripture and logic on this point? There is a way out. That is to distinguish between God's special and effectual calling on the one hand, and regeneration on the other. Although no one is capable of responding to the general call of the gospel, in the case of the elect God works intensively through a special calling so that they do respond in repentance and faith. As a result of this conversion, God regenerates them. The special calling is simply an intensive and effectual working by the Holy Spirit. It is not the complete transformation that constitutes regeneration, but it does render the conversion of the individual both possible and certain. Thus the logical order of the initial aspects of salvation is special calling—conversion—regeneration.

Conversion

The Christian life, by its very nature and definition, represents something quite different from the way we previously lived. In contrast to being dead in sins and trespasses, it is *new* life.[1630] While it is of lifelong and even eternal duration, it has a finite point of beginning. “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step,” the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu is reputed to have said. And so it is with the Christian life. The first step of the Christian life is called conversion. It is the act of turning from one’s sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith.

The image of turning from sin is found in both the Old and New Testaments. In the book of Ezekiel we read the word of the Lord to the people of Israel: “Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!” (Ezek. 18:30–32). Later Ezekiel is told to warn the wicked to turn from their ways (Ezek. 33:7–11). In Ephesians 5:14 Paul uses different imagery, but the basic thrust is the same: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” In Acts we find Peter advocating a change in direction of life: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19). While contemporary evangelists frequently plead, “Be converted,” it is noteworthy that in the passages we have cited, the command is in the active: “Convert!”

Conversion is a single entity that has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith. Repentance is the unbeliever’s turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ. They are, respectively, the negative and positive aspect of the same occurrence.[1631] In a sense, each is incomplete without the other and each is motivated by the other. As we become aware of sin and turn from it, we see the necessity of turning to Christ for the provision of his righteousness. Conversely, believing in Christ makes us aware of our sin and thus leads to repentance.

Scripture gives no specifications concerning the amount of time conversion involves. On some occasions, it appears to have been a cataclysmic decision, taking place virtually in a moment’s time. This was likely the case with the great majority of those who were converted at Pentecost, probably the first time that they had really heard the gospel. On the other hand, for some people conversion was more of a process. Nicodemus probably came to commitment to Christ in

this fashion (John 19:39). Similarly, the emotional accompaniments of conversion can vary greatly. Saul's decision was under highly dramatic circumstances. He heard a voice speaking to him from heaven (Acts 9:4–7) and even became blind for three days (vv. 9, 17–18). By contrast, as we observed earlier, Lydia's turning to Christ seems to have been very simple and calm in nature: "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). On the other hand again, just a few verses later we read of the Philippian jailor who, still trembling with fear upon hearing that none of the prisoners had escaped after the earthquake, cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). The conversion experiences of these two people were very different, but the end result was the same.

Sometimes the church has forgotten that there is variety in God's ways of working. On the American frontier a certain type of preaching became stereotypical. Life was uncertain and often difficult, and the circuit-riding evangelist came only on infrequent occasions. The hearers were pressed to make an immediate decision.[1632] And so conversion came to be thought of as a crisis decision. Although God frequently does work with individuals in this way, differences in personality type, background, and immediate circumstances may result in a very different type of conversion. It is important not to insist that the incidentals or external factors of conversion be identical for everyone.

It is important also to draw a distinction between conversion and conversions. There is just one major point in life when the individual turns toward Christ in response to the offer of salvation. There may be other points when believers must abandon a particular practice or belief lest they revert to a life of sin. These events, however, are secondary, reaffirmations of the one major step that has been taken. We might say that there may be many conversions in the Christian's life, but only one Conversion.

Repentance

The negative aspect of conversion is the abandonment or repudiation of sin. This is what we mean by repentance. It is based on a feeling of godly sorrow for our sin. In examining repentance and faith, we should remember that they cannot really be separated from one another. We will deal with repentance first because where one has been logically precedes where one is going.

Two Hebrew terms express the idea of repentance. One is נָחַם (*nacham*), an onomatopoetic word signifying "to pant, sigh, or groan." It came to mean "to lament or to grieve." When referring to an emotion aroused by consideration of the situation of others, it connotes compassion and sympathy. When used in

reference to an emotion aroused by consideration of one's own character and deeds, it means "to rue" or "to repent."[1633] Interestingly, when נָחַם occurs in the sense of "repent," the subject of the verb is usually God rather than a human. A prime example is Genesis 6:6: "The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled." Another example is Exodus 32:14. Having considered wiping out the people of Israel because of their sinfulness in worshiping the golden calf, God changed his mind: "Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened." A passage where the verb occurs with a human as its subject is found in Job. At the end of his long trial Job says, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5–6).

The type of genuine repentance that humans are to display is more commonly designated by the word שׁוּב (*shub*). It is used extensively in the prophets' calls to Israel to return to the Lord. It stresses the importance of a conscious moral separation, the necessity of forsaking sin and entering into fellowship with God.[1634] One of the best-known uses is in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Having noted that God will visit wrath on his enemies, Isaiah adds, "'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD" (59:20). Actually, the word can be used of either the negative or positive aspect of conversion.

There are also two major New Testament terms for repentance. The word μεταμέλομαι (*metamelomai*) means "to have a feeling of care, concern, or regret."[1635] Like נָחַם, it stresses the emotional aspect of repentance, a feeling of regret or remorse for having done wrong. Jesus used the word in his parable of the two sons. When the first son was asked by his father to go and work in the vineyard, "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went" (Matt. 21:29). The second son said he would go, but did not. Jesus likened the chief priests and Pharisees (whom he was addressing) to the second son and repentant sinners to the first son: "For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (v. 32). The word μεταμέλομαι is also used of Judas's remorse over his betrayal of Jesus: "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders" (Matt. 27:3), and then went out and hanged himself. It appears that μεταμέλομαι can designate simply regret and remorse over one's

actions, as in the case of Judas. Or it can represent true repentance, which involves an actual alteration of behavior, as in the case of the first son. Otto Michel comments that Judas displays "remorse, not repentance. Judas sees that his action was guilty and he gives way under the burden. The remorse of Judas (Matt. 27:3) and of Esau (Heb. 12:17) does not have the power to overcome the destructive operation of sin."[1636] Judas and Peter responded to their sins in contrasting ways. Peter returned to Jesus and was restored to fellowship. In the case of Judas, awareness of sin led only to despair and self-destruction.

The other major New Testament term for repentance is μετανοέω (*metanoeō*), which literally means "to think differently about something or to have a change of mind." The word was characteristic of John the Baptist's preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 3:2). It was also a key term in the preaching of the early church. On Pentecost Peter urged the multitude, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

From these texts it is clear that repentance is a prerequisite for salvation. The large number of verses and the variety of contexts and cultural settings shows that repentance is an essential part of the Christian gospel. One might contend that repentance was virtually the entirety of John the Baptist's message. Repentance also had a prominent place in the preaching of Jesus. In fact, it was the opening note of his ministry: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matt. 4:17). And at the close of his ministry he indicated that repentance was to be a paramount topic in the disciples' preaching. Shortly before his ascension he told them: "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46–47). Peter began to fulfill this charge on Pentecost. And Paul declared in his message to the philosophers on Mars' Hill: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). This last statement is especially significant, for it is universal: "*all* people *everywhere*." Repentance is an ineradicable part of the gospel message.

In the late twentieth century, a school of thought grew up within evangelicalism that insists that repentance and acceptance of the lordship of Christ is necessary for discipleship, but not for salvation. All that is required is faith, defined as belief and acceptance. Repentance is a necessity for discipleship.[1637] This distinction between salvation and discipleship, however, is

very difficult to sustain, as for instance, in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commands his disciples to "go and make disciples."[1638]

Repentance is godly sorrow for one's sin together with a resolution to turn from it. There are other forms of regret over one's wrongdoing that are based on different motivations. If we have sinned and the consequences are unpleasant, we may well regret what we have done. But that is not true repentance. That is mere penitence. Real repentance is sorrow for one's sin because of the wrong done to God and the hurt inflicted upon him. This sorrow is accompanied by a genuine desire to abandon that sin. There is regret over the sin irrespective of sin's personal consequence.

The Bible's repeated emphasis on the necessity of repentance is a conclusive argument against what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace" (or "easy believism").[1639] It is not enough simply to believe in Jesus and accept the offer of grace; there must be a real alteration of the inner person. If belief in God's grace were all that is necessary, who would not wish to become a Christian? But Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). If there is no conscious repentance, there is no real awareness of having been saved from the power of sin. There may be a corresponding lack of depth and commitment. After Jesus gave assurance that the many sins of the woman who had washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair were forgiven, he made the comment that "whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Any attempt to increase the number of disciples by making discipleship as easy as possible ends up diluting the quality of discipleship instead.

Faith

As repentance is the negative aspect of conversion, turning from one's sin, so faith is the positive aspect, laying hold of the promises and the work of Christ. Faith is at the very heart of the gospel, for it is the vehicle by which we are enabled to receive the grace of God.

In a very real sense, Old Testament Hebrew does not have a noun for faith, except perhaps אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*) in Habakkuk 2:4, but that word is usually rendered "faithfulness."[1640] Instead, Hebrew conveys the idea of faith with verb forms. The most common of the verbs used to designate faith is אָמַן (*am'an*). In the Qal stem it means "to nourish"; in the Niphal stem it means "to be firm, established, or steadfast"; in the Hiphil stem, which is the most significant for our purposes, it means "to consider as established, regard as true, or believe."

This verb may be used with the prepositions ל and . With the former it basically conveys the idea of confident resting upon someone or something; with the latter it may designate giving assent to a testimony.[1641] "*Positively*, [the word signifies] a fastening or leaning; for this is the proper meaning of הֶאֱמִיו, namely, *a fastening* (staying [Gesenius]) *of the heart upon the Divine word of promise*, *a leaning upon the power and faithfulness of God*, by reason of which He can and will effect what He chooses in spite of all earthly obstacles, and therefore a resting upon the צ ר־לֵבָב, Ps. lxxiii.26."[1642] A second Hebrew verb is טָחַ (*batach*). Often appearing with the preposition עַל, it means "to lean upon, to confide in." It does not connote intellectual belief as much as it suggests trust and a committing of oneself.[1643]

In the New Testament, the one primary word that represents the idea of faith is the verb πιστεύω (*pisteuō*) together with its cognate noun πίστις (*pistis*). The verb has two basic meanings. First, it means "to believe what someone says, to accept a statement (particularly of a religious nature) as true."[1644] An example is found in 1 John 4:1: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." A dramatic instance of the verb is Jesus's statement to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would" (Matt. 8:13). Jesus bade Jairus believe that his daughter would be well (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50), and asked the blind men who followed him from Jairus's house, "Do you believe that I am able to do this [heal you]?" (Matt. 9:28). These and numerous other instances establish that faith involves believing that something is true. Indeed, the author of Hebrews declares that faith in the sense of acknowledging certain truths is indispensable to salvation: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

At least equally important are the instances in which πιστεύω and πίστις signify "personal trust as distinct from mere credence or belief."[1645] This sense is usually identifiable through the use of a preposition. In Mark 1:15 the preposition ἐν (*en*) is used: after the Baptist's arrest Jesus preached in Galilee, saying, "Repent and believe the good news!" The preposition εἰς (*eis*) is used in Acts 10:43: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." The same construction is found in Matthew 18:6; John 2:11; Acts 19:4; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8; and 1 John 5:10. The apostle John speaks of believing in the name of Jesus (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα—*eis to onoma*): "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12;

see also 2:23; 3:18; and 1 John 5:13). This construction had special significance to the Hebrews, who regarded one's name as virtually equivalent to the person. Thus, to believe on or in the name of Jesus was to place one's personal trust in him.[1646] The preposition ἐπί (*epi*) is used with the accusative in Matthew 27:42: "He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (see also Acts 9:42; 11:17; 16:31; 22:19; Rom. 4:5). It is used with the dative case in Romans 9:33 and 10:11, and 1 Peter 2:6, all of which are quotations from the Septuagint, as well as in 1 Timothy 1:16.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that the type of faith necessary for salvation involves both believing that and believing in, or assenting to facts and trusting in a person.[1647] It is vital to keep these two together. Sometimes in the history of Christian thought one aspect of faith has been so strongly emphasized as to make the other seem rather insignificant. Frequently there is a correlation between one's view of faith and one's understanding of the nature of revelation. When revelation is thought of as the communication of information, faith is regarded as intellectual assent to doctrine. Such was the case in Protestant scholasticism.[1648] When revelation is conceived of as the self-presentation of God in a personal encounter, faith is regarded as personal trust in the God one encounters.[1649] We have argued earlier, however, that revelation is not an either/or matter. God reveals himself, but he does so, at least in part, through communicating information (or propositions) about himself, telling us who he is.[1650] Our view of revelation leads us to stress the twofold nature of faith: giving credence to affirmations and trusting in God.

Sometimes faith is pictured as being antithetical to reason and unconfirmable. It is true that faith is not something established on an antecedent basis by indisputable evidence. But faith, once engaged in, enables us to reason and to recognize various supporting evidences.[1651] This means that faith is a form of knowledge; it works in concert with, not against, reason. Pertinent here is Jesus's response to the two disciples whom John the Baptist sent to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:19). Jesus responded by telling them to report to John the miracles they had seen and the message they had heard. Jesus in effect said to John, "Here is the evidence you need in order to be able to believe."

A close inspection reveals that the cases cited in arguing that faith does not rest on any kind of evidence do not really support that conclusion. One is the case of Thomas, who, not having been with the other disciples when the resurrected Jesus appeared, did not believe. Thomas stated that unless he could see the nail prints in Jesus's hands, put his finger in the mark of the nails, and place his hand in Jesus's side, he would not believe (John 20:25). When Jesus

appeared, he invited Thomas to satisfy his doubts. And when Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28), Jesus responded, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29). Had Jesus expected Thomas to believe blindly, without any evidential basis? Remember that Thomas had lived with Jesus for three years, had heard his teaching, and had seen his miracles; he knew of Jesus's promise and claim that he would rise from the dead. He already had sufficient basis for believing the testimony of his fellow disciples, whose integrity he had long experienced. He should not have required additional evidence. Similarly, when Abraham was called on to offer Isaac, he was not being asked to act blindly. Although there was no visible evidence at the moment, Abraham had known Jehovah for a long time. He had found in the past that God was faithful in providing the land and the son that he had promised. Abraham's faith here was an extrapolation into the unknown future of his experience of God in the past.

Although we have depicted conversion as a human response to divine initiative, even repentance and faith are gifts from God. Jesus made very clear that conviction, which repentance presupposes, is the work of the Holy Spirit: "When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (John 16:8–11). Jesus also said, "No one can come to me [i.e., exercise faith] unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). This work of the Father is effective: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. . . . Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me" (John 6:37, 45). Thus, humanly exercised repentance and faith are also gracious works of God in the life of the believer.

Regeneration

Conversion refers to the human being's response to God's offer of salvation and approach to the human. Regeneration is the other side of conversion. It is completely God's doing. It is God's transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ.

Underlying the doctrine of regeneration is an assumption that human nature is in need of transformation. The human being is spiritually dead and therefore

needs new birth or spiritual birth.[1652] We noted earlier that the natural person is relatively unaware of and unresponsive to spiritual stimuli.[1653] The biblical pictures of unregenerate humans as blind, deaf, and dead indicate a lack of spiritual sensitivity. And not only are unbelievers unable to perceive spiritual truths; they are incapable of doing anything to alter their condition of blindness and their natural tendency toward sin. When one reads the description of the sinful human in Romans 3:9–20, it is apparent that some radical change or metamorphosis is needed, rather than a mere modification or adjustment in the person. To some, this appears a very pessimistic view of human nature, and indeed it is, in terms of natural potential; but our view does not limit its expectations to natural possibilities.

The biblical descriptions of the new birth are numerous, vivid, and varied. Even in the Old Testament, we find a striking reference to God's renewing work. He promises, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19–20). Although the terminology and imagery differ from the New Testament's, we have here the basic idea of transformation of life and spirit.

In the New Testament, the term that most literally conveys the idea of regeneration is παλιγγενεσία (*palingenesia*). It appears just twice in the New Testament. One of these instances is Matthew 19:28, where it refers to the "renewal of all things" that will be part of the eschaton. The other is Titus 3:5, which refers to salvation: God our Savior "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Here we have the biblical idea of rebirth. Although the literal term παλιγγενεσία is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, the idea is most certainly prominent.

The best-known and most extensive exposition of the concept of the new birth is found in Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus told Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (v. 3). At a later point in the discussion he made the comment, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'" (v. 7). The Greek word used here, ἄνωθεν (*anōthen*), can also be rendered "from above." That "again" or "anew" is the correct rendering here, however, is seen from Nicodemus's response, "How can someone be born when they are old? . . . Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" (v. 4).

Although the terminology varies, the idea is found elsewhere in the New Testament. In the same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of being

“born of the Spirit” (John 3:5–8). He had in mind a supernatural work transforming the life of the individual. This work, which is indispensable for entrance into the kingdom of God, cannot be achieved by human effort or planning. It is also spoken of as being “born of God” or “born through the word of God” (John 1:12–13; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 5:1, 4). Whoever undergoes this experience is a new creation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul speaks of the renewing in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), of being made alive (Eph. 2:1, 5), and of resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:6). The same idea is implicit in Jesus’s statements that he had come to give life (John 6:63; 10:10, 28).

While it is fairly easy to list instances where the idea of new birth occurs, it is not so easy to ascertain its meaning. But we ought not be surprised that the new birth is difficult to understand.[1654] Jesus indicated to Nicodemus that the concept is difficult. It is like the wind: although one does not know where it comes from or where it goes, one hears its sound (John 3:8). Because the new birth deals with matters that are not perceived by the senses, it cannot be studied in the fashion in which most subjects are studied. There is also a natural resistance to the idea of new birth, a resistance that makes it difficult for us to examine the concept objectively. The necessity of the new birth is an indictment of all of us, for it points out that none of us is good enough in his or her natural state; we all need to undergo metamorphosis if we are to please God.

Despite the problems in understanding the concept, several assertions can be made about regeneration. First, it involves something new, a whole reversal of the person’s natural tendencies. It is not merely an amplification of present traits. For one side of regeneration involves putting to death or crucifying existent qualities. Contrasting the life in the Spirit with that in the flesh, Paul says: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:24–25). Other references to the death of the individual or of certain aspects of the individual include Romans 6:1–11 and Galatians 2:20; 6:14. The idea of one’s being made dead to the flesh (the natural way of acting and living) and alive in the Spirit is evidence that regeneration is the production of a totally new creation (as Paul correctly labeled it), and not merely a heightening of what is already the basic direction of one’s life.

As a putting to death of the flesh, the new birth involves a counteracting of the effects of sin. This is perhaps most clearly seen in Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:1–10. The deadness that requires a transformation is a result of the sin in which we live, being led by the prince of the power of the air. Although

regeneration involves something totally new to us, it does not result in anything foreign to human nature. Rather, the new birth is the restoration of human nature to what it originally was intended to be and what it in fact was before sin entered the human race at the time of the fall. It is simultaneously the beginning of a new life and a return of the original life and activity.

Further, it appears that the new birth is itself instantaneous. Nothing in the descriptions of the new birth suggests that it is a process rather than a single action. It is nowhere characterized as incomplete. Scripture speaks of believers as "born again" or "having been born again" rather than as "being born again" (John 1:12–13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1, 5–6; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 5:1, 4—the relevant Greek verbs in these references are either in the aorist tense, which points to an occurrence without reference to duration, or in the perfect tense, which points to a state of completion). While it may not be possible to determine the precise time of the new birth, and there may be a whole series of antecedents, it appears that the new birth itself occurs in an instant.[1655]

Although regeneration is instantaneously complete, it is not an end in itself. As a change of spiritual impulses, regeneration is the beginning of a process of growth that continues throughout one's lifetime. This process of spiritual maturation is sanctification. Having noted that his readers were formerly dead but are now alive, Paul adds, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). He speaks in Philippians 1:6 of continuing and completing what has been begun: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." The manifestations of this spiritual ripening are called the "fruit of the Spirit." They are the direct opposite of the work of the old nature, the flesh (Gal. 5:19–23).

New birth is also a supernatural occurrence. It is not something that can be accomplished by human effort. Jesus made this clear in John 3:6: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." He was responding to Nicodemus's question whether new birth comes by reentering the womb. Regeneration is especially the work of the Holy Spirit. Although salvation was planned and originated by the Father and actually accomplished by the Son, it is the Holy Spirit who applies it to the life of the believer, thus bringing to fulfillment the divine intention for humans.

At times in the past, regeneration was thought of as an alteration of the substance of the soul.[1656] That idea is not very meaningful to us, in part because the meaning of "substance" is not very clear. It would be better simply to think in terms of a change in the individual's inclinations and impulses and not to speculate regarding the exact nature of the change that takes place.

The doctrine of regeneration places the Christian faith in an unusual position. On the one hand, Christians reject the current secular belief in the goodness of the human and the optimistic expectations arising therefrom. The very insistence on regeneration is a declaration that without external help and complete transformation there is no possibility that genuine good on a large scale will emerge from humankind. On the other hand, despite the pessimistic assessment of humans' natural powers, Christianity is very optimistic: with supernatural aid humans can be transformed and restored to their original goodness. It was in regard to God's ability to change human hearts, enabling us to enter his kingdom, that Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

Implications of Effectual Calling, Conversion, and Regeneration

1. Human nature cannot be altered by social reforms or education. It must be transformed by a supernatural work of the Triune God.
2. No one can predict or control who will experience new birth. It is ultimately God's doing; even conversion depends on his effectual calling.
3. The beginning of the Christian life requires a recognition of one's own sinfulness and a determination to abandon the self-centered way of life.
4. Saving faith requires correct belief regarding the nature of God and what he has done. Correct belief is insufficient, however. There must also be active commitment of oneself to God.
5. One person's conversion experience may be radically different from another's. What is important is that there be genuine repentance and faith.
6. The new birth is not felt when it occurs. It will, rather, establish its presence by producing a new sensitivity to spiritual things, a new direction of life, and an increasing ability to obey God.

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The Beginning of Salvation: *Objective Aspects*

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and describe union with Christ.
2. Contrast inadequate models with the scriptural teaching on the union with Christ and note the implications.
3. Define and describe justification.
4. Examine justification as a forensic doctrine and the relationship between faith and works.
5. Define and describe adoption.
6. Discover the benefits of adoption.

Chapter Summary

There are three essential elements among the objective aspects of salvation: union with Christ, justification, and adoption. Union with Christ is a generally inclusive term for all of salvation. It is also specific, referring to an intimate relationship with Christ, akin to the marriage relationship between husband and wife. In justification God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the believer, which cancels God's judgment on

the believer. Finally, adoption means that the justified believer actually receives favored status with God and is adopted into the family of God.

Study Questions

- How would you define and explain each of the three objective doctrines of salvation: union with Christ, justification, and adoption?
- What are the similarities and differences among the three doctrines?
- What are inadequate models of union with Christ, and how would you oppose them?
- What objections have been raised to the idea of forensic justification? How would you respond to those objections?
- What are the benefits of adoption? In what ways can adoption arouse a special sense of worship and thanksgiving in the believer?

Outline

Union with Christ 877

The Scriptural Teaching

Inadequate Models

Characteristics of the Union

Implications of Union with Christ

Justification 883

Justification and Forensic Righteousness

Objections to the Doctrine of Forensic Justification

Faith and Works

The Lingering Consequences of Sin

Adoption 891

The Nature of Adoption

The Benefits of Adoption

We have examined those aspects of the beginning of the Christian life that involve the actual spiritual condition of the person, that is, the subjective aspects.

In this chapter we will be considering the change in the individual's status or standing in relationship to God, that is, the objective dimensions of salvation's inception.

Union with Christ

The Scriptural Teaching

In one sense, union with Christ is an inclusive term for the whole of salvation; the various other doctrines are simply subparts.[1657] While this term and concept are often neglected in favor of concentrating on other concepts such as regeneration, justification, and sanctification, it is instructive to note the large number of references to the oneness between Christ and the believer. The most basic references in this connection depict the believer and Christ as being "in" one another. On the one hand, we have many specific references to the believer's being in Christ; for example, 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" There are two such phrases in Ephesians 1:3–4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." Two verses later we read "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (vv. 6–8). Paul tells us that we have been created anew in Christ: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). The grace of God is given to us in Christ: "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:4–5). Deceased believers are called "the dead in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16), and our resurrection will take place in Christ: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

The other side of this relationship is that Christ is said to be in the believer. Paul says, "To [the saints] God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Christ's presence in the believer is also expressed, in a somewhat different way, in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the

Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." There is also Jesus's analogy of the vine and branches, which emphasizes the mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer: "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4–5). All that the believer has spiritually is based on Christ's being within. Our hope of glory is Christ in us. Our spiritual vitality is drawn from his indwelling presence. Other passages include Jesus's promises to be present with the believer (Matt. 28:20; John 14:23). Finally, the believer is said to share a whole host of experiences "with Christ": suffering (Rom. 8:17); crucifixion (Gal. 2:20); death (Col. 2:20); burial (Rom. 6:4); quickening (Eph. 2:5); resurrection (Col. 3:1); glorification and inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

Inadequate Models

We must nevertheless ask precisely what is entailed in the union between believers and Christ, for the language of these references is less than lucid. In what sense can Christ be said to be in us, and we in him? Are these expressions completely metaphorical, or is there some literal referent?

Several explanations that have been offered do not accurately convey what this doctrine involves. Among them is the view that our union with Christ is metaphysical. The underlying idea here is the pantheistic concept that we are one in essence with God. We have no existence apart from his. We are part of the divine essence. Christ is one with us and is in us by virtue of creation rather than redemption.[1658] This means that he is one with all members of the human race, not merely with believers. This explanation, however, goes beyond the teaching of Scripture; all of the biblical statements about union with Christ pertain exclusively to believers. Various passages make it clear that not everyone is included among those in whom Christ dwells and who are in Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17).

A second model is that our union with Christ is mystical.[1659] The relationship between the believer and Jesus is so deep and absorbing that the believer virtually loses his or her own individuality. Jesus so controls the relationship that the human personality is almost obliterated. The Christian experience is compared to that of the sports enthusiast or concertgoer whose attention is so fully given to what is transpiring on the field or on the stage that he or she loses all consciousness of time, place, and self. The relationship is not so much a matter of the believer's living the way Jesus would have him or her to live as it is

a matter of Jesus's taking over and actually living the person's life. The believer is so suggestible to the commands of the Lord as to seem almost hypnotized.

Those who hold this view feel that full obedience to the will of the Lord is achievable in this life. That goal is, of course, highly commendable. It must be noted, too, that there are passages that seem to support their position, for example, Galatians 2:20, where Paul says, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Yet a closer examination reveals that this text does not teach that the individual personality is obliterated, for Paul goes on to say, "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Here it is Paul who lives—he lives by faith in Christ. Other pertinent references include Jesus's statement in John 14:12: "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Similarly, he said at the time of his departure from the earth, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Note that in these passages Jesus does not suggest that he will do the work while the disciples remain totally passive. They will do it, although in and with the strength he supplies. These and other passages make clear that, strong as Christ's influence is on the believer, they remain two. They do not merge into one, nor is one of them submerged into the personality of the other.

A third model sees our union with Christ as being like the union between two friends or between a teacher and student. A psychological oneness results from sharing the same interests and being committed to the same ideals. This could be called a sympathetic oneness.[1660] It is an external bond. One influences the other primarily through speech or example; for instance, the teacher influences the student primarily through the instruction imparted.

If the second model errs by making the connection between Christ and the believer too strong, this third model makes it too weak. For it views the relationship between the Christian and Jesus as no different in kind from the relationship one might have had with the apostle Paul or that John the Baptist's disciples had with him. Surely, however, when Jesus promised that he would abide with his followers, he had in mind something more than his teachings. Indeed, in his last great discourse to his disciples before his death, he distinguished between his teachings and his personal presence: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). He was obviously promising a relationship that far exceeds that of Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud with their disciples.

A fourth model is the sacramental view—the believer obtains the grace of Jesus Christ by receiving the sacraments.[1661] Indeed, one actually takes Christ into oneself by participating in the Lord's Supper, eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood. This model is based on a literal interpretation of Jesus's words in instituting the Lord's Supper: "this is my body . . . this is my blood" (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20). It interprets similarly Jesus's statement in John 6:53: "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." To a large extent, the sacramental view of our union with Christ hinges upon a literal interpretation of these verses. We will scrutinize and evaluate sacramentalism later (pp. 933–36). Here, however, we note simply that taking these passages in the most literal sense seems unwarranted and leads to some virtually ludicrous conclusions (e.g., that Jesus's flesh and blood are simultaneously part of his body and the elements of the Eucharist, as the Lord's Supper is often termed by sacramentalists). A further difficulty with the sacramental view of the union is that a human intermediary administers the sacraments. This conception contradicts the statements in Hebrews 9:23–10:25 that Jesus has eliminated the need for mediators and that we may now come directly to him.

Characteristics of the Union

Just what does the concept of union with Christ mean, positively? To gain a grasp of the concept, we will note several characteristics of the union. We must not expect to be able to comprehend this matter completely, for Paul spoke of it as a mystery. Comparing the union between Christ and members of his church to the union between a husband and wife, Paul said, "This is a profound mystery" (Eph. 5:32). He was referring to the fact that knowledge of this union is inaccessible to humans except through special revelation from God. It is "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26–27).

The first characteristic of our union with Christ is that it is judicial in nature. When the Father evaluates or judges us before the law, he does not look upon us alone. God always sees the believer in union with Christ and measures the two of them together. Thus, he does not say, "Jesus is righteous but that human is unrighteous." He sees the two as one and says in effect, "They are righteous." That the believer is righteous is not a fiction or a misrepresentation. It is the correct evaluation of a new legal entity, a corporation that has been formed, as it

were. The believer has been incorporated into Christ and Christ into the believer (although not exclusively so). All of the assets of each are now mutually possessed. From a legal perspective, the two are now one.

Second, this union is spiritual. This has two meanings. On the one hand, the union is effected by the Holy Spirit. There is a close relationship between Christ and the Spirit, closer than is often realized. This is apparent in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Note also the interchangeability of Christ and the Spirit in Romans 8:9–11: "You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." John Murray says, "Christ dwells in us if his Spirit dwells in us, and he dwells in us by the Spirit." The Spirit is "the bond of this union."[1662]

Not only is our union with Christ brought about by the Holy Spirit; it is a union of spirits. It is not a union of persons in one essence, as in the Trinity, or of natures in one person, as in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is not a physical bonding, as in the welding of two pieces of metal. It is in some way a union of two spirits that does not extinguish either of them. It does not make the believer physically stronger or more intelligent, but produces a new spiritual vitality within the human.

Finally, our union with Christ is vital. His life actually flows into ours, renewing our inner nature (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16) and imparting spiritual strength. There is a literal truth in Jesus's metaphor of the vine and the branches. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit if it does not receive life from the vine, so we cannot bear spiritual fruit if Christ's life does not flow into us (John 15:4).

Various analogies have been used to illuminate the idea of union with Christ. Several of them are drawn from the physical realm. In mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, one person actually breathes for another. A heart-lung machine performs the vital function of supplying the body cells with blood (and hence with oxygen and various essential nutrients) during surgery. And drawing on the realm of parapsychology, there is some evidence that thoughts can somehow be transmitted from certain individuals to others. Now since Christ has designed and created our entire nature, including our psyches, it is not surprising that, dwelling within us in some way that we do not fully understand, he is able to

affect our very thoughts and feelings. A final illustration, and one with biblical warrant, is that of husband and wife. Not only do the two become one physically, but ideally they also become so close in mind and heart that they have great empathy for and understanding of one another. While none of these analogies in itself can give us an adequate understanding, collectively they may enlarge our grasp of our union with Christ.

Implications of Union with Christ

Our union with Christ has certain implications for our lives. First, we are accounted righteous. Paul wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Because of our judicial union with Christ, we have right standing in the face of the law and in the sight of God. We are as righteous as is God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

Second, we now live in Christ's strength.[1663] Paul affirmed, "I can do all things through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). He also claimed, "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). When Paul struggled with his "thorn in the flesh," probably a physical ailment, he found that although it was not removed, God gave him the grace to bear it: "But [the Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:9). This power is found not merely in Christ's teaching and the inspiration of his example. He also gives us concrete help that we might fulfill what he expects of us.

Being one with Christ also means that we will suffer. The disciples were told that they would drink the cup that Jesus drank, and be baptized with the same baptism as he (Mark 10:39). If tradition serves us correctly, most of them suffered a martyr's death. Jesus had told them not to be surprised if they encountered persecution: "Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also" (John 15:20). Paul did not shrink from this prospect; indeed, one of his goals was to share Christ's sufferings: "for whose sake I have lost all things. . . . I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:8, 10). Peter urged his readers, "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:13).

Finally, we also have the prospect of reigning with Christ. The two disciples who asked for positions of authority and prestige were instead promised suffering (Mark 10:35–39); but Jesus also told the entire group that because they had continued with him in his trials, they would eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, "and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). Paul made a similar statement: "If we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). Although we often have trials and even suffering here, we are given resources to bear them. And for those who suffer with Christ, a glorious future lies ahead.

Justification

Humanity has a twofold problem as a result of sin and the fall. On the one hand, there is a basic corruption of human nature; our moral character has been polluted through sin. This aspect of the curse is nullified by regeneration, which reverses the direction and general tendencies of human nature. The other problem remains, however: our guilt or liability to punishment for having failed to fulfill God's expectations. It is to this problem that justification relates. Justification is God's action pronouncing sinners righteous in his sight. We have been forgiven and declared to have fulfilled all that God's law requires of us. Historically, it was this issue that preoccupied Martin Luther and led to his break from the Roman Catholic Church. It is of considerable practical significance today as well, for it deals with the question, How can I be right with God? How can I, a sinner, be accepted by a holy and righteous judge?

Justification and Forensic Righteousness

In order to understand justification, it is necessary first to understand the biblical concept of righteousness, for justification is a restoration of the individual to a state of righteousness. In the Old Testament, the verb צָדַק (*tsadaq*) and its derivatives connote conformity to a norm. Since the character of the individual is not so much in view as is his or her relationship to God's law, the term is more religious than ethical in nature. The verb means "to conform to a given norm"; in the Hiphil stem it means "to declare righteous or to justify."[1664] The particular norm in view varies with the situation. Sometimes the context is family relationships. Tamar was more righteous than Judah, because he had not fulfilled his obligations as her father-in-law (Gen. 38:26). And David, in refusing to slay Saul, was said to be righteous (1 Sam. 24:17; 26:23), for he

was abiding by the standards of the monarch-subject relationship. Clearly righteousness is understood as a matter of living up to the standards set for a relationship. Ultimately, God's own person and nature are the measure or standard of righteousness. God is the ruler of all and the source of all criteria of rightness. As Abraham confessed, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

In the Old Testament, the concept of righteousness frequently appears in a forensic or juridical context. A righteous person is one who has been declared by a judge to be free from guilt. The task of the judge is to condemn the guilty and acquit the innocent:[1665] "When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty" (Deut. 25:1). God is the Judge of human beings (Ps. 9:4; Jer. 11:20). Those who have been acquitted have been judged to stand in right relationship to God, that is, to have fulfilled what was expected of them in that relationship. In the Old Testament sense, then, justification involves ascertaining that a person is innocent and then declaring what is indeed true: that he or she is righteous, that is, has fulfilled the law.

The New Testament advances upon this Old Testament view of justification. Without such an addition, it would have been shocking and scandalous for Paul to say, as he did, that God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Justice demands that they be condemned; a judge who justifies or acquits the unrighteous is acting unrighteously himself. And so, when we read that, on the contrary, God in justifying the ungodly has shown himself to be righteous (Rom. 3:26), we must also understand that such justification is apart from the works of the law. In the New Testament, justification is God's declarative act by which, *on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death*, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law that pertain to them. Justification is a forensic act imputing the righteousness of Christ to the believer; it is not an actual infusing of holiness into the individual. It is a matter of declaring the person righteous, as a judge does in acquitting the accused.[1666] It is not a matter of making the person righteous or altering his or her actual spiritual condition.

Several factors support the argument that justification is forensic or declarative in nature:

1. The concept of righteousness as a matter of formal standing before the law or covenant, and of a judge as someone who determines and declares our status in that respect.

2. The juxtaposition of "justify" (δικαιόω—*dikaioō*) and "condemn" in passages like Romans 8:33–34: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." "Justifies" and "condemn" are parallel here. If the latter is a declarative or forensic act, then presumably the former is also. Certainly the act of condemning is not a matter of changing someone's spiritual condition, of somehow infusing sin or evil. It is simply a matter of charging a person with wrong and establishing guilt. Correspondingly, the act of justifying is not a matter of infusing holiness into believers but of declaring them righteous. A similar passage is Matthew 12:37, where Jesus, speaking of the day of judgment when everyone will give account for every careless word uttered, says, "For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." In the Old Testament we should note Deuteronomy 25:1, already cited, and Proverbs 17:15: "Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both." If "justify" meant "to make righteous or holy or good," those who justify the wicked would not be denounced along with those who condemn the righteous. If condemning is a declarative act, justifying must be also.

3. Passages where δικαιόω means "to defend, vindicate, or acknowledge (or prove) to be right." In some cases it is used of human action in relation to God. Luke reports that upon hearing Jesus's preaching, "all the people, even the tax collectors . . . acknowledged that God's way was right" (Luke 7:29). Jesus used the term in the same way when he responded to the attempts of the Pharisees and lawyers to justify their rejection of him: "But wisdom [i.e., the Baptist's teaching and mine] is proved right by all her children" (v. 35).

4. Linguistic evidence that justification is forensic or declarative in character. The verbal ending -όω, as in δικαιόω, does not carry the meaning "to make something a particular way." That, rather, is the signification of -άξω, as in ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*—"to make holy"). The ending -όw, by contrast, signifies "to declare something to be a particular way," as in ἀξιόω (*axioō*—"to deem worthy"). Thus, δικαιόω means "to declare to be just."[1667]

We conclude from the preceding data that justification is a forensic or declarative action of God, like that of a judge in acquitting the accused. Gottlob Schrenk observes, "In the NT it is seldom that one cannot detect the legal connexion. . . . The LXX, with its legal emphasis, has obviously had the greatest influence on NT usage."[1668] And D. E. H. Whiteley summarizes, "It is almost universally agreed that the word justify (*dikaioō*) does not mean 'make righteous.'"[1669] In language that has become more common of late, justification is the counting to a person of a righteousness external to him or her.

Objections to the Doctrine of Forensic Justification

Objections have been raised to the view that justification is forensic in nature. As we deal with them, we will gain a clearer picture of the meaning of justification. William Sanday and Arthur Headlam raise the question of how God could justify the ungodly (i.e., declare them righteous). Is this not something of a fiction in which God treats sinners as if they had not sinned or, in other words, pretends that sinners are something other than what they really are? This interpretation of justification seems to make God guilty of deception, even if it is only self-deception.[1670] Vincent Taylor picked up on this idea and contended that righteousness cannot be imputed to a sinner: "If through faith a man is accounted righteous, it must be because, in a reputable sense of the term, he is righteous, and not because another is righteous in his stead."[1671]

We respond that the act of justification is not a matter of God's announcing that sinners are something they are not. There is a constitutive aspect to justification as well. For what God does is actually to constitute us righteous by imputing (not imparting) the righteousness of Christ to us. Here we must distinguish between two senses of the word "righteous." One could be righteous by virtue of never having violated the law. Such a person would be innocent, having totally fulfilled the law. But even if we have violated the law, we can be deemed righteous once the prescribed penalty has been paid. There is a difference between these two situations, which points up the insufficiency of defining justification simply as God's regarding me "just as if I had never sinned." Humans are not righteous in the former sense but in the latter. For the penalty for sin has been paid, and thus the requirements of the law have been fulfilled. It is not a fiction, then, that believers are righteous, for the righteousness of Christ has been credited to them. This situation is somewhat analogous to what takes place when people marry or two corporations merge. Their separate assets are brought into the union and are thereafter treated as mutual possessions.[1672]

One objection sometimes raised to the doctrines of substitutionary atonement and forensic justification is that virtue simply cannot be transferred from one person to another. What should be borne in mind, however, is that this is not so external a matter as it is sometimes thought to be. For Christ and the believer do not stand at arm's length from one another, so that when God looks squarely at the believer, he cannot also see Christ with his righteousness, but only pretends to. Rather, Christ and the believer have been brought into such a unity that Christ's spiritual assets, as it were, and the spiritual liabilities and assets of the believer are merged. Thus, when looking at the believer, God the Father does not

see him or her alone. He sees the believer together with Christ, and in the act of justification justifies both of them together. It is as if God says, "They are righteous!" He declares what is actually true of the believer, which has come to pass through God's constituting the believer one with Christ.

Justification, then, is a three-party, not a two-party, matter. And it is voluntary on the part of all three. Jesus is not an unwilling victim conscripted to the task. He willingly volunteered to give himself and unite with the sinner. There is also a conscious decision on the part of the sinner to enter into this relationship. And the Father willingly accepts it. That no one is constrained means that the whole matter is completely ethical and legal.

Numerous passages of Scripture indicate that justification is the gift of God. One of the best known is Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Another is Ephesians 2:8–9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Justification is something completely undeserved. It is not an achievement. It is an obtainment, not an attainment. Even faith is not some good work God must reward with salvation. It is God's gift. It is not the cause of our salvation, but the means by which we receive it. And, contrary to the thinking of some, it has always been the means of salvation. In his discussion of Abraham, the father of the Jews, Paul points out that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. He makes this point both positively and negatively. He affirms that Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). Then he rejects the idea that we can be justified by works: "All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. . . . Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God" (vv. 10–11). So God has not introduced a new means of salvation. He has always worked in the same way.

The principle of salvation by grace alone is difficult for humans to accept. The problem the Galatian church encountered with legalism is not uncommon. Somehow it does not seem right that we should receive salvation without having to do anything for it or to suffer somewhat for our sins. Or if that does not seem to be the case with respect to ourselves, it certainly does seem to be the case with respect to others, especially those of an unusually evil character. Another difficulty is that when humans do accept the principle that they do not have to work to receive salvation, there frequently is a tendency to overreact, all the way to antinomianism (Rom. 6:1–2; Gal. 5:13–15).

Some have contended that the idea of forensic justification is based on a misunderstanding of Paul's purpose in this writing. In the later twentieth century, a "new perspective on Paul" arose, suggesting that traditional interpretations of

Paul as objecting to Judaism as a legalistic approach to meriting salvation were mistaken. Rather, he was combating the Judaizers who were insisting that Paul's Gentile converts must be circumcised. Judaism was not a religion of salvation by works, but rather the teaching that good works were a response to God's gracious establishment of the covenant with Israel. This is what Sanders calls "covenantal nomism."[1673] Thus Paul's doctrine of justification was not a central doctrine but a doctrine developed to deal with the specific issues of his controversies with the Judaizers.[1674]

A very extensive literature has grown up surrounding this issue. We may note briefly, however, that the concept of imputed righteousness antedates Paul's writings, so that he elaborated, rather than originated it. Further, he identifies his conversion with justification by faith apart from works, long before he encountered the Judaizers. Finally, he continued to emphasize this doctrine after the controversy with the Judaizers had subsided. In view of these considerations, it can hardly be understood merely as a doctrine created to deal with this specific situation.[1675]

Yet another objection to the doctrine is that while Paul teaches that our sins are imputed to Christ (2 Cor. 5:19–21; Rom. 4:8), the reverse does not follow. What God counts as righteousness is not Christ's righteousness imputed to us, but rather our faith (albeit in Christ). The texts that speak of imputation in relationship to righteousness are Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 22–24. These, however, it is contended, do not speak of Christ's righteousness being counted as our righteousness, but of our faith being counted as righteousness.[1676]

We should note, however, that the broad context in which the discussion takes place is significant. Robert Gundry maintains that the framework of thought within which Paul discusses justification is a "covenantal framework," rather than a "bookkeeping framework." Yet Paul speaks of debt, work, and so on, which is certainly more a bookkeeping than a covenantal framework. In other words, Gundry seems to have introduced a concept from outside the passages, which then becomes a controlling factor in their interpretation. More specifically, Gundry concedes that bookkeeping is an appropriate concept for understanding the transfer of our transgressions to Christ, but not for understanding the crediting of righteousness to the believer.[1677] It appears that a more natural understanding of these passages is that faith is the means by which one obtains the righteousness of Christ, rather than constituting the righteousness imputed to us.[1678]

The issue of imputed versus imparted righteousness continues to rise in new contexts, usually more nuanced than the classic dispute between Protestants and Catholics. Sometimes it is asserted that justification is not a matter of transfer of

external righteousness so much as actual participation in the righteousness of Christ, so that in Christ one does not merely have one's sins atoned for, but dies to the power of sin.[1679] Sometimes a distinction is made between the justification that takes place at the point of conversion and that at the final judgment. In this distinction, the judgment takes into account the works one has done, which are the basis, not simply of rewards, but of the determination of one's final status before God.[1680] N. T. Wright examines several Pauline passages and contends that this element of the basis of future judgment has been overlooked by many theologians, who have tended to treat Reformed views of justification as the whole of the biblical teaching. He says, "the idea that Paul would insist on such a judgment at which the criterion will be, in some sense, 'works,' 'deeds,' or even 'works of the law,' has naturally been anathema to those who have taught that his sole word about judgment and justification is that, since justification is by faith, there simply cannot be a final 'judgment according to works.' I am frequently challenged on this point in public, after lectures and seminars, and my normal reply is that I did not write Romans 2; Paul did."[1681]

This, then, seems to be the crucial element of difference between one of the more conservative new-perspective scholars and his critics. Wright insists that the final judgment should be considered a second or final justification. The first takes place at the point of saving faith and is based only on God's imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. The final justification, however, is based at least in part on the believer's faithful adherence to the covenant between the believer and God, that is, righteous works done, as depicted in Matthew 25:31–46.[1682]

The common element in these nuanced formulations is a sense that the classic Protestant view of forensic justification has too sharply separated what it terms justification and sanctification. In some cases, this is attributed to reading Paul's view, which is based on a Jewish, circular way of thinking, through Greek, linear categories.[1683]

This observation helpfully reminds us that God's work of salvation, however conceived, must issue in a transformed person and in holy living. It, however, imputes a sharper separation between the two than is inherent in the concept of forensic justification, and then uses that to argue for a stronger conclusion as a rectification. While there are genuine distinctions of these concepts of justification and sanctification in Paul, it does not mean that one can exist without the other, or give a basis for antinomianism. Further, there is a lack of acknowledgment of assumptions based on the acceptance of elements of the current intellectual milieu, which are then read into the biblical material. This is seen quite clearly in the Jewish/Western distinction, which has been highly

dubious at least since the work of James Barr and others, fifty or more years ago. This objection must be judged inadequate.

Faith and Works

The principle of salvation by grace brings us to the question of the relationship of faith to works. The position we have taken here is that works do not produce salvation. Yet the biblical witness also indicates that while it is faith that leads to justification, justification must and will invariably produce works appropriate to the nature of the new creature that has come into being. It is good, when we quote the classic text on salvation by grace, Ephesians 2:8–9, not to stop short of verse 10, which points to the outcome of this grace: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." James puts it even more forcefully in his discussion of the relationship between faith and works, which is summed up in his statement, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17; see also v. 26). Despite the fairly common opinion that there is a tension between Paul and James, both make essentially the same point: that the genuineness of the faith that leads to justification becomes apparent in the results that issue from it. If there are no good works, there has been neither real faith nor justification. We find support for this contention in the fact that justification is intimately linked with union with Christ. If we have become one with Christ, then we will not live according to the flesh, but rather by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–17). The union with Christ that brings justification also brings the new life. As J. A. Ziesler says, "The believer enters not just a private relationship with Jesus, but a new humanity, in which he becomes a new kind of man."[1684]

The Lingering Consequences of Sin

One issue remains: the consequences of sin seem to linger on, even after sin has been forgiven and the sinner justified. An example is David. He was told that his sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah had been put away so that he would not die; nevertheless, the child born to Bathsheba would die because of David's sin (2 Sam. 12:13–14). Is such forgiveness real and complete? Is it not as if God in such instances holds back a bit on his forgiveness so that a bit of punishment remains? And if this is the case, is there real grace?

We need to make a distinction here between the temporal and eternal consequences of sin. When one is justified, all of the eternal consequences of sin are canceled, including eternal death. But the temporal consequences of sin, both

those that fall on the individual and those that fall on the human race collectively, are not necessarily removed. Thus we still experience physical death and the other elements of the curse of Genesis 3. A number of these consequences follow from our sins in a cause-and-effect relationship that may be either physical or social in nature. God ordinarily does not intervene miraculously to prevent the carrying through of these laws. So if, for example, a person in a fit of rage, perhaps in a drunken state, kills his family but later repents and is forgiven, God does not bring the family members back to life. The sin has led to a lifetime loss.

While we do not know the exact nature of the cause of the death of David and Bathsheba's son, it is not difficult to see a possible connection between David's sin and the rape, murder, and rebellion that occurred among his other children. All too aware of his own shortcomings, David may have been overly indulgent with his sons, or they may have viewed his enjoining them to good behavior as hypocritical. We see the results in the tragedies that later transpired. There is a warning here—although God's forgiveness is boundless and accessible, we ought not to presume upon it. Sin is not something to be treated lightly.

Adoption

The effect of justification is primarily negative: the cancellation of the judgment against us. Unfortunately, it is possible to be pardoned without simultaneously acquiring positive standing. Such is not the case with justification, however. For not only are we released from liability to punishment, but we are restored to a position of favor with God. This transfer from a status of alienation and hostility to one of acceptance and favor is termed adoption.[1685] It is referred to in several passages in the New Testament. Perhaps the best known is John 1:12: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Paul notes that our adoption is a fulfillment of part of God's plan: "He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Eph. 1:5). And in Galatians 4:4–5 Paul links adoption with justification: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."[1686]

One dimension of salvation that has not received much emphasis in Western thought is the fact that Jesus is said to be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29). While this does not mean that we ever attain the deity that was his, it does mean that we have been ushered into those benefits of children

of the Father that Jesus enjoyed during the time of his earthly ministry. Jesus's role fits well with the African concept of the elder brother, which it shares with Hebrew thought.[1687]

The Nature of Adoption

There are several important characteristics of our adoption. First, it occurs simultaneously with conversion, regeneration, justification, and union with Christ. It is, additionally, the condition in which the Christian lives and operates from that time onward. Although logically distinguishable from regeneration and justification, adoption is not really separable from them. Only those who are justified and regenerated are adopted, and vice versa.[1688] This is made clear in the words that follow John 1:12, which, as we have already noted, is a key reference to the adopted children of God: "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Adoption involves a change of both status and condition. In the formal sense, adoption is a declarative matter, an alteration of our legal status. We become God's children. This is an objective fact. In addition, however, there is the actual experience of being favored of God. We enjoy what is designated the spirit of sonship. The Christian looks affectionately and trustingly upon God as Father rather than as a fearsome slave driver and taskmaster (John 15:14–15). Through adoption we are restored to the relationship with God that humans once had but lost. We are by nature and creation children of God, but we are rebellious and estranged children. We have voted ourselves out of God's family as it were. But God in adopting us restores us to the relationship with him for which we were originally intended. This condition is not something totally new, for it is not foreign to our original nature.

That we are by creation God's children is strongly implied in Paul's statement in Acts 17:24–29, culminating in verse 29: "Therefore since we are God's offspring. . . ." It is also implied in Hebrews 12:5–9, where God is pictured as a Father disciplining his children. James 1:17 similarly views God as the Father of all humans: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Probably the clearest and most straightforward of the texts in this regard is Malachi 2:10: "Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?" Malachi is here referring only to the people of Israel and Judah. Despite the fact that they have one Father, having all been created by one God, they have been faithless to one another and the covenant. But the underlying principle here is of

far wider application. All who have been created by this one God have one Father. God's fatherhood, then, is not of merely local significance or application. It is a universal truth because it is connected with his creation of the human race.

We must also observe, however, that the adoption of which we have been speaking introduces a type of relationship with God quite different from that which humans in general have with him. John clearly points out this distinction: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). The unbeliever simply does not have, and cannot experience, the type of filial relationship the believer experiences.[1689]

The Benefits of Adoption

The meaning or significance of adoption becomes most apparent when we examine its effects in and upon the believer's life. One of these is of course forgiveness. In light of the fact that God has forgiven us, Paul urges us to forgive others: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). He delights in forgiving; he is merciful, tenderhearted, and kind (Exod. 34:6–7; Deut. 5:10; Ps. 103:8–14). He is not a stern, harsh, or severe Father. He is not to be feared, but trusted. Our adoption means that there is continued forgiveness. Were God only our Judge, our past sins would all be forgiven, but we would have no assurance of forgiveness of future wrongs. In law one cannot be convicted or acquitted before the act in question takes place; one cannot pay a fine or serve a sentence anticipatively.[1690] Only after the act itself can the penalty be paid and justification made. In stark contrast, we need not fear that God's grace will cease and that we will be treated severely if we slip once. God truly is our Father, not a police officer. We have peace with God, as Paul pointed out in Romans 5:1. Our adoption and God's forgiveness are eternal.

Our adoption also involves reconciliation. Not only has God forgiven us, but we also have been reconciled to him. We no longer carry enmity toward him. God has shown his love for us by taking the initiative in restoring the fellowship damaged by our sin. As Paul puts it, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom. 5:8, 10). In adoption both sides are reconciled to one another.

There also is liberty for the children of God. The child of God is not a slave who obeys out of a sense of bondage or compulsion. Slaves live in fear of the

consequences should they fail to carry out their obligations. But Paul points out that as God's children we need not fear the consequences of failing to live up to the law: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, '*Abba*, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:14–16). A similar thought is expressed in Galatians 3:10–11. We are free persons. We are not obligated to the law in quite the way in which a slave or servant is.

This liberty is not license, however. There are always some who pervert their freedom. Paul gave warning to such people: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:13–16). Believers serve God not out of fear and pressure, but out of a higher motivation—their friendship with him. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14–15). Earlier in the same address he had made similar statements: "If you love me, keep my commands. . . . Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them" (John 14:15, 21). The believer keeps the commandments, not out of fear of a cruel and harsh master, but out of love for a kindly and loving Father.[1691]

Adoption means that the Christian is the recipient of God's fatherly care. Paul noted that "we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:16–17). As heirs we have available to us the unlimited resources of the Father. Paul pointed this out to the Philippians: "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). The believer can pray confidently, knowing that there is no limitation on what God is able to do. According to Jesus, the Father who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the fields cares even more for his human children (Matt. 6:25–34). His provision is always wise and kind (Luke 11:11–13).

It should not be thought that God is indulgent or permissive, however. He is our heavenly Father, not our heavenly Grandfather. Thus, discipline is one of the

features of our adoption. In the letter to the Hebrews there is a rather extended discussion of this subject (12:5–11). Quoting Proverbs 3:11–12, the writer comments: “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?” (v. 7) Discipline may not be pleasant at the moment of application, but it is beneficial in the long term. Love is concern and action for the ultimate welfare of another. Therefore, discipline should be thought of as evidence of love rather than of lack of love. It may not always be thought of as a benefit of adoption, but it is a benefit nonetheless. God several times referred to Israel as his son (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1). As unruly and rebellious as this son was, God did not cast him away. We need not be worried, then, that God will discard us when we stray. If he clung to Israel through all of their iniquity as recorded in the Old Testament, he will be patient with us as well, showing persistent, faithful lovingkindness.

Finally, adoption involves the Father’s goodwill. It is one thing for us to be pardoned, for the penalty incurred by our wrongdoing to have been paid. That, however, may simply mean we will not be punished in the future. It does not necessarily guarantee goodwill. If a criminal’s debt to society has been paid, society will not necessarily thereafter look favorably or charitably upon him or her. There may instead be suspicion, distrust, even animosity. With the Father, however, there are the love and goodwill that we so much need and desire. He is ours and we are his, and he through adoption extends to us all the benefits his measureless love can bestow.

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The Continuation of Salvation

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and explain what sanctification is and how it is accomplished in the life of the believer.
2. Identify and describe how God brings about sanctification in the believer.
3. Examine the role of law as it relates to the believer.
4. Identify the role of salvation among Old Testament believers.

Chapter Summary

After the miraculous work of salvation, God continues the transforming process to make the believer into the image of Christ. Sanctification is the process of being set apart from sin toward becoming holy and toward the goal of leading a sinless life. While this is not realized in this life, it is the goal. God's sanctifying work is carried out through several processes, including union with Christ and separation from the world.

Study Questions

- What is sanctification, and how is it accomplished in the life of the believer?
- What is the difference between the perfectionist view of sanctification and the view that complete sanctification is not attained within this life?
- What is deification, and how have some related it to sanctification?
- How do union with Christ, a relationship of friendship with him, and separation from the world contribute to sanctification?
- What is the role of the law in the New Testament conception of sanctification?
- What is the biblical teaching concerning the salvation of Old Testament believers?

Outline

Sanctification 897

The Nature of Sanctification

Sanctification: Complete or Incomplete?

Deification?

The Christian Life 905

Union with Christ

A Relationship of Friendship

The Role of the Law

Separation

Forgiveness: Conditional or Unconditional?

The Salvation of Old Testament Believers

The beginnings of salvation as we examined them in the preceding two chapters are both complex and profound. Yet they are not the end of God's special working to restore his children to the likeness to him for which they are destined. Having begun this work of transformation, he continues and completes it.

Sanctification

The Nature of Sanctification

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of believers, making them actually holy. By "holy" here is meant "bearing an actual likeness to God." Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled within the believer. In particular, sanctification is the Holy Spirit's applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ.

There are two basic senses of the word "sanctification," which are related to two basic concepts of holiness. On the one hand, there is holiness as a formal characteristic of particular objects, persons, and places. In this sense holiness refers to a state of being separate, set apart from the ordinary or mundane and dedicated to a particular purpose or use. The Hebrew adjective for "holy" (קָדֹשׁ —*qados*) literally means "separate," since it derives from a verb meaning "to cut off" or "to separate."[1692] Together with its cognates it is used to designate particular places (especially the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies), objects (e.g., Aaron's garments and the Sabbath Day), and persons (e.g., the priests and Levites) as specially set apart or sanctified to the Lord. An example is found in Exodus 13:2: "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal." Similarly, the holiness of God signifies his separateness from anything impure.

This sense of sanctification is found in the New Testament as well. Peter refers to his readers as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). Here, being sanctified means "belonging to the Lord." Sanctification in this sense is something that occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life, at the point of conversion, along with regeneration and justification. It is in this sense that the New Testament so frequently refers to Christians as "saints" (ἅγιοι—*hagioi*), even when they are far from perfect.[1693] Paul, for example, addresses the persons in the church at Corinth in this way, even though it was probably the most imperfect of the churches to which he ministered: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

The other sense of sanctification is moral goodness or spiritual worth. This sense gradually came to predominate. It designates not merely the fact that believers are formally set apart, or belong to Christ, but that they are then to conduct themselves accordingly. They are to live lives of purity and goodness.[1694]

The term “sanctification” does not appear in the Synoptic Gospels at all. To convey the idea that our lives are to be pure, Jesus emphasized instead that we are children of God: we belong to God and consequently should show a likeness to him. We should share his spirit of love: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:43–45). To Jesus, his brothers and sisters are those who do God’s will (Mark 3:35). Paul shares this conception that our status before God is to result in holy living. For example, he urges the Ephesians, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Eph. 4:1). He then goes on to specify a life of lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearance. The fact of belonging to God is to issue in moral attributes reflecting such a status.[1695]

In order to focus more sharply the nature of sanctification, it will be helpful to contrast it with justification. There are a number of significant differences. One pertains to duration. Justification is an instantaneous occurrence, complete in a moment, whereas sanctification is a process requiring an entire lifetime for completion. There is a quantitative distinction as well. One is either justified or not, whereas one may be more or less sanctified. That is, there are degrees of sanctification but not of justification. Justification is a forensic or declarative matter, as we have seen earlier, while sanctification is an actual transformation of the character and condition of the person. Justification is an objective work affecting our standing before God, our relationship to him, while sanctification is a subjective work affecting our inner person.

We need to look now at the characteristics of sanctification. We must first emphasize that sanctification is a supernatural work; it is something done by God, not something we do ourselves. Thus, it is not reform that we are speaking of. Paul wrote, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). Other references stressing that it is God who works our sanctification include Ephesians 5:25–27; Titus 2:14; and Hebrews 13:20–21. When we say that sanctification is supernatural, we mean that it is something nature cannot produce or account for. It is also supernatural in the sense that it is a special, volitional work, or series of works, by the Holy Spirit. It is not just a matter of his general providence as universally manifested.

Further, this divine working within the believer is a progressive matter. This is seen, for example, in Paul’s assurance that God will continue to work in the lives of the Philippians: “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in

you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Paul also notes that the cross is the power of God "to us who are being saved" (1 Cor. 1:18). He uses a present participle here, conveying the idea of ongoing activity. That this activity is the continuation and completion of the newness of life begun in regeneration is evident not only from Philippians 1:6, but also from Colossians 3:9–10: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

The aim of this divine working is likeness to Christ himself. This was God's intention from all eternity: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom. 8:29). The word translated "to be conformed to" (συμμόρφους—*summorphous*) indicates a likeness to Christ that is not just an external or superficial resemblance. It signifies the whole set of characteristics or qualities that makes something what it is. Further, it is a compound word, with the prefix indicating vital connection with the object resembled. Our being made like Christ is not an arm's-length transaction. What we come to have we have *together with* him.

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit.[1696] In Galatians 5 Paul speaks of the life in the Spirit: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (v. 16); "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (v. 25). He also lists a group of qualities he designates collectively as "the fruit of the Spirit"—"love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (vv. 22–23). Similarly, in Romans 8 Paul says much about the Spirit and the Christian. Christians walk according to the Spirit (v. 4), set their minds on the things of the Spirit (v. 5), are in the Spirit (v. 9); the Spirit dwells in them (v. 9); by the Spirit they have put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13); they are led by the Spirit (v. 14); the Spirit bears witness that they are children of God (v. 16); and the Spirit intercedes for them (vv. 26–27). It is the Spirit who is at work in the believer, bringing about likeness to Christ.

One might conclude from the preceding that sanctification is completely a passive matter on the believer's part. This is not so, however. While sanctification is exclusively of God, that is, its power rests entirely on his holiness,[1697] the believer is constantly exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation. For example, Paul writes to the Philippians: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12–13). Paul urges both practice of virtues and avoidance of evils (Rom. 12:9, 16–17). We are to put to death the works of the body (Rom. 8:13) and present our bodies a living

sacrifice (Rom. 12:1–2). So while sanctification is God's work, the believer has a role as well, entailing both removal of sinfulness and development of holiness.

Sanctification: Complete or Incomplete?

One major issue over which there has been disagreement throughout church history is whether the process of sanctification is ever completed within the earthly lifetime of the believer. Do we ever come to the point where we no longer sin? While it is dangerous to generalize, those who answer that question in the affirmative (the perfectionists) tend to be Arminians. Major perfectionistic denominations such as the Church of the Nazarene and the Pentecostal groups are Arminian. Not all Arminians are perfectionists, however. Calvinists are usually nonperfectionistic.

Perfectionists hold that it is possible to come to a state where a believer does not sin, and that indeed some Christians do arrive at that point. This does not mean that the person cannot sin, but that indeed he or she does not sin. Nor does this mean that there is no further need for the means of grace or for the Holy Spirit, that there is no longer any temptation or struggle with the innate tendency toward evil, or that there is no room for further spiritual growth.[1698] It does mean, however, that it is possible not to sin, and that some believers actually do abstain from all evil. Ample biblical texts support such a view. One of them is Matthew 5:48, where Jesus tells his hearers, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Paul notes that leaders will be provided to equip the saints for building up the body of Christ "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). He prays for the Thessalonians, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). The writer to the Hebrews similarly prays that "the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20–21). These verses seem to offer prima facie evidence that total sanctification is a possibility for all believers, and a reality for some.[1699]

No less earnest about their convictions are those who maintain that perfection is an ideal never attained within this life. They contend that much as we should desire and strive after complete deliverance from sin, sinlessness is simply not a realistic goal for this life. Certain passages indicate that we cannot escape sin.[1700] One of the more prominent of these passages is 1 John 1:8–10: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we

confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." That this passage was written to believers renders the statement that there is sin in all of us the more cogent.

Another passage very frequently alluded to by the nonperfectionist is Romans 7, where Paul describes his own experience. On the assumption that Paul has in view his life after conversion (an assumption not all scholars accept), this passage appears to be a vivid and forceful testimony to the effect that the believer is not free from sin. Paul puts it powerfully: "I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (vv. 18–19). This word came from one of the greatest of all Christians, indeed, many would say, the greatest Christian of all time. If even he confessed having great difficulty with sin, certainly we must conclude that perfection is not to be experienced in this life.

How shall we untangle all of these considerations and arrive at a conclusion on this difficult but important topic? We begin by noting again the nature of sin. It is not merely acts of an external nature. Jesus made quite clear that even the thoughts and attitudes that we have are sinful if they are less than perfectly in accord with the mind of the almighty and completely holy God (see, e.g., Matt. 5:21–28). Thus, sin is of a considerably more pervasive and subtle character than we might tend to think.

We also need to determine the nature of the perfection that is commanded of us. The word τέλειοι (*teleioi*), which is found in Matthew 5:48, does not mean "flawless" or "spotless." Rather, it means "complete." It is quite possible, then, to be "perfect" without being entirely free from sin.[1701] That is, we can possess the fullness of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13) and the full fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) without possessing them completely.

The standard to be aimed for is complete freedom from sin. The commands to strive by the grace of God to attain that goal are too numerous to ignore. And certainly, if it is possible by this enablement to avoid giving in to a particular temptation, then it must be possible to prevail in every case. Paul set it forth thus: "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13; my translation). Having said this, however, we must also note the forcefulness of passages like 1 John 1. In addition to these didactic passages, Scripture freely portrays the great men and women of God as sinners. While we must be careful to avoid basing our argument primarily on the experiential, the

phenomena of the Christian life, we must nonetheless note that the narrative and descriptive portions of Scripture confirm and elucidate the didactic passages in this regard. Apparently the perfection that we may presume was possessed by the great heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews 11 was not incompatible with the fact that they were not entirely free from sin. In addition, the Lord's Prayer implies that until the kingdom of God comes completely on earth, it will be necessary to pray, "Forgive us our sins." Our conclusion is that while complete freedom from and victory over sin are the standard to be aimed at and are theoretically possible, it is doubtful whether any believer will attain this goal within this life.

Certain difficulties attach to assuming such a stance, however. One is that it seems contradictory to repeatedly exhort Christians to a victorious, spotless life unless it is a real possibility.[1702] But does this necessarily follow? We may have a standard, an ideal, toward which we press, but which we do not expect to reach within a finite period of time. It has been observed that no one has ever reached the North Star by sailing or flying toward it. That does not change the fact, however, that it is still the mark toward which we press, our measure of "northernness." Similarly, although we may never be perfectly sanctified within this life, we shall be in the eternity beyond and hence should presently aim to arrive as close to complete sanctification as we can.

Another problem is the presence of teachings like 1 John 3:3–6: "All who have this hope in them purify themselves, just as they are pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (my translation). Does this not confirm the perfectionist position? Note, however, that the verb forms, particularly the participles in verse 4 ("who sins") and the latter half of verse 6 ("who continues to sin"), are in the present tense. The meaning here is that everyone who continues in habitual sin is guilty of lawlessness and has never known Christ.

There are important practical implications of our view that though sinlessness is not experienced in this life, it must be our aim. On the one hand, this position means that there need not be great feelings of discouragement, defeat, even despair and guilt, when we do sin. But on the other hand, it also means that we will not be overly pleased with ourselves nor indifferent to the presence of sin. For we will faithfully and diligently ask God to overcome completely the tendency toward evil which, like Paul, we find so prevalent within us.

Deification?

The Eastern Orthodox Church has long spoken of salvation using the term "deification," or "theosis." One traditional statement of this is that we "become by grace, in a movement boundless as is God, that which God is by His nature."[1703] An even more explicit statement is "When man shares the uncreated divinizing gift, he acquires supernatural attributes."[1704] Orthodox theologians are careful to preserve this conception against any sort of pantheistic absorption of the believer into the person of God. This has ordinarily been done by the use of a distinction between the divine essence and divine energies, a distinction that was especially developed by Gregory Palamas. According to this distinction, believers do not participate in God's essence, but in his energies, which are a different mode of the divine existence from his essence, constituting, respectively, unknowable and knowable parts of the divine existence. A somewhat different view has been articulated by John Zizioulas, who instead of the idea of participation in the divine energies substitutes the idea of participation in the life of the incarnated Christ. The church is the body of Christ in the world in history, and genuinely participates in him. Zizioulis says, "In the language of the Fathers this is called 'divinization' (*theosis*), which means participation not in the nature or substance of God, but in His personal existence. The goal of salvation is that the personal life which is realized in God should also be realized on the level of human existence."[1705]

A number of non-Orthodox theologians have in recent years used the terminology of deification, divinization, or theosis in their theology. One of the strongest statements is that of a Protestant, F. W. Norris, who says, "We Christians have the promise of participating in the divine nature. We are gods, united with Christ through baptism in his death and resurrection. We participate in his body and blood through the Eucharist."[1706]

Some evangelicals have spoken of participation in the life of God.[1707] On closer examination, however, what they seem to be expressing is a strong version of the traditional Protestant view of the union with Christ. One helpful expression of this is found in Thomas Oden, who speaks of the believer partaking of Christ, especially in the Eucharist.[1708] He raises the question, "In what sense does sanctifying grace enable the soul to partake of the divine nature?" and quotes from a number of the church fathers, without indicating explicitly to what extent he espouses their views.[1709] He then makes two important distinctions. He observes that in terms of the incommunicable attributes, such as infinity, "There is no possibility of the finite creature being made infinite, hence no *theosis* in that sense."[1710] He says, however, of the

communicable attributes, “God’s mercy and love can be manifested in human mercy and love. Communicable attributes of the infinitely just and wise One may be communicated to the proximately just and wise finite recipient.”[1711] It is important to note, however, even these communicable attributes “never are communicated to creatures in the fullness in which they exist in God.”[1712]

It appears that for the most part, the evangelicals who use the terminology of deification are using it more metaphorically than literally, when compared to the Orthodox treatment, and are actually speaking of what traditionally has been meant by union with Christ. Some, such as Donald Bloesch, reject the use of the terminology. While this language, if carefully defined and qualified, expresses an important part of the doctrine of salvation, the use of deification language in a postmodern era may be unwise and misleading. Given the New Age tendency toward Eastern pantheistic religions, any use of the language of theosis can easily be understood in a different sense than most evangelicals would intend it. It therefore seems wiser to avoid that language, and instead make explicit in the doctrine of union with Christ the biblical idea that the believer lives a spiritual life in a living connection with Christ, so that Christ’s life now is lived in and through us (John 15; Gal. 2:20).

The Christian Life

The New Testament has a great deal to say about the basis and nature of the ongoing Christian life. This instruction not only helps us understand God’s sanctifying activity in us, but also gives us guidance for living the Christian life.

Union with Christ

In the preceding chapter we examined at some length the concept of union with Christ as in a sense encompassing the whole of salvation, and its role in justification. Beyond that, however, our continued walk in the Christian life, our sanctification, is dependent on union with him. Jesus made this quite evident in his imagery of the vine and the branches: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). Jesus viewed union with him, which is closely linked to keeping his commandments (v. 10), as the key to the believer’s whole

Christian life. Fruit-bearing (v. 5), prayer (v. 7), and ultimately joy (v. 11) depend upon it.

Paul expressed a similar idea in his wish expressed in Philippians 3:8–11: "to gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—the power of his resurrection—and participate in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attain to the resurrection from the dead" (my translation). Here, becoming like Christ is closely connected with a willingness to share in his sufferings. A similar expression is found in Romans 8:17: "If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Apparently Paul regarded union with Christ as a two-way commitment.[1713]

A Relationship of Friendship

Perhaps Christ's most touching and intimate picture of the relationship between the believer and himself is found in his use of the figure of friendship in John 15. This is more than a metaphor, however, for surely here Christ is saying something literal about this relationship. Believers are not to think of themselves as servants or slaves (δοῦλοι—*douloi*), for Jesus has told them everything he has heard from his Father. In so doing he has acted not as a master, who does not explain to his servants what he is doing, but as a friend (v. 15). As friends of Jesus rather than slaves, believers have a totally different attitude. There are trust and confidence in Jesus rather than fear and secretiveness.

The same type of warmth and trust is also present in the believer's relationship to the Father. Just as human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, so also does the heavenly Father. He will not give anything evil or harmful to his child who asks in simple faith (Luke 11:1–13). The heavenly Father knows the child's needs and any danger that might threaten, and in accordance with that knowledge acts for the child's welfare (Matt. 6:25–34; 10:28–31).

The Role of the Law

Since the Christian life is based on our union and friendship with Christ, the question arises: What place does the law have in this scheme? Other than matters directly related to Jesus Christ himself, few topics have received more extensive treatment by Paul than has the place of the law. To understand the New

Testament teaching about the place of the law in the Christian life, we must first determine the role it played under the Old Testament scheme of things.

It is popularly held that, whereas salvation in the New Testament era is obtained through faith, Old Testament saints were saved by fulfilling the law. Close examination of Old Testament texts belies this assumption, however. Actually, the important factor was the covenant God established with his people by grace; the law was simply the standard God set for those people who would adhere to that covenant.[1714] So it is said that Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). Paul makes clear that Abraham's salvation was by faith, not by works of the law. In numerous ways the Old Testament itself points out that it is not fulfillment of the law that saves a person. The law itself prescribed complete and unqualified love for God: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5). It similarly commanded love for one's neighbor: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). If personal fulfillment of this law had been required of the Old Testament saints, none of them would have been saved. Clearly, salvation came through faith rather than works. Furthermore, although the covenant between God and humans was certified by an external ritual, namely, circumcision, that act alone was insufficient to make a person right with God. There had to be a circumcision of the heart as well (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4).[1715] That act of faith was the crucial factor.

During the intertestamental period the law took on a different status within Judaism. The idea of the law came to overshadow the covenant. Observance of the law came to be regarded as the basis on which God passes judgment upon humanity.[1716] It was said to be the grounds of hope (*Testament of Judah* 26:1), justification (Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch* 51:3), righteousness (*Apoc. Bar.* 67:6), salvation (*Apoc. Bar.* 51:7), resurrection (2 Macc. 7:9), life (*4 Ezra* 7:20–21; 9:31). Obedience to the law would bring in the kingdom and transform the world (*Jubilees* 23). George Ladd comments, "Thus the Law attains the position of an intermediary between God and man."[1717]

In the New Testament, and particularly the writings of Paul, the law is seen quite differently. The status and significance of the law are never depreciated in the New Testament. Jesus himself says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). Similarly, Paul speaks of the law as "God's law" (Rom. 7:22, 25). It is not sin (Rom. 7:7); it is holy, just, and good (v. 12); it is spiritual (v. 14).

Judaism at this time considered salvation to be based on obedience to the law, but realistically recognized that strict obedience was rare. So the teaching that

salvation is based on obedience was supplemented with a doctrine of repentance and forgiveness. In Paul's understanding, however, this new trend in Judaistic thinking mixed two contradictory principles: works and grace.[1718] He insisted instead that to be righteous one has to obey the law in all of its particulars (Gal. 5:3). Failure to keep any part of it is violation of all of it (Gal. 3:10). On this point he was in agreement with the teaching of James (James 2:11). None of us, of course, can obey all of the law.

Since we are unable to achieve righteousness by adhering strictly to the law, the role of the law is not to justify, but to show us what sin is (Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; Gal. 3:19). By revealing humans' sinful condition, the law establishes them as sinners. The law does not actually cause us to sin, but it constitutes our actions as sinful by giving God's evaluation of them. Our failure to fulfill the law does not mean, however, that the law is now abolished. For in Christ, God has done what the law could not do: sending his own Son for sin, he has condemned sin in the flesh, so that what the law requires is now fulfilled by those who walk by the Spirit (Rom. 8:3–4). As faith in Christ frees us from the law, we are actually being enabled to uphold the law (Rom. 3:31). The moral and spiritual law, then, continues to apply.

Not only the reception of righteousness but also the continuance of the Christian life is by grace, not by works that fulfill the law. And yet Christians are nonetheless to regard the biblically revealed law as an expression of God's will for their lives. Paul notes that we can fulfill several specific commandments of the law by love (Rom. 13:8–10). He reiterates the importance of the command to love one's father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise (Eph. 6:2). Thus, Ladd observes, "It is clear that the Law continues to be the expression of the will of God for conduct, even for those who are no longer under the Law."[1719]

It is important to draw a distinction between attempting to observe the principles embodied in the law and legalism. Scripture does not give us any basis for disregarding God's revealed commands. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15), and "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14). We are not at liberty to reject such commands; to do so would be an abuse of Christian freedom. Therefore, we must seek to guide our lives by these precepts. Such behavior is not legalism. Legalism is a slavish following of the law in the belief that one thereby earns merit; it also entails a refusal to go beyond the formal or literal requirements of the law.

Separation

One theme that follows from the biblical insistence on holiness and purity is separation. The Christian is to be removed from certain aspects of the world. James wrote: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). Similarly, Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Therefore, ‘Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’ And, ‘I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty’” (2 Cor. 6:17–18). Such appeals to live pure and distinctive lives are based on the fact that we are God’s own people; our relationships and behavior ought to be different from those of the world.

The application of these principles to the actual conduct of life has meant different things to different people. To some it means shunning the wisdom of the world, that is, avoidance of secular learning. To others it means separation from churches or church bodies that are not pure in doctrine or lifestyle. To yet others, it means withdrawing from any profound or prolonged contact with non-Christian persons, lest one’s own faith and life should be corrupted thereby. It has also meant abstaining from certain personal practices such as smoking, drinking, dancing, and theater attendance. Certain groups have adopted several of these understandings of separation.[1720]

There has also been an ecclesiastical form of separation. Conservatives in the first half of the twentieth century often chose to withdraw from groups that they perceived to be theologically liberal. This was the case with the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929,[1721] and the formation of the General Association of Regular Baptists and of the Conservative Baptist Association are instances of the same phenomenon.[1722] Some evangelicals, however, have in recent years chosen to remain a part of parent denominations that have drifted to the left theologically; it is the feeling of these evangelicals that they can have a greater influence from within than from outside.[1723]

There has, further, been a movement toward a less separatistic social stance. This is true on the individual level; close personal friendships are maintained with non-Christians. It is also true on a broader level; evangelicals are now choosing to live and work within the non-Christian segments of society, to be members of organizations that make either no explicit claim to a Christian commitment or an inconsistent one. And finally, some evangelicals have adopted personal practices that were formerly taboo, such as drinking, smoking, and even the use of four-letter words.[1724]

There are biblical grounds supporting certain forms of each side of this tension. On the one hand, there certainly is scriptural teaching that since we

belong to a pure and holy God, we are to be pure as well. But there is also Jesus's teaching that we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16). We are to make our influence felt in a world that needs the tempering effect of Christianity. To be involved in the structures of society while still maintaining our distinctiveness, our quality as salt and light, requires a delicate balance; each Christian will need to determine prayerfully just how he or she can best achieve it. The ideal laid down by James should be our goal: both to practice acts of compassion and kindness and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

Forgiveness: Conditional or Unconditional?

One issue of practical Christian living that has theological implications pertains to Christians' forgiveness of other humans' sins against them (horizontal forgiveness). Should a believer forgive the sin of another person who has sinned against him or her only if the other person repents of the sin and asks forgiveness, or should the believer forgive even in the absence of such repentance? These two positions have become known as conditional and unconditional forgiveness, respectively.[1725]

Those who hold the conditional view do so for several reasons. One is that some of the texts commanding horizontal forgiveness specify or imply repentance, such as Matthew 18:15–17 and Luke 17:3–4. A further argument is that our forgiveness of others' sins is to be like God's forgiveness of ours (Col. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Cor. 15:3; Matt. 6:12). God requires repentance for forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:37–38; 11:18).

Advocates of unconditional forgiveness point out the number of biblical instances in which forgiveness is either commanded or practiced without any mention of the condition of repentance (Luke 6:36–38; 23:34; Acts 7:60). They also note that in some sense, the appeal to God to forgive our sins is related to our forgiveness of others' sins (Mark 11:25; Matt. 6:12).

This issue deserves more extensive treatment than can be provided here. Both views have strengths and each has weaknesses. In my judgment, however, the passages that do not mention confession or repentance can more easily be reconciled with those that do, than vice versa. In other words, the conditional view can better explain more of the relevant biblical witness than can the unconditional view, which tends to have to rely on an argument from silence. It should be noted that the conditional forgiveness view does not imply an unforgiving or bitter spirit. More serious, however, is the logical or at least psychological tendency to move from saying that believers should forgive the

sins of others unconditionally, to saying that therefore God should be no less generous, with the implication of universalism. In general, then, the view of conditional forgiveness seems more adequate to all the pertinent considerations than does the unconditional view.

The Salvation of Old Testament Believers

One issue that may not be of direct practical importance but which has far-reaching implications is the status of the Old Testament believers. Was their salvation on the same basis as that of believers since the time of Pentecost? Was their subjective experience of the Christian life the same as that which we have today? If there were differences, how do they affect the way we interpret and apply the Old Testament?

In our examination of the status of the law, we noted that justification was apparently on the same grounds in Old Testament times as in the New Testament period. It was not by works but by faith. But what of the other aspects of salvation?

Regeneration is a particularly problematic issue with regard to Old Testament believers. Some theologians have quite flatly stated that Old Testament believers were not regenerated, and could not be, since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, and would not be until Pentecost. A representative of this position is Lewis Sperry Chafer:

> Of the present ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the believer—regeneration, indwelling, baptizing, sealing and filling—nothing indeed is said with respect to these having been experienced by the Old Testament saints. . . . Old Testament saints are invested with these blessings only theoretically. . . . The Old Testament will be searched in vain for record of Jews passing from an unsaved to a saved state, or for any declaration about the terms upon which such a change would be secured. . . . The conception of an abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which every believer becomes an unalterable temple of the Holy Spirit belongs only to this age of the church, and has no place in the provisions of Judaism.[1726]

This position is an inferential conclusion drawn from the belief that regeneration can take place only in connection with indwelling by the Holy Spirit. Yet there is an absence of real proof that Old Testament believers were not regenerated. On the other hand, there are several biblical considerations that do argue for the occurrence of regeneration in the Old Testament (or pre-Pentecost) period.

A major consideration is that the language used to describe the status of Old Testament saints is remarkably similar to that which depicts the regeneration of New Testament believers. Moses distinguished between two groups within

Israel. There were those who walked in the stubbornness of their heart (Deut. 29:19–20). They were referred to as “stubborn” and “stiff-necked” (Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; Ezek. 2:4). A similar concept is expressed by Stephen addressing those about to stone him: “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised” (Acts 7:51). Now contrast with these descriptions the promise of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:6: “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” The contrast is between those who are circumcised of heart and those who are not. Paul clarifies this expression: “A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God” (Rom. 2:28–29). Arthur Lewis comments: “Paul therefore taught and believed that within the total number of Jews there had always been a company of *true Jews*, all of those who were saved by faith and cleansed from within, having their hearts altered (‘circumcised’) to conform to the will of God.”[1727]

In addition to the resemblance in language depicting the condition of Old and New Testament believers, Old Testament descriptions of changes in human hearts strongly resemble the New Testament depiction of the new birth. Samuel told Saul, “The spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person” (1 Sam. 10:6). This promise was immediately fulfilled: “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart; and all these signs were fulfilled that day” (v. 9). The Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul and he prophesied. In Isaiah 57:15 God declares his intention “to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” The Hebrew verb literally means “to cause to live.”[1728] Twice in Ezekiel (11:19–20; 36:25–26) God promises to replace the heart of stone with a new heart, a heart of flesh. All of these references appear to be more than mere figurative expressions. What they are describing is a transformation like that which Jesus described to Nicodemus, well before Pentecost. It is difficult to believe that he was describing something that would not be available until a few years hence—or that the apostles were not born again until Pentecost.

The issue that concerns us here, however, is whether the Old Testament saints experienced sanctification. It is significant that in the Old Testament we find prominent cases of what the New Testament terms “the fruit of the Spirit.” Note, for example, that Noah and Job were both righteous men, blameless in conduct (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1, 8). Special attention is given to Abraham’s faith, Joseph’s goodness, Moses’s meekness, Solomon’s wisdom, and Daniel’s self-control.

While these men did not experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they were certainly under his influence.[1729]

In contrast to the similarities we have noted, there are two ways in which the salvation Old Testament believers possessed and experienced differed from the New Testament variety. While based entirely on the work of Christ, grace in the Old Testament was indirectly received. The Old Testament believers did not know how that grace had been effected. They did not understand that their righteousness was proleptic—it was achieved by the future death of the incarnate Son of God. That grace was also mediated by priests and sacrificial rites; it did not come about through a direct personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The second point of difference lies in the relative externality of Old Testament grace. The Holy Spirit did not dwell within, but exerted an external influence, for example, through the written and spoken word. The presence of God was visibly represented by the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple. The law was an external written code rather than the Spirit's imparting of truth to the heart, as would later be the case (John 14:26). But despite these differences, the Old Testament saint, like the New Testament believer, grew in holiness through faith and obedience to the commands of God. This spiritual progress was the work of God.

If there were radical differences between the salvation of Old Testament believers and that of Christians from Pentecost on, we might be inclined to think that the pattern we find in the New Testament is also a variable form subject to change. But the fact that the essence of salvation has remained unchanged across widely differing times and cultures, with only minor variations attributable to progressive revelation, indicates that the New Testament pattern of salvation is to be ours as well.

The Christian life, as we have seen, is not a static matter in which one is saved and then merely reposes in that knowledge. It is a process of growth and progress, lived not in the Christian's own strength, but in the power and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And it is a process of challenge and satisfaction.

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The Completion of Salvation

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and describe the doctrine of perseverance.
2. Differentiate between the Calvinist and Arminian views of perseverance and resolve the conflicting views.
3. Define and describe the doctrine of glorification.
4. Understand the meaning of glorification and the joy and encouragement that it provides.

Chapter Summary

The completion of salvation is found in the two doctrines of perseverance and glorification. Perseverance means that God will enable the believer to remain in the faith through the remainder of his or her life. It also means that the believer needs to demonstrate salvation through becoming more like Christ. Glorification will be accomplished in the life to come, when we will become all that God intends us to be.

Study Questions

- Why is the doctrine of perseverance important to the faith of the believer?

- How would you resolve the differences between the Calvinist and Arminian understanding of perseverance?
- What is the meaning of the doctrine of glorification?
- In what ways does glorification provide hope, encouragement, and joy to the believer?

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The Glorification of the Believer

Two major topics remain, related to the completion of the Christian life on earth and into the life to come. First, the Christian, kept by the grace of God, will successfully endure all the trials and temptations of this life, and remain true to the Lord until death. This we term "perseverance." Second, the life beyond will not be merely an extension of the current quality of life but the perfecting of it. The limitations we currently experience will be removed. This we term "glorification."

Perseverance

Will the believer who has genuinely been regenerated, justified, adopted by God, and united with Jesus Christ persist in that relationship? In other words, will a person who becomes a Christian always remain such? And if so, on what basis? This issue is of considerable importance from the standpoint of practical Christian living. If, on the one hand, there is no guarantee that salvation is permanent, believers may experience a great deal of anxiety and insecurity that will detract from the major tasks of the Christian life. On the other hand, if our salvation is absolutely secure, if we are preserved quite independently of our lives or actions, then there may well be, as a result, a sort of lassitude or

indifference to the moral and spiritual demands of the gospel; the end result may even be libertinism. Therefore, determining the scriptural teaching concerning the security of the believer is worth the necessary time and effort.

The Calvinist View

Two major positions have been taken on the issue of whether the salvation of the believer is absolutely secure—the Calvinist and the Arminian. These two positions hold certain conceptions in common. They agree that God is powerful and faithful, willing and able to keep his promises. They agree, at least in their usual forms, that salvation is neither attained nor retained by human works. They are agreed that the Holy Spirit is at work in all believers (although there may be some disagreement about the Spirit's presence and activity). Both are convinced of the completeness of the salvation God provides. Both insist that the believer can indeed know that he or she currently possesses salvation. There are, however, significant points of difference between the two.

The Calvinist position is both clear and forthright on this matter: "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."[1730] This point is consistent with the remainder of the Calvinist theological system. Since God has elected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity to receive eternal life, and those so chosen will necessarily come to receive that life, it follows that their salvation must be permanent. If the elect could at some point lose their salvation, God's election of them to eternal life would not be truly effectual. Thus, the doctrine of election as understood by Calvinists requires perseverance as well. As Loraine Boettner puts it:

> This doctrine [perseverance] does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved.[1731]

The Calvinist does not hold the doctrine of perseverance because of logical consistency alone, however. Numerous biblical teachings serve independently to support the doctrine. Among them is a group of texts emphasizing the indestructible quality of the salvation God provides.[1732] An example is 1 Peter 1:3–5: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." The three adjectives used to describe our inheritance are vivid and powerful. They speak of our salvation as one that cannot be destroyed in the fashion in which armies ravage a nation during war. It cannot be corrupted or spoiled by anything impure. And it never fades, no matter what influences are brought to bear upon it.

Various texts emphasizing the persistence and power of divine love also support the doctrine of perseverance.[1733] One such testimony is found in Paul's statement in Romans 8:31–39, culminating in verses 38 and 39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This text clearly points to a continued work of God in the life of the believer. Christ does not simply give us eternal life and then abandon us to our human self-efforts. Rather, the work begun in us is continued to completion: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Moreover, Christ is said to make intercession for us constantly (Heb. 7:25). Since Jesus said that the Father always hears his prayers (John 11:42), it follows that these prayers of intercession for us are effectual. And not only is Christ interceding at the right hand of the Father, but the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26). Thus, even when we do not know how to pray or what to pray for, prayer is being offered for us.

Support for the Calvinist position is also afforded by the biblical assurances that, because of God's provisions, we will be able to deal with and overcome whatever obstacles and temptations come our way. Our Master will enable us his servants to stand in the face of the judgment (Rom. 14:4). He provides a way for coping with temptations: "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Calvinist finds the greatest source of encouragement concerning this matter, however, in the direct promises of the Lord's keeping. One of the most straightforward is Jesus's statement to his disciples: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I

and the Father are one" (John 10:27–30). Accordingly, Paul had complete confidence in the Lord's keeping: "Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

In addition, many Calvinists also infer their view of perseverance from other doctrines.[1734] Among them is the doctrine of union with Christ. If believers have been made one with Christ and his life flows through them (John 15:1–11), nothing can conceivably nullify that connection. Louis Berkhof says, "It is impossible that they should again be removed from the body, thus frustrating the divine ideal."[1735] The doctrine of the new birth, the Holy Spirit's impartation of a new nature to the believer, likewise lends support to the doctrine of perseverance. John states, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God" (1 John 3:9). If salvation could be lost, regeneration would have to be reversed. But can this be? Can spiritual death actually come to someone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, that is, who has already been given eternal life? This must be impossible, for eternal life is by definition everlasting. Finally, perseverance is implied by the biblical teaching that we can be assured of salvation. Relevant passages here include Hebrews 6:11; 10:22; and 2 Peter 1:10. Perhaps the clearest of all is found in the book of 1 John. Having cited several evidences (the testimony of the Spirit, the water and the blood) that God has given us eternal life in his Son, the apostle summarizes: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). How could one have this assurance if it were possible to lose salvation? That we can have such assurance means that our salvation must be secure.

The Arminian View

Arminians take quite a different stance. One early statement of their view on the issue of perseverance is that of the Remonstrants. While the position detailed in the *Sententia Remonstrantium* presented to the Synod of Dort is in many ways quite moderate, insisting only that falling away is possible,[1736] later statements of the Arminian position are more emphatic. This position is based on both scriptural teaching and experiential phenomena.

The first class of biblical materials cited by Arminians as bearing on the issue of perseverance consists of warnings against apostasy. Jesus warned his disciples about the danger of being led astray (Matt. 24:3–14). He said specifically, "Watch out that no one deceives you" (v. 4). And after describing various events

that will take place before his second coming, he added, “and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (vv. 11–13). Would Jesus have issued such a warning to his disciples if it were not possible for them to fall away and thus lose their salvation? There are similar warnings in other portions of Scripture. Paul, whom Calvinists frequently cite in support of their position, suggested that there is a conditional character to salvation: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (Col. 1:21–23). Paul also warned the Corinthians, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12). The writer to the Hebrews was especially vehement, calling his readers’ attention on several occasions to the dangers of falling away and the importance of being on guard. One notable example is Hebrews 2:1: “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” A slightly different injunction is found in 3:12–14: “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.” It is difficult, says the Arminian, to understand why such warnings were given if the believer cannot fall away.[1737]

The Arminian also cites texts that urge believers to continue in the faith. An example of these exhortations to faithfulness, which frequently appear in conjunction with warnings such as we have just noted, is Hebrews 6:11–12: “We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” Paul testified regarding his own diligence and efforts to remain faithful: “No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27). The urgency of Paul’s efforts to keep from being disqualified suggests that even his salvation could be lost.

Arminians also base their view on passages that apparently teach that people do apostasize.[1738] Hebrews 6:4–6 is perhaps the most commonly cited and straightforward instance: “It is impossible for those who have once been

enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." Another instance is Hebrews 10:26–27: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." These are clear statements about people who, having had the experience of salvation, departed from it.

The Bible does not simply remain on this abstract level, however. It also records concrete cases of specific persons who apostasized or fell away.[1739] One of the most vivid is the case of King Saul in the Old Testament. He had been chosen and anointed king of Israel, but eventually proved so disobedient that God did not answer him when he prayed (1 Sam. 28:6). Rejected by God, Saul lost his position as king and came to a tragic death. A striking New Testament instance of apostasy is Judas, who was chosen by Jesus as one of the twelve disciples. It seems inconceivable to the Arminian either that Jesus would have intentionally chosen an unbeliever to be one of his most intimate associates and confidants, or that he made a mistake of judgment in his selection. The conclusion is clear: when chosen, Judas was a believer. Yet Judas betrayed Jesus and ended his own life apparently without any return to faith in Christ. Surely this must be a case of apostasy. Others who are mentioned include Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11); Hymenaeus and Alexander, who "have rejected [faith and a good conscience] and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith" (1 Tim. 1:19–20); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16–18); Demas (2 Tim. 4:10); and the false teachers and those who follow them (2 Pet. 2:1–2). As the Arminian sees it, only a most contrived line of reasoning can explain away the obvious impression that these individuals were actual believers who departed from the faith.

Note that the Arminians use two basic methods to formulate their view. First, they focus on didactic passages that apparently teach that it is possible to apostasize. Second, they point to historical phenomena, biblical narratives that tell of specific people who apparently did fall away. When the author directly interprets what occurred (e.g., when Paul asserts that Hymenaeus and Alexander have made shipwreck of their faith), however, these particular passages are actually functioning as didactic material. In addition to biblical examples, Arminians also point to various extrabiblical cases of persons from history or from their current experience who at one time gave every appearance of being regenerate yet subsequently abandoned any semblance of the Christian faith.

Finally, Arminians also raise several practical objections to the Calvinistic understanding of perseverance. One of these objections is that the Calvinistic view is in conflict with the scriptural concept of human freedom.[1740] If it is certain that those who are in Christ will persevere and not fall away, then it must surely be the case that they are unable to choose apostasy. And if this is the case, they cannot be free. Yet Scripture, the Arminians point out, depicts humans as free beings, for they are repeatedly exhorted to choose God and are clearly portrayed as being held responsible by him for their actions.

A Resolution of the Problem

The advocates of each of these opposed positions have cogent arguments to which they can appeal in support of their positions. Is there truth within both, or must we choose one or the other? One way to deal with this dilemma is to examine two key biblical passages that serve, respectively, as the major textual support for each of the two theories. These passages are John 10:27–30 and Hebrews 6:4–6.

Jesus's words in John 10:27–30 constitute a powerful declaration of security. Verse 28 is especially emphatic: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." In the clause "and they shall never perish" John uses the double negative οὐ μὴ (*ou mē*) with the aorist subjunctive, which is a very emphatic way of declaring that something will not happen in the future. Jesus is categorically excluding the slightest chance of an apostasy by his sheep. A literal translation would be something like, "They shall not, repeat, shall not ever perish in the slightest." This assertion is followed by statements that no one can snatch believers out of Jesus's hand or out of the Father's hand (vv. 28–29). All in all, this passage is as definite a rejection of the idea that a true believer can fall away as could be given.

Arminians argue that Hebrews 6 presents an equally emphatic case for their position. The passage seems clear enough: "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance" (vv. 4–6). The description is apparently of genuinely saved persons who abandon the faith and thus lose their salvation. Because of the complexity of the issue and the material in this passage, however, a number of interpretations have grown up:

1. The writer has in mind genuinely saved persons who lose their salvation.[1741] It should be noted that once they have lost their salvation, there is

no way they can regain it, or be renewed to salvation (v. 4).

2. The persons described were never regenerate. They merely tasted of the truth and the life, were but exposed to the Word of God; they did not fully experience these heavenly gifts. They do in fact apostasize, but from the vicinity of spiritual truth, not from its center.[1742]

3. The people in view are genuinely and permanently saved; they are not lost. Their salvation is real, the apostasy hypothetical. That is, the "if" clause does not really occur. The writer is merely describing what would be the case if the elect were to fall away (an impossibility).[1743]

Upon close examination, the second explanation is difficult to accept. The vividness of the description, and particularly the statement "who have shared in the Holy Spirit," argues forcefully against denying that the people in view are (at least for a time) regenerate. The choice must therefore be made between the first and third views.

Part of the difficulty in interpretation stems from the ambiguity of the word translated "if they then commit apostasy" or "if they fall away." The word is παραπεσόντος (*parapesontos*), which is an adverbial participle. As such, it can be rendered in many different ways. There are several usages of the adverbial participle; it can, for example, denote cause, time, concession, and, significant for our purposes here, condition.[1744] Thus one legitimate translation of παραπεσόντος would be "if they fall away," but it could also be rendered in several other ways, including "when they fall away" and "because they fall away." The meaning in cases like this must be determined on the basis of the context. The key element in the present context is found in verse 9: "Though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—things that have to do with salvation." This verse might be understood as implying that the people described in verses 4–6, unlike the people to whom Hebrews is addressed, were not really saved. We have seen, however, that there is a major difficulty with this interpretation. The other possibility is that the referents in verses 4–6 and verse 9 are the same. They are genuinely saved people who could fall away. Verses 4–6 declare what their status would be if they did. Verse 9, however, is a statement that they will not fall away. They could, but they will not! Their persistence to the end is evidence of that truth. The writer to the Hebrews knows that his readers will not fall away; he is convinced of better things regarding them, the things that accompany salvation.[1745] He speaks of their past work and love (v. 10), and exhorts them to continue earnestly in the same pursuits (v. 11). The full data of the passage would seem to indicate, then, that the writer has in view genuine believers who could fall away, but will not.

We are now able to correlate John 10 and Hebrews 6. While Hebrews 6 indicates that genuine believers *can* fall away, John 10 teaches that they *will not*.[1746] There is a logical possibility of apostasy, but it will not come to pass in the case of believers. Although they could abandon their faith and consequently come to the fate described in Hebrews 6, the grace of God prevents them from apostasizing. God does this, not by making it impossible for believers to fall away, but by making it certain that they will not. Our emphasis on *can* and *will* not is not inconsequential. It preserves the freedom of the individual. Believers are capable of repudiating their faith, but will freely choose not to.

At this point someone might ask: If salvation is sure and permanent, what is the point of the warnings and commands given to the believer? The answer is that they are the means by which God renders it certain that the saved individual will not fall away.[1747] Consider as an analogy the case of parents who fear that their young child may run out into the street and be struck by a car. One way the parents can prevent that from happening is to build a fence around the yard, which would prevent the child from leaving the yard, but would also remove the child's freedom. Try as he or she might, the child could not possibly get out of the yard. That is the idea some persons have of what perseverance is. Another possibility is for the parents to teach and train the child regarding the danger of going into the street and the importance of being careful. This is the nature of the security we are discussing. It is not that God renders apostasy impossible by removing the very option. Rather, he uses every possible means of grace, including the warnings contained in Scripture, to motivate us to remain committed to him. Because he enables us to persevere in our faith, the term *perseverance* is preferable to *preservation*.

But what of the claims that Scripture records cases of actual apostasy? When closely examined, these instances appear much less impressive than at first glance. Some cases, such as that of Peter, should be termed backsliding rather than apostasy. Peter's denial of his Lord was something done in a moment of weakness; it was not a deliberate and willful act of rebellion; it was temporary, not permanent. It is a bit difficult, on the other hand, to know how to classify the situation of King Saul, since he lived under the old covenant. As for Judas, there were early indications that he was not regenerate. Consider particularly the reference to his thievery (John 12:6). In the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who have departed from the truth . . . [and] say that the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:17–18), there is no indication that they had ever been convinced advocates of the truth, or that it had become an intrinsic part of their lives. In fact, the following verse focuses, by contrast, on sure believers: "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription:

‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness’” (v. 19). The reference to Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:19–20 is very difficult to interpret, since we do not know precisely what is meant by Paul’s having “handed [them] over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.” Like 2 Timothy 2:17–18, this reference needs to be seen in the light of Paul’s statements in 1 Timothy 1:6–7 about persons who have wandered away into vain discussions. Paul’s remark that they do not understand what they are saying may well imply that they are not true believers. The proximity of 1 Timothy 1:6–7 to the reference to Hymenaeus and Alexander (vv. 19–20), and the use of the key word ἀστοχέω (*astocheō*), “to swerve” from the truth, in both 1 Timothy 1:6 and the reference to Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:18), may indicate that the two situations were similar. Hymenaeus and Alexander may have been believers who were chastened and disciplined for wandering from the truth, or they may have been superficially involved individuals who were cast out of the fellowship. As for the other names (e.g., Demas) cited by the Arminians, there is insufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that they were true believers who fell away.

Even less reliable are the instances cited of contemporary persons who supposedly were at one time true believers but fell away. The difficulty here is that we can also cite instances of persons who by their own testimony were never really Christians, but were thought to be so. Further, we must be careful to distinguish cases of temporary backsliding, such as that of Peter, from real abandonment of the faith. It is necessary to ask regarding someone who seems to have lost the faith, “Is he or she dead yet?” Beyond that, we must note that the Bible does not justify identifying every person who makes an outward profession of faith as genuinely regenerate. Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing, but who are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). They are to be evaluated by their fruits rather than by their verbal claims (vv. 16–20). In the day of judgment such people will call him “Lord, Lord,” and claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many mighty works in his name (v. 22). All of these claims will presumably be true. It will not, however, be these individuals who enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather those who do the Father’s will (v. 21). Jesus’s final word regarding the sham believers will be, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (v. 23). The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23) is another indication that what appears to be genuine faith may be something quite different. It may be but a superficial and temporary response: “The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word,

they quickly fall away" (vv. 20–21). In light of what Jesus says in Matthew 7:16–20, it appears that the only truly regenerate believers are those who bear fruit, whether thirty-, sixty-, or a hundredfold (Matt. 13:23). Similarly, in speaking of eschatological matters, Jesus indicates that endurance is the distinguishing mark of the true believer: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:12–13; see also Matt. 10:22; Mark 13:13). Finally, we note that Jesus never regarded Judas as regenerate. For to Peter's confession of faith, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69), Jesus responded, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (v. 70). In Jesus's view not all who appear to be believers are truly that. We conclude that those who appear to have fallen away were never regenerate in the first place.

The practical implication of our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance is that believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent; nothing can separate them from the love of God. Thus, they can rejoice in the prospect of eternal life. There need be no anxiety that something or someone will keep them from attaining the final blessedness they have been promised and have come to expect. On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity. It is questionable whether anyone who reasons, "Now that I am a Christian, I may live as I please," has really been converted and regenerated. Genuine faith issues, instead, in the fruit of the Spirit. Assurance of salvation, the subjective conviction that one is a Christian, results from the Holy Spirit's giving evidence that he is at work in the life of the individual. The Spirit's work results in conviction on biblical grounds that God will enable the Christian to persist in that relationship—that nothing can separate the true believer from God's love.

Glorification

The final stage of the process of salvation is termed "glorification." In Paul's words, those whom God "foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). Glorification is the point at which the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the last things overlap, for it looks beyond this life to the world to come. This topic receives little treatment in standard theology textbooks, and even less

attention in sermons, yet it is rich in practical significance, for it gives believers encouragement and strengthens their hope.

Glorification is multidimensional. It involves both individual and collective eschatology. It involves the perfecting of the spiritual nature of the individual believer, which takes place at death, when the Christian passes into the presence of the Lord. It also involves the perfecting of the bodies of all believers, which will occur at the time of the resurrection in connection with the second coming of Christ.[1748] It even involves transformation of the entire creation (Rom. 8:18–25).

The Meaning of "Glory"

To understand the doctrine of glorification, we must first know the meaning of the term "glory," which translates a number of biblical words. One of them is the Hebrew ד ב ֹ (*kabod*), which refers to a perceptible attribute, an individual's display of splendor, wealth, and pomp.[1749] When used with respect to God, it does not point to one particular attribute, but to the greatness of his entire nature.[1750] Psalm 24:7–10 speaks of God as the King of glory. As King he is attended by his hosts and marked by infinite splendor and beauty.

In the New Testament, the Greek word δόξα (*doxa*) conveys the meaning of brightness, splendor, magnificence, and fame.[1751] Here we find glory attributed to Jesus Christ, just as it was to God in the Old Testament. Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify him as he had glorified the Father (John 17:1–5). It is especially in the resurrection of Christ that we see his glory. Peter proclaimed that in raising Jesus from the dead, God has glorified him whom the Jews had rejected (Acts 3:13–15). Similarly, Peter wrote in his first letter: "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet. 1:21). Paul asserted, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4); he also spoke of Christ's glorious resurrection body (Phil. 3:21). Paul saw Christ's glorification in the ascension as well—he was "taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). In addition, the apostles preached that Christ is now exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:31).

The second coming of Christ is also to be an occasion of his glory. Jesus himself has drawn a vivid picture of the glorious nature of his return: "They [will] see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30); "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the

angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matt. 25:31). One petition in Jesus's high priestly prayer was that his disciples might see his coming glory: "the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24). Paul spoke of "the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Both the Old and New Testaments present this eschatological manifestation of God's glory as the believer's hope and goal. The clearest Old Testament reference is found in Psalm 73:24: "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory." This promise of future blessedness is God's answer to the psalmist's complaint and despair at the apparent good fortune and prosperity of the wicked. The New Testament likewise pictures the coming glory as incomparably superior to the present suffering of the righteous. Paul writes in Romans 8:18: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." He makes a similar statement in 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Peter also links present suffering with the future revelation of glory. As "a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed," he exhorts his fellow elders to tend the flock of God so that "when the Chief Shepherd appears," they will "receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Pet. 5:1, 4).

The Glorification of the Believer

Not only Christ, but all true believers as well, will be glorified. The New Testament contains several characterizations of this future dimension of the Christian's salvation. Paul said, "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23). This, the final stage in the process of salvation, is an inheritance guaranteed by the Holy Spirit: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13–14). Peter also spoke of an inheritance: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3–5). Furthermore, the New

Testament promises salvation from the wrath of God at the time of judgment: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom. 5:9–10). In short, the believer can look forward to a much greater experience, characterized as adoption by God, redemption of the body, an undefiled inheritance guaranteed by the Spirit, and salvation from God's wrath.

But what precisely will be entailed in the glorification of the believer? One of its aspects will be a full and final vindication of the believer.[1752] The justification that took place at the moment of conversion will be manifested or made obvious in the future. This is the meaning of Romans 5:9–10, quoted in the preceding paragraph. In chapter 8, Paul contemplates the future judgment and asks who will bring any charge against the elect; in view of the fact that Christ died for us and now intercedes for us, no one will (vv. 33–34). Neither things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (vv. 38–39). The judgment will be the final declaration of the believer's justified status (Matt. 25:31–46). Like a student who is thoroughly prepared for an examination, the Christian regards the last judgment, not with apprehensiveness, but with anticipation, knowing that the result will be positive.

In glorification the individual will also be perfected, morally and spiritually.[1753] Several biblical references point to a future completion of the process begun in regeneration and continued in sanctification. One of the most direct of these statements is Colossians 1:22: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." The concept of future flawlessness or blamelessness is also found in Ephesians 1:4 and Jude 24. Guiltlessness is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:8. Paul prays that the Philippians' "love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight," so that they "may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9–11). Our moral and spiritual perfection will be attained in part through the removal of temptation, for the source of sin and evil and temptation will have been conclusively overcome (Rev. 20:7–10).

The future glorification will also bring fullness of knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul contrasts the imperfect knowledge we now have with the perfect knowledge that is to come: "Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." Our present incomplete understanding will be replaced by a much

fuller comprehension. Our knowledge will increase because we will see the Lord; we will no longer have to be content with merely reading accounts written by those who knew him during his earthly ministry. As John says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

What we have been describing thus far could perhaps be termed the glorification of the soul (the spiritual aspect of human nature). There will also be a glorification of the body (the physical aspect), in connection with the resurrection of the believer. At the second coming of Christ, all who have died in the Lord will be raised; and they, together with the surviving believers, will be transformed. Three passages in particular emphasize the change that will be produced in the body of the believer. In Philippians 3:20–21 Paul says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” The word σύμμορφον (*summorphon*—“like”) indicates that our bodies will be “similar in form” to that of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:1–5 Paul envisions the body that we will have, a body eternal in nature, not made by human hands but coming from God. It will be our heavenly dwelling. That which is mortal will be swallowed up by life (v. 4). The third passage is 1 Corinthians 15:38–50. Paul draws a comparison between the body we are to have and our present body:

1. The present body is perishable, subject to disease and death; the resurrection body is incorruptible, immune to disease and decay.
2. The present body is sown in dishonor; the resurrection body will be glorious.
3. The present body is weak; the resurrection body is powerful.
4. The present body is physical (ψυχικόν—*psuchikon*); the resurrection body will be spiritual.

Paul notes that the great change that will take place at the time of the coming of Christ will be instantaneous: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (vv. 51–52). Bernard Ramm comments: “In short, the four positive attributes of the resurrection body may be equated with the

glorification of that body. This glorification is no process, no matter of growth, but occurs suddenly, dramatically, at the end-time."[1754]

Finally, we should note the relationship between the believer's glorification and the renewal of the creation. Because humans are part of the creation, their sin and fall brought certain consequences to it as well as to themselves (Gen. 3:14–19). Creation is presently in subjection to futility (Rom. 8:18–25). Yet Paul tells us that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (v. 21). The nature of the transformation that is to take place is stated more specifically in Revelation 21:1–2: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." At that time God will declare, "I am making everything new!" (v. 5). Humanity's original dwelling was in the paradisiacal setting of the garden of Eden; their final dwelling will also be in a perfect setting—the New Jerusalem. Part of the glorification of the human will be the provision of a perfect environment in which to dwell. It will be perfect, for the glory of God will be present.

In this life believers sometimes groan and suffer because they sense their incompleteness. Yet they have a sure hope. The doctrine of perseverance guarantees that the salvation they possess will never be lost. And the doctrine of glorification promises that something better lies ahead. We will be everything that God has intended us to be. In part our glorification will take place in connection with death and our passage from the limitations of this earthly existence; in part it will occur in connection with Christ's second coming. That we will thereafter be perfect and complete is sure.

> Complete in Thee! no work of mine
> May take, dear Lord, the place of Thine;
> Thy blood hath pardon bought for me
> And I am now complete in Thee.
>
> Yea, justified! O blessed thought!
> And sanctified! Salvation wrought!
> Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,
> And glorified, I too shall be!
>
> James M. Gray

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The Means and Extent of Salvation

Chapter Objectives

After you have completed the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Examine three current theological views for the means of salvation: liberation, sacramental, and evangelical.
2. Assess the validity of the liberation and sacramental approaches in seeking to discover the means for salvation.
3. Demonstrate the validity of the evangelical approach.
4. Evaluate several positions for universalism.
5. Examine a representative view of universalism in the thought of Nels Ferré.
6. Formulate a biblical answer to the universalist approach.

Chapter Summary

Concluding the topic of salvation, we have two remaining issues. The first is the means by which salvation is obtained. There are three theological views: liberation, sacramental, and evangelical. The second issue is the question of the extent of salvation. Universalists claim that all will eventually be saved. The Bible refutes the universalist position.

Study Questions

- In what ways do those who believe in liberation theology change the biblical gospel to satisfy their concerns?
- How does sacramentalism modify the biblical means for salvation?
- How does evangelicalism contrast with the theologies of liberation and sacramentalism?
- What is your critique of Origen's position and the seven variants from his position on the issue of the way by which salvation might be made available to the entire human race?
- How do you evaluate the arguments of Nels Ferré for universalism?
- As an evangelical, how would you respond to universalism as propounded by its adherents through the centuries? Consider the biblical evidence.

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Evaluating the Case for Universalism

Two important dimensions of the topic of salvation remain to be discussed. The first concerns the means by which salvation is effected or obtained; the second deals with the extent of salvation—will all be saved?

Views of the Means of Salvation

One's view of the means by which salvation is obtained depends to a considerable extent on one's understanding of the nature of salvation. Yet even among people with basically the same understanding of the nature of salvation, there are different views of the means.

The View of Liberation Theology

To understand liberation theology's conception of the means of salvation, we must first look at its view of the nature of theology. In his *Theology of Liberation*, significantly subtitled *History, Politics, and Salvation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez observes that the basic view of the nature of theology has undergone radical transformation. Originally, theology was simply a meditating on the Bible; its aim was wisdom and spiritual growth.[1755] Then theology came to be viewed as rational knowledge, a systematic and critical reflection on the content of the Christian faith.[1756] In recent times, however, faith is no longer regarded as an affirmation of truths, but a total commitment of oneself to others. Love is at the center of the Christian life and of theology. Spirituality is not monastic contemplation, but activity in the world, with emphasis placed on the profane dimensions of life.

Gutiérrez defines salvation as liberation on three different levels. The first level of liberation has to do with "the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes."[1757] The second level has to do with humans' assuming "conscious responsibility for [their] own destiny."[1758] The third level is Christ the Savior's liberating humanity from sin.

Gutiérrez views salvation as eschatological in nature. He does not have in mind, however, some otherworldly deliverance from the conditions of life here. Rather, he has in mind the opening of history to the future.[1759] Moreover, although liberation theologians take very seriously the eschatological dimension of the Christian message and of the Bible, we must not assume that their interest in eschatology means that their basic approach is to apply the biblical message to the situations of history. Rather, they move the other way around—from their experience of reality to theology. This is what Juan Luis Segundo has described as the "hermeneutical circle." Their experience of reality leads the liberation theologians to question the prevailing ideologies, then the theological assumptions underlying those ideologies, and finally the hermeneutic.[1760] Liberation theologians reject the Western orthodox understanding of theology because of its failure to square with their experience of life, not because of new developments in exegesis.

What would bring about the needed liberation economically? One proposed solution has been development. That is the idea that working within a basically capitalist structure, it would be possible to improve conditions of the poor. Gutiérrez, however, regards this as a timid measure. It will not do to try to effect

changes within the existing order. Rather, he says, “Only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of the private property system, access to power of the exploited class, and a social revolution that would break this dependence would allow for the change to a new society, a socialist society —or at least allow that such a society would be possible.”[1761]

From the emphasis on transformation of present systems, it is clear that liberation theology views salvation as a liberation for all persons. Salvation involves economic, political, and racial equality for all. God’s work in this direction is accomplished by various means, not merely the church and the practice of religion. As a matter of fact, salvation is effected primarily by means of political processes, and even on occasion by revolution and violence.

In evaluating liberation theology’s concept of salvation, it must be conceded that, of the three levels of liberation, Gutiérrez identifies as the most basic the level of Christ’s granting us freedom from sin. In practice, however, the emphasis seems to be placed particularly on the economic and political aspects. There is no question, of course, that God is concerned about these aspects of life, as a reading of the Minor Prophets (e.g., Amos) will indicate. It must be seriously questioned, however, whether these aspects are as significant as the liberation theologians have made them. Rather, the crucial issue in Scripture is our bondage in sin, and the separation and estrangement from God that sin has produced. Even the exodus, the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage to the Egyptians, was not primarily a political event. In fact, if we examine the biblical accounts closely, we will see that the main purpose of the exodus was God’s establishing a special relationship with Israel so that they might enjoy the spiritual blessings reserved for his unique people. Political freedom, economic sufficiency, and physical health, important as they are, are secondary to spiritual destiny. This is an implication of Jesus’s statement: “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matt. 5:29–30). If our analysis is correct, the shortcoming of liberation theology is not in what it says, but in what it does not say. Not nearly enough is said about what the New Testament clearly indicates to be the primary dimension of salvation.

What of liberation theology’s advocacy of violence by the deprived and downtrodden? It is notable that this position appears to conflict with some of Jesus’s statements, such as his exhortations to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39; Luke 6:29) and love one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). While it is possible to make a sound case for the use of force in a good cause (e.g., in a just

war), the liberation theologians have not established an adequate argument for using force in the present situation.

The View of Sacramentalism

A second major view of the means of salvation is that salvation is transmitted and received through the sacraments of the church. Probably the clearest and most complete expression of this view is that of traditional Roman Catholicism, which is succinctly summarized by Joseph Pohle:

> The justification of the sinner . . . is ordinarily not a purely internal and invisible process or series of acts, but requires the instrumentality of external visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ, which either confer grace or augment it. Such visible means of grace are called Sacraments.[1762]

Several important characteristics of sacraments are noted in this brief statement. Justification is not merely an internal and invisible occurrence (a purely spiritual event), but depends on and requires particular external rites. These rites are actual means of grace. They symbolize the changes that take place within the individual, but they are not merely symbols. They actually effect or convey grace. They are, in other words, efficacious signs.[1763]

In the Catholic understanding, three elements are necessary to constitute a sacrament: a visible sign, an invisible grace, and divine institution. The visible sign consists of two parts: some form of matter (e.g., water in baptism) and a word of pronouncement.[1764] All sacraments convey sanctifying grace; that is, they cause the individual to become both just and holy, comprising what Protestants term justification and sanctification.[1765]

Of prime importance is the idea that the sacraments are efficacious. In the judgment of the Council of Trent, the Protestant Reformers considered the sacraments merely "exhortations designed to excite faith" (Luther), "tokens of the truthfulness of the divine promises" (Calvin), or "signs of Christian profession by which the faithful testify that they belong to the Church of Jesus Christ" (Zwingli). Condemning the positions of the Reformers, the council set forth its own position that the sacraments are means of grace to all those who do not erect an obstacle to that grace.[1766]

Proponents of the position of the Council of Trent argue that Scripture gives evidence of an essential causal connection between sacramental signs and grace. A most prominent example is John 3:5: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." It is contended that the water is the instrumental cause of new birth. Pohle says, "As truly, therefore, as the spiritual rebirth of a man is caused principally by the Holy Ghost, so is it caused

instrumentally by water, and consequently, the water of Baptism exercises a causal effect on justification."[1767] Other texts cited as supporting the contention that the water of baptism cleanses sin include Acts 2:38; 22:16; Ephesians 5:26; and Titus 3:5. Moreover, on the basis of various texts, efficacy is claimed for the other sacraments as well: confirmation (Acts 8:17), the Eucharist (John 6:56–58), penance (John 20:22–23), extreme unction (James 5:14–16), and holy orders (2 Tim. 1:6).[1768] In addition, the testimony of the church fathers is cited as support for the view that the sacraments are means of grace.[1769]

In the historic Catholic view, the sacraments are effective *ex opere operato* ("from the work done"). This expression, which was first used in the thirteenth century, was officially adopted by the Council of Trent. It indicates that the conferral of grace depends on the act itself, not on the merits of either the priest or the recipient. Certainly there must be a priest to perform the sacrament, and the recipient must be morally prepared. In fact, the amount of grace conferred depends on the recipient's disposition and cooperation.[1770] Yet these factors are not what gives effect to the sacrament. The sacrament itself is the efficient cause of the operation of grace.

At times the Catholic position appears contradictory. On the one hand, it is said that the sacraments produce their effects "independently of the merits and disposition of the recipient." On the other hand, moral preparation is deemed necessary if the sacrament is to produce "the full effect required for justification."[1771] This moral preparation, however, is simply the removal of "any previous indisposition opposed to the character of the respective sacrament."[1772] Thus, the actual efficacy of the sacrament in no way depends on the merit of the recipient. A theological argument in support of this contention is the practice of infant baptism, where there obviously cannot be any merit, or even active faith.[1773]

We have already alluded to the fact that there must be a proper administrator of the sacrament. With the exception of certain unusual circumstances, the only people qualified to administer the sacraments are ordained individuals, that is, persons who have received the sacrament of holy orders.[1774] As we have seen, the validity of the sacrament does not depend on either the personal moral worthiness or the orthodoxy of the priest.[1775] What is necessary, however, is that he have the intention of performing the sacrament.[1776] This need not necessarily be conscious intention. If a priest in the act of performing a sacrament is distracted, the administration of the sacrament is valid. This would be considered a case of virtual intention (as contrasted with actual intention). On the other hand, if a priest, while swimming, splashes water on another person playfully, that is not baptism, for it is not done with the aim of baptizing.

What all of this amounts to is that salvation is dependent on the church. For, in the first place, the sacraments, which were entrusted to the church by Christ, are requisite to salvation. And second, the presence of a qualified administrator, namely, an individual ordained by the church, is required. The essential point in this view is that salvation is actually effected by the sacraments. If we desire to receive salvation, we must receive the sacraments.

This clear-cut position of traditional Roman Catholicism is deficient at several points. We will indicate some of the deficiencies in our discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We note here, however, that there is little evidence for some of the interpretations traditional Catholicism has given to various pertinent texts in the Bible. These interpretations are at best doubtful and at worst highly imaginative. To be sure, classical Roman Catholicism does not subscribe to the view that the Bible is the sole authority of divine truth. Instead, it posits two equal authorities, the Bible and the unwritten tradition of the apostles, preserved, interpreted, and made explicit by the church. Yet there ought to be no contradiction between these two authorities in their teaching on basic issues such as the sacraments. That we fail to find objective efficacy of the sacraments taught in any clear way in the Bible, then, is apparently highly significant. Further, the idea that the ministry or priesthood has a unique or distinctive role fails to find clear expression in the Bible. Indeed, the teaching of passages such as Hebrews 9 appears to contradict this contention.

Moreover, the concept of the disposition required of the recipient if the sacrament is to convey grace presents difficulties. Sacramentalists, in an attempt to avoid the accusation that they view sacraments as magical, as having an automatic effect in and of themselves, stress that sacraments are objectively efficacious, that they confer the grace needed, but that a certain disposition is required of the recipient. The recipient must remove any obstacle to reception of the grace of God. In other words, the sacrament will avail, *ex opere operato*, if it is not resisted or objected to by the recipient. This makes faith, even saving faith, rather passive. At most, it is an intellectual acquiescence. The type of faith that is required in order to receive the grace of God is much more active, however. See, for example, James 2:18–26, where faith that involves only mental assent without accompanying works is termed dead. Furthermore, the faith for which the apostles appeal in the book of Acts is obviously active. They call for a positive seizing upon God's promises and for total commitment.

The Evangelical View

What, according to the evangelical construction of theology, are the means of salvation or, more broadly put, the means of grace? To some extent the evangelical view has been expounded in our assessment of the views of liberation theology and sacramentalism. More needs to be said, however, in terms of a positive declaration of the evangelical position.

In the evangelical view, the Word of God plays an indispensable part in the whole matter of salvation. In Romans Paul describes the predicament of persons apart from Christ. They have no righteousness; they are totally unworthy of his grace and salvation (3:9–20). How, then, are they to be saved? This is by calling upon the name of the Lord (10:13). For them to call, however, they must believe, but they cannot believe if they have not heard; therefore someone must tell them or preach to them the good news (vv. 14–15). Paul also writes to Timothy regarding the importance of the Word of God. The sacred writings known to Timothy from his youth "are able to make [him] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15–17). Peter also speaks of this instrumental role of the Word of God: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. . . . And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23, 25). In Psalm 19 David extols the virtues and values of the law of the Lord: it revives the soul (v. 7a), it informs (vv. 7b, 8), and it warns against wrong (v. 11).

There is a rich series of images depicting the nature and function of the Word of God. It is a hammer capable of breaking the hard heart (Jer. 23:29), a mirror reflecting one's true condition (James 1:23–25), a seed that springs up into life (Luke 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23), rain and snow to nourish the seed (Isa. 55:10–11). It is food: milk for babies (1 Cor. 3:1–2; Heb. 5:12–13), solid food for the mature (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12–14), and honey for all (Ps. 19:10). The Word of God is gold and silver (Ps. 119:72), a lamp (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; 2 Pet. 1:19), a sword discerning the heart (Heb. 4:12), a fire impelling the believer to speak (Jer. 20:9). These images graphically convey the idea that the Word of God is powerful and able to accomplish great work in the life of the individual. It is not, however, the Bible alone, but the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit, which effects spiritual transformation.[1777]

The Word of God is the means not merely to the beginning of the Christian life, but also to growth in it. Thus, Jesus told his disciples that they were made clean through the Word he had spoken to them (John 15:3). He also prayed that the Father would sanctify them in the truth, which is the Father's Word (John

17:17). The Lord told Joshua that the book of the law is the means to a life of rectitude: “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Josh. 1:8). The Word of God guides our feet (Ps. 119:105) and provides us protection as we engage in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:17).

We have seen that the Word of God, whether read or preached, is God’s means of presenting to us the salvation found in Christ; faith is our means of accepting that salvation.[1778] Paul put this quite clearly in Ephesians 2:8–9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” That the Word of God (the gospel) and faith are the means of salvation is evident in Romans 1:16–17: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” The necessity of faith is also made clear in Romans 3:25: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.” Paul is definite that there is only one way of salvation for all people, whether Jew or Gentile: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (Rom. 3:28–30). Even Abraham was counted righteous because of faith: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3; see also vv. 9, 12).

If what we have just said is correct, salvation is not by works. A person is declared righteous in the sight of God, not because of having done good works, but because of having believed. But what of the passages that seem to argue that works are necessary if we are to obtain God’s salvation? Among these passages are Matthew 25:31–46; Luke 7:36–50; 18:18–30; and James 2:18–26. As we interpret them, we will need to bear in mind the clear teaching of the passages we have just examined.

Perhaps the most problematic passage is Matthew 25:31–46, which seems to suggest that our eternal destiny will be based on whether we have done works of kindness and charity to others. One feature of this account should be noted, however. The works done to others are not really the basis on which the judgment is rendered. For these works are regarded as having been done (or not

having been done) to Jesus himself (vv. 40, 45). It is, then, one's relationship to the Lord, not to one's fellows, that is the basis for the judgment. The question arises: If the works done to others are not the basis of judgment, why are they brought into consideration at all? To answer this question, we must see Matthew 25:31–46 in the broader setting of the doctrine of salvation. Note here the surprise of both groups when the evidence is presented (vv. 37–39, 44). They had not thought of works done to others as indicative of their relationship with God. True, works are not meritorious. However, they are evidence of our relationship with Christ and of his grace already operating in us. Donald Bloesch comments:

> The intent of the parable is to show us that we will be judged on the basis of the fruits that our faith brings, though when we relate this passage to its wider context we see that the fruits of faith are at the same time the work of grace within us. They are the evidence and consequence of a grace already poured out on us. We are to be judged according to our works, but we are saved despite our works. Both affirmations must be made if we are to do justice to the mystery of the free gift of salvation. The final judgment is the confirmation of the validity of a justification already accomplished in Jesus Christ.[1779]

The key to understanding this passage, then, is to keep in mind that it relates to the final judgment, not to our coming to salvation. Good deeds done to others are represented as what follows from salvation, not as what we must do to receive it.

In Luke 7:36–50 we find the account of a sinful woman who washed Jesus's feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and then kissed and anointed them. Recounting what the woman had done and declaring that she loved much, Jesus pronounced her sins forgiven (vv. 44–48). This seems to indicate that she was forgiven on the basis of her actions and love. Jesus's parting words to the woman are very instructive, however: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50).[1780]

The story of the rich young ruler, as found in Luke 18:18–30 (and also in Matt. 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31), seems to suggest that salvation is obtained by works. For to the question "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18), Jesus replies, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). It is significant, however, that immediately before this episode, Jesus had said, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (v. 17). It is childlike trust, then, that is the basis of salvation; willingness to leave all behind is merely a test to determine whether one has such trust.[1781]

Finally, a close examination will show that James 2:18–26 does not look on works as an alternative to faith, but as a certification of faith. The apostle says,

“Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (v. 18). James in no way denies that we are justified by faith alone. Rather, his point in this passage is that faith without works is not genuine faith; it is barren (v. 20). Genuine faith will necessarily issue in works. Faith and works are inseparable. And so James writes: “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend” (vv. 21–23). It is significant that, just like Paul in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6, James here cites the classic proof-text for salvation by faith—Genesis 15:6. In saying that what Abraham did fulfilled this Scripture, James is clearly connecting works with justification by faith; works are the fulfillment or completion of faith.

It is our conclusion that the four passages we have just examined, when seen in their contexts and in relation to the texts that speak of justification by faith, do not teach that works are a means of receiving salvation. Rather, they teach that genuine faith will be evidenced by the works that it produces.[1782] Faith that does not produce works is not real faith. Conversely, works that do not stem from faith and a proper relationship to Christ will have no bearing at the time of judgment. Jesus makes this point in Matthew 7:22–23: on that day many will say to him, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” Presumably these claims will be true. Yet Jesus will respond, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Because their works were not done out of true faith and commitment, Jesus does not include such people among the number of those who have done the will of his Father in heaven (v. 21).

The Extent of Salvation

We come now to the issue of who will be saved; specifically, will all be saved? The church’s usual position throughout history has been that while some or even many will be saved, some will not. The church took this position not because it did not want to see everyone saved, but because it believed there are clear statements in Scripture to the effect that some will be lost. From time to time, however, a contrary position has been espoused in the church, namely, that all will be saved. This position, known as universalism, gave birth in America to a denomination bearing the name “Universalist” (it subsequently merged with the

Unitarians). Not all who hold to universalism are to be found in that denomination, however.

Varieties of Universalism

Universalism has had a long history. Origen was probably its first major proponent. He conjectured that the punishment of the wicked of which the Bible speaks will not be some form of eternal external suffering inflicted upon them by God, but a temporary internal anguish occasioned by their sense of separation from him.[1783] Its purpose is to be purification. That end can be realized without eternal punishment. So the punishment of the wicked will at some point come to an end, and all things will be restored to their original condition. This is Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*.

While Origen's form of the teaching of universal salvation has been the most popular, it has not been the only one. Indeed, there are several hypotheses as to how salvation might be available to and achievable by (at least theoretically) the entire human race:

1. The theory of universal conversion holds that all persons will be saved via the route stipulated by the Bible—repentance and faith. Proponents of this view believe that the world will someday be successfully evangelized; all persons will respond to the gospel and thus be saved. The problem with this theory, however, is that millions have already lived and died without being converted. The universal response envisioned lies in the future. Therefore, there is no guarantee of the salvation of all, but only of those persons who will respond in the future. There is no true universalism here. To be truly universalistic, this theory must be combined with some other theory or portion thereof.[1784]

2. The theory of universal atonement holds that Christ died not merely for a certain portion of the human race (the elect), but for all humans. This is not true universalism. Since the Arminians and Calvinists who propound the theory of universal atonement do not ordinarily maintain that all those for whom Christ atoned will believe (or that the atonement will be efficacious in every case), they speak only of universal atonement, not universal salvation.[1785] Only when this view is interpreted by external assumptions is it construed as true universalism.

3. The theory of universal opportunity holds that every person within his or her lifetime has an opportunity to respond in a saving fashion to Jesus Christ. The opportunity to be saved is not limited to those who actually hear the gospel proclaimed, who have been afforded some knowledge of the contents of the special revelation. Rather, everyone, by virtue of exposure to the general revelation discussed in Psalm 19, Romans 1 and 2, and elsewhere in Scripture,

may exercise implicitly the requisite faith in Jesus Christ. Here again, there is no claim that everyone will respond; the theory of universal opportunity is not, then, real universalism. While everyone could exercise faith, many will not. There may be unacknowledged Christians, but they are few in number. This group does not consist of rabid devotees of other world religions that conflict with the central tenets of Christianity. Rather, those who are saved through general revelation are like the Athenians who worshiped the "unknown God" (Acts 17:23).[1786]

4. The theory of universal explicit opportunity holds that everyone will have an opportunity to hear the gospel in an overt or explicit fashion. Those who do not actually hear it during their lifetime here upon earth will have an opportunity in the future.[1787] There will be a second chance. After death, they will be enabled to hear. Some proponents of this theory believe that even those who have heard and have rejected will be confronted with the claims of Christ in the life hereafter. Others maintain that everyone will have a first chance, rather than a "second chance," whether in this life through general revelation, or through a postmortem encounter with the gospel.[1788] When this belief is coupled with the idea that everyone given such an opportunity will of course accept it, the inevitable conclusion is universal salvation. This view is difficult to reconcile with Jesus's teaching about the afterlife (see Luke 16:19–31, especially v. 26).

5. The theory of universal reconciliation maintains that Christ's death accomplished its purpose of reconciling all humankind to God. The death of Christ made it possible for God to accept humans, and he has done so. Consequently, whatever separation exists between a human and the benefits of God's grace is subjective in nature; it exists only in the human's mind. The message humans need to be told, then, is not that they have an opportunity for salvation. Rather, they need to be told that they have been saved, so that they may enjoy the blessings that are already theirs. The advocates of this view lay great stress on 2 Corinthians 5:18: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Reconciliation is not something that is to be; it is an accomplished fact.[1789]

6. The theory of universal pardon maintains that God, being a loving God, will not hold unswervingly to the conditions he has laid down. While he has threatened eternal condemnation for all those who do not accept him, he will in the end relent and forgive everyone.[1790] Accordingly, there is no need for an exercise of faith. God will treat all persons as if they had believed. He will impute not only righteousness to everyone, but faith as well. While this might seem unfair to those who have believed and acted to accept the offer of salvation, they should remember Jesus's parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

Those who came late in the day received the same pay as did those who began to work early in the morning.

7. The theory of universal restoration is the view put forth by Origen. At some point in the future, all things will be restored to their original and intended state; there will be a full salvation. It is conceivable that God might instantaneously bring the human race into a state of perfection. In the usual form of this theory, however, which follows the pattern of Origen's thinking, the beginning of the life hereafter has a purgatorial function. When there has been a sufficient period of punishment, humankind will be purified to the point where God may have fellowship with them throughout the remainder of eternity.[1791]

Evaluating the Case for Universalism

It will not be possible to examine and evaluate each of the varieties of universalism we have just sketched. Insofar as they are theories of universal salvation, however, they are built on similar arguments. There are two general types of considerations advanced in support of the belief that salvation is universal. Some are based on or relate to a particular text of Scripture. Others are more theological in nature. The latter type of argument is presented by Nels Ferré.

Born in Sweden, Ferré was the son of a very conservative Baptist preacher. As a youth Nels was troubled by much that he heard from his father's pulpit, especially the idea that those who have not heard the gospel will be eternally lost in hell. His autobiographical sketch, "The Third Conversion Never Fails," recounts his growing questions about the Bible. When he at length summoned the courage to ask his father about these matters, he was rebuffed by an authoritarian answer—one must not question God.[1792] As a teenager he came alone to the United States, where he cast off the orthodox view. Later he was influenced by the theologians of the Lundensian school in his native Sweden, who emphasized the love of God. Following their lead, he built his own theology on the central thought of divine love. In his consideration of eschatology, this concept is powerful and determinative.

Ferré notes that most approaches to eschatology stress God's justice. While it is true that God is just, this justice, says Ferré, is completely in the service of his love.[1793] Thus, Ferré rests his perception of God primarily on one divine attribute. Asking why some people insist on teaching and preaching the concept of an eternal hell, he suggests that those who do so have never really understood the love of God.[1794] He bases his conclusion on the assumption that love and punishment, heaven and hell, joy and grief, are mutually exclusive:

> Some have never really seen how completely contradictory are heaven and hell as eternal realities. Their eyes have never been opened to this truth. If eternal hell is real, love is eternally frustrated and heaven is a place of mourning and concern for the lost. Such joy and such grief cannot go together. There can be no psychiatric split personality for the real lovers of God and surely not for God himself. That is the reason that heaven can be heaven only when it has emptied hell, as surely as love is love and God is God. God cannot be faithless to Himself no matter how faithless we are; and His is the power, the kingdom and the glory.[1795]

In studying the eschatological passages in the New Testament, Ferré found what he regarded as irreconcilable traditions. First there are the passages that teach that there will be an eternal hell.[1796] Whether Jesus himself taught such a doctrine, however, is uncertain.[1797] Another strand within the New Testament is that the wicked shall perish.[1798] They will simply be obliterated or annihilated at death. They will neither be saved eternally in heaven nor punished everlastingly in hell. Yet a third tradition is what Ferré terms "the sovereign victory of God in Christ over all, in terms of His own love."[1799] He cites certain specific texts as teaching that all human beings will be saved: God "is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10); "every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10–11); "God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom. 11:32). It was not any specific verses that led Ferré to his ultimate conclusion on the matter, however:

> But all such verses, in any case, however many they be, and however clear, are as nothing in comparison to the total message of the New Testament. . . . The logic of the New Testament at its highest and deepest point is the logic of God's sovereign love, "according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." . . . Those who worship the sovereign Lord dare proclaim nothing less than the total victory of His love. No other position can be consistently Christian. All other positions limit either God's goodness or His power, in which case both fundamentalism and modern liberalism have their own varieties of the finite God.[1800]

On the basis of such considerations, Ferré arrived at a universalist position. It is significant that his exposition of eschatology appears in a treatise on the doctrine of God, for it is his understanding of God as love that governs his interpretation of the pertinent Scriptures and the issue as a whole. He does not claim to understand how universal salvation will be brought about. We must simply accept the fact. But whatever the means, God' s sovereign love will bring the process to complete victory.[1801]

In our consideration of Ferré's view, we mentioned a few texts that seem to assert or imply that salvation is universal. Various other verses have been cited in support of universalism: "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one act of righteousness resulted in

justification and life for all people" (Rom. 5:18); "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22); "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19–20); Jesus "was made lower than the angels . . . so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9).

We must also consider those texts that suggest an opposite conclusion, however, and then attempt to reconcile the apparently contradictory material. There are many texts that seem to contradict universalism: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25:46); "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16); "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28–29); "What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?" (Rom. 9:22). Numerous other passages could be cited, among them Matthew 8:12; 25:41; 26:24; Mark 3:29; Romans 2:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; and Revelation 21:8. Indeed, simply on the basis of numbers, there appear to be considerably more passages teaching that some will be eternally lost than that all will be saved.

Can the apparent contradictions be reconciled? One possibility advanced by universalists is to regard those passages that suggest that the wicked will be lost as descriptions of a hypothetical rather than actual situation. (We are reminded here of our interpretation of Heb. 6:4–6). That is to say, they are descriptions of what would happen if we were to reject Christ. But, as a matter of fact, no one does, for the passages in question are warnings sufficient to turn us to Christ. On this basis, universalists can explain away texts like John 3:16 and Mark 3:29. However, there remain those verses that declare that some people will actually be lost. Examples include Matthew 8:12; 25:41, 46; and John 5:29. We cannot simply dismiss these references. Are we then forced, with Ferré, to conclude that there are irreconcilable traditions within the New Testament?

An alternative remains: interpreting the universalistic passages in such a way as to fit with the restrictive ones. Here we find a more fruitful endeavor. Note, first, that Philippians 2:10–11 and Colossians 1:19–20 do not say that all will be saved and restored to fellowship with God. They speak only of the setting right of the disrupted order of the universe, the bringing of all things into a proper relationship with God. But this could be achieved by a victory forcing the rebels into reluctant submission; it does not necessarily point to an actual return to

fellowship. Note also that 1 Timothy 4:10 and Hebrews 2:9 say merely that Christ died for all or offers salvation to all. These verses argue for universal atonement, but not necessarily for universal salvation. Indeed, Paul in 1 Timothy explicitly distinguishes "those who believe" from the rest of humanity.

More troublesome are the passages where a parallel is drawn between the universal effect of Adam's sin and Christ's saving work, namely, Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. In the context of each of these passages, however, there are elements that serve to qualify the universal dimension as it applies to Christ's work. In the case of Romans 5, verse 17 specifies that "*those who receive* God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (italics added). Furthermore, the term "many" (πολλοί—*polloi*) rather than "all" is used in verses 15 and 19. Paul similarly restricts the meaning of "all" in 1 Corinthians 15:22 ("in Christ all will be made alive"). For in the next verse he adds: "But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, *those who belong to him*" (italics added). In fact, he earlier made it clear that he is speaking about believers: "And if Christ has not been raised . . . then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost" (vv. 17–18). We conclude that the benefits of Christ's death are received by *all who are in Christ*, just as the penalty for Adam's sin is incurred by all who are in Adam.

One universalistic passage remains. Romans 11:32 seems to suggest that God saves all: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." Actually, however, the mercy God has shown is in his providing his Son as an atonement and extending the offer of salvation to all, for in this context Paul is talking about Israel's rejection of God and the subsequent offer of salvation to the Gentiles. God's mercy has been shown to all humans, but only those who accept it will experience and profit from it. Indeed, Paul points out (e.g., in vv. 7–10, 21–22) that some have rejected God's mercy and, accordingly, have not received his salvation. Thus, although salvation is universally available, it is not universal.

Not everyone will be saved. This is not a conclusion we state with satisfaction, but it is most faithful to the entirety of the biblical witness. It should be a spur to evangelistic effort:

> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom. 10:14–15)

PART 11
THE CHURCH

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The Nature of the Church

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define and explain the concept of the church.
2. Compare and contrast alternative definitions with the biblical-philological definition of the church.
3. Identify the characteristics of the true church by examining the images Paul used.
4. Identify and analyze four special problems related to the church.
5. Relate the implications of the study of the church to our understanding of the church.

Chapter Summary

The church is one of the few visible forms of a corporate relationship among believers. It is best defined by the biblical-philological method. The Bible employs a number of images to describe the church. Among the more important are the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Each contributes to our understanding. Four special problems related to the church are noted as well.

Study Questions

- How do the biblical images of the church relate to the definition of the church?
- How would you describe alternative characteristics and definitions of the church?
- Four special problems are identified: the church and the kingdom, the church and Israel, the visible church and the invisible church, and the time of the inception of the church. Give the nature of the problem for each. How would you respond to each problem?
- From our study of the church, five implications were stated. What is the meaning of each, and how does each contribute toward our better understanding the church?

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We have discussed to this point the nature of salvation as it pertains to individual Christians. Yet the Christian life is not a solitary matter. Typically, in the book of Acts, we find that conversion leads the individual into the fellowship of a group of believers. That collective dimension of the Christian life we call the church.

Defining the Church

Confusion regarding the Church

The church is at once a very familiar and a very misunderstood topic. It is one of the few aspects of Christian theology that can be observed. For many persons, it is the first point, and perhaps the only point, where Christianity is encountered. Karl Barth noted that one of the several ways in which the church witnesses to Jesus Christ is simply by its existence.[1802] There are concrete evidences that the church exists, or at least that it has existed. Church structures, even though sometimes very few persons gather within them, are proof of the reality of what we call the church. The church is mentioned in the media, but without much specification as to what is meant. Legislative documents refer to it. In the United States the church is to be kept separate from the state. People belong to a church; they go to church on Sunday. But for all of this familiarity, there are frequently considerable confusion and misunderstanding concerning the church.

Part of this misunderstanding results from the multiple usages of the term "church." Sometimes it is used with respect to an architectural structure, a building. Frequently it is used to refer to a particular body of believers; we might, for example, speak of the First Methodist Church. At other times, it is used to refer to a denomination, a group set apart by some distinctive; for instance, the Presbyterian Church or the Lutheran Church. In addition to the confusion generated by the multiple usages of the term "church," there is evidence of confusion at a more profound level—a lack of understanding of the basic nature of the church.

Among the reasons for this lack of understanding is the fact that at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention that other doctrines have received. At the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, Father Georges Florovsky claimed that the doctrine of the church had hardly passed its pretheological phase.[1803] By contrast, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity had been given special attention in the fourth and fifth centuries, as had the atoning work of Christ in the Middle Ages, and the doctrine of salvation in the sixteenth century. Even the Augustinian-Donatist controversy of the early fifth century, and the sixteenth-century dispute over the means of grace, while they dealt with aspects of the nature of the church, did not really get at the central issue of what the church *is.* Colin Williams suggests that "little direct theological attention was ever given to the church itself probably because it was taken for granted."[1804]

There are other reasons why it is imperative to carefully delineate the essential nature of the church. In the middle of the twentieth century, John Macquarrie pointed out that the church was the theme of much theological writing in his time:

> Probably more gets written on the Church nowadays than on any other single theological theme. Most of this writing has a practical orientation. We hear about the Church in relation to rapid social change, the Church in a secular society, the Church and reunion, the Church in missions. But, however valuable some of the insights gained in these various fields may be, they need to be guided and correlated by a theological understanding of the Church.[1805]

This phenomenon has accelerated with the general shift of culture toward a more postmodern orientation. The trend away from defining and stating what the essence of something is, toward describing what it does, has increased. A postmodern generation tends to be less focused on rational statement and definition, and more on experience and emotion. Macquarrie's words regarding the need for a theological understanding of the church have become even more pertinent.

In addition, much speaking and writing about the church is being done by those involved in actual ministry, rather than professional theologians. Their primary concern has been to minister to the actual people of a given time and place. Two results have been a relative de-emphasis on the theory or doctrine of the church, and a tendency for practical concerns, rather than biblical teaching, to dictate the understanding of the church.

The emphasis on matters such as social change and mission rather than on the church itself is due in part to a general shift to a secular way of thinking. To put it another way: there has been a major modification in the way God is viewed; there is more stress on his immanence than on his transcendence. He is no longer viewed as relating to the world only through the agency of his supernatural institution, the church, but also dynamically relating to the world through many avenues or institutions. The emphasis is on what God is doing, not on what he is like. Consequently, more attention is given to the mission of the church than to its identity and limits or boundaries.

Traditionally, the church was thought of as distinct from the world, as standing over against and intended to transform it. In the most fully developed form of this view, the church is the repository of grace, and the world can receive this grace and be transformed by it only by being connected to the church and receiving its sacraments. In a more Protestant form, this view holds that the church possesses the gospel, the good news of salvation, and that the world, which is lost and separated from Christ, can be saved or reunited with him only

by hearing that gospel, believing, and being justified and regenerated. Some, however, see God as working directly in the world, outside the formal structure of the church, and as accomplishing his purpose even through persons and institutions that are not avowedly Christian, resulting in part in an altered conception of the nature and means of salvation. Just as post–Vatican II Catholicism has broadened the meaning of the church, so also have many progressive Protestants.

The Empirical-Dynamic Definition of the Church

Still another factor has served to stymie modern attempts to develop a doctrine of the church. The twentieth century, with its widespread aversion to philosophy, and particularly to metaphysics and ontology, was far less interested in the theoretical nature of something than in its concrete historical manifestations. Thus, much modern theology is less interested in the essence of the church, what it "really is" or "ought to be," than in its embodiment, what it concretely is or dynamically is becoming. In a philosophical approach, which is basically deductive and Platonic, one begins by formulating a definition of the ideal church and then moves from this pure, fixed essence to concrete instances, which are but imperfect copies or shadows. In a historical approach, what the church is to be emerges inductively from its engagement with what is—the condition of the world and the problems within it shape what the church is to be.

There is widespread acknowledgment that such a shift in orientation has taken place within our culture, and many theologians accept it as normative and desirable. Carl Michalson, for example, has written: "The being of God—himself, his nature and attributes, the nature of the church, the nature of man, the preexistent nature of Christ—all these conjectural topics which have drawn theology into a realm of either physical or metaphysical speculation remote from the habitation of living men should be abandoned."[1806] Colin Williams agrees: "I have no doubt that this shift has occurred and must be welcomed."[1807]

The shift in emphasis from theoretical essence to empirical presence is characteristic of the way the whole world is viewed—as being in flux rather than fixed. Many now view language not as possessing fixed forms to be rigidly followed but as dynamic: it is alive and ever-changing. Its rules are determined by actual usage.[1808] Similarly, the church is now viewed as dynamic. It is not thought of in terms of its essence, but of its existence—an existentialist interpretation. It is an event, a project, not an already complete, realized entity.

As a result of this change in orientation, the church is now studied through disciplines and methodologies other than dogmatics or systematic theology,

which attempts to define or isolate essences. Many theologians look to the history of the church to tell them what the church is: the church is what it has been. Some of them look on the church as strictly a phenomenon of the New Testament; that is, they limit their historical study to the earliest period of the church, regarding it as normative.

The new emphasis applying nontheological disciplines and methodologies to the study of the church poses a danger as the church struggles to understand itself theologically. Whenever in the past the church was called upon, in the face of an alternative methodology or framework (e.g., biology, anthropology, or psychology), to justify its understanding of particular doctrines (e.g., the doctrine of humanity or sin), it had to a considerable degree already arrived at its formulation, so that it was relatively sure of itself. In this case, however, the church is not very sure of its own doctrine, and consequently may be tempted simply to adopt a view and categories derived from sociological science. As a social institution, the church has aroused the interest of those who study social institutions of various types. Yet the church is far more than a social institution and therefore must be defined in terms beyond the merely sociological.

Attempting to define the church in terms of its dynamic activity avoids making any kind of statement regarding the nature of the church. This may lead to what we described in chapter 4 as the approach of the transformers, who make significant alterations in the content of doctrine in order to meet changing situations in the world. But the question arises, If the definition of the church is to undergo frequent change in order to relate it to its contemporary world, in what sense is there continuity with what has preceded? Or, in other words, why continue to call it the church? What is the common thread identifying the church throughout all the changes? Should not at some point a different term be applied? Consider the field of biological evolution. When a new species develops from an existing species, a new name is assigned. Biologists do not apply the old name to the new species. That name is reserved for the members of the old species. For all of the apparent changes in the world, certain morphological or classificatory categories remain fixed. Yet it is being argued that while the church is changing and must change, very radically perhaps, it should still be called the church. But if it is to continue to be called the church, we must know just what distinguishes the church as the church, or qualifies it to be called the church. We must also determine if there is a point at which the church ought rather to be termed a club, a social agency, or something similar. These questions cannot be answered without addressing the issue of the nature of the church, and there is no better place to begin than with the biblical testimony itself.

The Biblical-Philological Definition of the Church

The word “church” and cognate terms in other languages (e.g., *Kirche*) are derived from the Greek word κυριακός (*kuriakos*), “belonging to the Lord.” They are, however, to be understood in light of the New Testament Greek term ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*). While this is a common word, its occurrences are unevenly distributed through the New Testament. The only instances in the Gospels are in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, both of which are somewhat disputed. It does not appear in 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 or 2 Peter, 1 or 2 John, or Jude. There is little significance to its absence from 1 and 2 John, since it is found in 3 John; from 2 Timothy and Titus, since it is found in 1 Timothy; and from Jude, since this book is so brief. More surprising, however, is its absence from Peter’s letters. Karl Schmidt comments: “1 Peter deals most emphatically with the nature and significance of the OT community and uses OT expressions, so that we may ask whether the matter [of the church] is not present even though the term is missing. The same question arises in respect of the non-occurrence of the word in the two Synoptists Mk. and Lk., and also in Jn.”[1809]

The meaning of the New Testament concept must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and that of the Old Testament. In classical Greek the word ἐκκλησία is found as early as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, and Euripides (fifth century BC on).[1810] It refers to an assembly of the citizens of a *polis* (city). Such assemblies convened at frequent intervals, as often as forty times a year in the case of Athens.[1811] While the authority of the ἐκκλησία was limited to certain matters, all who were full citizens were allowed a vote in those matters. In the secular sense of the word, then, ἐκκλησία refers simply to a gathering or assembly of persons, a meaning that is still to be found in Acts 19:32, 39, 41. In only three exceptional cases in classical Greek is it used of a religious fellowship or cultic guild.[1812] And in these instances it refers to their business meetings, not to the union itself.

Of more significance to us is the Old Testament background. Here we find two Hebrew terms, קָהָל (*qahal*) and עֵדָה (*‘edah*). The former term, perhaps derived from the word for voice, refers to a summons to an assembly and the act of assembling. It is not so much a specification of the members of the assembly as a designation of the occurrence of assembling. A religious significance sometimes attaches to the word (e.g., Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 23:1–3). The term can also denote a more general assembly of the people (e.g., 1 Kings 12:3). Women (Jer. 44:15) and even children (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 8:2) are included. The term is also used of the gathering of troops, and in Ezekiel it refers to nations other than Israel (Egypt, 17:17; Tyre, 27:27; Assyria, 32:22).

The other Hebrew term of relevance for us is עֵדָה. It appears especially in the Pentateuch, more than half of its occurrences being in the book of Numbers. It refers to the people, particularly as gathered before the tent of meeting. That the term first occurs in Exodus 12:3 suggests that the "congregation" of Israel came into being with the command to celebrate the Passover and leave Egypt.[1813] The word עֵדָה points to the community as centered in the cult or the law. Summarizing the distinction between the two Hebrew terms, Lothar Coenen comments:

> If one compares the use of the two Heb. words, it becomes clear, from the passages in which both occur in the same context (e.g. Exod. 12:1ff.; 16:1ff.; Num. 14:1ff.; 20:1ff.; 1 Ki. 12:1ff.) that *'edah* is the unambiguous and permanent term for the ceremonial community as a whole. On the other hand, *qahal* is the ceremonial expression for the assembly that results from the covenant, for the Sinai community and, in the deuteronomistic sense, for the community in its present form. It can also stand for the regular assembly of the people on secular (Num. 10:7; 1 Ki. 12:3) or religious occasions (Ps. 22:26), as well as for a gathering crowd (Num. 14:5; 17:12).[1814]

When we look at the Greek words used in the Septuagint to translate these Hebrew terms, we find that ἐκκλησία is often used to render קָהָל, but never עֵדָה. The latter term is usually rendered by συναγωγή (*sunagōgē*), which is also used to translate קָהָל. It is ἐκκλησία that is our major source of understanding the New Testament concept of the church.

Paul uses the word ἐκκλησία more than does any other New Testament writer. Since the majority of his writings were letters addressed to specific local gatherings of believers, it is not surprising that the term usually refers to a group of believers in a specific city. Thus we find Paul's letters addressed to "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), "the churches in Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), and "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). The same holds true of other New Testament writings as well. The opening portion of John's Apocalypse (Rev. 1–3) was addressed to seven specific churches. In Acts, also, ἐκκλησία refers primarily to all the Christians who live and meet in a particular city, such as Jerusalem (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:1, 5) or Antioch (13:1). Paul visited local churches to appoint elders (14:23) or to instruct and encourage (15:41; 16:5). This local sense of the church is evidently intended in the vast majority of occurrences of the word ἐκκλησία.

Beyond the references to churches in specific cities, there are also references to churches meeting in individual homes. In sending greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, Paul also greets "the church that meets at their house" (Rom. 16:5; see also 1 Cor. 16:19). In his letter to the Colossians, he writes, "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her

house" (Col. 4:15). In most cases, however, the word ἐκκλησία has a broader designation—all believers in a given city (Acts 8:1; 13:1). In some instances, a larger geographical area is in view. An example is Acts 9:31: "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers." Another example is 1 Corinthians 16:19: "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings." While the former reference is in the singular, the latter is plural.

We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place. Karl Schmidt says, "We have pointed out that the sum of the individual congregations does not produce the total community or the church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church."[1815] Coenen comments in a similar vein: "In *Acts* too [as in Paul] the *ekklesia* is ultimately one. Admittedly, it appears only as it gathers in particular places (cf. 14:27). But it always implies the totality."[1816] First Corinthians 1:2 is of special help to us in understanding this concept. Paul addresses this letter "to the church of God in Corinth" (see also 2 Cor. 1:1). Note that he is writing to the church as it is manifested or appears in one place, namely, Corinth. "It is one throughout the whole world and yet is at the same time fully present in every individual assembly."[1817]

At this point some people might accuse theologians of adopting a Platonic perspective, whereby local churches are regarded as instantiations or concrete, particular manifestations of the pure Form, the abstract Idea, of church.[1818] Note, however, that theologians are not reading this concept into the Bible. The concept is actually present in the thought of Paul and Luke. There is on this one point a genuine parallel between biblical thought and that of Plato.

The concept that the church is universal in nature enables us to understand certain New Testament passages more clearly. For example, Jesus's statement in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church," makes good sense in the light of this concept. In Ephesians, Paul particularly emphasizes the universal nature of the church. The church is Christ's body, and all things are under him (1:22–23); the church makes known the manifold wisdom of God (3:10) and will glorify him to all generations (3:21). "There is one body" (4:4); "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (5:23). The church is subject to Christ (v. 24) and is to be presented before him (v. 27). He loved the church and gave himself up for her (v. 25). Christ and the church are a great mystery (v. 32). All of these verses point to the universal nature of the church, as do

1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; and Colossians 1:18, 24. The church includes all persons anywhere in the world who are savingly related to Christ. It also includes all who have lived and been part of his body, and all who will live and be part of his body. This inclusiveness is depicted in Hebrews 12:23: “to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” In view of this inclusiveness we may offer a tentative theological definition of the church as the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers that display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.

Biblical Images of the Church

We next need to inquire regarding the qualities or characteristics that are present in the true church. Traditionally, this topic has been approached through an examination of the “marks of the church”—the qualities of unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity. We will instead approach it through an examination of certain images Paul used of the church. While there are a large number of such images,[1819] we will examine three in particular. Arthur Wainwright has argued that in much of Paul’s writing there is an implicit trinitarianism that shows itself even in the structure with which he organizes his letters.[1820] It is also present in the way he understands the church, for he describes it as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The People of God

Paul wrote of God’s decision to make believers his people: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is constituted of God’s people. They belong to him and he belongs to them.

The concept of the church as the people of God emphasizes God’s initiative in choosing them. In the Old Testament, he did not adopt as his own an existing nation, but actually *created* a people for himself. He chose Abraham and then, through him, brought into being the people of Israel. In the New Testament, this concept of God’s choosing a people is broadened to include both Jews and Gentiles within the church. So Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because

God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13–14; see also 1 Thess. 1:4).

Among the Old Testament texts in which Israel is identified as God's people is Exodus 15:13, 16. Singing to the Lord after the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses notes that God has redeemed Israel and they are his people: "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling . . . terror and dread will fall upon [Edom, Moab, and the inhabitants of Canaan]. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone—until your people pass by, LORD, until the people you bought pass by." Other allusions to Israel as the people of God include Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 32:9–10; Isaiah 62:4; Jeremiah 12:7–10; and Hosea 1:9–10; 2:23. In Romans 9:24–26 Paul applies the statements in Hosea to God's taking in of Gentiles as well as Jews: God "called [us], not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles[.] As he says in Hosea, 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one,' and 'In the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they will be called "children of the living God"'" (1:10).

The concept of Israel and the church as the people of God contains several implications. God takes pride in them. He cares for and protects his people; he keeps them "as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10). Finally, he expects that they will be his people without reservation and without dividing their loyalty. Jehovah's exclusive claim on his people is pictured in the story of Hosea's exclusive claim on his unfaithful wife, Gomer. All of the people of God are marked with a special brand as it were. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the proof of divine ownership. It was required of all male children of the people of Israel, as well as of all male converts or proselytes. It was an external sign of the covenant that made them God's people. It was also a subjective sign of the covenant in that it was applied individually to each person, whereas the ark of the covenant served as an objective sign for the whole group.

Instead of this external circumcision of the flesh, found in the administration of the old covenant, we find under the new covenant an inward circumcision of the heart. Paul wrote, "No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:29; see also Phil. 3:3). Whereas in the Old Testament, or under the old covenant, the people of God had been national Israel, inclusion among the people of God was not, in the New Testament, based upon national identity: "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6). Inclusion within

the covenant of God distinguishes the people of God; they are made up of all those "whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles" (v. 24). For Israel the covenant was the Abrahamic covenant; for the church it is the new covenant accomplished and established by Christ (2 Cor. 3:3–18).

A particular quality of holiness is expected of the people of God. God had always expected Israel to be pure, or sanctified. As Christ's bride the church must also be holy: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25–27).

The Body of Christ

Perhaps the most extended image of the church is its representation as the body of Christ. Indeed, some apparently regard this image as virtually a complete definition of the church.[1821] While it is a very full and rich statement, it is not the whole of the account.

This image emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ's activity now just as was his physical body during his earthly ministry. The image is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations. Ephesians 1:22–23 illustrates the former: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Paul's statement to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12:27 illustrates the latter: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

The image of the body of Christ also emphasizes the connection of the church, as a group of believers, with Christ. Salvation, in all of its complexity, is in large part a result of union with Christ. We observed in chapter 45 numerous references to the believer's being "with Christ" or "in Christ." Here we find an emphasis on the converse of this fact. Christ in the believer is the basis of belief and hope. Paul writes, "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27; see also Gal. 2:20).

Christ is the head of this body (Col. 1:18) of which believers are individual members or parts. All things were created in him, through him, and for him (v. 16). He is the beginning, the firstborn (v. 15). God purposed "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10 NIV 1984). Believers, united with him, are being nourished through him, the head to which they are connected (Col. 2:19). This image is virtually parallel to Jesus's

image of himself as the vine to which believers, as the branches, are connected (John 15:1–11). As the head of the body, he also rules the church: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority” (Col. 2:9–10). Christ is the Lord of the church.

The image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul develops the concept of the interconnectedness of the body, especially in terms of the gifts of the Spirit. Here he stresses the dependence of each believer upon every other. He emphasizes that “all its many parts form one body” (v. 12). They all, whether Jew or Greek, have been baptized by one Spirit into one body, and have been made to drink of one Spirit (v. 13). All of the various members have been given gifts, not for personal satisfaction, but for the edification (building up) of the body as a whole (14:4–5, 12). While there is diversity of gifts, there is not to be division within the body. Some of these gifts are more conspicuous than others, but they are not therefore more important (12:14–25). No one gift is for everyone (12:27–31); this means, conversely, that no one person has all the gifts. Each member needs the others, and each is needed by the others.

There is mutuality in this understanding of the body; each believer encourages and builds up the others. In Ephesians 4:15–16, Paul concludes: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” There is to be a purity of the whole. Members of the body are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) and restore those who are found to be in sin (v. 1). In some cases, as here, dealing with sinful members may involve gentle restoration. At times, it may require barring from the fellowship those who are defiling it, that is, actual exclusion or excommunication. In Matthew 18:8, 17, Jesus spoke of this possibility, as did Paul in Romans 16:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:12–13.

The body is to be characterized by genuine fellowship. This does not mean merely social interrelatedness, but an intimate feeling for and understanding of one another. There are to be empathy and encouragement (edification). Thus Paul writes, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). The church in the book of Acts even shared material possessions with one another.

One aspect of the body of Christ that has been inadequately emphasized is that the fellowship extends across time. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of the great cloud of witnesses (12:1), those who have gone before (chap. 11). The African emphasis on ancestors fits well with this idea of the church transcending the boundaries of time.[1822] We are one with those who have gone before, and with those who are yet to come.

The body is to be a unified body. Members of the church in Corinth were divided as to what religious leader they should follow (1 Cor. 1:10–17; 3:1–9). Social cliques or factions had been formed and were very much in evidence at the gatherings of the church (1 Cor. 11:17–19). This was not to be, however, for all believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:12–13). Paul also wrote on another occasion: “There is one body and one Spirit; just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6).

All ethnic and social barriers have been removed, as Paul indicated: “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11). The same idea, with special reference to eliminating divisions between Jews and Gentiles within the body, is found in Romans 11:25–26, 32; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 2:15.

As the body of Christ, the church is the extension of his ministry. Having indicated that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him (Matt. 28:18), he sent his disciples to evangelize, baptize, and teach, promising them that he would be with them always, even to the end of the age (vv. 19–20). He told them that they were to carry on his work, and would do so to an amazing degree: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). The work of Christ, then, if it is done at all, will be done by his body, the church.

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

Filling out Paul’s trinitarian concept of the church is the picture of the church as the temple of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who brought the church into being at Pentecost, where he baptized the disciples and converted three thousand, giving birth to the church. And he has continued to populate the church: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13).

The church is now indwelt by the Spirit, both individually and collectively. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:16–17). Paul later tells them, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19). Elsewhere he describes believers as “a holy temple in the Lord . . . a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:21–22). And in a context where we find the image of Christ as the cornerstone of the temple, Peter speaks of believers as “a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5).

Dwelling within the church, the Holy Spirit imparts his life to it. Those qualities that are his nature and that are spoken of as the “fruit of the Spirit” will be found in the church: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). The presence of such qualities is indicative of the activity of the Holy Spirit and thus, in a sense, of the genuineness of the church.

It is the Holy Spirit who conveys power to the church. Jesus so indicated in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Because of the imminent coming of the Spirit with power Jesus could give his disciples the incredible promise that they would do even greater works than he had done (John 14:12). Thus Jesus told them, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). It is the Spirit who does whatever is necessary to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (v. 8).

The promise was very soon fulfilled. Not only did three thousand persons respond to Peter’s preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), but the Lord daily added to their number people who were being saved (v. 47). Filled with the Spirit, the disciples testified to Jesus’s resurrection with boldness and great power (4:31, 33). One simply cannot account for the effectiveness of those early believers’ ministry on the basis of their abilities or efforts. They were not unusual persons. The results were a consequence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

As we observed earlier, the Spirit, being one, also produces a unity within the body. This does not mean uniformity, but oneness in aim and action. The early church is described as being “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). They even held all their material goods in common (2:44–45; 4:32, 34–35). The Spirit had created in them a stronger consciousness of membership in the group than of

individual identity, and so they viewed their possessions not as “mine” and “yours,” but as “ours.”

The Holy Spirit, dwelling within the church, also creates a sensitivity to the Lord’s leading. Jesus had promised to continue to abide with his disciples (Matt. 28:20; John 14:18, 23). Yet he had said as well that he had to go away so that the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:7). We conclude that the indwelling Spirit is the means of Jesus’s presence with us. So Paul wrote: “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, even though your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:9–10). Paul uses interchangeably the ideas of Christ’s being in us and the Spirit’s dwelling in us.

As the Spirit indwelt Jesus’s disciples, he brought to their remembrance the Lord’s teachings (John 14:26) and guided them into all truth (16:13). This work of the Spirit was dramatically illustrated in the case of Peter. In a vision Peter was told to kill and eat certain unclean beasts that had been let down to earth in something like a great sheet (Acts 10:11–13). Peter’s first response was, “Surely not, Lord!” (v. 14), for he was well aware of the prohibition against eating unclean animals. Tradition told him to abstain. Peter soon realized, however, that the essence of the message of the vision was not that he should eat unclean animals, but that he should bring the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (vv. 17–48). The Holy Spirit renders believers who are set in their ways responsive and obedient to the leading of the Lord.

The Spirit is in one sense also the sovereign of the church. For it is he who equips the body by dispensing gifts, which in some cases are persons to fill various offices and in other cases are special abilities. He decides when a gift will be bestowed, and upon whom it is to be conferred. Paul writes, “All these [the several gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11).

Finally, the Holy Spirit makes the church holy and pure. For just as the temple was a holy and sacred place under the old covenant because God dwelt in it, so also are believers sanctified under the new covenant because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Special Problems

There are four special issues that require particular attention in our introductory chapter on the doctrine of the church: the relationship between the church and

the kingdom; the relationship between the church and Israel; the relationship between the visible and invisible church; and the time of the beginning of the church.

The Church and the Kingdom

There is obviously a close connection between the kingdom and the church. In fact, Jesus, having announced that he would build his church and that the powers of death would not prevail against it, immediately went on to say to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18–19). From this one might infer that the church is a synonym for the kingdom. Indeed, Geerhardus Vos argued that the imagery in this passage is that the church is a house built upon a rock foundation (v. 18) and the keys to the house will be turned over to Peter.[1823] George Ladd, however, correctly maintains that this is pressing metaphorical language too far. Rather, he argues, the kingdom is to be thought of as the reign of God.[1824] The church, by contrast, is a realm of God, the people who are under his rule. The kingdom is the rule of God, whereas the church is the human community under that rule.[1825] Ladd makes five basic points concerning the relationship between the kingdom and the church:[1826]

1. The church is not the kingdom.
2. The kingdom creates the church.
3. The church witnesses to the kingdom.
4. The church is the instrument of the kingdom.
5. The church is the custodian of the kingdom.

The church is a manifestation of the kingdom or reign of God, the form it takes on earth in our time. It is the concrete manifestation of God's sovereign rule in our hearts. Under the old covenant, the form of expression that the kingdom took was Israel. The kingdom can be found wherever God rules in human hearts. But more than that, it is found wherever his will is done. Thus, the kingdom was present in heaven even before the creation of humans, for the angels were subject to and obeyed God. They are included within his kingdom now, and will be in the future. But they never have been and never will be part of the church. The church is only one manifestation of the kingdom.

The Church and Israel

A second specialized issue concerns the relationship of Israel to the church. Here we encounter widely and sharply differing opinions and even disputes. On the one hand, some Reformed theologians see literal Israel as virtually swallowed up or displaced by the church or spiritual Israel.[1827] Nothing is left to be fulfilled in relationship to literal Israel; consequently, there is no need for a millennium in which Jews will be restored to a prominent place in God's work. On the other hand, dispensationalists regard Israel and the church as two eternally separate entities with which God deals in different ways.[1828] As Ladd has noted, the truth here, as in so many matters, lies somewhere between the two poles.[1829]

We note first that spiritual Israel has in many respects taken the place of literal Israel. Paul stressed this point in Romans and Galatians. For example, he wrote, "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:28–29). To the Galatians he wrote, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (3:29). Other pertinent passages include Romans 4:11, 16, 18; and 9:7–8.

Further, we should observe that some of the promises directed to literal Israel in the Old Testament are regarded by New Testament writers as having been fulfilled in spiritual Israel, the church. For example, Hosea wrote, "I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hos. 2:23). It is clear from Hosea 1:6–11 that this verse has reference to Israel. Paul, however, applies it to Jew and Gentile alike. For in speaking of "us, whom [God] also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles," he quotes this verse: "As [God] says in Hosea: 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one'" (Rom. 9:24–25). Ladd also cites Peter's application of Joel's promise, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2:17).[1830] It should be noted, however, that Peter was speaking to and about Jews at this point (Acts 2:5, 22). Thus, the assertion that Peter is here applying to the church promises made to Israel is open to question.

There is, however, a future for national Israel. They are still the special people of God. Having declared that Israel's rejection has meant the reconciliation of the world, Paul asks, "What will their [Israel's] acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15). The future is bright: "And in this way all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). Yet Israel will be saved by entering the church just as do the

Gentiles. There is no statement anywhere in the New Testament that there is any other basis of salvation.

To sum up, then: the church is the new Israel. It occupies the place in the new covenant that Israel occupied in the old. Whereas in the Old Testament the kingdom of God was peopled by national Israel, in the New Testament it is peopled by the church. There is a special future coming for national Israel, however, through large-scale conversion to Christ and entry into the church.

The Visible Church and the Invisible Church

A further issue is the relationship between the visible church and the invisible church. This distinction, which appeared as early as Augustine,[1831] was first enunciated clearly by Martin Luther[1832] and then incorporated by John Calvin into his theology as well.[1833] It was Luther's way of dealing with the apparent discrepancies between the qualities of the church as we find them laid out in Scripture and the characteristics of the empirical church, as it actually exists on earth. He suggested that the true church consists only of the justified, those savingly related to God.

The distinction between the visible and invisible church, a distinction that some would disallow, is not the same as the distinction between the local and the universal church. Rather, what we are dealing with here is the question of the extent to which the true church is to be identified with the present earthly institution. Is it possible, on the one hand, that persons within the visible church are not true believers, not actually part of the body of Christ? And conversely, can there be membership in Christ's body apart from affiliation with some segment of the visible church, some local collection of believers? Or, to put the matter differently, which is the prior factor, the institutional or the personal/spiritual? Does connection with the institutional church make one a Christian? Or is the church constituted by the individual Christian experiences of its members? Which justifies the other, the institutional organization or the individual spiritual experiences? These questions have been answered in several different ways.

On the one hand, some groups maintain that the institutional or visible church is prior. Traditional Roman Catholicism is probably the purest form of this point of view, although it is also characteristic of Anglican and Eastern Orthodox communions. Particular organizations are regarded as part of the true church if they can trace their origin to Christ's act establishing the church (Matt. 16:18).[1834] In this view, Jesus's statement, "I will build my church," was not simply a prediction and promise. It was a constitutive declaration. That this was

the point at which he initiated the church is confirmed by his subsequent statement: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (v. 19). In the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, Jesus here conferred upon the apostles a special status enabling them to define doctrine and convey grace, for example, by forgiving sins. It is this grace that gives salvation or makes one a Christian. The authority to dispense this grace was transmitted by the apostles to their successors, a process that has continued to this day.[1835]

A major mark, then, of a true church is apostolicity. Jesus gave his apostles an exclusive franchise, as it were; accordingly, a true church will display a specific pedigree. A true church is one that can trace itself back to the apostles and thus, of course, to Jesus’s act of establishing the church. Without such a pedigree there is no church, no salvation, and no Christians. A group of persons might gather, organize themselves into a corporation, conduct religious services, erect a structure, and call themselves a church, but they are not thereby constituted a church. What authenticates a group of people as a church is visible connection to a present-day organization that can be traced back historically to the New Testament church. Those who hold this view set extreme importance on such matters as the order of the church, its leadership and government, and the ordained clergy.

At the opposite extreme is what might be termed the pietistic approach to the church, although that term is somewhat misleading. The emphasis here is on the individual’s direct relationship to God through Jesus Christ, which alone makes one a Christian. And it is the presence of such believers, regenerate persons, that properly constitutes a group as a church.[1836] Note that in this view those who are savingly related to Christ make up the church, whether or not they are assembled into any visible group. Membership in a visible group is no guarantee whatsoever of justification in God’s sight, so the visible organization is relatively unimportant. In fact, some deny the necessity of being part of an organized body. Informal fellowship on a voluntary basis is all that is needed. In the case of groups such as the Plymouth Brethren, there may well be an aversion to anything resembling a formal structure and professional clergy.[1837] Church membership, as a permanent commitment to a given group of believers, is minimized in this individualistic approach. Parachurch organizations or house churches may take the place of the organized church. And intercongregational organizations, whether denominations or interdenominational fellowships, are considered rather unimportant. While Christians who take this approach may consider themselves

interdenominational, actually they are frequently nondenominational, and sometimes even antidenominational.

In some cases, the de-emphasis of the visible church may stem from a dispensational view that regards the church in general as a parenthesis in God's plan, a virtual afterthought. The emphasis here is that God's original intention related to national Israel. When the time of God's dealing with the church is completed, Israel will be reinstated to its position of primacy. The actual Davidic kingdom will be reestablished, as will even the Old Testament sacrifices. Israel and the church are separate and always will be.[1838] Israel's future primacy will not be the result of massive numbers of conversions incorporating Jews into the church, but of a reinstitution of Israel's special status as a nation. The church is a temporary phenomenon unforeseen in the Old Testament. Indeed, no Old Testament prophecy pertains to the church or is fulfilled in the church. Since this is the case and even the invisible church is relatively transient, the visible or institutional church certainly need not receive a great deal of attention.

This view could in some ways be more accurately referred to as the individualistic rather than the pietistic view. What makes the term "pietistic" appropriate, however, is that there is frequently a strong emphasis on the quality of individual Christian living. Since the individual's relationship to Christ is determinative of Christianity, individual piety and purity of life are exceedingly important. Thus, whenever individual Christians join together, they will emphasize such ethical qualities within the group as well. These qualities are not to be looked upon as characteristics of the group as a group, but of the individuals who happen to make it up.

Intermediate between the two views we have discussed is what might be termed the "parish" view. It stresses both the visible and invisible church. The visible church or parish includes all who make an outward profession and come together to hear the Word and celebrate the sacraments.[1839] The believers within this visible church constitute the true church, the invisible church.

According to this view, there are certain marks by which the presence of the true church can be detected. These are objective marks, not merely subjective criteria. That is to say, they are not merely qualities of the individuals making up the group, but of the local assembly quite apart from the spiritual condition of the individuals within it. The two most frequently mentioned are true preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments. The former has reference to purity or correctness of doctrine. The latter means that a duly authorized person administers the sacraments in an appropriate way to people entitled to receive them, and that there is a correct understanding of their efficacy.[1840]

Having examined these several views, we conclude that the distinction between the visible and invisible church needs to be maintained, but with qualifications. The parable of the weeds amid the wheat (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43) and Jesus's teaching about the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46) support this distinction. But it is to be seen as a recognition of the possibility of hypocrisy and even deceit, not as a demeaning of the importance of church membership. It is a reflection of the truth of 2 Timothy 2:19: "The Lord knows those who are his." Even one of Jesus's twelve disciples turned out to be a traitor.

We should observe that Scripture seems to look upon the individual's spiritual condition as prior. For example, Luke says of the early church, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). When questioned about salvation, the apostles never suggested that it depends on connection with a group of believers. When Peter and the others were asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), the reply was, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). Peter's message was the same in Acts 3:12–26 and 4:7–12. Paul's reply to the Philippian jailor's question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), was straightforward: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (v. 31). In none of these instances is there any suggestion that relationship to a group is determinative. Jesus's statement to the Samaritan woman indicates that worshiping in a particular place is of less importance than worshiping in spirit and truth (John 4:20–24).

Having assigned to faith the priority, or given precedence to the invisible over the visible, we must nevertheless not minimize the importance of the visible form of the church. It was apparently the standard procedure for the believer to become a part of the fellowship (see, e.g., Acts 2:47). Although we do not know exactly what membership in the apostolic church entailed, it was certainly for the purposes of edification, prayer, service, and, as can be seen particularly in Acts 5, discipline. We should therefore emphasize the importance of every believer's becoming an integral part of a group of believers, and making a firm commitment to it. Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others.

While acknowledging the distinction between the visible or empirical church and the invisible or spiritual fellowship, we should do whatever we can to make the two identical. Just as no true believer should be outside the fellowship, so also there should be diligence to ensure that only true believers are within. The handling of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), as well as Paul's instructions to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:1–5) and the Galatians (6:1) regarding the treatment of sinners, argues for a careful monitoring by the group of the spiritual condition

and conduct of the members. While perfect purity of the membership is an ideal that cannot be realized within this life (Matt. 13:24–30), open unbelief and sin are not to be tolerated.

The Time of Inception of the Church

A final question regarding the nature of the church relates to the time of its beginning. Louis Berkhof, among others, speaks of the church in the patriarchal and Mosaic periods.[1841] It is notable, however, that Jesus makes only two references to the church (Matt. 16:18; 18:17), and that in the former case he is speaking of the future ("I will build my church"). The fact that Luke never uses ἐκκλησία in his Gospel but employs it twenty-four times in Acts is also significant. It would seem that he did not regard the church as present until the period covered in Acts. (While Acts 7:38 uses ἐκκλησία of the people of Israel in the wilderness, it is likely that the term is here being used in a nontechnical sense.) We conclude that the church originated at Pentecost.

In light of this conclusion, we need to ask regarding the status of Israel. What of the Old Testament believers? We have argued that while the form the people of God took in the Old Testament was national Israel, in the New Testament it is the church, and that the church began with Pentecost. Does this mean that we who are now part of the church will be forever in a separate grouping from the Old Testament believers? I would suggest, instead, that those who were part of Israel prior to Pentecost have been incorporated into the church. This certainly seems to have been the case with the apostles. They had been part of Israel, but at Pentecost became the nucleus of the church. If the Old Testament believers, those who made up true Israel, were saved, like us, on the basis of Christ's redemptive life and death, then they may well have been swept by the event of Pentecost into the same body as the New Testament believers. Israel was not, then, simply succeeded by the church; Israel was included within the church. The people of God are truly one people; the body of Christ is truly one body.

Implications

1. The church is not to be conceived of primarily as a sociological phenomenon, but as a divinely established institution. Accordingly, its essence is to be determined not from an analysis of its activity, but from Scripture.

2. The church exists because of its relationship to the Triune God. It exists to carry out its Lord’s will by the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. The church is the continuation of the Lord’s presence and ministry in the world.
4. The church is to be a fellowship of regenerate believers who display the spiritual qualities of their Lord. Purity and devotion are to be emphasized.
5. While the church is a divine creation, it is made up of imperfect human beings. It will not reach perfect sanctification or glorification until its Lord’s return.

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The Role of the Church

Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe four functions of the church: evangelism, edification, worship, and social concern.
2. Recognize and define the gospel as the heart of the ministry of the church and implicit in every function of the church.
3. Define and explain the character of the church, which focuses on a willingness to serve and its adaptability in various areas.

Chapter Summary

The church has been charged to carry out Christ's ministry in the world. To accomplish this, certain functions must be met. A balance of these functions is essential to the spiritual health and well-being of the body. The gospel is at the very heart of the ministry of the church and is implicit in all of the functions of the church. When the gospel is modified, the church ceases to be balanced. To continue its existence, it is necessary for the church to be willing to serve, be adaptable in methodology, and be adaptable to its environment.

Study Questions

- What are the functions of the church, and how do they relate to one another?
- Why is the gospel at the heart of the ministry of the church?
- What does the Old Testament teach about the good news?
- What does Paul have to say about the gospel in his writings?
- What attitude must the church hold to perform its functions?

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Willingness to Serve

Adaptability

Although we have voiced criticism of the position that the church is to be defined in terms of its functions, those functions are nonetheless very important topics, for the church was not brought into being by our Lord simply to exist as an end in itself. Rather, it was brought into being to fulfill the Lord's intention for it. It is to carry on the Lord's ministry in the world—to perpetuate what he did and to do what he would do were he still here. Our first consideration in this chapter will be the various functions the church is charged with carrying out.[1842] Then we will examine what is at the heart of the ministry of the church and gives form to all that the church does, namely, the gospel. Finally, we will look at two qualities the church needs to display at the present time—willingness to serve and adaptability.

The Functions of the Church

Evangelism

The one topic emphasized in both accounts of Jesus's last words to his disciples is evangelism. In Matthew 28:19 he instructs them, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." In Acts 1:8 he says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This was the final point Jesus made to his disciples. It appears that he regarded evangelism as the very reason for their being.

The call to evangelize is a command. Having accepted Jesus as Lord, the disciples had brought themselves under his rule and were obligated to do whatever he asked. For he had said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15); "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me" (v. 21); and "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14). If the disciples truly loved their Lord, they would carry out his call to evangelize. It was not an optional matter for them.

The disciples were not sent out merely in their own strength, however. Jesus prefaced his commission with the statement, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). Having all authority, he commissioned the disciples as his agents. Thus they had the right to go and evangelize all nations. Further, Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and that they would consequently receive power. So they were both authorized and enabled for the task. Moreover, they were assured that he was not sending them off on their own. Although he was to be taken from them bodily, he would nonetheless be with them spiritually to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Note also the extent of the commission: it is all-inclusive. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus speaks of "all nations," and in Acts 1:8 he gives a specific enumeration: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Differing issues are involved at the various levels of this command.[1843]

Jerusalem was, of course, the immediate vicinity. While not the home territory of the inner circle of disciples (they were Galileans), it was the site of Pentecost. Since the first converts would have many close contacts in Jerusalem, it was natural for the church to witness and grow there. Jerusalem was also the most difficult place to witness, however, for it was the location of the scandal in connection with the events of Christ's last days, and especially his humiliating death by crucifixion. There would be a natural distrust of and perhaps even revulsion for any presentation of the message of the Savior. On the other hand, one advantage of witnessing in Jerusalem was that the people lived close enough to each other to unite into one congregation if they chose to do so.

Beyond Jerusalem, the disciples were to be witnesses in "all Judea." This area was basically homogeneous in its thinking and customs, for its inhabitants were Jews, and Judean Jews at that. Yet most of them were too far removed from the center in Jerusalem to gather there. Consequently, fulfillment of this part of the commission would result in the establishment of additional congregations.

Perhaps the most distasteful part of the commission for the disciples was the third part—"in Samaria." This took them to the people whom they found most difficult to love, and who would probably be least receptive to their message because of it being brought by Jews. The Jews and the Samaritans had been engaged in conflict for a long time. The friction dated back to the time of the Jews' return from the Babylonian captivity. Samaritans were the product of intermarriage of the Israelites left behind by the Assyrians and various foreign colonists whom the Assyrians then sent in to help repopulate the area. When the Jews returned from Babylon and began to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans offered to help, but their offer was spurned. From that time on, there was friction between the two groups. This is evident in the Gospel accounts of Jesus's ministry. When Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water, she responded, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" John comments, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4:9). This was an unusual encounter, for Jesus and his disciples did not ordinarily pass through Samaria, preferring rather to cross the Jordan River and travel through Perea in their journeys between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. Jesus lent additional force to his parable about loving one's neighbor by making its hero a Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). The Jews meant to insult Jesus when they asked, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" (John 8:48). It is likely that the former taunt (to which Jesus did not reply) was intended to be the more humiliating of the two. Surely the Samaritans were the people whom the Jews would have least liked to see included in the church with them, yet Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses in . . . Samaria."

Finally, the disciples were to bear witness "to the ends of the earth." There was no geographical restriction upon the commission. They were to take the gospel message everywhere, to all nations and to every type of people. They could not, of course, accomplish this on their own. Rather, as they won converts, those converts would in turn evangelize yet others. Thus the message would spread in ever-widening circles, and the task would eventually be completed.

Therefore, if the church is to be faithful to its Lord and bring joy to his heart, it must be engaged in bringing the gospel to all people. This includes people whom we may by nature tend to dislike. It extends to those who are unlike us.

And it goes beyond our immediate sphere of contact and influence. In a very real sense, local evangelism, church extension or church planting, and world missions are all the same thing. The only difference lies in the length of the radius. The church must work in all of these areas. If it does not, it will become spiritually ill, for it will be attempting to function in a way its Lord never intended.

Edification

The second major function of the church is the edification of believers. Although Jesus laid greater emphasis on evangelism, the edification of believers is logically prior. Paul repeatedly spoke of the edification of the body. In Ephesians 4:12, for example, he indicates that God has given various gifts to the church "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Believers are to grow up into Christ: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (v. 16). The potential for edification is the criterion by which all activities, including our speech, are to be measured: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (v. 29).

Moreover, in Paul's discussion of certain controversial spiritual gifts, he brings up the matter of edification. He says, for example, in 1 Corinthians 14:4–5: "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified." The importance of edifying others as one exercises controversial gifts is mentioned again, in varying ways, in verses 12, 17, and 26. The last of these references sums up the matter: "Everything must be done so that the church may be built up." Note that edification is mutual upbuilding by all the members of the body, not merely the minister or pastor.

There are several means by which members of the church are to be edified. One of them is fellowship.[1844] The New Testament speaks of κοινωνία (*koinōnia*), literally, a having or holding all things in common. And indeed, according to Acts 5, the members of the early church even held all their material possessions in common. Paul speaks of sharing one another's experiences: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). While hurt is reduced, joy is increased by being

shared. We are to encourage and sympathize with each other. Believers are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

On occasion this may entail correction and rebuke, which should be administered lovingly. Jesus laid down a pattern for discipline in Matthew 18:15–17. In severe cases, there may even be a need for excommunication from the group, as in the case of the immoral man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1–2. The primary aim of such disciplinary action is not to rid the group of the erring member, however, but to restore such a person to righteous living and thus to fellowship with believers.

One of the values of community is that the church becomes the guard against the tendencies of individuals to deviate in favor of the bias of their own ideas and desires. During the modern period, there was a strong emphasis on the individual, so that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers sometimes became perverted into "everyone is entitled to his own opinion," or "no one can tell me what to believe or do." Yet those who more recently have emphasized the community dimension of the church have paradoxically tended not to set fixed standards of belief and living, or to take action against those who deviate from them.[1845] This may well be an overreaction to authoritarian and legalistic Christianity they have experienced in the past.

The church also edifies its members through instruction or teaching.[1846] This is part of the broad task of discipling. One of Jesus's commands in the Great Commission was, "[teach] them [converts] to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). To this end, one of God's gifts to the churches is "pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11) to prepare and equip the people of God for service. The instruction need not always be given by the official pastor-teacher of a congregation, however, nor need it be given within a large group. A beautiful picture of this truth is seen in Acts 18. Apollos, a learned and eloquent Jew who had come to a knowledge of Jesus, was speaking powerfully in the synagogue of Ephesus. There Priscilla and Aquila heard him, whereupon they invited him to their home and "explained to him the way of God more adequately" (v. 26). He then continued his ministry with even greater effectiveness.

Education may take many forms and occur on many levels. It is incumbent upon the church to utilize all legitimate means and technologies available today. First of all, there is Christian education in the local church. Beyond that level the local church cooperates with other churches to carry on specific aspects of their instructional task. For example, theological seminaries and divinity schools equip pastor-teachers and others to instruct people in the Word. This is a case of Paul's command to Timothy: "And the things you have heard me say in the

presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Since the church has the task of teaching the truth of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, by implication it has the obligation to grow in its understanding of that revelation. Thus the task of biblical scholarship is incumbent upon the church. This task is carried out by specialists who possess gifts in such matters. But the church must study not merely God's special revelation, but also his general revelation and the relationships between the two. Christian liberal arts colleges are one means by which the church can fulfill its responsibility to instruct. Christian day schools and academies represent the same endeavor on a less advanced level. And mission schools, where basic literacy is taught, equip people to read the biblical message.

Preaching is another means of instruction that has been used by the Christian church from its very beginning.[1847] In 1 Corinthians 14, when Paul speaks of prophesying, he probably is referring to preaching. He comments that prophesying is of greater value than is speaking in tongues, because it edifies or builds up the church: "But everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church" (vv. 3–4).

To the end of mutual edification God has equipped the church with various gifts apportioned and bestowed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). As we noted earlier (p. 798), the New Testament contains four significantly different lists of these gifts. Whenever virtues like faith, service, and giving, which, on biblical grounds, are to be expected of all believers, are represented as special gifts of the Spirit, it appears that the writer has in mind unusual or extraordinary dimensions or degrees of those virtues. The Holy Spirit in his wisdom has given just what is needed, so that the body as a whole may be properly built up and equipped.

Worship

Another activity of the church is worship. Whereas edification focuses on the believers and benefits them, worship concentrates on the Lord. The early church came together to worship on a regular schedule, a practice commanded and commended by the apostle Paul. His direction to the Corinthians to set aside money on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2) intimates that they regularly gathered for worship on that day. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers not to neglect the assembling of themselves together as was the habit of some (Heb. 10:25). Although worship emphasizes God, it is also intended to benefit the worshipers. This we infer from Paul's warning against prayers, songs, and

thanksgivings that fail to edify because no one is present to interpret their meaning to those who do not understand (1 Cor. 14:15–17).

Worship, the praise and exaltation of God, was a common Old Testament practice, as can be seen particularly in the book of Psalms. And in the pictures of heaven in the book of Revelation and elsewhere, the people of God are represented as recognizing and declaring his greatness. In this aspect of its activity, the church centers its attention on who and what God is, not on itself. It aims at appropriately expressing God's nature, not at satisfying its own feelings.[1848]

It is important at this point to note the locus of the various functions of the church. In biblical times the church gathered for worship and instruction. Then it went out to evangelize. In worship, the members of the church focus on God; in instruction and fellowship, they focus on themselves and fellow Christians; in evangelism, they turn their attention to non-Christians. It is well for the church to keep some separation among these several activities. If this is not done, one or more may be crowded out. As a result the church will suffer since all of these activities, like the various elements in a well-balanced diet, are essential to the spiritual health and well-being of the body. For example, worship of God will suffer if the gathering of the body becomes oriented primarily to the interaction among Christians, or if the service is aimed exclusively at evangelizing the unbelievers who are present. This was not the pattern of the church in the book of Acts. Rather, believers gathered to praise God and be edified; then they went forth to reach the lost in the world outside.

Worship need not follow any one stereotyped form. There is room for considerable variation in style of music, liturgy, prayers, and message. To some extent, the form these elements take will vary in accordance with the culture within which the worship takes place. In some cases, there will be rather set and prescribed worship. In others, there is more freedom of variation. Guidance in these matters is given by Paul, instructing that all things be done "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40), and yet that the Spirit not be quenched. Elements of ancient practice may be utilized, or elements of contemporary culture, so long as these are not directly connected with beliefs and practices that conflict with those that are biblically revealed. In all of this, the focus should be on glorifying God and bringing the worshiper into contact with God. The goal should be neither preservation of a practice because it has been done that way for a long time, nor introduction of a practice for the sake of innovation.

Social Concern

Cutting across the various functions of the church is its responsibility to perform acts of Christian love and compassion for both believers and non-Christians. It is clear that Jesus cared about the problems of the needy and the suffering.[1849] He healed the sick and even raised the dead on occasion. If the church is to carry on his ministry, it will be engaged in some form of ministry to the needy and the suffering. That Jesus expects this of believers is evident in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Jesus told this parable to the lawyer who, understanding that one can inherit eternal life by loving God with one's whole being and loving one's neighbor as oneself, asked who his neighbor was. In answering the question, Jesus also explained what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself. The good Samaritan, although he had nothing to do with the assault on the man going down to Jericho, took it upon himself to care for the victim's needs even at personal cost, inconvenience, and possible danger. Since love of neighbor is closely linked by the law to love of God and involves actions like those of the good Samaritan, the Christian church must be concerned about hurt and need in the world. Indeed, Jesus suggests in Matthew 25:31–46 that the one sign by which true believers can be distinguished from those who make empty professions is acts of love done in Jesus's name and emulating his example. Concern for the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner is appropriate for those who worship a God who himself displays such concern (Deut. 10:17–19).

Emphasis on social concern carries over into the Epistles as well. James is particularly strong in stressing practical Christianity. Consider, for example, his definition of religion: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). He speaks out sharply against showing favoritism to the rich, an evil that occurred even within the church (2:1–11). He excoriates verbal encouragement unaccompanied by action: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (2:15–17). John is equally pointed: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17–18). The half brother of Jesus and the beloved disciple had learned well what Jesus had taught to be the meaning of "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Social concern includes condemning unrighteousness as well. Amos and several other Old Testament prophets spoke out emphatically against the evil and

corruption of their day. John the Baptist likewise condemned the sin of Herod, the ruler of his day, even though it cost him his liberty (Luke 3:19–20) and eventually even his life (Mark 6:17–29).

The church is to show concern and take action wherever it sees need, hurt, or wrong. There will be differences of opinion as to the strategies and tactics that should be employed. In some cases, the church will work simply to alleviate the hurt, that is, to treat the consequences of the problem. In others, it will act to change the circumstances that have produced the problem. There will be times when the church acting collectively will be able to accomplish more than Christians acting individually; in other situations the reverse will be true.[1850]

The church has a great deal to do by way of improving its record. Yet it occasionally fails to note just how much has already been accomplished. What percentage of the colleges and hospitals in England and the United States were founded in earlier years by Christian groups? Today many of the charitable and educational functions once carried out by the church are instead managed by the state and supported by taxes paid by both Christians and non-Christians. Consider also that the social needs in developed countries are not nearly as severe as they once were.

Many of the churches that minimize the need for regeneration claim that evangelicals have not participated sufficiently in the alleviation of human needs.[1851] When, however, one shifts the frame of reference from the American domestic scene to the world, the picture is quite different. For evangelicals, concentrating their medical, agricultural, and educational ministries in countries where the needs are most severe, have outstripped their counterparts in the "mainline" churches in worldwide mission endeavor. Indeed, on a per capita basis, evangelicals have done more than have the liberal churches, and certainly much more than has the general populace.[1852]

The Heart of the Ministry of the Church: The Gospel

It is important for us now to look closely at the one factor that gives basic shape to everything the church does, the element that lies at the heart of all its functions, namely, the gospel, the good news. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus announced that he had been anointed specially to preach the gospel; later he charged the apostles to continue his ministry by spreading the gospel.

Jesus entrusted to the believers the good news that had characterized his own teaching and preaching from the very beginning. In the book of Mark, Jesus's first recorded activity after his baptism and temptation is his preaching the

gospel in Galilee: “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:14–15). Similarly, Luke records that Jesus inaugurated his ministry in Nazareth by reading from Isaiah 61:1–2 and applying the prophecy to himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19). And when John the Baptist inquired whether Jesus was really the one who had been prophesied, Jesus’s reply included as evidence the fact that “the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Luke 7:22). Matthew characterizes the ministry of Jesus as “teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matt. 9:35). Furthermore, Jesus linked fidelity to the gospel very closely with commitment to him: “‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions) and in the age to come eternal life’” (Mark 10:29–30). He also declared that the good news must be preached to all nations or throughout the world before the end (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10).

The key Old Testament word with reference to the gospel is the verb ר ַ ָּ (*basar*). It has the general sense of “proclaiming good news.” An example is found in 1 Kings 1:42, where Adonijah says to Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest, “Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.” David uses the verb in 2 Samuel 4:10: “when someone told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news!” A messenger coming from battle is thought to be bearing good tidings (2 Sam. 18:27). In Jeremiah 20:15 the verb is used of the glad tidings of the birth of a son.

In some cases, the verb ר ַ ָּ is used of a message that is not favorable, as in 1 Samuel 4:17, where a messenger announces the defeat of Israel, the loss of the ark, and the death of Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, a combination of bad news that resulted in Eli’s death—he fell backward from his seat and broke his neck (v. 18). In 1 Kings 1:42 and Isaiah 52:7, as well as 2 Samuel 18:27, the adjective ב ט (*tob*, “good”) is used in conjunction with ר ַ ָּ. Consequently, some scholars have concluded that the verb by itself means simply “to deliver a message.” That is, it is thought to be neutral as to whether the news is good or

bad. Gerhard Friedrich rejects this conclusion, appealing to evidence from other Semitic languages:

> This is not so. In all Semitic languages, in Accadian, Ethiopic and Arabic, the sense of "joy" is contained in the stem. The realistic conception of the "word" in Semitic languages is shown by the fact that they have a social stem for declaring something good, whereas Latin and modem languages do not, and Greek takes a middle course by constructing the composite εὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι. The addition בשׂ in the OT is simply a strengthening of something already present in the stem.[1853]

Similarly, the key New Testament words with reference to the gospel, εὐαγγελίζομαι (*euangelizomai*) and εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), by virtue of the element εὐ (*eu*), invariably denote good tidings.[1854] In fact, Friedrich states categorically: "εὐαγγέλιον is a technical term for 'news of victory.'"[1855]

It has been questioned whether Jesus used the term εὐαγγέλιον (or, more correctly, its Aramaic equivalent) in speaking of himself. The scope of this volume does not permit our considering all of the arguments that have accumulated on the subject. It is sufficient to observe that Jesus thought of himself not only as declaring, but also as constituting, the good news:

> The really decisive question is not whether Jesus himself used the word *euangelion* but whether it is a word appropriate to the substance of his message. There is no doubt that Jesus saw his message of the coming kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14) which is already present in his word and action as good news. . . . Moreover, he appears not only as the messenger and author of the message, but at the same time as its subject, the one of whom the message tells. It is therefore quite consistent for the early Christian church to take up the term *euangelion* to describe the message of salvation connected with the coming of Jesus.[1856]

Friedrich observes that whether Jesus used the word εὐαγγέλιον of himself is "a question of His Messianic consciousness. If He realised that He was the Son of God who must die and rise again, then He also realised that He was Himself the content of the message. . . . What is given with His person constitutes the content of the Gospel."[1857]

Among New Testament writers, Paul makes the greatest use of the terms εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαλλελίζομαι. On many occasions he uses the noun without any qualifier; that is, there is no adjective, phrase, or clause to define what he means by "the gospel" (Rom. 1:16; 10:16; 11:28; 1 Cor. 4:15; 9:14 [twice]; 9:23; 2 Cor. 8:18; Gal. 2:5, 14; Phil. 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15; 1 Thess. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:8; Philem. 13). Obviously, εὐαγγέλιον had a meaning sufficiently standardized that Paul's readers knew precisely what he meant by "the gospel." The word has two basic senses: active proclamation of the message and the content proclaimed. Both senses occur in 1 Corinthians 9:14: "those who preach

the gospel [the content] should receive their living from the gospel [the act of proclaiming it].”’

It is apparent that when Paul uses εὐαγγέλιον as the direct object of a verb of speaking or hearing, he has in view a particular content, a particular body of facts. Among the verbs of speaking used in conjunction with εὐαγγέλιον are εὐαγγελίζομαι (1 Cor. 15:1; 2 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:11), καταγγέλλω (*katangellō*, 1 Cor. 9:14), κηρύσσω (*kērussō*, Gal. 2:2; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:9), λαλέω (*laleō*, 1 Thess. 2:2), γνωρίζω (*gnōrizō*, 1 Cor. 15:1; Eph. 6:19), διδάσκω (*didaskō*, Gal. 1:12), and ἀνατίθημι (*anatithēmi*, Gal. 2:2).

Verbs of hearing used with εὐαγγέλιον include ἀκούω (*akouō*, Col. 1:23), προακούω (*proakouō*, Col. 1:5), παραλαμβάνω (*paralambanō*, 1 Cor. 15:1; Gal. 1:12), and δέχομαι (*dechomai*, 2 Cor. 11:4).

The question arises, If Paul and his readers viewed the gospel as involving a certain content, what is that content? While Paul nowhere gives us a complete and detailed statement of the tenets of the gospel, some passages are indicative of what it includes. In Romans 1:3–4 he speaks of the gospel “regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul reminds his readers in what terms he had preached the gospel to them (v. 1): “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas . . . to the Twelve . . . to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, . . . to James, then to all the apostles, and . . . to me also” (vv. 3–8). A briefer reference is Paul’s exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:8: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.”

To summarize: Paul viewed the gospel as centering on Jesus Christ and what God has done through him. The essential points of the gospel are Jesus Christ’s status as the Son of God, his genuine humanity, his death for our sins, and his burial, resurrection, subsequent appearances, and future coming in judgment. It may well be said that, in Paul’s view, Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. In fact, the apostle uses the expression “the gospel of Christ” on several occasions (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 3:2). Friedrich contends that we should not attempt to determine whether the objective or subjective genitive is being used in these passages; Christ is to be understood as both the object and the author of the message.[1858] Paul sees the essential truths of this gospel message as fulfillments of Old Testament promises (Rom. 1:1–4; 16:25–26; 1 Cor. 15:1–4). Even the fact of coming judgment is good

news to the believer (Rom. 2:16), since Christ will be the agent of judgment. For the believer, the result of the judgment will be vindication, not condemnation.

Taking note of what Paul opposes or refutes is another way of determining some of the basic elements in the gospel. The occasion of his letter to the Galatians was their turning away from what he had preached, and the one in whom they had believed, to a different kind of gospel—which, in reality was not a gospel at all (Gal. 1:6–9). Some of the Galatians had come to believe that righteousness, at least a degree of it, can be attained by works. The true gospel, on the other hand, argues Paul, categorically maintains that one is justified by faith in the gracious work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

These considerations notwithstanding, we must not think of the gospel as merely a recital of theological truths and historical events. Rather, it relates them to the situation of every individual believer. Thus, Jesus died "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Nor is the resurrection of Jesus an isolated event; it is the beginning of the general resurrection of all believers (1 Cor. 15:20 in conjunction with Rom. 1:3–4). Furthermore, the fact of coming judgment pertains to everyone. We will all be evaluated on the basis of our personal attitude toward and response to the gospel: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8).

To Paul, the gospel is all-important. He declares to the church in Rome that the gospel "is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16). He reminds the Corinthians: "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2). He explains to the Ephesians: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13). It is the means by which life is obtained. He writes to Timothy that "it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). The gospel brings peace and hope to those who believe. Accordingly, Paul speaks of "the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15) and "the hope held out in the gospel" (Col. 1:23).

Convinced that only the gospel can bring salvation along with all its attendant blessings, Paul insists that the gospel is absolute and exclusive. Nothing is to be added to or taken from it, nor is there any alternate route to salvation. We have already alluded to the case of certain Judaizers who came to Galatia after Paul had preached there. Seeking to improve upon the gospel, they insisted that Gentile converts submit to circumcision, a rite the Old Testament law had required of proselytes to Judaism. Paul was very vigorously opposed, since any

reliance upon such works would constitute a partial loss of confidence in the efficacy of grace. He reminded the Galatians that those who rely on the law are required to fulfill all of its points and hence are doomed to fail (Gal. 3:10). Those believers who have turned to this different gospel have deserted the one who called them (1:6). Paul is so categorically opposed to any effort to alter the gospel message that he declares, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be eternally under God’s curse!” (v. 8). He reiterates this thought in the following verse: “If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!” (v. 9). (The verb in the first statement is subjunctive [“should preach”], pointing to a hypothetical situation; the verb in the latter is indicative [“is preaching”], pointing to an actual situation.) Surely Paul would be this insistent only on a point of the utmost significance.

Knowing that the gospel is the only route to salvation, Paul is determined to defend it. He writes to the Philippians of his “defending and confirming the gospel” (Phil. 1:7). Those who preach Christ out of love know that Paul has been in prison for the defense of the gospel (v. 16). In both instances, the Greek word is ἀπολογία (*apologia*), a legal term signifying the case of someone who has been brought to trial. Paul was prepared to give a reasoned argument for the gospel. It is in his letter to the church at Philippi that Paul speaks of his defense of the gospel. It is likely that the jailer who had responded to Paul’s presentation of the gospel and was saved (Acts 16:25–34) was a member of that church. Having witnessed in that very city an earthshaking demonstration of the power of God to salvation, could Paul ever have surrendered the gospel? Yet some people have contended that the gospel needs no defense, that it can stand on its own two feet. This reasoning, however, runs contrary to the pattern of Paul’s own activity, for example, his speech in the middle of the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34).[1859] The objection to an apologetic approach fails to recognize that in creating belief, the Holy Spirit makes use of human minds and reason.

But we must not characterize Paul’s activity as simply a defense of the gospel. He went on the offensive as well. He was eager to proclaim the good news to all nations. He wanted to see it established everywhere. He wanted to preach it to the Romans (Rom. 1:15). He had a sense of compulsion about his mission: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

This gospel not only cuts across all racial, social, economic, and educational barriers (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:28), but also spans the centuries of time. A message that does not become obsolete (Jude 3), it is the church’s sacred trust today. In an age in which most ideas and systems of thought, as well as techniques and commodities, are of a throwaway variety, the church has an infallible and

enduring resource—a message that is the only means of salvation. The church can display the same confidence in the gospel that Paul had, for it is still the same gospel; time has not eroded its effectiveness.

The church has good news to offer to the world, news that, as we observed earlier, brings hope. In this respect the message and ministry of the church are unique. For in our world today there is little hope. Of course, to varying degrees there has always been a lack of hope. Sophocles, in the golden age of Greece some five centuries before Christ, wrote: "Not to be born at all—that is by far the best fate. The second best is as soon as one is born with all speed to return thither whence one has come."[1860] In the twentieth century, however, hopelessness reached new proportions. Existentialism has spawned literary works like Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* and Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*. There is little encouraging news, whether social, economic, or political, in the newspapers. In *Herzog*, Saul Bellow has captured well the spirit of the entire age: "But what is the philosophy of this generation? Not God is dead, that period was passed long ago. Perhaps it should be stated Death is God. This generation thinks—and this is its thought of thoughts—that nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have any true power. Death waits for these things as a cement floor waits for a dropping light bulb."[1861] By contrast, the church says with Peter, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). There is hope, and it comes to fulfillment when we believe and obey the gospel.

The gospel offers its blessings of peace, joy, and satisfaction in a way contrary to what we expect. (This is not surprising, since Jesus was not the kind of Messiah his contemporaries expected.) We do not obtain the benefits of the gospel by seeking them directly, for Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). Only when we give up our own will, self-seeking, and pride, do peace, joy, and satisfaction emerge. The same point can be made regarding the matter of self-esteem. Those who seek to build up their self-esteem directly will fail. For genuine self-esteem is a by-product of exalting and esteeming God.

Because the gospel has been, is, and will always be the way of salvation, the only way, the church must preserve the gospel at all costs. When the gospel is modified, the vitality of the church is lost. The church dies. Kenneth Scott Latourette notes what resulted when rationalism ate away parts of the gospel message, and particularly the person of Christ:

> Those forms [of the church] which conformed so much to the environment that they sacrificed this timeless and placeless identity died out with the passing of the age, the society, and the climate of opinion to which they had adjusted themselves. The central core of the uniqueness of Jesus, of fidelity to his birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection as events in history, and of belief in God's working through him for the revelation of Himself and the redemption of man proved essential to continuing life.[1862]

The truth of Latourette's observations became evident in twentieth-century Christianity. Groups which in the first half of the century abandoned the gospel of supernatural regeneration through faith in a supernatural, atoning Christ have not prospered. Indeed, they have declined, as spiritual momentum ebbed from them. Conservative evangelical groups, on the other hand, have grown. Those groups that have continued to preach the gospel Paul preached, which have offered an authentic alternative to an unbelieving or secular world, have succeeded in winning non-Christians. This phenomenon has been examined in books like Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*.[1863] The gospel is still the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, just as it was in the first century.

The Character of the Church

Not only the church's functions but also the attitude or disposition with which the church performs its functions is a matter of extreme importance. Since the church is, in its continuing existence, Christ's body and bears his name, it should be characterized by the attributes Christ manifested during his physical incarnation on earth. Two of these attributes are crucial as the church operates in our rapidly changing world: willingness to serve and adaptability.

Willingness to Serve

Jesus stated that his purpose in coming was not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28). In becoming incarnate he took upon himself the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (v. 8). The church must display a similar willingness to serve. It has been placed in the world to serve its Lord and the world, not to be exalted and have its own needs and desires satisfied. Although the church may attain great size, wealth, and prestige, that is not its purpose.

Jesus did not associate with people for what they could in turn do for him. If he had, he would never have gone to Zacchaeus's home, or engaged the Samaritan woman in conversation, or allowed the sinful woman to wash his feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. These were acts of which a modern campaign manager or public relations expert would certainly have disapproved, for they were not helpful in gaining Jesus prestige or favorable publicity. But Jesus was not interested in exploiting people. Similarly, the church today will not determine its activity on the basis of what will enable it to prosper and grow. Rather, it will seek to follow its Lord's example of service. It will be willing to go to the undesirables and helpless, those who cannot give anything in return to the church. A true representative of the church will even be willing to give his or her life, if necessary, for the sake of its ministry.

Willingness to serve means that the church will not seek to dominate society for its own purposes. The question of the relationship of church and state has had a long and complex history. Scripture tells us that the state, like the church, is an institution created by God for a specific purpose (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17). Many models of church-state relationships have been devised and put into practice. Some of these models have involved such a close alliance between the two that the power of the state virtually compelled church membership and certain religious practices. But in such cases the church was acting as a master rather than a servant. The right goal was pursued, but in the wrong fashion (as would have been the case had Jesus succumbed to the temptation to fall down and worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world). This is not to say that the church should not receive the benefits the state provides for all within its realm, or that the church should not address the state on issues regarding which legislation is to be enacted. But it will not seek to use political force to compel spiritual ends.

Adaptability

The church must also be versatile and flexible in adjusting its methods and procedures to the changing situations of the world in which it finds itself. It must go where needy persons are found, even if that means a geographical or cultural change. It must not cling to all its old ways. As the world to which it is trying to minister changes, the church will have to adapt its ministry accordingly, but without altering its basic direction.

As the church adapts, it will be emulating its Lord, who did not hesitate to come to earth to redeem humanity. In doing so, he took on the conditions of the human race (Phil. 2:5–8). In similar fashion, the body of Christ will preserve the

basic message with which it has been entrusted, and continue to fulfill the major functions of its task, but will make all legitimate changes necessary to carry out its Lord's purposes. The stereotypical church—a rural congregation led by but one minister and consisting of a group of nuclear families who meet at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning in a small white building with a steeple—still exists in some places. But it is the exception. Circumstances are now very different in most parts of the world. If the church has a sense of mission like that of its Lord, however, it will find ways to reach people wherever they are.

The aim, as we suggested in chapter 4, is to preserve the essential nature of the Christian message and mission, while expressing and applying it in forms that make sense to contemporaries. This may involve some rather major changes in the form and function of the church. Some have succeeded in ministering in a relevant fashion, while maintaining a biblically based theology.[1864] Others, however, modify not only the form but also the content of the church's message and life, to the point that there is major difference from the New Testament church.[1865] The words of Latourette, quoted earlier, are a reminder that long-term faithfulness to its calling, rather than short-term relevance to culture, should be the church's goal. Interestingly, some who are able to recognize the church's conformity to an earlier culture either do not recognize the same problem in their own time or think a closer identification to a more current culture to be a good thing. While finding creative ways to utilize its culture as a vehicle for communication of the gospel, the church must always recognize that there will be inevitable points of incompatibility between biblically revealed Christianity and the culture, whether Greek, modern, postmodern, or any other.

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The Government and Unity of the Church

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to achieve the following:

1. Identify and evaluate the episcopal, presbyterian, congregational, and nongovernmental forms of church government.
2. Design a church government that incorporates all of the best elements of previously organized church governments based on Scripture.
3. Explain the alternative views of who may hold leadership roles in the church.
4. Identify and explain the biblical, theological, and practical considerations that surround the issue of church unity.
5. Identify and assess the different conceptions of church unity.
6. Develop a position on church unity that follows appropriate biblical and theological guidelines.

Chapter Summary

As the church has developed, several forms of church government have appeared. The four most basic forms are episcopal, presbyterian, congregational, and a form of nongovernment. The congregational model best fulfills principles found in Scripture of order, the priesthood

of the believer, and the value of the person to the whole body. Special issues include the eligibility of women for leadership roles in the church. There are many sound biblical, theological, and practical reasons for the church to be unified. There is not agreement, however, on the form unity should take. Although the formal ecumenical movement has declined, many ministries have emphasized fellowship and cooperative activity apart from denominational distinctives. There are biblical and theological guidelines that can help a believer deal appropriately with the issue of unity.

Study Questions

- What is significant about the office of the bishop in the episcopal form of church government, and how was it formed in the Roman Catholic Church?
- What scriptural support can be found for the presbyterian form of church government?
- How do congregational churches relate to other congregational churches?
- Why have the Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren chosen to minimize the structure of their churches?
- How would you respond if the members of a new congregation asked you to advise them on what form of church government they should choose?

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As groups of believers become more permanent and formally constituted, the question of church government naturally arises. The issue of church government is in the final analysis a question of where authority resides within the church and who is to exercise it. Although the advocates of the various forms of church government agree that God is (or has) the ultimate authority, they differ in their conceptions of how or through whom he expresses or exercises it.

Forms of Church Government

Throughout the history of the church there have been several basic forms of church government. Our study will begin with the most highly structured and move on to the less structured. After carefully examining the basic forms, we will attempt to determine whether one is more adequate than the others.

Episcopal

In the episcopal form of church government, authority resides in a particular office, that of the bishop (ἐπίσκοπος—*episcopos*). There may be varying degrees of episcopacy, that is to say, the number of levels of bishops varies. The simplest form of episcopal government is found in the Methodist Church, which has only one level of bishops. Somewhat more developed is the governmental structure of the Anglican or Episcopal Church, while the Roman Catholic Church has the most complete system of hierarchy, with authority being vested especially in the supreme pontiff, the bishop of Rome, the pope.

Inherent in the episcopal structure is the idea of different levels of ministry or different degrees of ordination.[1866] The first level is that of the ordinary minister or priest. In some churches there are steps or divisions within this first level, for example, deacon and elder. The clergy at this level are authorized to perform all of the basic duties associated with the ministry; that is, they preach and administer the sacraments. Beyond this level, however, a second level of ordination constitutes one a bishop and invests that individual with certain special powers.

The bishop is the key to the functioning of church government. Some would go so far as to say that the episcopacy is of the very essence of the church: the church cannot exist without it.[1867] Indeed, a few would even assert that the episcopacy *is* the church. Those who claim that the episcopacy is necessary to the very being of the church include the Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics (or High Church Anglicans). Others, such as Low Church Anglicans, see the system of bishops as but one of a number of forms of church government with scriptural basis.[1868] They do, however, view episcopacy as the best system for doing the work of the kingdom. It is desirable and perhaps even necessary for the well-being, but not the being, of the church. Therefore, the powers of the bishop are considerable, if not absolute. Finally, there are churches that retain the office of bishop, but with considerably lessened powers. Throughout the history of the Methodist Church, for example, the amount of power granted to the bishops has varied.[1869]

The role of the bishops is to exercise the power of God that has been vested in them. Their authority transcends that of ordinary ministers. In particular, as God's representatives and pastors they govern and care for a group of churches rather than merely one local congregation.[1870]

One particular power of the bishop is ordination of ministers or priests. In laying hands upon a candidate for ordination, the bishop vests in the candidate the powers that attach to the ministry. The bishop also has the authority of pastoral placement. In theory, this is absolute power to place a minister in a particular local parish. In practice, however, the episcopacy has tended toward a greater democratization in recent years; the bishop or the bishop's representative usually consults the local congregation regarding their wishes and sometimes even permits the congregation a considerable amount of initiative in the matter, especially in the Methodist system. The bishop also has the responsibility of preserving the true faith and the proper order within a particular geographical area by exercising discipline.

Viewed as the primary channel by which God expresses his authority upon earth, bishops have in times past exercised wide responsibilities in temporal

affairs. Certain communions regard the bishops as the successors to the apostles. By the laying on of hands in the ceremony of ordination, the authority of the apostles has been transmitted down through history to the bishops of today. According to this theory, which is known as apostolic succession, modern bishops have the authority the apostles had, and which they had in turn received from Christ.[1871]

There is, in this scheme, little distinction between the visible and the invisible church. The bishops define the church. They are not chosen from below but from above. A bishop is a bishop because of being chosen either by someone on a higher level (such as an archbishop) or by other bishops. Where those who are to rule or guide the church are selected by people at a lower level, it is questionable whether a bishopric really exists, even if the name is used.

The most highly developed episcopal form of government is that found within the Roman Catholic Church.[1872] Here the bishop of Rome emerged as the supreme bishop and came to be referred to as the pope or the father of the entire church. He governs through archbishops, who superintend large areas. Beneath them are the bishops, to whom the priests are responsible.

Until Vatican Council I (1869–70), the pope was viewed as having supreme authority, but only when he acted in concert with the other bishops. At that council, however, it was decided that he has supreme and virtually unlimited authority in his own right. For Vatican I declared that when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* (in his official capacity) in matters of faith and practice, he is infallible.[1873] The exact character of this authority was never fully defined, however, for the council had to adjourn before it could elaborate upon infallibility.

There is considerable difference of opinion as to when the pope is speaking *ex cathedra*, and how many such statements there have been in the history of the church. The pope does not ordinarily preface a decree by stating, “I am about to make an *ex cathedra* pronouncement.” Being wise and careful leaders, the popes have been cautious about identifying their official declarations as *ex cathedra*, since once made, such rulings are irrevocable and unalterable.

In practice, the pope exercises his authority through the bishops. While they may act independently of him, the fact remains that they have received their powers from him. He is the absolute and ultimate source of authority within the church. Authority derives from above and flows downward. There is one check, however, on the office and power of the pope. He cannot name his successor; the new pope is elected by the College of Cardinals. Yet it is the pope who has appointed the cardinals, and new popes are selected from among their number. Thus the popes do, in a sense, have a part in determining their successors.

Several arguments are advanced in support of the episcopal form of government. The case usually begins with a declaration that Christ is the founder of the church.[1874] He provided it with an authoritative governing structure. For immediately after asserting that all authority in heaven and on earth is his (Matt. 28:18), he sent forth the eleven apostles in that authority (vv. 19–20; Acts 1:8). To the best of our knowledge, the apostles were the only officers Jesus appointed. It might be concluded that they were the only persons in the New Testament with the right to exercise ecclesiastical oversight or authority (ἐξουσία—*exousia*).[1875] We do find evidence, however, that they began to delegate some of their authority to others, notably Timothy and Titus. In addition, the apostles evidently *appointed* elders or rulers in the local churches. When Paul and Barnabas journeyed throughout Galatia, strengthening and encouraging the churches they had earlier established, they "appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23). Even where it is not clear that the process of selection rested with the apostles, it was they who did the ordaining. When the church in Jerusalem chose seven men "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom," to assist in the work, they were "presented . . . to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:3, 6).

A second argument is the position occupied by James within the church of Jerusalem. His authority was similar to that later held by bishops. Here then is precedent for the episcopal system.[1876]

Finally, there is the historical argument that there is a line of direct succession from the apostles to today's bishops. It is maintained that through the ordination process the authority of the apostles has been passed down to modern-day bishops.[1877]

There are also various objections to the episcopal form of church government. One is that the system is too formalized; there tends to be more emphasis on the office than on the qualifications of the person who holds it. In the New Testament, authority was given only to those who were spiritually qualified and sound in doctrine. Paul warned the Corinthians about certain people who claimed to work on the same terms he did: "For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13). Paul also warned the Galatians about false teachers, pronouncing an anathema on any, even angels, who might preach a gospel different from what he had preached to them (Gal. 1:8–9). What a person is, does, believes, and says is of far more importance than any position she or he might hold. Indeed, the latter is to be determined by the former, not the former by the latter.[1878]

Some also take exception to the theory of apostolic succession. The historical record seems weak and ambiguous at best. Further, there is no express evidence of anyone's conveying the power to ordain, although various persons are reported to have laid their hands on others. Nor is there any description in the Scriptures of any very highly developed government, or any report of a command to preserve or perpetuate a particular form of government. In addition, there is scant indication of any difference in authority between bishops and elders. For example, while Acts 6:6 speaks of the apostles' laying their hands on the seven at Jerusalem, Timothy received his gift when the elders laid hands on him (1 Tim. 4:14). The biblical data here are simply not as clear or unequivocal as we would desire.[1879]

Further, advocates of the episcopal form of church government give insufficient attention to Christ's direct exercise of lordship over the church. He installed Paul without any intermediary; no other apostle was involved. Paul makes much of this point in justifying his apostleship (Gal. 1:15–17). If Paul received his office directly from God, might not others as well? In other words, in at least this one case apostolic authority does not seem to rest on previous apostolic authority.[1880]

Presbyterian

The presbyterian system of church government places primary authority in a particular office as well, but there is less emphasis on the individual office and officeholder than on a series of representative bodies that exercise that authority. The key officer in the presbyterian structure is the elder,[1881] a position with a background in the Jewish synagogue. In Old Testament times the elders were persons who had ruling or governing roles and capacities. They held their authority by reason of their age and experience. Elders are also found in the New Testament church. In Acts 11:30 we read of elders in the Jerusalem congregation: the believers in Antioch provided relief to the believers in Jerusalem, "sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul." We have already observed that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in all the churches (Acts 14:23). Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus to Miletus and addressed them (Acts 20:17). The Pastoral Epistles also make mention of elders. Some of those who advocate the presbyterian form of government maintain that the terms "elder" and "bishop" are interchangeable, and thus the term ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*) in passages like 1 Timothy 3:1–2 and Titus 1:7 is to be understood as referring to elders. It should be noted, however, that the term elder (πρεσβύτερος

—*presbuteros*) usually occurs in the plural, suggesting that the authority of the elders is collective rather than individual.

It seems that in New Testament times the people chose their elders, those whom they assessed to be particularly qualified to rule the church. This practice appears to be consistent with the filling of other offices. The whole congregation put forward Barsabbas and Matthias as candidates to replace Judas among the apostles, the final choice being made by the casting of lots (Acts 1:23–26). The group asked in their prayer that God use the casting of lots to reveal the man whom he had already selected. Similarly, the whole body of believers at Jerusalem picked the seven men "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom," to assist the apostles (Acts 6:3). In this respect, the New Testament procedure was quite different from the selection of elders in the synagogue, which was basically a matter of seniority.

In selecting elders to rule the church, the people were conscious of confirming, by their external act, what the Lord had already done. The church was exercising on Christ's behalf the power or authority he had delegated to it. That God chooses the leaders of his church is indicated in several places in the New Testament. In Acts 20:28 Paul urges the elders of Ephesus: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [ἐπίσκοποι]. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." He writes to the Corinthians, "And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28). We assume that the offices of bishop and elder are implicit in this list. Other indications that God chooses the officers of his church include Matthew 16:19; John 20:22–23; and Ephesians 4:11–12.

The authority of Christ is to be understood as dispensed to individual believers and delegated by them to the elders who represent them. Once elected or appointed, the elders function on behalf of or in the place of the individual believers. It is therefore at the level of the elders that divine authority actually functions within the church.[1882]

This authority is exercised in a series of governing assemblies. At the level of the local church the session (Presbyterian)[1883] or consistory (Reformed)[1884] is the decision-making group. All the churches in one area are governed by the presbytery (Presbyterian) or classis (Reformed), which is made up of one lay elder and one minister from each consistory (Reformed) or one lay elder from each session and all the ministers in the area (Presbyterian). The next grouping is the synod, made up of an equal number of lay elders and clergy chosen by each presbytery or classis. At the highest level the Presbyterian Church also has a

General Assembly, composed again of lay and clergy representatives from the presbyteries. Note that the synods are bypassed in this process; they do not choose the representatives to the General Assembly.[1885] Decisions are made by the governing body at each level. These decisions are subject to review and revision by the next higher body. This process does not so much originate or legislate action, as it, particularly in conservative settings, interprets and applies the explicit teachings of Christ and guidelines of the church.

The prerogatives of each of the governing bodies are spelled out in the constitution of the denomination. For example, the session of each local church chooses its own pastor. The presbytery must confirm this choice, however. The presbytery also holds title to the property utilized by the local congregation, although this policy is being modified somewhat by recent court cases. No group has any authority over the other groups on its level. For example, no presbytery has authority over another presbytery. Appeal for action may be made to the synod, however, if both presbyteries in a dispute belong to the same synod; if not, an appeal may be made to the General Assembly. Similarly, a session that is displeased with another within its presbytery may appeal its case to the presbytery.

The presbyterian system differs from the episcopal in that there is only one level of clergy.[1886] There is only the teaching elder or pastor. No higher levels, such as bishop, exist. Of course, certain persons are elected to administrative posts within the ruling assemblies. They are selected (from below) to preside or supervise, and generally bear a title such as stated clerk of the presbytery. They are not bishops, there being no special ordination to such office. No special authority is attached to the office. The only power these officers have is an executive power to carry out the decisions of the group that elected them. Thus, the authority belongs to the electing body, not to the office or its occupant. Moreover, there is a limited term of service, so that occupancy of the office depends on the continued intention and will of the body.

In the presbyterian system, there is a deliberate coordinating of clergy and laity. Both groups are included in all of the various governing assemblies. Neither has special powers or rights that the other does not have. A distinction is drawn, however, between ruling elders (laity) and teaching elders (clergy). This distinction was not so clear-cut in biblical times. For while much of the teaching (the work of the clergy) was done by the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, some of it was done by the ruling elders, as is indicated in 1 Timothy 5:17: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” While this verse indicates that ruling elders engaged in teaching, it also suggests that some

specialization was already taking place. As the apostles gradually passed from the scene, and as heretical interpretations arose, the need for authoritative teaching grew. Thus, the office of teaching elder came into being. Certain men were released from other activities in order to give full-time attention and energy to rightly interpreting and teaching the meaning of the Word.

The argument for the presbyterian system begins with the observation that the Jewish synagogue was ruled by a group of elders, and the Christian church, at least initially, functioned within the synagogue. Its people evangelized there and evidently organized their assemblies in a similar fashion. There was apparently some sort of governing council or committee. Paul beseeches the Thessalonians, "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you" (1 Thess. 5:12). The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account" (Heb. 13:17). The decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is an example of this type of church government in action.[1887]

Furthermore, the presbyterian system of government preserves several essential New Testament principles of polity. One of these is the lordship of Christ. In the presbyterian system, his will and his Word are the ultimate standards by which the church determines its actions. Second, the principle of participation by the people is preserved. They have direct access to God and the right to express their personal opinions. Third, the presbyterian system maintains the concept of corporateness: each individual is seen as part of the body. Finally, the power of the local church resides in a group, the elders, not in just one minister or elder who derives authority from a bishop.[1888]

Critical objections come especially from those who advocate a more individualistic or congregational type of church government. They object that the presbyterian system is rooted in a hierarchy of governing bodies for which there is little or no support within Scripture.[1889] Further, they object that the presbyterian polity does not give each and every believer an adequate part in church government. While the presbytery and the session are in theory servants and representatives of the individual believers, they may well come to assume a ruling role. Many decisions that could be referred to the church membership as a whole are not. Thus, although intended to represent and carry out the authority of individual believers, the presbyterian structure of church government has on occasion usurped that authority.[1890]

Congregational

A third form of church government stresses the role of the individual Christian and makes the local congregation the seat of authority. Two concepts are basic to the congregational scheme: autonomy and democracy. By autonomy we mean that the local congregation is independent and self-governing.[1891] There is no external power that can dictate courses of action to the local church. By democracy we mean that every member of the local congregation has a voice in its affairs. They possess and exercise authority. Authority is not the prerogative of a lone individual or select group. Neither a monarchical (episcopal) nor oligarchical (presbyterian) structure is to take the place of the individual. A secondary sense of the principle of democracy in the congregational system is that decisions within interchurch associations are made on a representative basis. Among the major denominations that practice the congregational form of government are the Baptists, Congregationalists, and most Lutheran groups.

The principle of autonomy is believed to reflect the basic New Testament position on church government. In Acts and the Epistles the primary focus is on the local church. There is no reference to any structure above or beyond it, no command to form interchurch unions of any type.[1892] We find no instance of control over a local church by outside organizations or individuals. The apostles made recommendations and gave advice, but exercised no real rulership or control. Even Paul had to argue for his apostolic authority and beseech his readers to follow his teachings (Gal. 1:11–24).

The principle of autonomy means that each local church is self-governing. Each congregation calls its own pastor and determines its own budget. It purchases and owns property independently of any outside authorities.[1893] While it may seek advice from other churches and denominational officials, it is not bound to follow that advice, and its decisions do not require outside ratification or approval.

A congregation may enter into cooperative affiliations, but these are strictly voluntary in nature. Such affiliations are, in general, desirable for several reasons. First, they display in visible form the unity present within the universal or invisible church. Second, they provide and promote Christian fellowship on a wider basis than is possible within a single congregation. Further, they enable service and ministry in a more effective fashion than does the local church alone. Missions, the establishment of new congregations, and youth activities (e.g., camping) are among a number of undertakings that are more feasible on a large scale. The reasons for such affiliations, then, are primarily pragmatic. Joining such groups and adhering to their decisions are voluntary on the part of the local church. Moreover, the relationship may be terminated by the individual congregation whenever it chooses. The associations, conventions, or conferences

formed by local churches must themselves operate on a democratic basis. No one church, group of churches, or individual may dominate, control, or dictate to the others. Voting is on a representative basis, usually in proportion to the size of the individual churches involved. As in the presbyterian form of government, any leaders engaged are servants, not masters, of the churches and their members. They serve by the will of the membership of the local congregations and for specified limited periods. They bear titles, like executive secretary, but are in no sense bishops.

There is one point at which the autonomy of the local congregation must be qualified. When a congregation is accepting financial subsidization from a larger fellowship of churches, the association or convention will want to be fully informed of the actions of the local body, and may even proceed to lay down some guidelines and restrictions that the latter must follow. (This is not surprising, for accepting a loan or mortgage from a bank entails assuming certain obligations and restrictions.) It should be borne in mind, however, that the restrictions are voluntarily assumed; the congregation has not been compelled to accept assistance.

The concept of democracy means that authority within the local congregation rests with the individual members. Much is made here of the priesthood of all believers. It is felt that this principle would be surrendered if bishops or elders were given the decision-making prerogative. The work of Christ has made such rulers unnecessary, for now every believer has access to the Holy of Holies and may directly approach God. Moreover, as Paul has reminded us, each member or part of the body has a valuable contribution to make to the welfare of the whole.[1894]

There are some elements of representative democracy within the congregational form of church government. Certain persons are elected by a free choice of the members of the body to serve in special ways.[1895] They are representatives and servants of the church, answerable to those who have chosen them. They are not to exercise their authority independently of or contrary to the wishes of the people. If they do, they may be removed from office. All major decisions, however, such as calling a pastor and purchasing or selling property, are made by the congregation as a whole. This power is reserved to the entire membership by the constitution of the church. In these and all other matters of congregational decision, every member of voting age, regardless of social or economic status, has one vote.

In the congregational form of government, as in the presbyterian, there is only one level of clergy. The titles of bishop, elder, and pastor are believed to be different names for the same office; it has been suggested that they designate

different functions or different aspects of the ministry.[1896] It is noteworthy that when addressing the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17) Paul advised, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [ἐπισκόπους]. Be shepherds [ποιμαίνειν—pastor] of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (v. 28). It is argued that the use of all three terms in connection with the same group indicates equivalency. The only other office is a lay office, that of the deacon (literally, “the one who serves”).

Several arguments are advanced for making the congregational system the normative form of church government. In the earliest days of the church, recounted by the book of Acts, the congregation as a whole chose persons for office and determined policy.[1897] They chose Judas’s successor (Acts 1). They selected the first deacons (Acts 6). While there is no explicit statement that the congregation as a whole was involved in appointing Paul and Barnabas to their work (Acts 13:1–3), the conclusion can be drawn from the fact that when they returned to Antioch, they made their report to the whole church (Acts 14:27). And it was the whole church that sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to help settle the question of circumcision (Acts 15:2–3). Similarly, the whole church of Jerusalem sent the reply: “Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers” (v. 22). What of the apparent appointing of elders by the apostles (Acts 14:23)? One possible interpretation is that they may not actually have been chosen by the apostles. Perhaps the apostles suggested the idea and presided at the ordination, but the choice was made by the people. This is in fact the pattern in Acts 6.

Further, Jesus’s teaching seems to be opposed to the special leadership positions found within the episcopal and presbyterian schemes of government. He censured those who sought rank above other persons. When his disciples disputed which of them was the greatest, “Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves’” (Luke 22:25–27). A leader, then, is actually to be the servant of all. A proper sense of servanthood will result if leaders keep in mind that they have been chosen by those whom they serve and are answerable to them. Jesus also taught that we are not to seek special distinctions and titles: “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Teacher and you are all brothers” (Matt. 23:8). These

teachings of Jesus would seem to favor a democratic structure within the Christian church.

Another consideration is that both Jesus and Paul assigned the responsibility for discipline to the group as a whole. In Jesus's discussion of the treatment of a believer who has sinned, the final agent of discipline is the church. If the offending person refuses to listen to the church, that person is to be treated like a pagan or a tax collector (Matt. 18:15–17). Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation as a whole (1 Cor. 1:2), not merely the elders, to put out of their fellowship the man who was living immorally with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5).[1898]

Finally, it is observed that the letters of Paul were addressed to the churches as a whole rather than to a bishop or a group of elders. The letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were written to them as individuals, not as leaders of a particular church.[1899]

There are, however, several objections to the congregational form of church government, just as there were to the episcopal and presbyterian forms. The first objection is that the congregational scheme disregards the biblical evidence for apostolic (and hence episcopal) authority. For example, Paul did appoint elders (Acts 14:23) and instructed Titus to do the same (Titus 1:5). In addition, on many of the occasions when Paul spoke or wrote to the churches, he was not simply offering advice or counsel, but virtually commanding them.[1900]

Second, there was a separation of the offices of bishop, elder, and deacon rather early in church history. The bishops were accorded a special status and authority. If we maintain that this trend was not already present within the body of Christ in New Testament days, we are making the rather large assumption that the church very quickly departed from its New Testament foundations.[1901]

Finally, while it is true that Paul's letters are addressed to whole congregations rather than their leaders, what of Revelation 2–3, John's letters to the seven churches? These letters were addressed to the "angel" or "messenger" of the respective congregations, presumably the ruling elder in each case.

One interesting recent development within churches generally following the congregational approach is the tendency to retain the concept of autonomy, but to move toward a more representative democracy, or elder type of government, on the local level. This development has been especially popular with churches seeking to emulate the megachurch model, an essentially modern type of church, but it should be noted that it not only conflicts with the postmodern mood, but with recent developments in secular politics and corporate government as well.

Nongovernmental

There are some who do not advocate a particular form of church government as much as they advocate what might best be termed nongovernment. Certain groups, such as the Quakers (Friends) and the Plymouth Brethren, deny that the church has a need for a concrete or visible form. Accordingly, they have virtually eliminated all governmental structure. They stress instead the inner working of the Holy Spirit, who exerts his influence upon and guides individual believers in a direct fashion rather than through organizations or institutions.

Quakers emphasize the concept of "inner light." Since church membership has strictly minimal significance, there are no explicit rules for joining. In the local groups there may be elders or overseers who have certain responsibilities. Meetings are held to determine courses of action. However, no votes are ever taken. Instead, the decisions are made by a mutual agreement produced by the Holy Spirit.[1902]

The Plymouth Brethren virtually eliminate the visible church. They hold that the church exists on earth primarily in its invisible form, which is made up of all true believers. Thus, there is no need for an organization involving specific officeholders as such. The presidency of the Holy Spirit is the ruling force.[1903]

In each of these groups there is a concerted effort to eliminate as much structural organization as possible. They rely on the Holy Spirit to work in a direct fashion, to lead them to conviction of his will. Those who hold this position are to be commended for accentuating the role of the Holy Spirit and the need to rely on him. However, their assumption of a universal direct working of the Spirit is not justified by the biblical evidence. Moreover, the degree of sanctification and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit they posit of the members of a congregation is an unrealistic ideal. The main issue here is whether we regard the Bible or some more direct communication by the Holy Spirit as God's primary guide for our lives. As elsewhere in this endeavor, we consider Scripture to be the most important means of revelation.

Some congregations have recently moved toward this model, in keeping with the postmodern mood. So, for example, one pastor speaks of the "potluck" approach, not only to decision making, but to theology making.[1904]

Constructing a System of Church Government for Today

Attempts to develop a structure of church government that adheres to the authority of the Bible encounter difficulty at two points. The first is the lack of

didactic material. There is no prescriptive exposition of what the government of the church is to be like, comparable to, say, Paul's elucidation of the doctrines of human sinfulness and justification by faith. The churches are not instructed to adopt a particular form of church order. The only didactic passages on church government are Paul's enumerations of basic qualifications for offices that already existed (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). Although it is preferable to build on the basis of didactic or prescriptive rather than narrative or descriptive passages, in this case we have little choice.

When we turn to examine the descriptive passages, we find a second problem: there is no unitary pattern. On the one hand, there are strongly democratic elements, a fact pointed out by the advocates of the congregational form. There also are strongly monarchical elements, particularly the apostles' appointing and ordaining officers and instructing the churches, passages highlighted by those who favor the episcopal approach. From still other passages we conclude that the elders had a strong role.

It is probably safe to say that the evidence from the New Testament is inconclusive; nowhere in the New Testament do we find a picture closely resembling any of the fully developed systems of today. It is likely that in those days church government was not very highly developed, indeed, that local congregations were rather loosely knit groups. There may well have been rather wide varieties of governmental arrangements. Each church adopted a pattern that fit its individual situation.

We should bear in mind that at this point the church was just coming into being: it was not as yet sharply distinguished from Judaism. The pragmatic needs in a period of establishment are, naturally, quite different from those in a later stage of development. Anyone who has served as the first pastor of a church, particularly one made up of new Christians, has encountered occasions when delegation and committee work simply are not practical.

Most of the churches in the New Testament were established by itinerant missionaries. Thus, there was no fixed and permanent ministry. Under these circumstances, it was natural for the apostles to exercise considerable authority. It later became possible and necessary, however, to establish a permanent resident ministry. In one sense, this should not have been necessary. Ideally, the priesthood of all believers should have obviated the need for offices of authority, but the ideal was not at this point practical.

Initially, as we would expect, the pattern of the synagogue, that is, a system of elders, was adopted. This pattern did not become universal, however. In the Greek settings, the office of bishop tended to predominate. In addition, some modifying factors were already at work producing a more democratic pattern.

Even if it were clear that there is one exclusive pattern of organization in the New Testament, that pattern would not necessarily be normative for us today. It might be merely the pattern that was, not the pattern which must be. But as matters stand, there is so much variation in the descriptions of the New Testament churches that we cannot discover an authoritative pattern. We must therefore turn to the principles we find in the New Testament, and attempt to construct our governmental system upon them.

We must ask two questions if we are to construct our system in this fashion. First, in what direction was church government moving within the New Testament period? Is there anything that would indicate the ultimate outcome? We can discern in the New Testament the beginnings of a movement to ameliorate the situation of women and slaves. Is there a similar movement to improve church government? If so, we might be able to infer the ideal at which the movement was aiming, although we might have difficulty ascertaining just how far it was intended to progress.[1905] Here unfortunately we have little to go on. We know that the church originally took over the pattern of the Jewish synagogue: a group of elders served as rulers. We also know that while the church was in its infancy, the apostle Paul sometimes had to take a directive approach. Other than that we know little. There is no indication that the church was moving toward a specific form of church government.

The second question we must ask is, What are the reasons for church government? What values is it intended to promote and preserve? Once we have determined what Scripture has to say on the matter, we will be able, in accordance with our guidelines for contemporizing the biblical message,[1906] to construct a model of church government suitable for today.

One principle that is evident in the New Testament, and particularly in 1 Corinthians, is the value of order. The situation at Corinth, where total individuality tended to take over, was undesirable. At its worst it was downright destructive. It was necessary, then, to have some control over the highly individualized ways in which spirituality was being expressed (1 Cor. 14:40). It was also desirable to have certain persons responsible for specific ministries. We are reminded here of the situation in Acts 6, where we are told that seven men were appointed to be in charge of the ministry to widows.

Another principle is the priesthood of all believers.[1907] All persons are capable of relating to God directly. Several texts teach this truth either explicitly or implicitly (Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14–16). There is no need of any special intermediary. All have redemptive access to the Lord. And what is true of the initiation of the Christian life is also true of its continuation. Each believer can discern God’s will directly.

Finally, the idea that each person is important to the whole body is implicit throughout the New Testament and explicit in passages like Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The multiplicity of gifts suggests that the input into decision making should be broadly based. The book of Acts stresses group consensus (Acts 4:32; 15:22). There is a special sense of fellowship and ownership whenever all the members of a community feel that they have played a significant part in determining what is to be done.

It is my judgment that the congregational form of church government most nearly fulfills the principles that have been laid down. It takes seriously the principle of the priesthood and spiritual competency of all believers. It also takes seriously the promise that the indwelling Spirit will guide all believers.

At the same time, the need for orderliness suggests that a degree of representative government is necessary. In some situations leaders must be chosen to act on behalf of the group. Those chosen should always be conscious of their accountability to those whom they represent; and, where possible, major issues should be brought to the membership as a whole to decide.

We may think of the episcopal system as a structuring of the church along monarchical or imperial lines. The presbyterian form is like a representative democracy, the congregational a direct democracy. It is not surprising that the episcopal system developed and thrived during the days of monarchies. Monarchy was the system of government to which people were accustomed and with which they were probably most comfortable. In a day of widespread education and political interest, however, people will function best within a presbyterian or congregational system.

It might be concluded that, since most national democracies today are representative democracies, the presbyterian system would be the most suitable form of church government. But local churches are less like national governments than like local governments, which hold open hearings and town meetings. The value of direct involvement by well-informed people is considerable. And the principle that decisions are best made by those who will be most affected likewise argues for the congregational pattern of local autonomy.

Two situations call for some qualification of our conclusion. (1) In a very large church many members may not have sufficient knowledge of the issues and candidates for office to make well-informed decisions, and large congregational meetings may be impractical. Here a greater use of the representative approach will probably be necessary. Even in this situation, however, the elected servants must be ever mindful that they are responsible to the whole body. (2) In a group of immature Christians where there is an absence of trained and competent lay

leadership, a pastor may need to take more initiative than is ordinarily the case. But the pastor should also constantly work at instructing and building up the congregation so that they might become increasingly involved in the affairs of the church.

Anyone who has spent much time in contact with a variety of congregations is aware of the dual dangers to be avoided: on the one hand, the independence and insensitivity of an elite few to the concerns of the many, and on the other, the tyranny of the uninformed majority.

Who May Hold Office? Some Special Issues

For most of its history, the ruling and teaching ministries of the church have been restricted to men, although certain groups were exceptions to this. More recently, however, the question of whether women may also preach, teach, administer the sacraments, and exercise leadership in the church has increasingly been raised.

One group holds that women are not eligible for these roles. They rely on a number of arguments:

1. Paul explicitly teaches that women are to be silent in churches, and not teach (1 Cor. 14:34–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–15).[1908]
2. Paul specifies that a bishop and a deacon is to be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6, my translation).[1909]
3. Jesus did not select any women among his twelve disciples.[1910]
4. Throughout the history of the church, the dominant position has been to restrict these teaching and ruling functions to men.[1911]

Those holding the opposite view reply that these prohibitions and statements of qualifications were expressed in a culture in which women were not afforded opportunities for the education necessary for exercising teaching and leading roles, and in which female leadership would have been unacceptable.[1912] Further, these statements appear in contexts where prescriptions of certain attire and jewelry also were included. These advocates also contend that Paul was not prescribing that bishops and deacons must be (married) men, but that they must be faithful and monogamous persons.

This latter group contends that women should be allowed to exercise the gifts of teaching and administration, if they are so endowed. They advance several arguments in support of their contention:

1. A number of women, both in the Old and New Testament, prophesied or taught. These include Isaiah's wife, Philip's daughters, and Priscilla. There also were women leaders and judges, notably Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah.[1913]
2. Jesus taught women, something no rabbi of his time would do.[1914]
3. Paul lists several women who participated in ministry with him.[1915]
4. Women were the first witnesses to Jesus's resurrection.[1916]

The opponents counter these arguments by distinguishing between prophesying and teaching.[1917] Further, at least one of Paul's arguments seems to rest on the doctrine of creation itself.[1918] The instances of God using women in leadership occurred where men were unwilling to assume leadership, such as Barak in the case of Deborah.[1919] They also note that Priscilla only assisted her husband, Aquila, in instructing Apollos, and did this privately, not publicly.[1920] They generally regard these arguments for women's ministry as motivated by secular feminism.

In my judgment, the evidence is not clear-cut in support of either position alone. On balance, however, the greater evidence appears to support the position of full access to these ministries for women. Although ordinarily didactic passages should be weighted more heavily over narrative passages, in this case the narrative is of what God has done, which alters the situation somewhat. God does seem to have used women to prophesy, and the argument distinguishing prophecy from teaching is unconvincing. Further, there were leaders who were women, and closer examination of the text reveals that Deborah was already judging Israel before the Barak incident (Judg. 4:4). Increasing numbers of women today appear to possess the type of gifts that the church has generally identified as evidence that God has called a man to ministry. It appears to me that Jesus's not choosing women apostles may have been a concession to the culture at that time, but that he took significant steps in the direction of countering that cultural bias. In this, the biblical revelation may not be too different from God's tolerance of divorce in the Old Testament, and of slavery. The prohibition of women serving as ministers sometimes presupposes an implicit sacerdotalism that is not ordinarily found in conjunction with other aspects of evangelical theology.

A rather different issue is the growing controversy over the ordination and ministerial service of practicing homosexuals. While a homosexual orientation, combined with a celibate lifestyle, does not seem to be sinful, the consistent biblical proscriptions of homosexual practice (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26–27;

1 Cor. 6:9–10) seem to disqualify practicing homosexuals from holding such positions.

The Unity of the Church

A topic that has come up for discussion at various periods in history is the unity of the church. The definition of church unity and the degree of urgency in the discussion have varied over the centuries. At times church unity has been a subject of considerable controversy. Beginning especially in the twentieth century, disagreements over the nature of church unity have, ironically, caused a great deal of disunity. Yet the topic is important to examine.

Arguments for Unity of the Church

Biblical Teachings regarding the Unity of Believers

Among the reasons why the church must strive for unity are didactic passages in the New Testament that specifically teach that the church ought to be, actually is, or will be one unified body. Probably the most persuasive is the so-called high priestly prayer of Jesus: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20–23). The unity between the Father and the Son is a model for the unity of believers with one another. The unity of believers with each other and with God will testify to the world that the Father has sent the Son. Little is said about the nature of this unity, however.

A second major passage is Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4. After begging his readers to lead a life worthy of their calling (v. 1), he urges them to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (v. 3). He follows this appeal with a list of fundamentals that unite believers: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (vv. 4–6). Since all believers confess the same body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father, they ought to display a unity of the Spirit. As Paul concludes his case, he urges his readers to grow up into

Christ: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (v. 16). Yet as concerned as Paul is about building a unity of the Spirit, he does not really specify what this unity consists in. Nor does he make it clear that this unity is to extend beyond the local church to which he is writing. It is important for us to keep in mind here, however, that Ephesians was likely an encyclical letter. It was not restricted to one congregation of believers.[1921]

Paul makes a somewhat similar appeal in Philippians 2:2, where he urges his readers to be “one in spirit and of one mind.” The key to developing this attitude is humility and concern for others (vv. 3–4). And the perfect model is Christ’s self-emptying action (vv. 5–8). Following his example will lead to true unity among the members of the congregation.

General Theological Considerations

In addition to these specific teachings of Scripture, more general theological considerations argue for unity among believers. These considerations include the oneness of ancient Israel and the oneness of God, on which Israel’s nationhood was based. Israel was to be one nation because the God it worshiped was one. That God is one is most clearly expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 6:4. Because God is one, the people of Israel were expected to worship him with all their heart (v. 5). The unity of Old Testament Israel is symbolized in two institutions, the temple and the law. In Deuteronomy 12, it is made clear that all other places and forms of worship are to be eliminated, because there is only one true God.[1922]

Various New Testament images make it clear that the church, as the successor to Israel, is to follow Israel’s lead in manifesting unity. The unity is more intense, however, for Paul refers to the church as a household: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of his household” (Eph. 2:19). Peter similarly speaks of the church as a spiritual house: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).[1923] The image of the church as the bride of Christ likewise argues for unity among believers. If the church is the bride of Christ, it must be one entity, not many.[1924] The image of the church as the body of Christ is another powerful argument for unity. As Paul discusses the multiplicity of members and functions within the church, he says explicitly: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—

whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

Paul's most profound theological argumentation for the unity of believers is probably to be found in Ephesians and Colossians. In Colossians 1:13–23, a passage that begins on a soteriological note and then switches to God's work of creation, Paul declares that Christ has created all things (vv. 15–16) and that in him all things hold together (v. 17). This means that he is the head of the body, the church (v. 18). Paul reaches a climax in verses 19–20: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." Christ's aim is to reconcile all things to himself. All things, including the church, will unite in him. Paul has this end in view when he pleads in 3:14–15: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."[1925]

Unity of the church is a theme sounded throughout the book of Ephesians. The first chapter concludes with the image of Christ as "the head over everything for the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22–23). In the next chapter the emphasis is on the unity of Jew and Gentile: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (2:14–16). The chapter concludes with a reference to Jew and Gentile joined together into a holy temple in the Lord (vv. 20–22). In chapter 4 Paul compiles a list of the grounds on which the church is to be thought of as one (vv. 4–6). Stig Hanson comments on the passage: "One Body refers to the Church as the Body of Christ, the opinion of most expositors. This Body must be one since Christ is one, and Christ cannot be divided."[1926] Later in the chapter (vv. 11–14), Paul develops the idea of the ministry, which has the purpose of building up the church in the one faith (v. 5). This guarantees the unity initiated by the one Christ.

Practical Considerations: A Common Witness and Efficiency

Several practical considerations argue for Christian unity. One of them is the common witness that a closely knit group can present. We mentioned earlier that Jesus prayed for the unity of believers so that their concerted testimony might influence the world (John 17:21). The early believers were characterized by a

oneness of purpose, and they were highly effective in their testimony. Perhaps there is a logical cause and effect relationship between the two: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all . . .” (Acts 4:32–33). The company of believers tends to grow when their witness is united, whereas there may well be a negative or canceling effect when they compete with or even criticize one another. In non-Christian lands, the native, confronted by a multiplicity of missionary efforts, must decide not only whether to become a Christian, but also what type of Christian to become: Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, or whatever.[1927]

Another practical consideration is the matter of efficiency. Where there is a lack of unity among Christians, there is duplication of efforts. Every local congregation feels that it must have certain structural and procedural components, just as does every mission board and every Christian college and seminary. The result is often a multitude of mediocre ministries and a waste of resources of the kingdom of God. This is not simply the application of business techniques to ministry, but is rather a matter of the stewardship of resources.

Conceptions of the Nature of Unity

Despite considerable agreement about the desirability of unity, there is little agreement about its nature, the form it is to take. There are basically four different ideas about unity. To some extent they can be correlated with conceptions of the nature of the church. The list that follows moves from a view emphasizing the invisible church to a view emphasizing the visible church. In general, the greater the concentration on the visible church, the greater the concern that unity be manifested in actual organic union.

Spiritual Unity

The first view of church unity emphasizes that all Christians are one by virtue of being committed to and serving the same Lord. They are joined together in the invisible church, of which Christ is the head. One day there will be an actual gathering of this body in visible form. In the meantime, the unity of the church consists in the fact that there is no hostility among believers. All believers love other believers, even those with whom they have no actual contact or interaction. The existence of separate organizations of the visible church, even in the same

area, does not constitute a challenge to this unity. Christians who regard church unity as essentially spiritual in nature usually emphasize purity of doctrinal belief and lifestyle as criteria for membership.[1928]

Mutual Recognition and Fellowship

In the second view unity is implemented on a practical level. Each congregation recognizes others as legitimate parts of the family of God. Thus members can readily transfer from one congregation to another. There may be pulpit exchanges as well, a practice that entails recognition of ordination by other groups. In addition, members of different churches have fellowship with one another, and congregations with similar commitments and ideals work together when possible. For example, they may cooperate in conducting mass evangelistic crusades. Essentially, however, cooperation is on an ad hoc basis; it is not expressed in any form of official, permanent organization.[1929]

Conciliar Unity

Yet there are occasions when churches do enter into organizational alliance in order to accomplish their common purposes. They band together into what is called a council or association of churches. This is essentially a cooperative fellowship of denominations, each of which retains its own identity. It is a combined endeavor of, for example, Methodists, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, all of whom continue their own unique traditions. There is emphasis on both fellowship and action, since the unity is visible as well as spiritual.

Organic Unity

The final view is that church unity means the actual creation of one organization in which separate denominational identities are eliminated. Membership and ordination are joint. When denominations unite in this fashion, there is often a merging of local congregations as well. A prime example is the United Church of Canada, a single denomination formed in 1925 by the uniting of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. Another example is the Church of South India. In the early 1960s, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) began to plan the merger of several denominations into what they decided to call the Church of Christ Uniting. The ultimate goal was the combination of all Christian churches, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant, into one common church. In practice the aim of the National Council of the Churches of Christ has seemed to alternate between conciliar and organic unity.

Brief History of Modern Efforts at Unity

Ecumenism can be traced back a long way. Indeed, one history of ecumenism traces it from 1517 on.[1930] In a sense, however, the modern ecumenical movement began in 1910 as a cooperative missionary endeavor. Kenneth Scott Latourette says, "The ecumenical movement was in large part the outgrowth of the missionary movement."[1931] The crucial event was the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. The two major leaders were John R. Mott and Joseph H. Oldham.[1932] As a result of proposals by several denominations, widespread support developed for a World Conference on Faith and Order.[1933] A series of meetings were held, interrupted by the two world wars. Out of this came the World Council of Churches, and its United States affiliate, the National Council of Churches. A group of evangelicals, however, felt that they could not participate in that movement, and formed the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942. This was not so much a protest against the National Council of Churches as it was an effort at constructive cooperative action on the basis of a conservative theological position.[1934]

Another development also bore on this general trend toward dialogue and cooperation. There had been a rather marked separation between Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity. On Christmas Day 1961, Pope John XXIII issued a call convoking the Second Vatican Council. The new openness to non-Catholic Christianity displayed by this council was soon to make Protestant-Catholic dialogue a reality.

More recently the formal ecumenical movement has declined. In its place there have grown nondenominational and interdenominational ministries, which emphasize fellowship and cooperative activity apart from denominational distinctives. In addition, denominationalism has declined.[1935] Attendance at denominational meetings is only a fraction of what it once was. Persons are less inclined to choose a local church on the basis of its denominational identity than the services it provides, and may even utilize several different congregations for the meeting of various needs.[1936] Concurrent with this, many local churches have dropped denominational labels from their names, in favor of more generic titles.[1937] Ecumenical activity is more likely to occur at the micro level, where pastors associate with other pastors in fellowship groups, than on the macro level. Indeed, nondenominational associations are frequently more the locus of activity than are denominational groupings.[1938]

There also is a tendency for churches to become their own denominations. Whereas once churches planted daughter churches as independent, autonomous congregations, there developed a tendency toward quasidenominations, where

each daughter church bore an element of the mother church's name in its own name (Wood-, Grace, etc.). Then, rather than starting separate congregations, large churches began operating on multiple campuses, with the lead pastor preaching live at the main campus, and by closed-circuit television at the other campuses. Although these usually functioned within one metropolitan area, there are cases of satellites operating in distant locations. The result of this tends to be competition rather than unity between congregations.

The cultural situation of the early twenty-first century favors local groupings, rather than macro fellowships. At a time of globalization, churches have forged sister church relationships with churches in other parts of the world, and some American churches have even come under the care of a bishop in countries such as Nigeria. It seems unlikely that the ecumenical movement, in the twentieth century sense, will return to vitality anytime soon. Probably ad hoc or temporary cooperation of churches will continue to be made around particular issues or causes, rather than permanent affiliations. While it might be the ideal for all churches to be organically one, given the variety of cultures, backgrounds, and tastes, it is likelier that the sort of unity that will be primary is spiritual unity.

Guidelines for Action

In view of Christ's prayer for the unity of his followers, what should be our stance? We conclude our chapter on church unity with several guidelines.

1. We need to realize that the church of Jesus Christ *is* one church. All who are related to the one Savior and Lord are indeed part of the same spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:13).
2. The spiritual unity of believers should show itself or come to expression in goodwill, fellowship, and love for one another. We should employ every legitimate way of affirming that we are one with Christians who are organically separated from us.
3. Christians of all types should work together whenever possible. If no essential point of doctrine or practice is compromised, they should join forces. In other words, it is important that there be occasions on which Christians lay aside their differences. Cooperation among Christians gives a common witness to the world and is faithful stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.
4. It is important to delineate carefully the doctrinal basis and objectives of fellowship. The original goal of the 1910 World Missionary Conference at

Edinburgh has been largely supplanted by other concerns in the World Council of Churches.[1939] Yet the execution of Christ's commission is still the major task of the church. Consequently, it is difficult to justify committing time, personnel, and finances to activities that do not contribute, at least indirectly, to evangelization.

5. We should avoid any union that would sap the spiritual vitality of the church. It is conservative churches that are growing; evangelicals have the momentum. Alliances that would dilute their vitality must be very carefully evaluated and possibly avoided.
6. Christians should not be too quick to leave their parent denomination. As long as there is a reasonable possibility of redeeming the denomination, the conservative witness should not be abandoned. For that matter, if conservatives withdraw from ecumenical circles, their position will not be represented therein.
7. It is important that Christians make sure that divisions and separation are due to genuine convictions and principles, and not to personality conflicts or individual ambition.
8. Where Christians do disagree, whether as individuals, churches, or denominations, it is essential that they do so in a spirit of love, seeking to correct others and persuade them of the truth, while remaining open to instruction themselves. Truth will ever be linked to love.

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The Initiatory Rite of the Church: *Baptism*

Chapter Objectives

After completing the study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Recall and describe each of four basic views of baptism: means of saving grace, sign and seal of the covenant, token of salvation, and the occasion of salvation.
2. Identify and clearly articulate the meaning of baptism for the individual believer.
3. Identify and explain the subjects for baptism.
4. Assess the appropriate mode for baptism.

Chapter Summary

Since all Christian churches perform the rite of baptism, baptism plays a significant role in the life of the church. Four basic views are maintained by different groups of Christians. The first group maintains that salvation comes through baptism. The second group views baptism as a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. The third group takes the position that baptism is a token of salvation. The fourth group asserts that baptism is the point at which God gives salvation. In resolving these

issues, it is important to consider the meaning of baptism, the subjects of baptism, and the mode of baptism.

Study Questions

- How do the Catholic and Lutheran positions differ? What is the meaning of *ex opere operato*?
- How would you describe the Presbyterian and Reformed interpretation of baptism? What relationship do these theologians see between baptism and circumcision?
- How does the third position, viewing baptism as a token of salvation, differ from the two other positions?
- How does Romans 6:1–11 help us to correctly interpret the meaning of baptism?
- Who are the legitimate recipients of baptism?
- How would you arrive at an appropriate understanding of the mode of baptism?

Outline

The Basic Views of Baptism 1018

Baptism as a Means of Saving Grace

Baptism as a Sign and Seal of the Covenant

Baptism as a Token of Salvation

Baptism as the Occasion of Salvation

Resolving the Issues 1025

The Meaning of Baptism

The Subjects of Baptism

The Mode of Baptism

Virtually all Christian churches practice the rite of baptism. They do so in large part because Jesus in his final commission commanded the apostles and the church to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). It is almost universally agreed that baptism is in some way connected with the beginning of the Christian life, with one's initiation into the universal, invisible church as well as the local, visible church. Yet there is also considerable disagreement regarding baptism.

Three basic questions about baptism have been debated among Christians: (1) What is the meaning of baptism? What does it actually accomplish? (2) Who are the proper subjects of baptism? Is it to be restricted to those who are capable of exercising conscious faith in Jesus Christ, or may it also be administered to children and even infants; and if so, on what basis? (3) What is the proper mode of baptism? Must it be by dipping (immersion), or are other methods (pouring, sprinkling) acceptable? These questions have been arranged in decreasing order of significance, since our conclusion as to the meaning and value of the act of baptism will go far toward determining our conclusions on the other issues.

The Basic Views of Baptism

Baptism as a Means of Saving Grace

Underlying these issues are various basic ways in which Christians interpret baptism. Some groups believe that the act of baptism in water actually conveys grace to the person baptized. This is the doctrine of baptismal regeneration: baptism effects a transformation, bringing a person from spiritual death to life. The most extreme form of this view is to be found in traditional Catholicism. We will, however, focus on a classic Lutheran position that shares many features with Catholicism.

Baptism, according to the sacramentalists, is a means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins.[1940] By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration. In the Lutheran understanding, the sacrament is ineffectual unless faith is already present. In this respect, the Lutheran position differs from the Catholic position, which holds that baptism confers grace *ex opere operato*, that is, the sacrament works of itself. The Lutheran view, in other words, emphasizes that faith is a prerequisite, while the Catholic doctrine stresses the self-sufficiency of the sacrament. The sacrament, it should be emphasized, is not a physical infusion of some spiritual substance into the soul of the person baptized.

A comparison is often drawn between the sacrament of baptism and the preaching of the Word. Preaching awakens faith by entering the ear to strike the

heart. Baptism, on the other hand, reaches and moves the heart via the eye.

The sacrament is God's doing, not a work offered to God by the person being baptized. Nor is it a work performed by the minister or priest, of pouring some form of grace into the person being baptized. Rather, baptism is the Holy Spirit's work of initiating people into the church: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13).[1941]

Romans 6:1–11 is crucial to the sacramentalists' view of baptism. In their interpretation of this passage, baptism is not simply a picture of our being united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Rather, it actually unites us with Christ. When Paul says, "All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" (v. 3), he means that baptism unites us with Christ's death and his resurrection (v. 5).[1942]

In addition to one's being objectively united with Christ once and for all by baptism, the sacrament also has a subjective effect on the believer. This effect will last throughout life, even though baptism is administered only once. Believers will often be reminded of it. This, in fact, is what Paul is doing in Romans 6:3–5 as well as in Galatians 3:26–27. The knowledge that one has been baptized and therefore is united with Christ in his death and resurrection will be a constant source of encouragement and inspiration to the believer.[1943]

The subjects of baptism, according to Lutheranism, fall into two general groups. First, there are adults who have come to faith in Christ. Explicit examples are found in Acts 2:41 and 8:36–38. Second, children and even infants were also baptized in New Testament times. Evidence is seen in the fact that children were brought to Jesus to be touched (Mark 10:13–16). In addition, we read in Acts that whole households were baptized (Acts 11:14 [see 10:48]; 16:15, 31–34; 18:8). It is reasonable to assume that most of these households were not composed exclusively of adults. Children are part of the people of God, just as surely as, in the Old Testament, they were part of the nation of Israel.[1944]

That children were baptized in the New Testament is precedent for the practice today. Moreover, the baptism of children is necessary. For all persons are born into this world with original sin, which is sufficient grounds for condemnation. The taint of this sin must be removed. Since children are not capable of exercising the faith needed for regeneration, it is essential that they receive the cleansing wrought by baptism.

According to traditional Roman Catholic theology, unbaptized infants who die cannot enter into heaven. They are consigned to a place called *limbus infantium*. There they do not suffer the pains and deprivation of hell, but neither do they enjoy the benefits of the blessedness of heaven.[1945] In 2006, however, Pope

Benedict XVI abolished the doctrine. Lutheran theologians, on the other hand, have not been so sure about the status of unbaptized infants. There is a possibility that God has a means, not fully revealed to us, of producing faith in the unbaptized children of Christians. We are reminded that girls in the Old Testament, though they were not circumcised, were somehow able to enjoy the benefits of the covenant. There is no similar proposal regarding the children of unbelievers, however. Nor is there dogmatism about any of these matters, since they have not been revealed to us, but are among the unsearchable things of God.[1946] There is, the Lutheran observes, a long history of the practice of infant baptism, traceable in extrabiblical sources at least to the second century AD. There is thus good precedent for the practice. Since we do not know the details of God's dealing with unbaptized children and infants, it is advisable for Christians to baptize their offspring.

Lutheran theologians are aware of the charge of inconsistency between the practice of infant baptism and the insistence on justification by faith alone. They have generally dealt with this apparent dilemma in one of two ways. One is the suggestion that infants who are baptized may possess an unconscious faith. Faith, it is maintained, does not necessarily require reasoning power and self-consciousness. Luther observed that faith does not cease when we are asleep, preoccupied, or engaged in strenuous work. Jesus teaches that children can have implicit faith. Evidence is found in Matthew 18:6 ("one of these little ones . . . who believe in me"); 19:14; Mark 10:14; and Luke 18:16–17. Another proof is the prophecy that John the Baptist "will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (Luke 1:15). Finally, we have the apostle John's words, "I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father" (1 John 2:14).[1947] The other means of dealing with the apparent inconsistency is to maintain that it is the faith of the parents that is involved when a child is baptized. Some would even say that the church has faith on behalf of the child. Infant baptism, then, rests on vicarious faith.[1948]

In Roman Catholicism, this dilemma does not occur. For according to Catholic doctrine, baptism takes effect *ex opere operato*. Faith is not really necessary. The only requisites are that someone present the child and a priest administer the sacrament properly.[1949]

In the Lutheran view the mode of baptism is not of great importance. It must of course involve water, but that is the only crucial factor. To be sure, the primary meaning of the word βαπτίζω (*baptizō*) is "to dip," but there are other meanings of the word. Consequently we are uncertain what method was used in biblical times, or even whether there was only one method. Since there is no essential, indispensable symbolism in the mode, baptism is not tied to one form.

Baptism as a Sign and Seal of the Covenant

The position held by traditional Reformed and Presbyterian theologians is tied closely to the concept of the covenant. They regard the sacraments, of which baptism is one, as signs and seals of God's grace. Sacraments are not means of grace *ex opere operato*, or in virtue of some inherent content of the rite itself. Rather, as the Belgic Confession says, they are "visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit."[1950] In particular, they are signs and seals of God's working out the covenant he has established with the human race. Like circumcision in the Old Testament, baptism makes us sure of God's promises.

The significance of the sacrament of baptism is not quite as clear-cut to the Reformed and Presbyterian as to the baptismal regenerationist. The covenant, God's promise of grace, is the basis, the source, of justification and salvation; baptism is the act of faith by which we are brought into that covenant and hence experience its benefits. The act of baptism is both the means of initiation into the covenant and a sign of salvation. Charles Hodge puts it this way: "God, on his part, promises to grant the benefits signified in baptism to all adults who receive that sacrament in the exercise of faith, and to all infants who, when they arrive at maturity, remain faithful to the vows made in their name when they were baptized."[1951] In the case of adults, these benefits are absolute, while the salvation of infants is conditional upon future continuance in the vows made.

The subjects of baptism are in many ways the same as in the sacramentalists' view. On the one hand, all believing adults are to be baptized. Examples in Scripture are those who responded to Peter's invitation at Pentecost, believed, and were baptized (Acts 2:41) and the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31–33).[1952] On the other hand, the children of believing parents are also to be baptized. While the baptism of children is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, it is nonetheless implicitly taught. God made a spiritual covenant with Abraham *and with his descendants* (Gen. 17:7). This covenant has continued to this day. In the Old Testament it is always referred to in the singular (e.g., Exod. 2:24; Lev. 26:42). There is only one mediator of the covenant (Acts 4:12; 10:43). New Testament converts are participants in or heirs to the covenant (Acts 2:39; Rom. 4:13–18; Gal. 3:13–18; Heb. 6:13–18). Thus, the situation of believers both in the New Testament and today is to be understood in terms of the covenant made with Abraham.[1953]

Since the Old Testament covenant remains in force, its provisions still apply. If children were included in the covenant then, they also are today. We have already observed that the covenant was not only to Abraham but to his

descendants as well. Also of significance is the all-embracing character of the Old Testament conception of Israel. Children were present when the covenant was renewed (Deut. 29:10–13). Joshua read the writings of Moses in the hearing of the entire congregation—"the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children" (Josh. 8:35). When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, and he spoke the Lord's word of promise to all Israel, the children were present (2 Chron. 20:13). All of the congregation, including even nursing infants (Joel 2:16), heard Joel's promise of the outpouring of the Spirit upon their sons and daughters (v. 28).

A key step in the argument now occurs: as circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament, so is baptism in the New Testament. It is clear that circumcision has been put away; it no longer avails (Acts 15:1–2; 21:21; Gal. 2:3–5; 5:2–6; 6:12–13, 15). Baptism has been substituted for circumcision as the initiatory rite into the covenant.[1954] It was Christ who made this substitution. He commissioned his disciples to go and evangelize and baptize (Matt. 28:19). Just as circumcision was required of proselytes converting to Judaism, so baptism is required of those converting to Christianity. It is their mark of entrance into the covenant. The two rites clearly have the same meaning. That circumcision pointed to a cutting away of sin and a change of heart is seen in numerous Old Testament references to circumcision of the heart, that is, spiritual circumcision as opposed to physical circumcision (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25–26; Ezek. 44:7, 9). Baptism is similarly pictured as a washing away of sin. In Acts 2:38 Peter instructs his hearers, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." In 1 Peter 3:21 he writes, "Baptism . . . now saves you." Paul refers to "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5) and also links baptism with spiritual revival (Rom. 6:4). Conclusive evidence for the supplanting of circumcision by baptism is found in Colossians 2:11–12: "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Two additional observations need to be made here. First, those who hold that baptism is essentially a sign and seal of the covenant claim that it is not legitimate to impose upon a child the requirements incumbent upon an adult. Second, they emphasize the objective aspect of the sacrament. What really matters is not one's subjective reaction, but one's objective initiation into the covenant with its promise of salvation.[1955]

In the Reformed and Presbyterian approach to baptism, the mode is a relatively inconsequential consideration. The verb βαπτίζω is ambiguous. What was important in New Testament times was the fact and results of baptism, not the manner in which it was administered.[1956]

There are indications that the means used in New Testament times was not, indeed, could not have been, exclusively immersion. For example, would John have been physically capable of immersing all those who came to him? Did the Philippian jailor leave his post in the prison to go where there was sufficient water for immersion? Was water brought to Cornelius's house in sufficient quantities for immersion? When Paul was baptized, did he leave the place where Ananias found him? These questions suggest that immersion may not have been practiced in every case.[1957]

Moreover, immersion is not required for preservation of the symbolism of baptism. The rite of baptism does not primarily set forth death and resurrection, but purification. Any of the various Old Testament means of ablution—immersion, pouring, sprinkling—will picture purification. They are the διαφόροις βαπτισμοῖς (*diaphorois baptismois*), "various washings," referred to in Hebrews 9:10. In light of all of these considerations, we are free to use whatever means is appropriate and available.[1958]

Baptism as a Token of Salvation

The third view we will examine sees baptism as a token, an outward symbol or indication of the inward change that has been effected in the believer.[1959] It serves as a public testimony of one's faith in Jesus Christ. It is an initiatory rite—we are baptized into the name of Christ.[1960]

Christ commanded the act of baptism (Matt. 28:19–20). Since it was ordained by him, it is properly understood as an ordinance rather than a sacrament. It does not produce any spiritual change in the one baptized. We continue to practice baptism simply because Christ commanded it and because it serves as a form of proclamation. It confirms the fact of one's salvation to oneself and affirms it to others.

The act of baptism conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing. In particular, we are not regenerated through baptism, for baptism presupposes faith and the salvation to which faith leads. It is, then, a testimony that one has already been regenerated. If there is a spiritual benefit, it is the fact that baptism brings us into membership or participation in the local church.[1961]

For this view of baptism, the question of the proper subjects of baptism is of great importance. Candidates for baptism will already have experienced the new

birth on the basis of faith. They will have exhibited credible evidence of regeneration. While it is not the place of the church or the person administering baptism to sit in judgment upon the candidate, there is an obligation to determine at least that the candidate understands the meaning of the ceremony. This can be determined by requiring the candidate to give an oral testimony or answer certain questions. Precedent for such caution before administering baptism can be found in John the Baptist's words to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him for baptism: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:7–8).[1962]

The baptism of which we are speaking is *believers'* baptism, not necessarily *adult* baptism. It is baptism of those who have met the conditions for salvation (i.e., repentance and active faith). Evidence for this position can be found in the New Testament. First, there is a negative argument or an argument from silence. The only people whom the New Testament specifically identifies by name as having been baptized were adults at the time of their baptism.[1963] The arguments that "there must surely have been children involved when whole households were baptized," and "we cannot say for sure that no children were baptized," do not carry much weight with those who hold to believers' baptism; and, indeed, such arguments seem flimsy at best. Further, Scripture makes it clear that personal, conscious faith in Christ is prerequisite to baptism. In the Great Commission, the command to baptize follows the command to disciple (Matt. 28:19). John the Baptist required repentance and confession of sin (Matt. 3:2, 6). In the conclusion of his Pentecost sermon, Peter called for repentance, then baptism (Acts 2:37–41). Belief followed by baptism is the pattern in Acts 8:12; 18:8; and 19:1–7.[1964] All these considerations lead to the conclusion that responsible believers are the only people who are to be baptized.

Regarding the mode of baptism, there is some variation. Certain groups, particularly the Mennonites, practice believers' baptism, but by modes other than immersion.[1965] Probably the majority of those who hold to believers' baptism utilize immersion exclusively, however, and are generally identified as Baptists. Where baptism is understood as a symbol and testimony of the salvation that has occurred in the life of the individual, it is not surprising that immersion is the predominant mode, since it best pictures the believer's resurrection from spiritual death.[1966]

Baptism as the Occasion of Salvation

One additional view is that held by those in the Stone-Campbell tradition (Christian Churches and Churches of Christ).[1967] They hold that water baptism is

an essential element in the reception of salvation. They clearly reject the idea of baptismal regeneration, for that would suggest that baptism in itself, apart from faith, can bring about salvation. Rather, baptism is closely bound with faith, so that baptism is the point at which God gives salvation. Jack Cottrell states the position by referring to "the Biblical teaching that regeneration occurs *during* baptism *but only when faith is also present*."[1968] The advocates of this view contend that the consistent biblical teaching is that faith and baptism are inseparable parts of the response to God's offer of saving grace. For example, Cottrell says of Galatians 3:26–27, "Union with Christ is the prerequisite of sonship. And since union with Christ is entered into at baptism, then baptism also is a prerequisite of sonship."[1969] John Castelein says, "We believe that in the NT plan of salvation baptism marks the point in time when God, because of his grace—and for no other reason—cleanses and forgives penitent believers of all their sins. . . . From the human side, an individual submits to a physical action in baptism. We believe it marks the time when the individual appropriates for himself or herself the promises of God's Word."[1970]

Resolving the Issues

We now come to the issues we raised at the beginning of this chapter. We must ask ourselves which of the positions we have sketched is the most tenable in the light of all of the relevant evidence. The question of the nature and meaning of baptism must precede all others.

The Meaning of Baptism

Is baptism a means of regeneration, an essential to salvation? A number of texts seem to support such a position. On closer examination, however, the persuasiveness of this position becomes less telling. In Mark 16:16 we read, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"; note, however, that the second half of the verse does not mention baptism at all: "but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Beyond this, however, the entire verse (and indeed the whole passage, vv. 9–20) is not found in the best texts.

Another verse cited in support of the concept of baptismal regeneration, the idea that baptism is a means of saving grace, is John 3:5: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." But there is no clear indication that baptism is in view here. We must ask what being "born of

water" would have meant to Nicodemus, and our conclusion, while not unequivocal, seems to favor the idea of cleansing or purification, not baptism.[1971] Note that the emphasis throughout the passage is on the Spirit and that there is no further reference to water. The key factor is the contrast between the *supernatural* (Spirit) and the *natural* (flesh): "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (v. 6). Jesus explains that to be born anew is to be born of the Spirit. This working of the Spirit, like the blowing of the wind, is not fully comprehensible (vv. 7–8). In view of the overall context, it appears that being born of water is synonymous with being born of the Spirit. The καί (*kai*) in verse 5, then, is an instance of the ascensive use of the conjunction, and the verse should be translated, "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water, even the Spirit."

A third passage that needs to be taken into account is 1 Peter 3:21: "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Note that this verse is actually a denial that the rite of baptism has any effect in itself. It saves only in that it is "the pledge of a good conscience toward God," an act of faith acknowledging dependence on him. The real basis of our salvation is Christ's resurrection.

A number of passages in the book of Acts link repentance and baptism. Probably the most crucial is Peter's response on Pentecost to the question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). He replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). The emphasis in the remainder of the narrative, however, is that three thousand received his word—then they were baptized. In Peter's next recorded sermon (3:17–26), the emphasis is on repentance, conversion, and acceptance of Christ; there is no mention of baptism. The key verse (v. 19, which is parallel to 2:38 except for the significant fact that there is no command to be baptized) reads: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." The kerygma in chapter 4 centers upon the cruciality of belief in Jesus; once again there is no mention of baptism (vv. 8–12). And when the Philippian jailor asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), Paul answered simply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (v. 31). He did not mention baptism, although we should note that the whole household was baptized shortly thereafter. While there is a close and important connection between repentance and conversion on the one hand, and baptism on the other, these passages in Acts seem to indicate that the connection is not inseparable or absolute. Thus, unlike repentance and

conversion, baptism is not indispensable to salvation. It seems, rather, that baptism may be an expression or a consequence of conversion.

Finally, we must examine Titus 3:5. Here Paul writes that God "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." If this is an allusion to baptism, it is vague. It seems rather that "the washing of rebirth" refers to a cleansing and forgiveness of sins. Baptism is simply a symbolic portrayal, not the means, of this forgiveness. We conclude that there is little biblical evidence to support the idea that baptism is a means of regeneration or a channel of grace essential to salvation.

Moreover, certain specific difficulties attach to the concept of baptismal regeneration. When all the implications are spelled out, this concept contradicts the principle of salvation by grace, which is so clearly taught in the New Testament. The insistence that baptism is necessary for salvation is something of a parallel to the insistence of the Judaizers that circumcision was necessary for salvation, a contention that Paul vigorously rejected in Galatians 5:1–12. Further, with the exception of the Great Commission, Jesus did not include the topic of baptism in his preaching and teaching about the kingdom. Indeed, the thief on the cross was not, and could not have been, baptized. Yet he was assured by Jesus, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). It should also be observed that the attempts to reconcile the concept of baptismal regeneration with the biblical principle of salvation by faith alone have proved inadequate. Neither the argument that infants who are baptized possess an unconscious faith nor the argument that the faith of the parents (or the church) avails is very forceful. On a variety of grounds, then, the view that baptism is a means of salvific grace is untenable.

The view that baptism is the occasion of salvation also has several significant difficulties. One is that the large number of instances where regeneration or faith is mentioned without the mention of baptism are either ignored or inadequately treated. Further, the Scriptural argument rests on some highly questionable contentions, such as that water in John 3:5 meant baptism, and even on textually highly suspect passages, such as Mark 16:9–20. Whereas those who hold this view accuse others of reading into the text their theological presuppositions,[1972] it appears that they themselves may have done the same thing. And, in the final analysis, the exact nature of the relationship of baptism to faith remains less than fully clear.

What of the claim that baptism is a continuation or a supplanting of the Old Testament rite of circumcision as a mark of one's entrance unto the covenant? It is significant here that the New Testament tends to depreciate the external act of

circumcision. It argues that circumcision is to be replaced, not by another external act (e.g., baptism), but by an internal act of the heart. Paul points out that Old Testament circumcision was an outward formality denoting Jewishness, but the true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly: "No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (Rom. 2:29). Paul is asserting not merely that circumcision has passed, but that the whole framework of which circumcision was a part has been replaced. Whereas Oscar Cullmann[1973] and others have argued vigorously that baptism is the New Testament equivalent of circumcision, George Beasley-Murray has pointed out that baptism actually "did away with the need of circumcision because it signified the union of the believer with Christ, and in union with Him the old nature was sloughed off. A lesser circumcision has been replaced by a greater; the spiritual circumcision promised under the old covenant has become a reality under the new through baptism."[1974] If anything has taken the place of external circumcision, then, it is not baptism but internal circumcision. Yet there is, as Paul suggests in Colossians 2:11–12, a close relationship between spiritual circumcision and baptism.

What, then, is the meaning of baptism? To answer this question, we note, first, that there is a strong connection between baptism and our being united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Paul emphasizes this point in Romans 6:1–11. The use of the aorist tense suggests that at some specific moment the believer actually becomes linked to Christ's death and resurrection: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (vv. 3–4). We note, second, that the book of Acts often ties belief and baptism together. Baptism ordinarily follows upon or virtually coincides with belief. In recounting his conversion and baptism many years later, Paul quoted Ananias's words to him: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Ananias's words suggest that in baptism one is calling upon the name of the Lord. Baptism is itself, then, an act of faith and commitment. While faith is possible without baptism (i.e., salvation does not depend on one's being baptized), baptism is a natural accompaniment and the completion of faith.

Baptism is, then, an act of faith and a testimony that one has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, that one has experienced spiritual circumcision. It is a public indication of one's commitment to Christ. Karl Barth makes a straightforward presentation of this point in the very first words of his

remarkable little book *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*: "Christian baptism is in essence the representation [*Abbild*] of a man's renewal through his participation by means of the power of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and therewith the representation of man's association with Christ, with the covenant of grace which is concluded and realized in Him, and with the fellowship of His Church."[1975]

Baptism is a powerful form of proclamation of the truth of what Christ has done; it is a "word in water" testifying to the believer's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3–5). It is a symbol rather than merely a sign, for it is a graphic picture of the truth it conveys. There is no inherent connection between a sign and what it represents. It is only by convention, for example, that green traffic lights tell us to go rather than to stop. By contrast, the sign at a railroad crossing is more than a sign; it is also a symbol, for it is a rough picture of what it is intended to indicate, the crossing of a road and a railroad track. Baptism is a symbol, not a mere sign, for it actually pictures the believer's death and resurrection with Christ.

The Subjects of Baptism

The next logical question concerns the proper subjects of baptism. The issue here is whether to hold to infant baptism or believers' baptism (i.e., the position that baptism should be restricted to those who have confessed faith in Christ's atoning work). Note that our dichotomy is not between infant and adult baptism, for those who reject infant baptism stipulate that candidates for baptism must actually have exercised faith. We contend that believers' baptism is the correct position.

One of the most significant considerations is the lack of any positive New Testament indication that infants were baptized. An impressive admission was made in *Baptism and Confirmation Today*, a report of the Joint Committees on Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion of the Church of England:

> It is clear that the recipients of Baptism were normally adults and not infants; and it must be admitted that there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament for the Baptism of infants. All we can say is that it is possible that the "households" said to have been baptized *may* have included children (Acts 16.15, 33; 1 Cor. 1.16). But at any rate it is clear that the *doctrine* of Baptism in the New Testament is stated in relation to the Baptism of adults, as was also the case (with two or three exceptions) in the writers of the first three centuries. . . . In every recorded case of Baptism in the New Testament, the Gospel has been heard and accepted, and the condition of faith (and presumably of repentance) has been consciously fulfilled prior to the reception of the Sacrament.[1976]

A large number of New Testament scholars now concede this point. They make no assertion stronger than that it is possible that the baptisms of whole households included infants.

Some scholars take a more vigorous approach, however. Among them is Joachim Jeremias, who has argued that there must have been infants in the households who were baptized. With regard to Acts 11:14 (see 10:48); 16:15; 16:31–34; 18:8; and 1 Corinthians 1:16, he states, "In all five cases the linguistic evidence forbids us to restrict the concept of the 'house' to the adult members of the family. On the contrary it shows plainly that it is *the complete family including all its members* which receives baptism."[1977] Beasley-Murray points out, however, that this line of argument, while it seems reasonable, leads to conclusions beyond what Jeremias intends, for the households in question experienced more than baptism. Beasley-Murray maintains, for example, that "on Jeremias' principle no doubt is to be entertained concerning the meaning of [Acts 10:44–48]: *all* the house of Cornelius heard the word, *all* received the Spirit, *all* spoke with tongues, *all* were baptized; the infants present also heard the word, received the Spirit, spoke with tongues and so were baptized. To this *no* exception is permissible!"[1978] There is, of course, another interpretation of this passage and others like it. It is possible that all of the members of these households met the conditions for baptism: they believed and repented. In that case, of course, all of the individuals involved had reached an age of understanding and responsibility.

Another argument used in support of infant baptism is that the children who were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them (Matt. 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17) were actually being brought to be baptized. The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland contended in its 1955 interim report that Jesus's expression "little ones . . . who believe in me" (Matt. 18:6) signifies that they had been "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).[1979] The report further sought to demonstrate that Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15; and Luke 18:17 are parallel to John 3:3 and 3:5, and that all have reference to baptism.[1980] This is an elaboration of Jeremias's argument. Beasley-Murray comments on this section of the report: "Some of that exegesis appears to me to be so improbable, I cannot understand how a responsible body of mid-twentieth century theologians could permit it to be published in their name."[1981]

Both Jeremias and Cullmann see Mark 10:13–16 and the parallel passages in terms of the *Sitz im Leben*, the situation of the early church. They believe that these narratives were included in the Gospels to justify the church's practice of infant baptism.[1982] While analysis and evaluation of this issue go beyond the scope of our treatise,[1983] it is important to observe that the passages in question

do not mention baptism. Surely, if the purpose of including them in the Gospels was to justify infant baptism, there would be an explicit reference to baptism somewhere in the immediate context. When Jesus said that whoever would enter the kingdom of heaven must become like a child, he was making a point about the necessity of simple trust, not about baptism.

Finally, we note that the case for baptism of infants rests on either the view that baptism is a means of saving grace or the view that baptism, like Old Testament circumcision, is a sign and seal of entrance into the covenant. Since both of those views were found to be inadequate, we must conclude that infant baptism is untenable. The meaning of baptism requires us to hold to the position of believers' baptism, as does the fact that the New Testament nowhere offers a clear case of an individual's being baptized before exercising faith.

The Mode of Baptism

It is not possible to resolve the issue of the proper mode of baptism on the basis of linguistic data alone. We should note, however, that the predominant meaning of βαπτίζω is "to dip or to plunge under water."[1984] Even Martin Luther and John Calvin acknowledged immersion to be the basic meaning of the term and the original form of baptism practiced by the early church.[1985] There are several considerations that argue that immersion was the biblical procedure. John baptized at Aenon "because there was plenty of water" (John 3:23). When baptized by John, Jesus came "up out of the water" (Mark 1:10). Upon hearing the good news, the Ethiopian eunuch said to Philip, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Then they both went down into the water. Philip baptized him, and they came up out of the water (vv. 38–39).

But is the fact that immersion was the mode originally employed more than historically authoritative for us? That is, is it also normatively authoritative for us? There is no doubt that the procedure followed in New Testament times was immersion. But does that mean we must practice immersion today? Or are there other possibilities? Those to whom the mode does not seem crucial maintain that there is no essential link between the meaning of baptism and the way in which it is administered. But if, as we stated in our discussion of the meaning, baptism is truly a symbol, and not merely an arbitrary sign, we are not free to change the mode.

In Romans 6:3–5 Paul appears to be contending that there is a significant connection between how baptism is administered (one is lowered into the water and then raised out of it) and what it symbolizes (death to sin and new life in

Christ—and beyond that, baptism symbolizes the basis of the believer's death to sin and new life: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ). Beasley-Murray says:

> Despite the frequent denials of exegetes, it is surely reasonable to believe that the reason for Paul's stating that the baptized is *buried* as dead, rather than that he *died* (as in v. 6), is the nature of baptism as immersion. The symbolism of immersion as representing burial is striking, and if baptism is at all to be compared with prophetic symbolism, the parallelism of act and event symbolized is not unimportant. Admittedly such a statement as that of C. H. Dodd, "Immersion is a sort of burial . . . emergence a sort of resurrection," can be made only because the kerygma gives this significance to baptism; its whole meaning is derived from Christ and His redemption—it is the kerygma *in action*, and if the action suitably bodies forth the content of the kerygma, so much the clearer is its speech. But we repeat, the "with Him" of baptism is due to the gospel, not to the mimesis. It is "to His death": Christ and His dying, Christ and His rising give the rite all its meaning. As one of the earliest of British Baptists put it, to be baptized is to be "dipped for dead in the water."[1986]

One might contend that Beasley-Murray, as a Baptist, is biased on this matter. The same cannot be said, however, of the Reformed scholar Karl Barth, who wrote:

> The Greek word βαπτίζω and the German word *taufen* (from *Tiefe*, depth) originally and properly describe the process by which a man or an object is completely immersed in water and then withdrawn from it again. Primitive baptism carried out in this manner had its mode, exactly like the circumcision of the Old Testament, the character of a direct threat to life, succeeded immediately by the corresponding deliverance and preservation, the raising from baptism. One can hardly deny that baptism carried out as immersion—as it was in the West until well on into the Middle Ages—showed what was represented in far more expressive fashion than did the effusion which later became customary, especially when the effusion was reduced from a real wetting to a sprinkling and eventually in practice to a mere moistening with as little water as possible. . . . Is the last word on the matter to be, that facility of administration, health, and propriety are important reasons for doing otherwise [i.e., for administering baptism in other than its original form]?[1987]

In light of these considerations, immersionism seems the most adequate of the several positions. While it may not be the only valid form of baptism, it is the form that most fully preserves and accomplishes the meaning of baptism.

Whatever mode be adopted, baptism is not a matter to be taken lightly. It is of great importance, for it is both a sign of the believer's union with Christ and, as a confession of that union, an additional act of faith that serves to cement the more firmly that relationship.

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The Continuing Rite of the Church: *The Lord's Supper*

Chapter Objectives

After careful study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe at least six points of substantial agreement among denominational groups on the Lord's Supper.
2. Identify and describe at least five points of substantial disagreement among denominational groups on the Lord's Supper.
3. Examine four major views of the Lord's Supper and the implications of each view.
4. Formulate answers to the issues involved in an adequate view of the Lord's Supper.

Chapter Summary

The Lord's Supper is vital to all Christian groups. It continues what baptism began in initiating one into the Christian faith. There are at least six points of essential agreement among Christian groups and at least five points of disagreement. A resolution for each of these issues is proposed.

Study Questions

- What are the points of essential agreement among various Christian groups concerning the Lord's Supper? List each point, state its importance, and address the issue from your perspective.
- Why are the presence of Christ, the efficacy of the rite, and the elements used important? How are they related to each other?
- Are there special expectations for the administrator and the recipient? What is sacerdotalism? What role does it play in this discussion?
- What are the dissimilarities among the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Zwinglian views of the Lord's Supper? In four parallel columns list the points of disagreement between these views.
- What do you believe about the Lord's Supper?

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The Presence of Christ

The Efficacy of the Rite

The Proper Administrator

The Appropriate Recipients

The Elements to Be Used

The Frequency of Observance

While baptism is the initiatory rite, the Lord's Supper is the continuing rite of the visible church. It may be defined, in preliminary fashion, as a rite Christ himself established for the church to practice as a commemoration of his death.

We immediately encounter a curious fact about the Lord's Supper. Virtually every branch of Christianity practices it. It is a common factor uniting almost all segments of Christianity. Yet, on the other hand, there are many different interpretations. Historically, it has actually kept various Christian groups apart. So it is at once a factor that unites and divides Christendom.

Philosophical presuppositions have played a large role in shaping the major views of the Lord's Supper. Some of these presuppositions reflect debates and disputes that occurred in medieval times. In many cases, the philosophical positions underlying the presuppositions have been altered or even abandoned, and today theology is less oriented to philosophical issues. Yet, curiously, the theological consequences of medieval philosophical issues linger on. Therefore, it will be important to isolate the presuppositions on which the differing views of the Lord's Supper rest.

In some cases the subject of the spiritual or practical value of the Lord's Supper has become lost in the dispute over theoretical issues. The theoretical questions are important (they affect the spiritual considerations), and so they ought not to be too quickly dismissed. If, however, we get bogged down in the technical issues, and do not move on to deal with the practical meaning, we will have missed the whole point of Christ's having established the Supper. Experience of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, not just comprehension, is our goal.

Points of Agreement

The several traditions or denominational groups agree on a number of broad and very significant issues.

Establishment by Christ

For a long period of time, there was no question among students of the New Testament that Jesus himself established the Lord's Supper. The first to call this point seriously into question was H. E. G. Paulus in his commentary on the New Testament (1800–1804) and his life of Jesus (1828). David Strauss likewise denied it in the first edition of his life of Jesus (1835), but admitted its possibility in the later popular edition (1864), when he questioned merely the details.[1988] Some recent form critics also dispute the authenticity of Jesus's statements establishing the Lord's Supper. W. D. Davies, for example, speaks of "the precipitate of those words percolated through the mind of a Rabbi."[1989]

For the most part, however, there is agreement that the establishment of the Lord's Supper goes back to Jesus himself. The evidence includes the fact that the three Synoptic Gospels all attribute to him the words inaugurating the practice (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20). Although there are some variations in the details, the common core in the Synoptics argues for an early inclusion in the oral tradition.[1990] In addition, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 gives a similar account of the instituting of the Lord's Supper. He states that he received from the Lord (παραλαμβάνω—*paralambanō*) what he now passes on (παραδίδωμι—*paradidōmi*) to his readers. While Paul does not state whether these facts were directly revealed to him by the Lord, or had been transmitted to him by others, the verb παραλαμβάνω suggests the latter, and his giving it to the Corinthian church is a continuation of the process of transmission.[1991] Paul probably heard the account from eyewitnesses, that is, the apostles. In any event, Paul's inclusion of the narrative indicates that the tradition existed several years before the writing of the first of the Gospels, which was likely Mark.[1992] We conclude that while we may not be able to determine the precise words spoken by Jesus, we do know that he instituted the practice that bears his name: the *Lord's* Supper.

The Necessity of Repetition

Some theologians maintain that Jesus himself established the Lord's Supper, but did not issue a command to repeat it. This conclusion is based on the fact that Matthew and Mark do not include "Do this in remembrance of me" in their accounts.[1993] Some redaction critics assume that Luke added this command, editing it into the text, although it was not in the tradition he received. But absence from Matthew and Mark does not prove that the command is not authentic. Luke may well have had independent sources. In any event, since

Luke wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, his letter in its entirety is the Word of God and, consequently, on this particular point is authoritative and binding upon us. In addition, Paul's account includes the command, "Do this . . . in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24–25), and continues, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). We must add to these considerations the practice of the church. Evidently believers celebrated the Lord's Supper from a very early time. Certainly it was already being observed by the church at the time of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (c. AD 55). This was easily within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, who would have been a check upon the authenticity of Paul's report of Jesus's words. These considerations argue that the command to repeat the sacrament goes back to Jesus.

We also need to ask what the point of the Last Supper would have been had there been no command to repeat it. In that case, the bread and wine would have had significance only for the group that was present. The elements would have constituted some sort of private object lesson for the Eleven. And the report of the Last Supper would have been incorporated in the Gospels only for the sake of the historical record. We know, however, that by the time of the writing of Mark (c. AD 60–62) there was no longer a pressing need for a historical account of the Last Supper (unlike most of the other events of Jesus's ministry). Paul's detailed historical and didactic account was already in circulation. That Mark and the other Synoptists nevertheless saw fit to include a report of the Last Supper strongly suggests that they regarded it as substantially more than a historical event. It is reasonable to infer that they included the Lord's Supper in their Gospels because Jesus intended it to be a continuing practice for future generations. In that case, the inclusion of the Lord's Supper in the narratives of Matthew and Mark is evidence that the rite is to be repeated regularly, even though those two writers record no command to that effect.

A Form of Proclamation

While there is a difference of opinion as to whether the bread and wine are more than mere emblems, there is a general agreement among all communions that the Lord's Supper is at least a representational setting forth of the fact and meaning of Christ's death. Paul specifically indicated that the Lord's Supper is a form of proclamation: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The act of taking the bread and the cup is a dramatization of the gospel, a graphic display of what Christ's death has accomplished. It points backward to his death as the basis of

our salvation. Beyond that, however, it also declares a present truth—the importance of a proper frame of mind and heart. Communicants are to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking the cup; those who participate "without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves" (vv. 28–29). To eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is to be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood (v. 27). While one might interpret Paul's reference to "recognizing the body" (v. 29 NIV 1984) as signifying that the church was not being properly recognized, the expression "the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27) is evidence that Paul was actually thinking of Jesus's death. Paul noted with chagrin that there were divisions within the Corinthian church (v. 18). Some of the members in partaking of the elements were not really eating the Lord's Supper (v. 20), for they simply went ahead without waiting for the others (v. 21). Disregard for fellow Christians and for the church is a contradiction of the Lord's Supper. So the Lord's Supper is as much a symbol of the present vital fellowship of believers with the Lord and with one another as it is a symbol of the past death of Jesus. It is also a proclamation of a future fact; it looks forward to the Lord's second coming. Paul wrote, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (v. 26, italics added).

A Spiritual Benefit to the Partaker

All Christians who participate in the Lord's Supper see it as conferring a spiritual benefit on them. In this sense, all agree that the Lord's Supper is *sacramental*. It can be a means, or at least an occasion, of spiritual growth in the Lord. There are different understandings of the nature of the benefit conferred by taking of the Lord's Supper. There also are different understandings of the requisite conditions for receiving this spiritual benefit. All agree, however, that we do not take the elements merely because the Lord's command obligates us to do so. Participation leads or contributes to spiritual growth.

Restriction to Followers of Christ

All denominations are agreed that the Lord's Supper is not to be administered indiscriminately to all persons. It is in some fashion a token of the discipleship involved in the relationship between the individual believer and the Lord. Accordingly, it must not be administered to someone who is not a follower of the Lord.

This restriction is based on the fact that the Lord's Supper was originally administered to the inner circle of disciples. It was not shared with the crowds of persons who came to Jesus, some of whom were merely curious or desirous of some personal benefit from him. Rather, the Last Supper was shared within the intimate gathering of those most fully committed to Christ. Further, the group had to be purified. Judas, who was to betray Jesus, left the group apparently in the midst of the meal.

Restriction of the Lord's Supper to believers is also borne out by Paul's statement about self-examination, which we noted earlier. It is necessary for one to examine oneself, in order to eat and drink in a worthy manner. One must be not only a believer but a practicing believer to take of the elements. Anything less is sin (1 Cor. 11:27–34).

The Horizontal Dimension

The Lord's Supper is, or represents, the Lord's body. It is also for the body, that is, the church. In 1 Corinthians 10:15–17 Paul argues that since all partake of one loaf, which is Christ's body, they are all one body. This is the background to Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 11:17–22. For members of the church to be divided into factions and to despise others who partake with them of the one loaf is an abuse and contradiction of the practice. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church. It cannot be appropriately practiced by separate individuals in isolation.

Points of Disagreement

The Presence of Christ

Of the disputed matters regarding the Lord's Supper, the nature of Christ's presence has probably been the most prominent point of discussion. Even Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, who agreed upon other matters, including the efficacy and value of the rite, could not reach agreement on this point. The issue pertains to whether, and in what sense, the body and blood of Christ are actually present in the elements employed. That is, how literally are we to interpret the statements "This is my body" and "This is my blood"? Several answers have been given to this question:

1. The bread and wine *are* the physical body and blood of Christ.[1994]

2. The bread and wine *contain* the physical body and blood.[1995]
3. The bread and wine *contain spiritually* the body and blood.[1996]
4. The bread and wine *represent* the body and blood.[1997]

The Efficacy of the Rite

What is the value of the Lord's Supper? What does it actually accomplish for (and in) the participants? One position is that it actually conveys grace to the communicant. The rite has within it the power to effect spiritual changes that would not otherwise occur. A second position is that the Lord's Supper serves to bring the participants in contact with the living Christ. He is present spiritually, and we benefit from thus encountering him. It is the encounter, however, not the rite itself, that is the source of the benefit. The rite is merely an instrument to foster our relationship with him. It does not constitute the relationship nor convey the attendant blessing. Yet a third option holds that the Lord's Supper serves merely as a reminder of the truth that the Lord is present and available. Its potential for spiritual benefit is much the same as that of a sermon. The benefit of a sermon depends on whether it is believed and accepted. Similarly, it is quite possible to partake of the Lord's Supper and be unaffected by the experience.

The Proper Administrator

Who may preside when the Lord's Supper is observed? Is it necessary to have a priest or minister? Is an ordained person a necessity for the rite to be valid? And if so, what constitutes proper ordination?

We are dealing here with the issue of sacerdotalism, which is closely linked to sacramentalism. Sacramentalism is the doctrine that the sacraments in and of themselves convey grace and can even accomplish the individual's salvation. Sacerdotalism is the correlative doctrine that only certain persons are qualified to administer the sacraments. For example, in classic Roman Catholic dogma, only a Catholic priest ordained into the apostolic succession can administer the Eucharist. If any other person should take the same physical elements and pronounce the same words over them, they would remain bread and wine. Those who receive the elements would be partaking not of the Eucharist, but simply a meal.

In some very nonliturgical Christian groups, there is no special limitation on who may administer the Lord's Supper. Any Christian who possesses the spiritual qualifications for partaking of the Lord's Supper may also administer it.

If a layperson follows the established form and has the proper intention, the sacrament is valid.

A subsidiary issue here is the relative emphases on the church and the clergy. Some fellowships that spell out precise qualifications for the administrant nonetheless put greater emphasis on the church. The clergy is an institution of the church; the clergyperson is simply its designated representative. Other fellowships lay greater stress on the priesthood per se and proper ordination into it. In their view the priest actually possesses the power to effect what the Lord's Supper accomplishes.

The Appropriate Recipients

We have noted that all churches require that those who partake of the Lord's Supper be Christians. There may be additional stipulations as well. Some groups insist that the participant have been properly baptized. Some local congregations distribute the elements only to their own members. Others specify a minimum age. A particular state of spiritual readiness is often required, at least tacitly or informally. Virtually all groups deny the Lord's Supper to people known to be living in serious sin. It may be necessary to go to confession or to fast before taking of the elements. Some require that the recipient believe in the real presence.

A specific issue of historical interest is whether the laity properly receive both elements of the Lord's Supper. One of Luther's great criticisms of the Catholic Church was that it withheld the cup from the laity. They were permitted to take only the bread. The clergy took the cup on behalf of the laity. This practice constituted what Luther labeled one of the "Babylonian captivities" of the church.[1998]

The Elements to Be Used

Finally, we turn to an issue that does not divide denominations from one another as much as it causes disputes within otherwise agreeing groups: Must the elements be the same as those used at the first observance of the Supper? Must the bread be unleavened, as was the case in the Passover meal? Or may we interpret Paul's reference to "one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17) as signifying that other breads are acceptable? Must we use wine, or will grape juice serve equally well? If wine, what alcoholic content would equal that in the wine used by Jesus and the disciples? And must there be one common cup, or will individual cups do equally well? Is the congregation at liberty to make changes in the procedure for

sanitary purposes? While these questions may seem relatively inconsequential to some, they have at times been the basis of rather severe debate and even division.

Sometimes this issue arises out of a desire for cross-cultural adaptation of the Christian message. May elements quite dissimilar from those originally used be employed if bread and wine are not available, or would they fail to carry the meaning that they conveyed to the people who lived in the New Testament world? For example, might an Eskimo culture substitute water and fish for wine and bread?

Sometimes the issue arises from a desire for variety or novelty. Young people may feel that they can put freshness into their religious experience by varying the symbols. Would it be valid to substitute potato chips and cola when bread and wine or grape juice are available?

Major Views

The Traditional Roman Catholic View

The official Roman Catholic position on the Lord's Supper was spelled out at the Council of Trent (1545–63). While many Catholics, especially in Western countries, have now abandoned some of the features of this view, it is still the basis of the faith of large numbers.

Transubstantiation is the doctrine that, as the administering priest consecrates the elements, an actual metaphysical change takes place. The substance of the bread and wine—what they actually are—is changed into Christ's flesh and blood, respectively. The accidents, however, remain unchanged. Thus the bread retains the shape, texture, and taste of bread. A chemical analysis would tell us that it is still bread. But what it essentially is has been changed.[1999] The whole of Christ is fully present within each of the particles of the host.[2000] All who participate in the Lord's Supper, or the Holy Eucharist as it is termed, literally take the physical body and blood of Christ into themselves.

To modern persons who are not given to thinking in metaphysical terms, transubstantiation seems strange, if not absurd. It is, however, based on Aristotle's distinction between substance and accidents, which through Thomas Aquinas found its way into the official theology of the Roman Catholic Church. From that philosophical perspective, transubstantiation makes perfectly good sense.

A second major tenet of the Catholic view is that the Lord's Supper involves a sacrificial act. In the Mass a real sacrifice is again offered by Christ on behalf of the worshipers in the same sense as was the crucifixion.[2001] It is to be understood as a propitiatory sacrifice satisfying God's demands. It serves to atone for venial sins. The sacrament of the Eucharist is greatly profaned, however, if someone bearing unforgiven mortal sins participates. Thus, one should seriously examine oneself beforehand, just as Paul instructed his readers to do.

A third tenet of the Catholic view is sacerdotalism, the idea that a properly ordained priest must be present to consecrate the host. Without such a priest to officiate, the elements remain merely bread and wine. When, however, a qualified clergyman follows the proper formula, the elements are completely and permanently changed into Christ's body and blood.[2002]

In the traditional administration of the sacrament, the cup was withheld from the laity, being taken only by the clergy. The major reason was the danger that the blood might be spilt.[2003] For the blood of Jesus to be trampled underfoot would be a desecration. In addition, there were two arguments to the effect that it is unnecessary for the laity to take the cup. First, the clergy act representatively for the laity; they take the cup on behalf of the people. Second, nothing would be gained by the laity's taking the cup. The sacrament is complete without it, for every particle of both the bread and wine contains fully the body, soul, and divinity of Christ.[2004]

The Lutheran View

The Lutheran view differs from the Roman Catholic view at many but not all points. Luther did not reject *in toto* the traditional view. In contrast to the Reformed churches and Zwingli, Luther retained the Catholic conception that Christ's body and blood are physically present in the elements. In his dialogue with Zwingli (the Marburg Colloquy), Luther is reputed to have repeatedly stressed the words "This is my body."[2005] He took the words of Jesus quite literally at this point. The body and blood are actually, not merely figuratively, present in the elements.

What Luther denied was the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. The molecules are not changed into flesh and blood; they remain bread and wine. But the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. The bread and wine have not become Christ's body and blood, but we now have the body and blood in addition to the bread and wine. The body and blood are there, but not in a way that would exclude the presence of the bread and

wine. While some have used the term *consubstantiation* to denote Luther's concept that body and bread are concurrently present, that blood and wine coexist, it was not Luther's term. Thinking in terms of one substance interpenetrating another, he used as an analogy an iron bar heated in fire. The substance of the iron does not cease to exist when the substance of fire interpenetrates it, heating it to a high temperature.[2006]

Luther rejected other facets of the Catholic conception of the Mass, in particular, the idea that the Mass is a sacrifice. Since Christ died and atoned for sin once and for all, and since the believer is justified by faith on the basis of that one-time sacrifice, there is no need for repeated sacrifices.[2007]

Luther also rejected sacerdotalism. The presence of Christ's body and blood does not result from the priest's actions. It is instead a consequence of Jesus Christ's power. Whereas Catholicism holds that the bread and wine are transformed at the moment the priest pronounces the words, Lutheranism does not speculate as to when the body and blood first appear. While a properly ordained minister ought to administer the sacrament, the presence of the body and blood is not to be attributed to him or to anything that he does.[2008]

Despite denials of various facets of the Catholic position, Luther insisted on the concept of manducation. There is a real eating of Jesus's body. Luther interpreted "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26) literally. In his view these words do not refer to some spiritual reception of Christ or of his body, but to a real taking of Christ into our body.[2009] Indeed, Jesus had said on another occasion: "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them" (John 6:53–56). The plain sense of these words fits well with Jesus's statement at the Last Supper. Luther maintained we must take them literally if we are to be faithful to the text and consistent in our interpretation.

What of the benefit of the sacrament? Here Luther's statements are less clear. He insists that by partaking of the sacrament one experiences a real benefit—forgiveness of sin and confirmation of faith.[2010] This benefit is due, however, not to the elements in the sacrament, but to one's reception of the Word by faith. Here Luther sounds almost as if he regards the sacrament as simply a means of proclamation to which one responds as to a sermon. If the sacrament is merely a form of proclamation, however, what is the point of the physical presence of Christ's body and blood? At other times Luther appears to have held that the benefit comes from actually eating the body of Christ. What is clear from

Luther's disparate statements is that he certainly regarded the Lord's Supper as a sacrament. By virtue of taking the elements, believers receive a spiritual benefit they otherwise would not experience. The Christian ought therefore to take advantage of the opportunity for grace afforded by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The Reformed View

The third major view of the Lord's Supper is the Calvinistic or Reformed view. While the term "Calvinism" usually stirs up images of a specific view of predestination, that is not what we have in mind here. Rather, we are referring to Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper.

There is some disagreement as to just what the respective views of Calvin and Zwingli were. In one interpretation, Calvin's emphasis on the dynamic or influential presence of Christ is not far different from Luther's view.[2011] Zwingli, on the other hand, taught that Christ is merely spiritually present. If this interpretation is correct, then it was Zwingli's view, not Calvin's, that prevailed in Reformed circles. According to another interpretation, Calvin held that Christ is spiritually present in the elements, and Zwingli maintained that the elements are mere symbols of Christ; he is neither physically nor spiritually present.[2012] If this interpretation of their respective positions is correct, it was Calvin's view that was accepted by the Reformed churches. Whose view eventually became the standard of the Reformed churches is not as important, however, as what the Reformed position entails. And on that we can be quite clear. Therefore, it is best to label the position we are discussing "Reformed" rather than "Calvinistic."

The Reformed view holds that Christ is present in the Lord's Supper but not physically or bodily. Rather, his presence in the sacrament is spiritual or dynamic. Using the sun as an illustration, Calvin asserted that Christ is present influentially. The sun remains in the heavens, yet its warmth and light are present on earth. So the radiance of the Spirit conveys to us the communion of Christ's flesh and blood.[2013] According to Romans 8:9–11, it is by the Spirit and only by the Spirit that Christ dwells in us. The notion that we actually eat Christ's body and drink his blood is absurd. Rather, true communicants are spiritually nourished by partaking of the bread and the wine. The Holy Spirit brings them into closer connection with the person of Christ, the living head of the church and the source of spiritual vitality.

In the Reformed view, the elements of the sacrament are not arbitrary or separable from what they signify—the death of Christ, the value of his death, the believer's participation in the crucified Christ, and the union of believers with

one another.[2014] And while the elements signify or represent the body and blood of Christ, they do more than that. They also seal. Louis Berkhof suggests that the Lord's Supper seals the love of Christ to believers, giving them the assurance that all the promises of the covenant and the riches of the gospel are theirs by a divine donation. In exchange for a personal claim on and actual possession of all this wealth, believers express faith in Christ as Savior and pledge obedience to him as Lord and King.[2015]

There is, then, a genuine objective benefit of the sacrament. It is not generated by the participant; rather, it is brought to the sacrament by Christ himself. By taking the elements the participant actually receives anew and continually the vitality of Christ. This should not be thought of as unique, however, in the sense that the participant experiences in the sacrament something experienced nowhere else. Indeed, even the Old Testament believers experienced something of the same nature. Calvin says, "The water gushing from the rock in the desert was to the Israelites a badge and sign of the same thing that is figured to us in the Supper by wine."[2016] Nor should the benefit of the Lord's Supper be thought of as automatic. The effect of the sacrament depends in large part upon the faith and receptivity of the participant.

The Zwinglian View

The view that the Lord's Supper is merely a commemoration is usually associated with Zwingli, although some would argue that Zwingli's conception went further. It is likely that Zwingli embraced more than one stance on this matter and that he may have altered his position toward the end of his life. Charles Hodge maintains that there is very little difference between the views of Zwingli and Calvin.[2017]

What is prominent in Zwingli's view is his strong emphasis on the role of the sacrament in bringing to mind the death of Christ and its efficacy on behalf of the believer. Thus, the Lord's Supper is essentially a commemoration of Christ's death.[2018] While Zwingli spoke of a spiritual presence of Christ, some who in many respects adopted his position (e.g., the Anabaptists) denied the concept of a physical or bodily presence so energetically as to leave little room for any type of special presence. They pointed out that Jesus is spiritually present everywhere. His presence in the elements is no more intense than his presence elsewhere.

The value of the sacrament, according to this view, lies simply in receiving by faith the benefits of Christ's death. The Lord's Supper is but one of the ways we can receive these benefits by faith, for the effect of the Lord's Supper is as a type

of proclamation.[2019] The Lord's Supper differs from sermons only in that it involves a visible means of proclamation. In both cases, as with all proclamation, responsive faith is necessary if there is to be any benefit. Christ is not present with the nonbelieving person. We might say, then, that it is not so much that the sacrament brings Christ to the communicant as that the believer's faith brings Christ to the sacrament.

Dealing with the Issues

The Presence of Christ

We must now come to grips with the issues posed earlier in this chapter and seek to arrive at some resolution. The first issue is the question of Christ's presence in the sacrament. Are the body and blood of Christ somehow specially present, and if so, in what sense? The most natural and straightforward way to render Jesus's words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," is to interpret them literally. Since it is our general practice to interpret Scripture literally where that is natural, we must be prepared to offer justification if we interpret these words in any other way. In this case, however, certain considerations do in fact argue against literal interpretation.

First, if we take "This is my body" and "This is my blood" literally, an absurdity results. If Jesus meant that the bread and wine were at that moment in the upper room actually his body and his blood, he was asserting that his flesh and blood were in two places simultaneously, since his corporeal form was right there beside the elements. To believe that Jesus was in two places at once is something of a denial of the incarnation, which limited his physical human nature to one location.

Second, there are conceptual difficulties for those who declare that Christ has been bodily present in the subsequent occurrences of the Lord's Supper. While the preceding paragraph introduced the problem of how Christ's flesh and blood could have been in two places simultaneously, here we face the problem of how two substances (e.g., flesh and bread) can be in the same place simultaneously (the Lutheran conception) or of how a particular substance (e.g., blood) can exist without any of its customary characteristics (the Catholic view). Those who hold to a physical presence offer explanations of their view that assume a type of metaphysic that seems very strange or even untenable to twentieth-century minds.

These difficulties in themselves are not enough to determine our interpretation. They do, however, suggest that Jesus's words are not to be taken literally. Can we find clues as to what Jesus actually meant when he said, "This is my body" and "This is my blood"?

As Jesus spoke the words inaugurating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he focused attention on the relationship between individual believers and their Lord. On many of the other occasions when he addressed this topic, he used metaphors to characterize himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"; "I am the vine, you are the branches"; "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the bread of life." At the Last Supper he used similar metaphors, reversing the subject and predicate noun: "This [bread] is my body"; "This [wine] is my blood." In keeping with the figurative language, we might render Jesus's statements, "This represents [or signifies] my body," and "This represents [or signifies] my blood." This approach spares us from the type of difficulties incurred by the view that Christ is physically present in the elements.

But what of the idea that Christ is spiritually present? This view arose from two historical sources. One was the desire of certain theologians to retain something of the traditional belief in Christ's presence even as they sought to change it. Their approach to reformation of the faith leaned more toward retaining whatever is not explicitly rejected by Scripture than toward preserving only those tenets of the faith that are explicitly taught in Scripture. Instead of totally rejecting tradition and constructing a completely new understanding, they chose to modify the old belief. The other source of the view that Christ is spiritually present was a disposition toward mysticism. Some believers, having had a profound experience of encounter with Christ as they observed the Lord's Supper, concluded that Christ must have been spiritually present. The doctrine served as an explanation of the experience.

It is important to remember that Jesus promised to be with his disciples everywhere and through all time (Matt. 28:20; John 14:23; 15:4–7). So he is everywhere present, and yet he has also promised to be with us especially when we gather as believers (Matt. 18:20). The Lord's Supper, as an act of worship, is therefore a particularly fruitful opportunity for meeting with him. It is likely that Christ's special presence in the sacrament is influential rather than metaphysical in nature. In this regard it is significant that Paul's account of the Lord's Supper says nothing about the presence of Christ. Instead, it simply says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). This verse suggests that the rite is basically commemorative.

We need to be careful to avoid the negativism that has sometimes characterized this view that the Lord's Supper is essentially a memorial. Out of zeal to avoid the conception that Jesus is present in the elements in some sort of literal way, some have sometimes gone to such extremes as to give the impression that the one place where Jesus most assuredly is not to be found is the elements of the Lord's Supper. This is what one Baptist leader termed "the doctrine of the real absence" of Jesus Christ.

How then, should we regard the Lord's Supper? We should look forward to the Lord's Supper as a time of relationship and communion with Christ, for he has promised to meet with us. We should think of the sacrament not so much in terms of Christ's presence as in terms of his promise and the potential for a closer relationship with him. We also need to be careful to avoid the neo-orthodox conception that for the true communicant the Lord's Supper is a subjective encounter with Christ. He is objectively present. The Spirit is capable of making him real in our experience and has promised to do so. The Lord's Supper, then, is a time when we are drawn close to Christ, and thus come to know him better and love him more.

The Efficacy of the Rite

What has been said about the presence of Christ has also intimated a great deal about the nature of the benefit conferred by the Lord's Supper. It should be apparent from Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 that there is nothing automatic about this benefit. Many at Corinth who participated in the Lord's Supper, instead of being spiritually edified, had become weak and ill; some had even died (v. 30). The value intended by the Lord was not being realized in their cases. The effect of the Lord's Supper must be dependent on or proportional to the faith of the believer and his or her response to what is presented in the rite. The Corinthians who became ill or died had not recognized or judged correctly (διακρίνω—*diakrinō*) the body of Christ. A correct understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper and an appropriate response in faith are necessary for the rite to be effective.[2020]

It is therefore important to review what the Lord's Supper symbolizes. It is in particular a reminder of the death of Christ and its sacrificial and propitiatory character as an offering to the Father on our behalf. It further symbolizes our dependence on and vital connection with the Lord, and points forward to his second coming. In addition, it symbolizes the unity of believers within the church and their love and concern for each other: the body is *one* body.

It is appropriate to explain the meaning of the Lord's Supper at each observance. And there should also be a rigorous self-examination by each participant. Every individual should carefully ascertain his or her own understanding and spiritual condition (1 Cor. 11:27–28). The Lord's Supper will then be an occasion of recommitment of oneself to the Lord.

The Proper Administrator

Scripture gives very little guidance on the matter of who should administer the Lord's Supper. Except for the original celebration of the sacrament, when Jesus himself administered the elements, we are not told who presided or what they did. Nor does Scripture stipulate any special qualifications for those who lead or for those who assist in the rite. For that matter, very little is said in the New Testament about ordination.

What does appear in the Gospel accounts and in Paul's discussion is that the Lord's Supper has been entrusted to, and is presumably to be administered by, the church. It would therefore seem to be in order for the persons who have been chosen and empowered by the church to supervise and conduct its services of worship to superintend the Lord's Supper as well. Thus, at least some of the duly chosen leaders of the church should assist in the observance of the sacrament; the pastor should take the leading role. In the absence of such officers, others who meet the qualifications might serve in their place. In general, those who assist should meet the qualifications Paul laid down for deacons; those who lead should meet his set of qualifications for bishops (1 Tim. 3).

The Appropriate Recipients

Nowhere in Scripture do we find an extensive statement of prerequisites for receiving the Lord's Supper. Those we do have we infer from Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 11 and from our understanding of the meaning of the sacrament. If the Lord's Supper signifies, at least in part, a spiritual relationship between the individual believer and the Lord, then it follows that a personal relationship with God is a prerequisite. In other words, those who participate should be genuine believers in Christ. And while no age qualifications can be spelled out in hard and fast fashion, the communicant should be mature enough to be able to discern the meaning (1 Cor. 11:29).

We infer another prerequisite from the fact that there were some people whose sin was so grave that Paul urged the church to remove them from the body (1 Cor. 5:1–5). Certainly, the church, to which the Lord's Supper has been

committed, should, as a first step in discipline, withhold the bread and cup from one known to be living in flagrant sin. In other cases, however, since we do not know what the requirements for membership in the New Testament churches were, it is probably best, once we have explained the meaning of the sacrament and the basis of partaking, to leave to the individuals themselves the decision as to whether to participate.

The Elements to Be Used

What elements we decide to use in celebrating the Lord's Supper will depend, at least in part, on whether our chief concern is to duplicate the original conditions as closely as possible or to capture the symbolism of the sacrament. If our chief concern is duplication, we will use the unleavened bread of the traditional Passover meal. If, however, our concern is the symbolism, we might use a loaf of leavened bread. The oneness of the loaf would symbolize the unity of the church; breaking the loaf would signify the breaking of Christ's body. With respect to the cup, duplication of the original event would call for wine, probably diluted with anywhere from one to twenty parts of water for every part of wine.[2021] If, on the other hand, representation of the blood of Christ is the primary consideration, then grape juice will suffice equally well.

Where the traditional elements are unavailable, substitutes that retain the symbolism may be employed. Indeed, fish might well be a more suitable symbol than bread. The use of bizarre substitutes simply for variety should be avoided. Potato chips and cola, for example, bear little resemblance to the original. A balance should be sought between, on the one hand, repeating the act with so little variation that we participate routinely without awareness of its meaning, and, on the other, changing the procedures so severely that we focus our attention on the mechanics instead of Christ's atoning work.

What we are commemorating in the Lord's Supper is not the precise circumstances of its initiation, but what it represented to Jesus and the disciples in the upper room. That being the case, suitability to convey the meaning, not similarity to the original circumstances, is what is important as far as the elements are concerned. A similar consideration holds with respect to the time of observance. To celebrate the sacrament on Maundy Thursday rather than Good Friday may be more an attempt to duplicate the Last Supper than a commemoration of the Lord's death.

As to whether it is necessary to use one loaf of bread and one cup, there is some latitude. Paul does speak of the "one loaf" (ἄρτος—*artos*) of which all partake (1 Cor. 10:17), but this does not necessarily dictate a whole loaf. There is

no parallel statement about “one cup,” so the use of individual cups does not compromise the symbolism. Sanitary concerns may well lead the church to utilize individual containers rather than one common cup. Moreover, in large gatherings this may be the only practical means of celebrating the Supper.

The Frequency of Observance

How often we should observe the Lord’s Supper is another matter concerning which we have no explicit didactic statements in Scripture. We do not even have a precise indication of the practice in the early church, although it may well have been weekly, that is, every time the church assembled. In view of the lack of specific information, we will make our decision on the basis of biblical principles and practical considerations.

The tendency of our beliefs to slip from the conscious to the preconscious level was one reason Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper. Sigmund Freud recognized that the human personality has at least three levels of awareness: the conscious (or, as Freud termed it, the perceptual conscious), the preconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious is what we are actually aware of at any given moment. In the unconscious lie those experiences and ideas we cannot volitionally recall into consciousness (although they can be brought back into consciousness through psychoanalysis, hypnosis, or certain types of drugs). The preconscious contains those experiences and ideas that, although one is not currently aware of them, can readily be recalled to consciousness by an act of will. Often our doctrinal beliefs hover at this intermediate level. The Lord’s Supper has the effect of bringing preconscious beliefs into consciousness. It should therefore be observed often enough to prevent long gaps between times of reflection on the truths it signifies, but not so frequently as to make it seem trivial or so commonplace that we go through the motions without really thinking about the meaning. Perhaps it would be good for the church to make the Lord’s Supper available on a frequent basis, allowing the individual believer to determine how often to partake. Knowing that we can partake of the Lord’s Supper when we feel the need and desire, but that we are not required to participate at every available opportunity, will prevent the sacrament from becoming routinized.

Should it be as easy as possible for one to partake, or should it be more difficult? There is something to be said for making the sacrament sufficiently unavailable as to require a definite intention and decision to partake. If the Lord’s Supper is appended to another worship service, many people will remain and participate simply because they happen to be there. On the other hand, if the

Lord’s Supper is a separate service, its importance will be highlighted. All the participants will have made a specific decision to receive the elements and to concentrate on their meaning.

The Lord’s Supper, properly administered, is a means of inspiring the believer’s faith and love as he or she reflects again on the wonder of the Lord’s death and the fact that those who believe in him will live everlastingly.

> And can it be that I should gain
> An interest in the Savior’s blood?
> Died He for me, who caused His pain?
> For me, who Him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
>
> Charles Wesley, 1738

PART 12
THE LAST THINGS

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Introduction to Eschatology

Chapter Objectives

Following your study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Examine several alternative approaches to the study of eschatology to aid understanding and especially teaching and preaching.
2. Classify different types of eschatology by employing seven evaluative questions.
3. Identify and explain six different modern approaches to eschatology.
4. Appraise the nine conclusions that may be drawn from the study of eschatology.

Chapter Summary

The study of eschatology has evoked a variety of responses among believers, ranging from virtual avoidance to total preoccupation with the doctrine. Neither extreme is desirable. A balanced view is advocated. A variety of systems exist, including modernized, demodernized, realized, existentialized, politicized, and systematized. At least nine conclusions may be drawn about eschatology.

Study Questions

- What are some reasons we should study eschatology?
- What are “eschatomania” and “eschatophobia”?
- How do classification questions help us analyze an eschatological system? What questions need to be raised?
- How would you compare and contrast the six selected eschatological systems: modernized, demodernized, realized, existentialized, politicized, and systematized? Develop a chart with three columns. Write each system in the first column. Identify the main exponent in the second column. List the principal views of each in the third column. Look back over the chart and try to formulate your own conclusions.
- How do the conclusions at the end of the chapter help you develop an effective approach to eschatology?

Outline

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The Classification of Eschatologies [1059]

Modern Treatments of Eschatology [1061]

The Liberal Approach: Modernized Eschatology

Albert Schweitzer: Demodernized Eschatology

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Conclusions regarding Eschatology [1068]

The Status of Eschatology

As the derivation of the word indicates, eschatology has traditionally meant the study of the last things. Accordingly, it has dealt with questions concerning the consummation of history, the completion of God’s working in the world. In many cases it has also been literally the final topic considered in the study of theology.

Eschatology has had varying fortunes during the history of Christianity. Because theology is usually defined and refined in response to challenges and

controversies, and the number of major debates over eschatology has been few, for much of the history of the church it remained relatively undeveloped in comparison to such doctrines as the nature of the sacraments and the person and work of Christ. These latter doctrines, being more central to the Christian faith and experience, were extensively treated at an earlier point.[2022] Whether eschatology was the primary topic of the modern period, as James Orr thought,[2023] might be disputed, for in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a great amount of attention was also given to other doctrines, such as revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet it is certainly true that in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, eschatology received closer examination than ever before.

There are various conceptions of the relationship of eschatology to other doctrines. Some theologians have regarded it as merely an appendage to or completion of some other doctrine. For instance, it has sometimes been considered as simply a part of the doctrine of salvation.[2024] When viewed as essentially a study of the final steps in Christ's establishing his rule in the world, eschatology completes the doctrine of the work of Christ.[2025] It has also been attached to the doctrine of the church; we think, for example, of Augustine's discussion of the kingdom and the church.[2026] Other theologians have looked on eschatology as an independent doctrine on a par with the other major doctrines.[2027] Still other theologians have insisted that eschatology is the supreme doctrine—it sums up all of the others and brings them to their fulfillment.[2028] Finally, a few have maintained that eschatology is the whole of theology or, more correctly, that the whole of theology is eschatology.[2029] There is, then, a wide range of views of the status of eschatology.

There are a number of reasons for the current attention to eschatology. One is the rapid development of technology and consequent changes in our culture in general. To avoid obsolescence, it is necessary for corporations and public agencies to predict and prepare for the future. This has given rise to a whole new discipline—"futurism." Curiosity as to what homes, transportation, and communication will be like in the next decade or the next century gives rise to speculation and then research. There is a corresponding interest in the future in a broader sense, a cosmic sense. What does the future hold for the whole of reality?

A second major reason for the prominence of eschatology is the rise of the third world. For some who live in the developed nations, current economic and political trends are negative and discouraging. For the third world nations, however, it is otherwise. The future holds great promise and potential. As Christianity continues its rapid growth in the third world nations, indeed, more

rapid there than anywhere else, their excitement and anticipation regarding the future stimulate greater interest in eschatology than in accomplished history.

Further, the strength of communism or dialectical materialism in our world forced theologians to focus on the future. Communism has a definite philosophy of history. It sees history as marching on to an ultimate goal. As the dialectic achieves its purposes, history keeps moving from one stage to the next. Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*),[2030] which represents Marxism as the world's hope for a better future, has had great impact on various Christian theologians. They have felt challenged to set forth an alternative, superior basis for hope.

Certain schools of psychology have also begun to emphasize hope. Perhaps the most notable example was Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, a blend of existentialism and psychoanalysis. From his experiences in a concentration camp during World War 2, Frankl concluded that humans need a purpose for living. One who has hope, who "knows the 'why' for his existence . . . will be able to bear almost any 'how.'"[2031] In a very real sense, the why, the purpose, of existence is related to the future, to what one anticipates will occur.

Finally, the threat of nuclear destruction that has hovered above the human race for some time has stirred inquiry regarding the future. And while the effect of the ecological crises we face is less rapid than nuclear war would be, they, too, jeopardize the future of the race. More recently, serious disruptions of the global economy threaten the economic futures many have anticipated. These facts make it clear that we cannot live merely in the present, preoccupied with what is now. We must think of the future.

When we examine what theologians and ministers are doing with eschatology, we find two contrasting trends. On the one hand, there is an intensive preoccupation with eschatology. Theological conservatives have shown great interest in the subject. Dispensationalists in particular have emphasized it in their preaching and teaching. One pastor is reported to have preached on the book of Revelation every Sunday evening for nineteen years! Sometimes the teaching is augmented by large, detailed charts of the last times. Current political and social events, especially those relating to the nation of Israel, are identified with prophecies in the Scripture. As a result, some preachers have been caricatured as having the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other.

There is another variety of eschatomania, very different in orientation and content. This is the approach that makes eschatology the whole of theology.[2032] The Christian faith is regarded as so thoroughly eschatological that "eschatological" is attached as an adjective to virtually every theological concept. Eschatology is seen "behind every bush" in the New Testament. In the

view of those who follow this approach, however, the central subject of eschatology is not the future, but the idea that a new age has begun. Often the tension between the old and the new is emphasized; in fact, the phrase "already, but not yet" became a sort of slogan.

The opposite of eschatomania might be called "eschatophobia"—a fear of or aversion to eschatology, or at least an avoidance of discussing it. In some cases, eschatophobia is a reaction against those who have a definite interpretation of all prophetic material in the Bible and identify every significant event in history with some biblical prediction. Not wanting to be equated with this rather sensationalistic approach to eschatology, some preachers and teachers avoid discussion of the subject altogether. As a result, in some conservative circles there is virtually no alternative to dispensationalism. Many laypersons, having heard no other view presented, have come to think of dispensationalism as the only legitimate approach to eschatology. Moreover, in situations where a rather minor point of eschatology has been made a test of orthodoxy, younger pastors tend to avoid the subject entirely, hoping to avert suspicion. And in settings where discussing eschatology has become an intramural sport, some pastors, hoping to avoid divisiveness, make little or no mention of the millennium and the great tribulation. In this respect, eschatological topics are not unlike glossolalia.

Many of the issues of eschatology are obscure and difficult to deal with. Consequently, some teachers and preachers simply avoid the subject. Certain professors who teach courses in Christian doctrine always find themselves running behind schedule in their lecturing. Consequently, they never have time to deal with the millennium and the great tribulation. Similarly, professors of New Testament studies have difficulty finding time for the book of Revelation, and even some professors of Old Testament studies have difficulty budgeting their schedule to allow much attention to the prophetic books. Perhaps this is just lack of organization and discipline, but more than one instructor has admitted that the lack of time is a convenience.

Somewhere between the two extremes of preoccupation with and avoidance of eschatology, we must take our stance. For eschatology is neither an unimportant and optional topic nor the sole subject of significance and interest to the Christian. We will find an appropriate mediating position if we keep in mind the true purpose of eschatology. At times eschatology has become a topic of debate, resulting in accusations and acrimony among Christians. This is not the purpose for which God revealed eschatological truths. Paul indicates in 1 Thessalonians 4 his reason for writing about the second coming. Some believers whose loved ones had died were experiencing a grief that was, at least to a degree, unhealthy

and unnecessary. Paul did not want them to sorrow like unbelievers, who have no hope for their departed loved ones (v. 13). After describing the second coming and assuring his readers of its certainty, he counsels, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (v. 18). It is sometimes easy to forget that the eschatological truths in God’s Word, like the rest of his revelation, are intended to comfort and assure us.

The Classification of Eschatologies

A series of questions can be posed to help us classify the various eschatological views. In some cases, a single question will serve to classify the view being considered, since it will be a key to the entire system. In other cases, several questions will have to be asked if we are to fully comprehend the nature of the view with which we are dealing.

1. Is eschatology thought of as pertaining primarily to the future or the present? Eschatology has traditionally been understood as dealing with the end times, matters to transpire at some future point. Some theologians, however, see eschatology as a description of events in the here and now. We are in a new age and experience a new quality of life. Still others view eschatology as a description of what has always been, is, and always will be true. In other words, it has a timeless character.

At this point it will be helpful to note a system that is used to classify the various interpretations of prophetic or apocalyptic material in Scripture. While it is most often used as a means of classifying interpretations of the book of Revelation[2033] or, more generally, all such prophetic literature, the system can also be applied to distinguish views of eschatology:

1. The futuristic view holds that most of the events described are in the future. They will come to fulfillment at the close of the age, many of them probably clustered together.
2. The preterist view holds that the events described were taking place at the time of the writer. Since they were current for the writer, they are now in the past.
3. The historical view holds that the events described were in the future at the time of writing, but refer to matters destined to take place throughout the history of the church. Instead of looking solely to the future for their occurrence, we should also search for them within the pages of history and consider whether some of them may be currently coming to pass.

4. The symbolic or idealist view holds that the events described are not to be thought of in a time sequence at all. They refer to truths that are timeless in nature, not to singular historical occurrences.

2. Is the view of the future of life here on earth primarily optimistic or pessimistic? Some eschatologies anticipate an improvement in conditions. Others look for a general worsening of the circumstances of human existence. Many of the latter expect that, under human control, the situation will deteriorate until God intervenes and rectifies what is occurring.

3. Is divine activity or human effort thought to be the agent of eschatological events? If divine activity, these events will be regarded as supernaturally realized; if human effort, they will be viewed as the result of familiar and natural processes. The former perspective looks for genuinely transcendent working by God; the latter stresses God's immanent activity in the world.

4. Is the focus of eschatological belief this-worldly or otherworldly? In other words, is it expected that the promises of God will largely come to pass upon this earth in a fundamental continuity with life as we now experience it, or is it expected that there will be a deliverance from the present scene and that his promises will be fulfilled in heaven or some place or situation radically different from what we now experience? Eschatologies of the former type pursue more secular hopes; those of the latter type are more spiritual in nature.

5. Does the particular view speak of hope for the church alone or for the human race in general? Do the benefits anticipated accrue only to believers, or are the promises to all? If the latter, is the church the agent or vehicle of the good things coming to all?

6. Does the eschatology hold that we will come into the benefits of the new age individually, or that their bestowal will be cosmic in character? If the latter, it is likely that God's promises will be fulfilled in one all-inclusive occurrence. Moreover, in that case, the effects may not be limited to human beings, but may involve other segments of the creation; there may well be a transformation of the natural order.

7. Is there a special place for the Jewish people in the future occurrences? As God's chosen and covenant people in the Old Testament, do they still have a unique status, or are they simply like the rest of the human race?

Modern Treatments of Eschatology

In many ways the history of eschatology has paralleled that of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In both cases a formal position was worked out fairly early and became part of orthodoxy. In orthodox circles, consequently, eschatology and the Holy Spirit were only rarely of vital interest or major objects of concern. It was in the cults, or in radical fringe groups, that these doctrines were taken very seriously and given dynamic and aggressive expression. While they were part of traditional belief, they were not the subject of much debate or preaching. In the twentieth century, however, both doctrines became matters of much broader interest and concern.

The Liberal Approach: Modernized Eschatology

The nineteenth century was a time of considerable intellectual ferment, and Christian theology felt its force. The Darwinian theory of evolution, the growth of natural sciences, and critical studies of the Bible all contributed to a new mood. In theology, liberalism attempted to retain the Christian faith while bringing the scientific approach to religious matters. There was confidence in the historical method as a means of gaining understanding of what had actually occurred in biblical times. Application of this method to study of the Gospels came to be known as the search for the historical Jesus. While there were variations in the conclusions, there were some general agreements. One was that Jesus was basically a human teacher whose message was primarily about the heavenly Father.

Jesus's message was really quite simple, according to Adolf von Harnack, whose thought represents the culmination of nineteenth-century liberalism. Jesus emphasized the fatherhood of God, who has created all humans and who watches over and protects them, as he does all parts of his creation. The infinite value of a human soul was another major teaching of Jesus. God has made humans the highest object of his creation and his love, so we should love our fellow humans.[2034]

The kingdom of God was also a basic topic of Jesus's teaching. Whereas this kingdom had traditionally been understood as a future earthly reign of Christ that would be established by his dramatic second coming, liberals stressed the present character of the kingdom. They pointed out that Jesus had said to his disciples, "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:8–9). The kingdom, then, is not something far removed, either spatially or temporally. It is something near, something into which humans can enter. It is not something external imposed from without. It is simply the reign of

God in human hearts wherever obedience to God is found. The role of Christians is to spread this kingdom, which, according to Albrecht Ritschl, is a realm of righteousness and ethical values.[2035]

In the view of liberals, Jesus also taught some rather strange ideas. One of these ideas was the second coming, the conception that he would return bodily at the end of the age to establish his kingdom. Liberals found this an untenable carryover from a prescientific way of understanding reality. Yet they also believed that the conception contains an important message. The teaching of the bodily second coming is merely the husk within which is contained the true message, the kernel. What must be done is to peel away the husk to get to the kernel.[2036] The real message of the second coming is the victory of God's righteousness over evil in the world. This is the kernel; the second advent is merely the husk or wrapping. We need not retain the wrapping. No one in his or her right mind eats the husk with the corn.

In the rejection of the idea of the second coming, we see the liberals' profound appreciation for the conclusions of modern learning, which, along with the historical method, was one of the basic components of their approach to the Bible. Prominent in the heyday of liberalism was the idea of progress. Advances were being made scientifically, politically, and economically. The Darwinian theory of evolution was being generalized to cover all of reality. Everything was seen as growing, developing, progressing—not merely biological organisms, but human personality and institutions as well. The belief in the triumph of God over evil was blended with this doctrine of progress. It was presumed that a continuing Christianization of the social order, including economics, would be the current exemplification of the real meaning of the second coming.

Albert Schweitzer: Demodernized Eschatology

Some theologians, however, were uneasy with the liberals' interpretations of Jesus. Not merely conservatives but even some who shared the liberals' basic approach to interpreting the Bible also objected. One of the first of this group was Johannes Weiss. His *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* proved to be a radical departure for those who applied the historical method to the Gospels. Instead of assuming that the kingdom of which Jesus spoke is a present ethical kingdom, Weiss theorized that Jesus was thoroughly eschatological, futuristic, and even apocalyptic in his outlook. According to Weiss, Jesus did not look for a gradual spread of the kingdom of God as an ethical rule in the hearts of humans, but for a future kingdom to be introduced by a dramatic action of God. This

hypothesis appeared to Weiss to fit the data of Jesus's life and teaching much better than did the conclusions of the standard lives of Jesus.[2037]

What Weiss had begun, Albert Schweitzer completed. He was sharply critical of the liberal interpretations and reconstructions of the life of Jesus. These half-historical, half-modern conceptions were the product of fruitful imaginations. He said of the liberal conception of Jesus as a preacher of an ethical kingdom: "He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb."[2038] Instead of a Jesus who had little to say about the future, Schweitzer found a Jesus whose thoughts and actions were permeated by a radical, thoroughgoing eschatology. Schweitzer used the phrase "consistent eschatology." A key factor in Jesus's message was his future coming (Schweitzer preferred this term to "second coming"). Not only was this eschatological preaching basic and central to Jesus's ministry; it was also the original plan. While some theologians see the eschatological element in Jesus's teaching as an afterthought adopted when he failed to establish an earthly kingdom, Schweitzer believed that a future heavenly kingdom was at the base of Jesus's preaching, even from the beginning of his first Galilean ministry.[2039]

Jesus preached a future kingdom that would be radically supernatural, sudden in its coming, and discontinuous from human society as previously experienced. It would be introduced through a cosmic catastrophe. One should prepare for it by repenting. This is what Jesus really believed, according to Schweitzer; but, of course, Jesus was mistaken! Failing in his attempt to introduce his contemporaries to this cosmic kingdom, Jesus was destroyed. He died a martyr's death.[2040] It is this true historical Jesus, not the modern Jesus, that we are to follow. For Jesus cannot be made to fit our conceptions. He will reveal himself to those who obey his commands and perform the tasks he has set them.[2041] While Schweitzer did not specify just what this means or how this revelation is to take place, his mission work in Lamberéné was evidently his personal attempt to fulfill Christ's commands.

C. H. Dodd: Realized Eschatology

C. H. Dodd gave eschatology its next major reorientation. His eschatology was similar to Schweitzer's in one major respect but diametrically opposed to it in another. In common with Schweitzer he held that eschatology is a major theme permeating Scripture, particularly Jesus's teachings. Unlike Schweitzer, however, Dodd insisted that the content of Jesus's message was not a future coming and a future kingdom; rather, with the advent of Jesus the kingdom of

God had already arrived. In terms of the four views of eschatology we looked at earlier, this is the preterist approach.

In formulating his eschatology, Dodd pays particular attention to the biblical references to the day of the Lord. Whereas in the Old Testament the day of the Lord is viewed as a future matter, in the New Testament it is depicted as a present occurrence. This mythological concept has become a definite historical reality. Eschatology has been fulfilled, or realized. Hence, Dodd's view has come to be known as "realized eschatology." Instead of looking ahead for future fulfillments of prophecy, we should note the ways in which it has already been fulfilled. For example, the triumph of God was evident when Jesus saw Satan fall from heaven (Luke 10:18). With the coming of Christ, the judgment has already taken place (John 3:19). Eternal life is already our possession (John 5:24). In Dodd's mind, there is little doubt that the New Testament writers saw the end times as having already come. In drawing this conclusion, Dodd gives greater attention to Paul than do Schweitzer or the liberal lives of Jesus. Peter's witness at Pentecost is also of significance: "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams'" (Acts 2:16–17). There really is no need to look ahead for the fulfillment of prophecies like Joel's. They have already been fulfilled.[2042]

Rudolf Bultmann: Existentialized Eschatology

Still another approach to eschatology was put forward by Rudolf Bultmann. His handling of eschatology is simply part of his much larger program of demythologization, which we examined earlier. In short, Bultmann insisted that much of the New Testament is in the form of mythology. The writers expressed their understanding of life in terms that were common in New Testament times. What they recorded is not to be taken as an objective account of what actually transpired or as a literal explanation of the cosmos. If taken in this fashion, the New Testament seems ludicrous. The ideas that Jesus ascended into heaven, for example, and that diseases are caused by demons inhabiting humans are simply untenable as well as unnecessary. Instead, we must understand that the New Testament writers used myths drawn from Gnosticism, Judaism, and other sources to give expression to what had happened to them existentially.[2043]

Bultmann brought Martin Heidegger's existentialism to his interpretation of the New Testament. Since the message of the New Testament is existential rather than historical (i.e., it does not tell us what actually happened), does it not make

good sense to interpret it by using existential philosophy? Bultmann considers Heidegger's thought to be a secularized, philosophical version of the New Testament view of human existence.[2044]

Since the historical element in the New Testament does not tell us primarily about specific occurrences but about the very nature of existence, we must regard it as essentially timeless. The same is true of eschatology, which does not refer to literal events that will occur in the future. Paul in particular writes of current experience rather than future events. He thinks of salvation as bearing upon present existence: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17). Resurrection, too, is a present experience: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). John tells us that Jesus spoke of judgment as a present phenomenon as well: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out" (John 12:31). John likewise reports similar words of Jesus regarding eternal life and resurrection: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (John 3:36); "Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (5:25). Bultmann comments, "For John the resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost and the *parousia* of Jesus are one and the same event, and those who believe have already eternal life."[2045] Even a purely eschatological event like the coming of the spirit of antichrist is existentially true at all times: "but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). The next verse declares that the children of God *have* overcome these spirits. Eschatological realities like resurrection, eternal life, and the coming of the spirit of antichrist, then, do not depend on whether a particular event has yet transpired, for they are true in a timeless, existential sense.

Jürgen Moltmann: Politicized Eschatology

The theology of hope considers eschatology not simply one part of theology, or one doctrine of theology, but rather the whole of theology. To an unusual degree, the inspiration for this theology stems from the personal experiences of one man, Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann was a prisoner of war in a British camp until 1948. He saw the collapse of his native Germany and all of its institutions. Like some other authors of prison camp memoirs, he noted that, as a general rule, the prisoners with hope had the best chance of survival. When he returned to Germany and began to study theology, his views matured. In particular,

exposure to the thought of the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch intensified his interest in the theme of hope. He could not understand why Christian theology had allowed this theme, of which it was the rightful owner, to slip away.[2046] As atheistic Marxism picked up and exploited the theme of hope, Christianity was becoming irrelevant. On the one hand, Christianity had a God but no future, and on the other, Marxism had a future but no God.[2047] Moltmann called Christians to remember the "God of Hope" who is witnessed to in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; reclaiming the theme of hope, they should "begin to assume responsibility for the personal, social, and political problems of the present."[2048]

Moltmann subsequently has called upon the church to mediate the presence of Christ, who in turn will mediate the future of God. The Christian hope will not be brought about simply by passive waiting, however. For "we are construction workers and not only interpreters of the future whose power in hope as well as in fulfillment is God. This means that Christian hope is a creative and militant hope in history. The horizon of eschatological expectation produces here a horizon of ethical intuitions which, in turn, gives meaning to the concrete historical initiatives."[2049]

Aiming at realization of the Christian hope, Moltmann has developed a political theology to transform the world. Yet the future will not be achieved primarily by our work. It will be basically God's doing. To attain that future (our hope) requires action, not theological explanation. In contrast to earlier theologies, which attempted to deal with the problem of evil in the world by offering a theodicy (a vindication of God's justice), the theology of hope, instead of asking why God does not do something about evil in the world, acts to transform that evil. So faith has become action, which in turn will help to bring about the object of that faith.

Dispensationalism: Systematized Eschatology

One additional school of eschatology, although relatively new as orthodox theologies go, has exerted considerable influence within conservative circles. This movement, which has come to be known as dispensationalism, is a unified interpretive scheme. That is to say, each specific part or tenet is vitally interconnected with the others. Thus, when we speak of the systematizing of eschatology, we have in mind not only that the data have been organized to facilitate understanding, but also that conclusions in some areas automatically follow from tenets in others. The developer of dispensationalism was John Nelson Darby (1800–1882). He was the organizing force in the Plymouth

Brethren movement as well. Dispensationalism was popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible and through conferences on biblical prophecy that were led by pastors and laypersons who had studied at Bible institutes where dispensationalism was virtually the official position.[2050]

Dispensationalists tend to think of their system as being, first and foremost, a method of interpreting Scripture. At its core is the conviction that Scripture is to be interpreted literally. This does not mean that obviously metaphorical passages are to be taken literally, but that if the plain meaning makes sense, one should not look further.[2051] Application of this principle leads to rejection of both allegorical interpretations and the liberal attempts to explain away the supernatural elements in Scripture, for example, the miracles. It also means that prophecy is interpreted very literally and often in considerable detail. Specifically, "Israel" is always understood as a reference to national or ethnic Israel, not the church. Despite the stress on literal interpretation, however, there is also a tendency toward a typological understanding of some narrative and poetical portions that at times approaches the old allegorizing method. An example is the frequent explanation of the Song of Solomon as a picture of Christ's love for his church, in spite of the fact that the book says nothing explicit about either Christ or the church.

Dispensationalism finds in God's Word evidence of a series of "dispensations" or economies under which he has managed the world. These dispensations are successive stages in God's revelation of his purposes. They do not entail different means of salvation, for the means of salvation has been the same at all periods of time, namely, by grace through faith. There is some disagreement as to the number of dispensations, the most common number being seven. Thus, humanity was first in the dispensation of innocence. Then came the dispensations of conscience (from the fall to the flood), human government (from the flood to the call of Abraham), promise, law, and grace. The seventh is yet to come. Many dispensationalists emphasize that recognizing to what dispensation a given passage of Scripture applies is crucial. We should not attempt to govern our lives by precepts laid down for the millennium, for example.[2052]

Traditional dispensationalists also put great stress on the distinction between Israel and the church. Some of them, in fact, regard this distinction as fundamental to understanding Scripture and organizing eschatology. In their view God made an unconditional covenant with Israel; that is to say, his promises to them do not depend on their fulfilling certain requirements. They will remain his special people and ultimately receive his blessing. Ethnic, national, political Israel is never to be confused with the church, nor are the

promises given to Israel to be regarded as applying to and fulfilled in the church. They are two separate entities.[2053] God has, as it were, interrupted his special dealings with Israel, but will resume them at some point in the future. Unfulfilled prophecies regarding Israel will be fulfilled within the nation itself, not within the church. Indeed, the church is not mentioned in the Old Testament prophecies. It is virtually a parenthesis within God's overall plan of dealing with Israel. We must be careful, then, not to confuse the two divine kingdoms mentioned in Scripture. The kingdom of heaven is Jewish, Davidic, and messianic. When it was rejected by national Israel during Jesus's ministry, its appearance on earth was postponed. The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is more inclusive. It encompasses all moral intelligences obedient to the will of God—the angels and the saints from every period of time.[2054]

Finally, the millennium takes on a special significance in dispensationalism. At that time God will resume his dealings with Israel, the church having been taken out of the world or "raptured" some time earlier (just prior to the great tribulation). The millennium consequently will have a markedly Jewish character. The unfulfilled prophecies regarding Israel will come to pass at that time. Here we see the organic nature of dispensationalism, the interconnectedness of its tenets. Proceeding on the principle of literal interpretation, dispensationalists put great stress on the distinction between Israel and the church.[2055]

Conclusions regarding Eschatology

1. Eschatology is a major topic in systematic theology. Consequently, we dare not neglect it as we construct our theology. On the other hand, it is but one doctrine among several, not the whole of theology. We must not convert our entire doctrinal system into eschatology, nor allow our theology to be distorted by an undue emphasis on it.

2. The truths of eschatology deserve careful, intense, and thorough attention and study. At the same time, we must guard against exploring these matters merely out of curiosity. And when striving to understand the meaning of difficult and obscure portions of God's Word, we must also avoid undue speculation and recognize that because the biblical sources vary in clarity, our conclusions will vary in degree of certainty.

3. We need to recognize that eschatology does not pertain exclusively to the future. Jesus did introduce a new age, and the victory over the powers of evil has already been won, even though the struggle is still to be enacted in history.

4. We must pair with the previous insight the truth that there are elements of predictive prophecy, even within Jesus's ministry, which simply cannot be regarded as already fulfilled. We must live with an openness to and anticipation of the future.

5. The biblical passages regarding eschatological events are far more than existential descriptions of life. They do indeed have existential significance, but that significance is dependent upon, and an application of, the factuality of the events described. They really will come to pass.

6. We as humans have a responsibility to play a part in bringing about those eschatological events that are to transpire here on earth and within history. Some see this responsibility in terms of evangelism; others see it in terms of social action. As we carry out our role, however, we must also be mindful that eschatology pertains primarily to a new realm beyond space and time, a new heaven and a new earth. This kingdom will be ushered in by a supernatural work of God; it cannot be accomplished by human efforts.

7. The truths of eschatology should arouse in us watchfulness and alertness in expectation of the future. But preparation for what is going to happen will also entail diligence in the activities that our Lord has assigned to us. We must not become impatient nor prematurely abandon our tasks. We should study the Scripture intensively and watch developments in our world carefully, so that we may discern God's working and not be misled. We must not become so brash, however, as to dogmatically identify specific historical occurrences with biblical prophecy or predict when certain eschatological events will take place.

8. As important as it is to have convictions regarding eschatological matters, it is good to bear in mind that they vary in significance. Agreement is essential on such basic matters as the second coming of Christ and the life hereafter. On the other hand, holding to a specific position on less central and less clearly expounded issues, such as the millennium or the tribulation, should not be made a test of orthodoxy or a condition of Christian fellowship and unity. Emphasis should be placed on the points of agreement, not those of disagreement.

9. When we study the doctrines of eschatology, we should stress their spiritual significance and practical application. They are incentives to purity of life, diligence in service, and hope for the future. They are to be regarded as resources for ministering, not topics for debate.

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Individual Eschatology

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Distinguish between cosmic and individual eschatology.
2. Define death and distinguish between physical and spiritual death.
3. Determine why believers, as well as unbelievers, experience physical death.
4. Identify and describe the intermediate state between death and resurrection for the believer.
5. Examine three current views on the intermediate state (soul sleep, purgatory, and instantaneous resurrection), and propose a resolution of the difficult problems associated with this doctrine.
6. Formulate a set of conclusions on the intermediate state in order to respond effectively to questions about this issue.

Chapter Summary

For all people there exists the personal eschatological reality of death. While all persons participate in physical death, only those who are not believers will also experience spiritual death. The difficult problem of the intermediate state is addressed from the perspective of three contemporary views. A solution to the difficulties is proposed. Implications and conclusions about death and the intermediate state are

drawn and should provide some answers to the issues surrounding death and the intermediate state.

Study Questions

- What is death, as a doctrinal issue, and why is it important to theology?
- Why do believers experience death? What differences exist between believers and unbelievers regarding death?
- What is the intermediate state? Why is the intermediate state a problem?
- What especially distinguishes purgatory from the other views of the intermediate state?
- How would you respond to a believer asking about the current state of a deceased loved one who was a Christian? Consider the same for a non-Christian.
- What have you learned about the doctrines of death and the intermediate state? If you minister to others, how can this help you be more effective?

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When we speak of eschatology, we must distinguish between individual eschatology and cosmic eschatology—those experiences that lie, on the one hand, in the future of the individual, and, on the other, in the future of the human race and indeed of the entire creation. The former will occur to each individual as he or she dies. The latter will occur to all persons simultaneously in connection with cosmic events, specifically, the second coming of Christ.

Death

An undeniable fact about the future of every person is the inevitability of death. There is a direct assertion of this fact in Hebrews 9:27: “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” The thought also runs through the whole of 1 Corinthians 15, where we read of the universality of death and the effect of Christ’s resurrection. While death is said to have been defeated and its sting removed by his resurrection (vv. 54–56), there is no suggestion that we will not die. Paul certainly anticipated his own death (2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:19–26).

The Reality of Death

Death is one facet of eschatology that almost all theologians and all believers and indeed all persons in general recognize. The only exception would seem to be the Christian Scientists, who question the reality both of sickness and of death. Yet even this group, after initial denials, eventually came to acknowledge that their founder, Mary Baker Eddy, had died.[2056]

Although everyone at least intellectually acknowledges the reality and the certainty of death, there nonetheless is often an unwillingness to face the inevitability of one’s own death. So we see within our society numerous attempts to avoid thinking of death. At funeral homes, many people pay their formal respects and then seek to get as far away from the coffin as possible. The embalmer’s cosmetic art is highly developed, the aim apparently being to conceal the appearance of death. We employ a whole series of euphemisms to avoid acknowledging the reality of physical death. Persons do not die—they expire or pass away. We no longer have graveyards, but cemeteries and memorial parks. Even in the church, death may only be spoken of during Passion Week and funerals. Many people have not made a will, some probably because of procrastination, but others because of abhorrence of the thought of death.

To the existentialist, this unwillingness to come to grips with the reality of death is a prime example of “inauthentic existence.” Death is one of the harsh

realities of life: every individual is going to grow old, die, be taken to the cemetery, and be buried in the ground. That is our inevitable end. Life, if it is to be lived properly, must include acceptance of the fact of death. Death is simply the end of the process, the final stage of life, and we must accept it.[2057]

While disagreeing with the existentialist as to the meaning of death, the Christian agrees as to its reality and inescapability. Paul acknowledges that death is ever present in the world: "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Cor. 4:11–12). Usually death does not come upon us suddenly. It is the end of the process of decline of our mortal, corruptible bodies. We reach our physical peak and then deterioration begins. In little ways we find our strength ebbing from us, until finally the organism can no longer function.

The Nature of Death

What is death, however? How are we to define it? Various passages in Scripture speak of physical death, that is, cessation of life in our physical body. In Matthew 10:28, for example, Jesus contrasts death of the body with death of both body and soul: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." The same idea appears in Luke 12:4–5: "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him." Several other passages speak of loss of the ψυχή (*psuchē*—"life"). An example is John 13:37–38: "Peter asked, 'Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me?'" Other references of this type include Luke 6:9 and 14:26. Finally, death is referred to in Ecclesiastes 12:7 as separation of body and soul (or spirit): "and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." This passage is reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 (the human originated when God breathed the breath of life into dust from the ground) and 3:19 (the human shall return to dust). In the New Testament, James 2:26 also speaks of death as separation of body and spirit: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

What we are dealing with here is cessation of life in its familiar bodily state. This is not the end of existence, however. Life and death, according to Scripture, are not to be thought of as existence and nonexistence, but as two different states

of existence.[2058] Death is simply a transition to a different mode of existence; it is not, as some tend to think, extinction.

In addition to physical death, Scripture speaks of spiritual and eternal death. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body; spiritual death is the separation of the person from God; eternal death is the finalizing of that state of separation—one is lost for all eternity in his or her sinful condition.[2059] Scripture clearly refers to a state of spiritual deadness, which is an inability to respond to spiritual matters or even a total loss of sensitivity to such stimuli. This is what Paul has in mind in Ephesians 2:1–2: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." When the book of Revelation refers to the "second death," it is eternal death that is in view. An example is found in Revelation 21:8: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." This second death is something separate from and subsequent to normal physical death. We know from Revelation 20:6 that the second death will not be experienced by believers: "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." The second death is an endless period of punishment and of separation from the presence of God, the finalization of the lost state of the individual who is spiritually dead at the time of physical death.

Physical Death: Natural or Unnatural?

There has been a great deal of debate as to whether humans were created mortal or immortal, whether they would have died had they not sinned.[2060] It is our position that physical death was not an original part of the human condition. But death was always there as a threat should the human sin, that is, eat of or touch the forbidden tree (Gen. 3:3). While the death that was threatened must have been at least in part spiritual death, it appears that physical death was also involved, since the man and woman had to be driven out of the garden of Eden lest they also eat of the tree of life and live forever (Gen. 3:22–23).

Some of the Scripture passages that have been offered as evidence that physical death is the result of human sin actually prove no such thing. A case in point is Ezekiel 18:4, 20: "The one who sins is the one who will die." The reference here is to spiritual or eternal death, for the text goes on to say that if

the sinner turns from his wicked ways, that person shall live and not die (vv. 21–22). Since both believer and unbeliever experience physical death, the reference here cannot be to physical death. The same holds true of Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." That it is eternal life that is contrasted with death suggests that the result of sin in view here is eternal death, not physical death. In 1 Corinthians 15, however, Paul is clearly referring, at least in part, to physical death when he says, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man" (v. 21). For physical death is one of the evils countered and overcome by Christ's resurrection. He was himself delivered from physical death. This verse, then, is proof that physical death came from humans' sin; it was not part of God's original intention for the human race.

Since physical death is a result of sin, it seems probable that the humans were created with the possibility of living forever. They were not inherently immortal, however; that is, they would not by virtue of their nature have lived on forever. Rather, if they had not sinned, they could have partaken of the tree of life and thus have received everlasting life. They were mortal in the sense of being able to die; and when they sinned, that potential or possibility became a reality. We might say that they were created with contingent immortality. They could have lived forever, but it was not certain that they would. Upon sinning they lost that status.

Death, then, is not something natural to humans. It is something foreign and hostile. Paul pictures it as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). And there is little doubt that God himself sees death as an evil and a frustration of his original plan. God is himself the giver of life; those who thwart his plan of life by shedding human blood must forfeit their own lives (Gen. 9:6). His sending death is an expression of his disapproval of human sin, our frustrating his intention for us. This was the case with the flood that God sent to do away with all flesh (Gen. 6:13), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), the punishment of Korah and those who rebelled with him (Num. 16), and the numerous other instances of the death penalty. In each case, this was the unnatural consequence of their sin. The psalmist vividly depicts death as an expression of God's anger: "You sweep people away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation" (Ps. 90:5–7). Yet God is also compassionate. Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35), and on other occasions as well restored the dead to life.

The Effects of Death

For the unbeliever death is a curse, a penalty, an enemy. For although death does not bring about extinction or the end of existence, it cuts one off from God and from any opportunity of obtaining eternal life. But for those who believe in Christ, death has a different character. The believer still undergoes physical death, but its curse is gone. Because Christ himself became a curse for us by dying on the cross (Gal. 3:13), believers, although still subject to physical death, do not experience its fearsome power, its curse. As Paul put it, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

Looking on death as indeed an enemy, the non-Christian sees nothing positive in it and recoils from it in fear. Paul, however, was able to take an entirely different attitude toward it. He saw death as a conquered enemy, an erstwhile foe that now is forced to do the Lord's will. So Paul regarded death as desirable, for it would bring him into the presence of his Lord. He wrote to the Philippians: "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil. 1:20–23). This was the Paul who, as Saul of Tarsus, had heard the dying Stephen exclaim that he could see heaven and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). Stephen had then prayed simply, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59). And Paul had undoubtedly been told the tradition of the Lord himself, who had said at the end of his life, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). For Paul, as for Stephen and Jesus, death was no longer an active enemy, but a conquered enemy who now serves not to condemn and destroy, but to free us from the dreadful conditions sin has introduced.

The believer can thus face the prospect of death with the knowledge that its effects are not final, for death itself has been destroyed. Although the final execution of this judgment upon death is yet in the future, the judgment itself is already accomplished and assured. Even the Old Testament contained prophecies regarding the victory over death: "He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken" (Isa. 25:8); "I will

deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will have no compassion" (Hos. 13:14). In 1 Corinthians 15:55 Paul cites the latter passage, and in Revelation 21:3–4 John picks up the former: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" In the previous chapter John has written, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14). Passages such as these make it clear that death has been defeated and will ultimately be destroyed.

But why is the believer still required to experience death at all? If death, physical as well as spiritual and eternal, is the penalty for sin, then when we are delivered from sin and its ultimate consequence (eternal death), why should we not also be spared from the symbol of that condemnation, namely, physical death? If Enoch and Elijah were taken to be with the Lord without having to go through death, why should not such translation be the experience of all whose faith is placed in Christ? Is it not as if something of the curse for sin still remains on those who have been forgiven of sin?

Some theologians have attempted to show that death has certain beneficial results. Louis Berkhof argues that death is the culmination of the chastisements God uses to sanctify his people.[2061] While acknowledging that death evidently is not indispensable to the accomplishment of sanctification, since Enoch and Elijah did not die, Berkhof nonetheless sees it as a means by which believers can identify with their Lord, who also went through sufferings and death on the way to his glory. Death frequently calls forth from believers unusual degrees of faith. Yet while this is true in many cases, there are other instances in which death (or suffering, for that matter) does not appear to sanctify or evoke unusual faith. That greater degrees of sanctification and faith are realized by some Christians at the time of death is hardly sufficient ground to justify the physical death of all believers. Berkhof's effort therefore appears to be a somewhat strained explanation. A better approach is simply to consider death one of the conditions of humanity as now constituted; in this respect, death is like birth.

It is necessary to distinguish here between the temporal and the eternal consequences of sin. Although the eternal consequences of our own individual sins are nullified when we are forgiven, the temporal consequences, or at least some of them, may linger on. This is not a denial of the fact of justification, but merely evidence that God does not reverse the course of history. What is true of our individual sins is also true of God's treatment of Adam's sin or the sin of the

race as well. All judgment upon and our guilt for original and individual sin are removed, so that spiritual and eternal death are canceled. We will not experience the second death. Nonetheless, we must experience physical death simply because it has become one of the conditions of human existence. It is now a part of life, as much so as are birth, growth, and suffering, which also ultimately takes its origin from sin. One day every consequence of sin will be removed, but that day is not yet. The Bible, in its realism, does not deny the fact of universal physical death, but insists that it has different significance for the believer and the unbeliever.

The Intermediate State

The Difficulty of the Doctrine

The doctrine of the intermediate state is an issue that is both very significant and problematic. It therefore is doubly important that we examine carefully this somewhat strange doctrine. “Intermediate state” refers to the condition of humans between their death and the resurrection. The question is, what is the condition of the individual during this period of time?

It is vital that we have practical answers to this question at the time of bereavement. Many pastors and parents have been asked at a graveside, “Where is Grandma now? What is she doing? Is she with Jesus already? Are she and Grandpa back together? Does she know what we are doing?” These questions are not the product of idle speculation or curiosity; they are of crucial importance to the individual posing them. An opportunity to offer comfort and encouragement is available to the Christian who is informed on the matter. Unfortunately, many Christians do not seize this opportunity because they do not know of a helpful reply.

There are two major reasons why many Christians find themselves unable to respond in this situation. The first is the relative scarcity of biblical references to the intermediate state. This doctrine is not the subject of any extended discourse in the way in which the resurrection and the second coming are. Rather, it is treated somewhat incidentally. At least two explanations have been offered for the relative silence. One is that the early church expected the period between Jesus’s departure and his return to be relatively brief; thus the period between any human being’s death and resurrection would be relatively brief as well.[2062] The other is that, whatever its length, the intermediate state is merely temporary and, accordingly, did not concern the early believers as much as did the final

states of heaven and hell.[2063] The scarcity of references leads some to think that the biblical writers did not consider it to be very important. In one sense, of course, it is not essential or indispensable, since one's salvation does not depend on one's conviction regarding the intermediate state. Nonetheless, like other nonessential issues, for example, the form of church government, the doctrine of the intermediate state is of considerable practical importance.

The second reason why Christians fail to minister effectively to the bereaved is the theological controversy that has developed around the doctrine of the intermediate state. Prior to the twentieth century, orthodoxy had a fairly consistent doctrine worked out. Believing in some sort of dualism of body and soul (or spirit) in the human person, conservatives maintained that part of the human survives death. Death consists in the separation of the soul from the body. The immaterial soul lives on in a conscious personal existence while the body decomposes. At Christ's second coming, there will be a resurrection of a renewed or transformed body, which will be reunited with the soul. Thus, orthodoxy held to both the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.[2064]

Liberalism, however, rejected the idea of the resurrection of the body, considering it mythological and scientifically impossible. It is preposterous to think that a body that has decomposed, and perhaps even been cremated, its ashes being scattered, can be brought back to life. The liberal who wished to maintain some sort of continuing life after death replaced the idea of the resurrection of the body with the immortality of the soul. Since those who held this view did not anticipate any future resurrection, they did not believe in a bodily second coming of Christ either.[2065]

Neo-orthodoxy took a quite different view of the matter. In the judgment of these theologians, the idea of the immortality of the soul was a Greek, not a biblical, concept. It stemmed from the notion that all matter, including the body, is inherently evil, and that salvation consists in deliverance of the good soul or spirit from the evil body. The neo-orthodox hope for the future lay instead in an expectation of the resurrection of the body. While some were careful to distinguish this concept from resurrection of the flesh, some form of bodily resurrection was envisioned. Underlying this view was the monistic idea of the human person as a radical unity—existence means bodily existence; there is no separate spiritual entity to survive death and exist apart from the body.[2066] So whereas liberalism held to immortality of the soul, neo-orthodoxy held to resurrection of the body. Both schools agreed that their views were mutually exclusive. That is, it was a matter of either/or; they did not consider the possibility of both/and.

Current Views of the Intermediate State

Soul Sleep

There are various current understandings of the intermediate state. One view, which over the years has had considerable popularity, is termed "soul sleep." This is the idea that the soul, during the period between death and resurrection, reposes in a state of unconsciousness. In the sixteenth century, many Anabaptists and Socinians apparently subscribed to this view that the soul of the dead person lies in a dreamless sleep. And today the Seventh-day Adventists list among their "Fundamental Beliefs" the concepts "that the condition of man in death is one of unconsciousness [and that] all men, good and evil alike, remain in the grave from death to the resurrection."[2067] The Jehovah's Witnesses hold a view rather similar to that of Seventh-Day Adventists. In the case of the Adventists, however, the phrase "soul sleep" is somewhat misleading. Anthony Hoekema suggests instead "soul-extinction," since in the Adventist view one does not fall asleep at death, but actually becomes completely nonexistent, nothing surviving.[2068] Hoekema's characterization of the Adventist position as soul-extinction is quite in order as long as we understand that "soul" is here being used as a synonym for "person."

The case for soul sleep rests in large measure on the fact that Scripture frequently uses the imagery of sleep to refer to death. Stephen's death is described as sleep: "When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). Paul notes that "when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). Paul uses the same image four times in 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 6, 18, 20, 51) and three times in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15. Jesus himself said of Lazarus, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up" (John 11:11), and then indicated clearly that he was referring to death (v. 14). Literal understanding of this imagery has led to the concept of soul sleep.

Every view of the intermediate state is, of course, closely related to a specific anthropology or understanding of human nature. Those who subscribe to soul sleep maintain that the person is a unitary entity without components. A human does not consist of body and soul. Rather, human person, body, and soul are one and the same entity. Thus, when the body ceases to function, the soul (i.e., the whole person) ceases to exist. Nothing survives physical death. There is no tension, then, between immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body. The simplicity of this view makes it quite appealing. Nevertheless, there are several problems.

One problem is that there are several biblical references to personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection. The most extended is the parable of

the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). While it was not Jesus's primary intent here to teach us about the nature of the intermediate state, it is unlikely that he would mislead us on this subject. Another reference is Jesus's words to the thief on the cross, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). In addition, dying persons speak of giving up their spirits to God. Jesus himself said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46); and Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). While one might argue that Stephen was not necessarily speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and consequently may not have been expressing an infallible word from God on this point, certainly what Jesus said must be regarded as authoritative.

The second problem is whether it is legitimate to conclude that Scripture passages that refer to death as sleep are literal descriptions of the condition of the dead prior to the resurrection. It would seem, rather, that "sleep" should be understood simply as a euphemism for the cessation of life. Nothing more specific is implied about the character of the dead person's state. Jesus's use of the image of sleep in reference to Lazarus (John 11:11) and the explanation that follows (v. 14) support this interpretation. If indeed "sleep" is more than a figure of speech, that needs to be substantiated.

Another problem for the theory of soul sleep is the conceptual difficulty attaching to the view that human nature is unitary. If indeed nothing of the person survives death, then what will be the basis of our identity? If the soul, the whole person, becomes extinct, what will come to life in the resurrection? On what basis can we maintain that what will come to life will be the person who died? It would seem that we will identify the post-resurrection person with the pre-death person on the basis of the body that is raised. Yet this in turn presents two further difficulties. How can the very same molecules come together to form the post-resurrection person? The molecules constituting the pre-death person may well have been destroyed, have formed new compounds, or even have been part of someone else's body. In this connection, cremation presents a particularly difficult problem. But beyond that, to identify the pre-death and post-resurrection persons on the basis of the body raised is to hold that human nature is primarily material or physical. For all of the foregoing reasons, the theory of soul sleep must be rejected as inadequate.

PURGATORY

Because the doctrine of purgatory is primarily a Roman Catholic teaching, it is necessary to see it in the context of Catholic dogma in general. In that theology,

immediately upon death, the individual's eternal status is determined. The soul becomes aware of God's judgment upon it. This is not so much a formal sentence as it is a clear perception of whether one is guilty or innocent before God. The soul is then "moved of its own accord to hasten either to Heaven, or Hell, or Purgatory, according to its deserts."[2069] The text on which this view rests is Hebrews 9:27: "People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." The juxtaposition of these two events is understood as an indication that immediately after death there is a judgment that determines the destination of each individual. Those who have died in a state of wickedness go directly to hell, where they immediately realize that they are irrevocably lost.[2070] Their punishment, eternal in nature, consists of both the sense of having lost the greatest of all goods and actual suffering. The suffering is in proportion to the individual's wickedness and will intensify after the resurrection.[2071] On the other hand, those who are in a perfect state of grace and penitence, who are completely purified at the time of death, go directly and immediately to heaven, which, while it is described as both a state and a place, should be thought of primarily as a state.[2072] Those who, although in a state of grace, are not yet spiritually perfect go to purgatory.

Joseph Pohle defines purgatory as "a state of temporary punishment for those who, departing this life in the grace of God, are not entirely free from venial sins or have not yet fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions."[2073] As we noted, those who leave this life in a state of spiritual perfection go directly to heaven. Those who have mortal sin upon their souls or are entirely outside the grace of the church are consigned to hell. But many fall into neither of these two groups. Since nothing defiled can enter heaven, God cannot justly receive them into his immediate presence. On the other hand, he cannot justly consign them to hell, for they have done nothing warranting such severe punishment. Purgatory is a middle state, so to speak, where they may be cleansed of their venial sins.

Thomas Aquinas argued that the cleansing that takes place after death is through penal sufferings. In this life, we can be cleansed by performing works of satisfaction, but after death that is no longer possible. To the extent that we fail to attain complete purity through works on earth, we must be further cleansed in the life to come. "This is the reason," said Thomas, "why we posit a purgatory or place of cleansing."[2074] Thomas also suggested that purgatory, as a place of suffering, is connected with hell.[2075] Pohle argues, instead, that it is connected with heaven, since those in purgatory are children of God and will sooner or later be admitted to the abode of the blessed. Yet while their eventual departure from purgatory to heaven is sure and definite, the time of deliverance is uncertain and the rate of cleansing variable.

The forgiveness of venial sins can be accomplished in three different ways: by an unconditional forgiveness on God's part; by suffering and the performance of penitential works; and by contrition. Although God can forgive unconditionally, he has chosen to require contrition and works as conditions of forgiveness in this life; and so it seems likely that he does not forgive venial sins unconditionally in purgatory either.[2076] Since the soul in purgatory is not able to perform works of satisfaction, it can atone only by passive suffering. But there are also three means by which the souls in purgatory can be assisted in their progress toward heaven by the faithful still on earth—the Mass, prayers, and good works.[2077] These three means reduce the period of time necessary for purgatorial suffering to have its full effect. When the soul arrives at spiritual perfection, no venial sin remaining, it is released and passes into heaven.

The Roman Catholic Church bases its belief in purgatory on both tradition and Scripture. We find a clear statement of the doctrine in the Decree of Union adopted at the Council of Florence in 1439: "Souls are cleansed by purgatorial pains after death, and in order that they may be rescued from these pains, they are benefitted by the suffrages of the living faith, viz: the sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety."[2078] The Council of Trent reiterated the belief, pointing to various church fathers and synods as authorities for it. As we have noted, Thomas Aquinas wrote concerning purgatory, and there was an ancient tradition of praying, offering the Mass, and giving alms for the benefit of the dead. Tertullian mentions anniversary Masses for the dead, a practice that suggests belief in purgatory.[2079]

The primary biblical text appealed to is 2 Maccabees 12:43–45:

> He [Judas Maccabaeus] also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.

The New Testament text most often cited is Matthew 12:32, where Jesus says, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Roman Catholics contend that this verse implies that some sins (i.e., sins other than speaking against the Holy Spirit) will be forgiven in the world to come, an interpretation held by Augustine[2080] and some other Fathers. Some Catholics also cite 1 Corinthians 3:15: "If it is burned up, the

builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."

The major points in our rejection of the concept of purgatory are points that distinguish Catholicism and Protestantism in general. The major text appealed to is in the Apocrypha, which Protestants do not accept as canonical Scripture. And the inference from Matthew 12:32 is rather forced; the verse in no way indicates that some sins will be forgiven in the life to come. Further, the concept of purgatory implies a salvation by works. For humans are thought to atone, at least in part, for their sins. This idea, however, is contrary to many clear teachings of Scripture, including Galatians 3:1–14 and Ephesians 2:8–9. To be sure, there is something quite appealing about the doctrine of purgatory. It simply does not seem right that we should be allowed to go freely into heaven, without suffering a bit for our sins. It is difficult for most of us to accept the idea of salvation by grace. But the teaching of Scripture must prevail, not what appears to us to be logical and just; and on that basis, the concept of purgatory—and indeed any view that posits a period of probation and atonement following death—must be rejected.

Instantaneous Resurrection

A novel and creative conception that has been advanced in recent years is the idea of an instant resurrection or, more accurately, an instant reclothing. This is the belief that immediately upon death, the believer receives the resurrection body that has been promised. One of the most complete elaborations of this view is found in W. D. Davies's *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. Davies holds that Paul had two different conceptions concerning our resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is thinking of future resurrection of the body. In 2 Corinthians 5, however, we have more advanced understanding of the subject. The initial stages of the age to come had already appeared in the resurrection of Jesus. Paul realizes that, having died and risen with Christ, he is already being transformed and will receive his new or heavenly body at the moment of physical death. The fear of being unclothed, which he speaks of in verse 3, has been supplanted by the realization that on both this side and the other side of death, he will be clothed.[2081]

Rabbinic Judaism held that we will be disembodied at death and will then have to wait for the general resurrection. Davies contends that Paul presents a different view in his later writings:

> [The dead] would on the contrary, be embodied, and there is no room in Paul's theology for an intermediate state of the dead. It agrees with this that Paul in later passages of his Epistles speaks not

> of the resurrection of Christians but of their revelation. In Rom. 8.19 we read: "The earnest longing of the creation waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God"; and in Col. 3.4 we read: "When Christ who is our life shall be revealed then shall ye also be revealed with him in glory." There is no need to resurrect those who have already died and risen with Christ and received their heavenly body, but they may be revealed. The final consummation would merely be the manifestation of that which is already existent but "hidden" in the eternal order.[2082]

According to Davies, then, when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he no longer believed in an intermediate state. Rather, upon death there will be an immediate transition into the final state, an instantaneous reception of the heavenly body. This position supplanted his belief in a future bodily resurrection to take place in connection with the second advent. So if we build our eschatology upon Paul's most mature thinking, we presumably will not have a doctrine of an intermediate state either.

But has Davies solved the problem? He has attempted to resolve what he perceives to be an inherent contradiction between the Greek concept of immortality and the rabbinic concept of bodily resurrection. But laboring as he does under the presupposition that human nature is an essential and absolute unity, Davies has been led astray in his interpretation of Paul. The fact is that Paul's anthropology allowed him to hold to both a future resurrection and a disembodied survival. They are not contradictory ideas, but complementary parts of a whole. Nor is Davies's solution as biblical as he alleges, for there are a number of passages in which Paul ties the transformation of our bodies to a future resurrection accompanying the second advent (e.g., Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:16–17). Paul also makes much of the second coming as an occasion of deliverance and glorification (e.g., Rom. 2:3–16; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Thess. 1:5–2:12; 2 Tim. 4:8). And Jesus himself emphasized a future time when the dead will be raised (John 5:25–29). We must conclude that Davies's solution to the problem he, as a result of a faulty presupposition, has injected into the writings of Paul does little more than create additional problems.

A Suggested Resolution

Is there some way to resolve the numerous problems that attach to the issue of the intermediate state, some means of correlating the biblical testimony regarding resurrection of the body and conscious survival between death and resurrection? Several considerations must be kept in mind:

1. Joachim Jeremias has pointed out that the New Testament distinguishes between Gehenna and Hades. Hades receives the unrighteous for the period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is the place of

punishment assigned permanently at the last judgment. The torment of Gehenna is eternal (Mark 9:43, 48). Further, the souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades, whereas in Gehenna both body and soul, reunited at the resurrection, are destroyed by eternal fire (Mark 9:43–48; Matt. 10:28). This is a counter to the view of some of the early church fathers that all who die, righteous and unrighteous alike, descend to Sheol or Hades, a sort of gloomy, dreamy state where they await the coming of the Messiah.[2083]

2. There are indications that the righteous dead do not descend to Hades (Matt. 16:18–19; Acts 2:31 [quoting Ps. 16:10]).
3. Rather, the righteous, or at least their souls, are received into paradise (Luke 16:19–31; 23:43).
4. Paul equates being absent from the body with being present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:19–26).

On the basis of these biblical considerations, we conclude that upon death believers go immediately to a place and condition of blessedness, and unbelievers enter an experience of misery, torment, and punishment. Although the evidence is not clear, it is likely that these are the very places to which believers and unbelievers will go after the great judgment, since the presence of the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23) would seem to be nothing other than heaven. Yet while the place of the intermediate and final states may be the same, the experiences of paradise and Hades are doubtlessly not as intense as what will ultimately be, since the person is in a somewhat incomplete condition.

Because we developed in chapter 23 a model of human nature that allows for disembodied personal existence, we will not go into details here. We do need to note, however, that there is no inherent untenability about the concept of disembodied existence. The human being is capable of existing in either a materialized (bodily) or immaterialized condition. We may think of these two conditions in terms of a dualism in which the soul or spirit can exist independently of the body. Like a chemical compound, the body-soul, so to speak, can be broken down under certain conditions (specifically at death), but otherwise is a definite unity. Or we may think in terms of different states of being. Just like matter and energy, the materialized and immaterialized conditions of the human are interconvertible. Both of these analogies are feasible. Paul Helm,[2084] Richard Purtill,[2085] and others have formulated conceptions of disembodied survival that are neither self-contradictory nor

absurd. We conclude that the disembodied intermediate state set forth by the biblical teaching is philosophically tenable.

Implications of the Doctrines of Death and the Intermediate State

1. 1. 1. Death is to be expected by all, believer and unbeliever, except by those who are alive when the Lord returns. We must take this fact seriously and live accordingly.
2. Although death is an enemy (God did not originally intend for the human to die), it has now been overcome and made captive to God. It therefore need not be feared, for its curse has been removed by the death and resurrection of Christ. It can be faced with peace, for we know that it now serves the Lord's purpose of taking to himself those who have faith in him.
3. There is between death and resurrection an intermediate state in which believers and unbelievers experience, respectively, the presence and absence of God. While these experiences are less intense than the final states, they are of the same qualitative nature.
4. In both this life and the life to come, the basis of the believer's relationship with God is grace, not works. There need be no fear, then, that our imperfections will require some type of postdeath purging before we can enter the full presence of God.

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The Second Coming and Its Consequents

Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe the characteristics of the second coming that can be inferred from relevant Scripture passages.
2. Identify and define the resurrection of the body according to the biblical material available.
3. Identify and explain the event of the final judgment through the context of Scripture.
4. Respond to the full meaning of the second coming and its consequents.

Chapter Summary

Scripture has outlined three specific events that will occur at the time of the second coming. Besides the event of the second coming itself, there will also be a resurrection that precedes the event of the final judgment. The purpose and guidance of these events are under the care of God alone. However, the hope that believers hold in the knowledge of God will be realized at the time of these events.

Study Questions

- What makes the time of the second coming indefinite, and how have people attempted to pinpoint it?
- What is the character of the second coming, and what makes it significant?
- How does the Old Testament teaching compare with the New Testament's concerning the resurrection of the body?
- What exactly will happen in the final judgment according to Scripture?
- How would you respond to the secular claim that life contains no hope for the future?

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Among the most important events of cosmic eschatology, as we have defined it in this work, are the second coming and its consequents: the resurrection and the final judgment.

The Second Coming

With the exception of the certainty of death, the one eschatological doctrine on which orthodox theologians most agree is the second coming of Christ. It is indispensable to eschatology. It is the basis of the Christian's hope, the one event that will mark the beginning of the completion of God's plan.

The Definiteness of the Event

Many Scriptures indicate clearly that Christ is to return. In his great discourse on the end times (Matt. 24–25), Jesus himself promises that he will come again: "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (24:30). Several other times in this same speech he mentions the "coming of the Son of Man" (vv. 27, 37, 39, 42, 44). Toward the end of the discussion we read: "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (v. 31). All of the teachings in this speech, including the parables, presuppose the second coming. Indeed, Jesus delivered the discourse in response to his disciples' request, "Tell us, . . . when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (v. 3). Later that week, in his hearing before Caiaphas, Jesus said, "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). While Matthew records more than do the other Gospel writers, Mark, Luke, and John also include some of Jesus's comments on the second coming. We find in Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27, for example, almost identical declarations that the people living in the last days will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and glory. And John tells us that in the upper room Jesus promised his disciples, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

In addition to Jesus's own words, there are numerous other direct statements in the New Testament regarding his return. At Jesus's ascension, two men in white robes, presumably angels, said to the disciples, "Men of Galilee, . . . why

do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The second coming was part of the apostolic kerygma: "Repent, then . . . that [God] may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:19–21). Paul wrote of the second coming on several occasions. He assured the Philippians, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (3:20–21). This passage in a book not explicitly eschatological is particularly significant because it shows the practical effect the second coming will have on us. Probably Paul's clearest and most direct statement is in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–16: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Other direct statements are found in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10; and Titus 2:13. In addition, we find in Paul many less elaborate references to the second coming: 1 Corinthians 1:7; 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8. Other authors also mention the second coming: Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7–8; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; and 1 John 2:28. Certainly the second coming is one of the most widely taught doctrines in the New Testament.

The Indefiniteness of the Time

While the fact of the second coming is emphatically and clearly asserted in Scripture, the time is not. Indeed, the Bible makes it clear that we do not know and cannot ascertain the exact time when Jesus will return. Although God has set a definite time, that time has not been revealed. Jesus indicated that neither he nor the angels knew the time of his return, and neither would his disciples: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. . . . Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn" (Mark 13:32–33, 35; see also Matt. 24:36–44). Apparently the time of his return was one of the matters to which Jesus was

referring when, just before his ascension, he responded to his disciples' question whether he would now restore the kingdom to Israel: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). Instead of satisfying their curiosity, Jesus told the disciples that they were to be his witnesses worldwide. That the time of his return is not to be revealed explains Jesus's repeated emphasis on its unexpectedness and the consequent need for watchfulness (Matt. 24:44, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:35).

The Character of the Coming

PERSONAL

That Christ's second coming will be personal in character is not the subject of any extensive discussion. Rather, it is simply assumed throughout the references to his return. Jesus says, for example, "I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3). Paul's statement that "the Lord himself will come down from heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16) leaves little doubt that the return will be personal in nature. The word of the angels at Jesus's ascension, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11), establishes that his return will be just as personal as was his departure.

Nonetheless, some interpreters have given the Scriptures cited above a different interpretation. This is an attempt to resolve what they believe to be two contrasting and even conflicting emphases within Jesus's teaching.[2086] On the one hand, there is the apocalyptic motif: the kingdom will be ushered in through a sudden and cataclysmic event, the personal return of Christ. On the other hand, there is the theme that the kingdom is immanent; it is already present within the world and will keep on growing in a gradual fashion. William Newton Clarke interprets the former in the light of the latter: "No visible return of Christ to the earth is to be expected, but rather the long and steady advance of his spiritual Kingdom. . . . If our Lord will but complete the spiritual coming that he has begun, there will be no need of a visible advent to make perfect his glory on the earth."[2087] Sometimes this approach has been adopted out of a conviction that Jesus believed in and taught (as did the early church) an impending return, probably within that very generation, but was obviously wrong.[2088] A careful exegesis of the pertinent passages will show, however, that at no point does Jesus specifically teach that he will return quickly. Further there is no essential reason why the kingdom cannot be both present and future, both immanent and cataclysmic.

Bodily

There are those who claim that Jesus's promise to return was fulfilled at Pentecost through a spiritual coming. Jesus did, after all, say, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). He also said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). And Paul spoke of the riches of this mystery, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Some interpreters put a great deal of weight upon the use of the term παρουσία (*parousia*) for the second coming. Pointing out that the word basically means "presence," they argue that its force in references to "the coming of the Lord" is that Jesus is present with us, not that he is coming at some future time.

Since Pentecost Christ has indeed been with and in each believer from the moment of new birth on. Several considerations, however, prevent our regarding this spiritual presence as the full meaning of the coming he promised. While it is true that the basic meaning of παρουσία is "presence," it also means "coming," and this is the meaning that is most prominent in the New Testament, as can be determined by examining how the word is used in context. Further, there are several other New Testament terms, particularly ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*) and ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphaneia*), which clearly do indicate "coming."[2089] And the statement in Acts 1:11 that Jesus will return in the same way as he departed implies that the return will be bodily. Perhaps the most persuasive argument, however, is that many of the promises of Jesus's second coming were made after Pentecost, in fact as much as sixty years later, and they still placed the coming in the future.

Visible

The Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that Christ began his reign over the earth on October 1, 1914. This was not a visible return to earth, however, for Jesus has not had a visible body since his ascension. Nor was it even a literal return, since it was in heaven that Christ ascended the throne. His presence, then, is in the nature of an invisible influence.[2090]

It is difficult to reconcile the Witnesses' conception of the second coming with the biblical descriptions. Once again we point to Acts 1:11: Christ's return will be like his departure, which was certainly visible, for the disciples watched Jesus being taken into heaven (vv. 9–10). Other descriptions of the second coming make it clear that it will be quite conspicuous; for example, Matthew 24:30: "They [will] see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

Unexpected

Although the second coming will be preceded by several signs—the desolating sacrilege (Matt. 24:15), great tribulation (v. 21), darkening of the sun (v. 29)—they will not indicate the exact time of Jesus's return. Consequently, there will be many for whom his return will be quite unexpected. It will be as in the days of Noah (v. 37). Although Noah spent some time in the construction of the ark, none of his contemporaries, except for his own family, prepared themselves for the flood. People will be feeling secure, but sudden destruction will come upon them (1 Thess. 5:2–3). Jesus's teachings suggest that because of a long delay before the second coming, some will be lulled into inattention (Matt. 25:1–13; cf. 2 Pet. 3:3–4). When the parousia finally occurs, however, it will happen so quickly that there will be no time to prepare (Matt. 25:8–10). As Louis Berkhof puts it, "The Bible intimates that the measure of surprise at the second coming of Christ will be in an inverse ratio to the measure of their watchfulness."[2091]

Triumphant and Glorious

Various descriptions of Christ's return indicate its glorious character, a sharp contrast to the lowly and humble circumstances of his first coming. The latter was the first stage of Christ's humiliation; the former will be the final stage of his exaltation. He will come on the clouds with great power and great glory (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). He will be accompanied by his angels and heralded by the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16). He will sit on his glorious throne and judge all the nations (Matt. 25:31–46). The irony of this situation is that he who was judged at the end of his stay on earth will be the judge over all at his second coming.

The Unity of the Second Coming

A large and influential group of conservative Christians teaches that Christ's coming will actually take place in two stages. These stages are the rapture and the revelation, or the "coming for" the saints and the "coming with" the saints. These two events will be separated by the great tribulation, believed to be approximately seven years in duration. Those who hold this view are termed pretribulationists, and most of them are dispensationalists.

The rapture or "coming for" will be secret; it will not be noticed by anyone except the church. Because it is to precede the tribulation, no prophecy must yet be fulfilled before it can take place. Consequently, the rapture could occur at any

moment, or, in the usual terminology, it is imminent. It will deliver the church from the agony of the great tribulation. Then, at the end of the seven years, the Lord will return again, bringing his church with him in a great triumphant arrival. This will be a conspicuous, glorious, universally recognized event.[2092] Christ will then set up his earthly millennial kingdom.

In contrast to pretribulationism, the other views of Christ's second coming hold that it will be a single occurrence, a unified event. They refer all prophecies regarding the second coming to the one event, whereas the pretribulationist refers some of the prophecies to the rapture and others to the revelation.[2093]

How are we to resolve this issue? While numerous considerations that bear upon this issue will be examined in the following chapter, there is one crucial consideration we will examine now. It relates to the vocabulary used to designate the second advent. The three major terms for the second coming are παρουσία, ἀποκάλυψις, and ἐπιφάνεια. The pretribulationist argues that παρουσία refers to the rapture, the first stage of the return, the believer's blessed hope of being delivered from this world before the tribulation begins. The other two terms refer to Christ's coming with the saints at the end of the tribulation.

When examined closely, however, the terms that designate the second coming do not support the distinction made by pretribulationists. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17, for example, the term παρουσία is used to denote an event that is hard to conceive of as the rapture: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming [παρουσία] of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." As George Ladd says, "It is very difficult to find a secret coming of Christ in these verses."[2094] In addition, the term παρουσία is used in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, where we read that following the tribulation Christ by his coming will destroy the man of lawlessness, the antichrist, in a public fashion. Further, Jesus said of the παρουσία: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:27).[2095]

Nor do the other two terms fit the pretribulationists' conception. Whereas supposedly the παρουσία, not the ἀποκάλυψις or ἐπιφάνεια, is the blessed hope awaited by the church, Paul is thankful that his readers have been enriched in knowledge as they "eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed

[ἀποκάλυψις]" (1 Cor. 1:7). He assures the Thessalonians that God will "pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed [ἀποκάλυψις] from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (2 Thess. 1:6–7). And Peter speaks of the believers' joy and reward in connection with the ἀποκάλυψις: "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:13). He had earlier written that his readers might have to suffer various trials, "so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:7). Both of these references (and 1:13 as well) suggest that the believers to whom Peter is writing (who are part of the church) will receive their glory and honor at the ἀποκάλυψις of Christ. According to pretribulationism, however, the church should already have received its reward at the παρουσία.

Finally, Paul also speaks of the ἐπιφάνεια as the object of the believer's hope. He writes to Titus that we believers are to live godly lives, "while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing [ἐπιφάνεια] of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). A similar use of ἐπιφάνεια can be found in 1 Timothy 6:14 and 2 Timothy 4:8. We conclude that the use of a variety of terms is not an indication that there will be two stages in the second coming. Rather, the interchangeableness of the terms clearly points to a single event.

The Imminence of the Second Coming

An additional question we must deal with is whether the second coming is imminent. Could it occur at any time, or are there some prophecies that must first be fulfilled?

Some Christians, particularly those who hold to a pretribulational coming for the saints by Christ, believe that the return could happen at any moment. In light of this, we must be prepared at all times for that possibility lest we be caught unaware. Several arguments are used in support of this position:

1. Jesus urged his disciples to be ready for his coming, since they did not know when it would take place (Matt. 24–25). If there are other events that must take place before Christ returns, such as the great tribulation, however, we would know at least that the return will not occur until those other events have transpired.[2096]

2. There is a repeated emphasis that we are to wait eagerly, for the Lord's coming is at hand. Many passages (e.g., Rom. 8:19–25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 4:5; Titus 2:13; James 5:8–9; Jude 21) indicate that the coming could be very soon and perhaps at any moment.[2097]

3. Paul's statement that we await our blessed hope (Titus 2:13) requires that the next event in God's plan be the coming of the Lord. If the next step were instead to be the great tribulation, fear and apprehensiveness would instead be our reaction. Since the return of our Lord is the next event on God's timetable, there is no reason why it could not happen at any time.[2098]

When examined closely, however, these arguments are not fully persuasive. Do the commands of Christ to watch for his coming and the warnings that his return will occur at an unlikely time and without clear signs necessarily mean that it is imminent? There has already been an intervening period of almost two thousand years. While we do not know how long the delay will be, nor, consequently, the precise time of Christ's coming, we can still know that it is not yet. Not knowing when it will occur does not preclude knowing certain times when it will not occur.

Further, Jesus's statements did not at the time they were expressed mean that the second coming could happen immediately. He indicated through at least three of his parables (the nobleman who went to a far country, Luke 19:11–27; the wise and foolish virgins, Matt. 25:5; and the talents, Matt. 25:19) that there was to be a delay. Similarly, the parable of the servants (Matt. 24:45–51) involves a period of time for the servants to prove their character. In addition, certain events had to transpire before the second coming; for example, Peter would grow old and infirm (John 21:18), the gospel would be preached to all nations (Matt. 24:14), and the temple would be destroyed (Matt. 24:2). If these events had to occur before Jesus would return, the second coming could not have happened immediately. His saying, "Watch!" and "You do not know the hour," is not inconsistent with a delay to allow certain events to happen.

This is not to say that it is inappropriate to speak of imminence. It is, however, the complex of events surrounding the second coming, rather than the single event itself, that is imminent. Perhaps we should speak of this complex as imminent and the second coming itself as "impending."[2099]

Resurrection

The major result of Christ's second coming, from the standpoint of individual eschatology, is the resurrection. This is the basis for the believer's hope in the

face of death. Although death is inevitable, the believer anticipates being delivered from its power.

The Biblical Teaching

The Bible clearly promises the resurrection of the believer. The Old Testament gives us several direct statements, the first being Isaiah 26:19: “But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.” Daniel 12:2 teaches resurrection of both the believer and the wicked: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” The idea of resurrection is also asserted in Ezekiel 37:12–14: “Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

In addition to direct statements, the Old Testament intimates that we can expect deliverance from death or Sheol. Psalm 49:15 says, “But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.” While there is no statement about the body in this passage, there is an expectation that the incomplete existence in Sheol will not be our final condition. Psalm 17:15 speaks of awaking in the presence of God: “As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.” Some expositors see similar intimations in Psalm 73:24–25 and Proverbs 23:14,[2100] although the latter is questionable.

While we must exercise care not to read too much of the New Testament revelation into the Old Testament, it is significant that Jesus and the New Testament writers maintained that the Old Testament teaches resurrection. When questioned by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, Jesus accused them of error due to lack of knowledge of the Scriptures and of the power of God (Mark 12:24), and then went on to argue for the resurrection on the basis of the Old Testament: “Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” (vv. 26–27). Peter (Acts 2:24–32) and Paul (Acts 13:32–37) saw Psalm 16:10 as a prediction of the

resurrection of Jesus. Hebrews 11:19 commends Abraham's belief in God's ability to raise persons from the dead: "Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

The New Testament, of course, teaches the resurrection much more clearly. We have already noted Jesus's rejoinder to the Sadducees, which is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 22:29–32; Mark 12:24–27; Luke 20:34–38). And John reports several additional occasions when Jesus spoke of the resurrection. One of the clearest declarations is in John 5: "Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. . . . Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned" (vv. 25, 28–29). Other affirmations of the resurrection are found in John 6:39–40, 44, 54, as well as the narrative of the raising of Lazarus (John 11, especially vv. 24–25).

The New Testament Epistles also give testimony to the resurrection. Paul clearly believed and taught that there is to be a future bodily resurrection. The classic and most extended passage is 1 Corinthians 15. The teaching is especially pointed in verses 51 and 52: "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." The resurrection is also clearly taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–16 and implied in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10. And when Paul appeared before the council, he created dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees by declaring, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6); he made a similar declaration before Felix (Acts 24:21). John also affirms the doctrine of resurrection (Rev. 20:4–6, 13).

A Work of the Triune God

All of the members of the Trinity are involved in the resurrection of believers. Paul informs us that the Father will raise believers through the Spirit: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit, who lives in you" (Rom. 8:11). There is a special connection between the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection, a point Paul particularly emphasized in 1 Corinthians 15:12–14: "But if it is preached that Christ has been

raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." In Colossians 1:18 Paul refers to Jesus as "the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." In Revelation 1:5 John similarly refers to Jesus as the "firstborn from the dead." This expression does not point so much to Jesus's being first in time within the group as to his supremacy over the group (cf. Col. 1:15, "the firstborn over all creation"). The resurrection of Christ is the basis for the believer's hope and confidence. Paul writes, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess. 4:14). And although the context does not explicitly mention the general resurrection, Peter at the beginning of his first epistle ties the new birth and the living hope of the believer to Christ's resurrection and then looks to the second coming, when genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor (1 Pet. 1:3–9).

Bodily in Nature

Several passages in the New Testament affirm that the body will be restored to life. One of them, quoted earlier, is Romans 8:11: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit, who lives in you." In Philippians 3:20–21 Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." In the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, he says, "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (v. 44). Paul also makes clear that the view that resurrection has already occurred, that is, in the form of a spiritual resurrection not incompatible with the fact that the bodies are still lying in their graves, is a heresy. He makes this point when he condemns the views of Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18).

In addition, there are inferential or indirect evidences of the bodily nature of the resurrection. The redemption of the believer is spoken of as involving the body, not merely the soul: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we

ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22–23). In 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 Paul points out the spiritual significance of the body. This is in sharp contrast to the view of the gnostics, who minimized the body. Whereas some gnostics drew the conclusion that, the body being evil, a strict asceticism should be practiced, others concluded that what is done with the body is spiritually irrelevant, and hence engaged in licentious behavior. Paul, however, insists that the body is holy. Our bodies are members of Christ (v. 15). The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). "The body . . . is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (v. 13). In view of the emphasis on the body, the statement that immediately follows is obviously an argument for bodily resurrection: "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also" (v. 14). The conclusion of the entire passage is: "Therefore honor God with your bodies" (v. 20).

Another indirect argument for the bodily character of the resurrection is that Jesus's resurrection was bodily in nature. When Jesus appeared to his disciples, they were frightened, thinking that they were seeing a spirit. He reassured them by saying, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:38–39). And when he later appeared to Thomas, who had expressed skepticism about the resurrection, Jesus said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). That Jesus was seen and heard and recognized by the disciples suggests that he had a body similar to the one he had possessed before. The fact that the tomb was empty and the body was never produced by the opponents of Christ is a further indication of the bodily nature of his resurrection. The special connection that, as we have already noted, exists between the resurrection of Christ and that of the believer argues that our resurrection will be bodily as well.

We now must face the question of just what it means to say that the resurrection involves the body. There are certain problems if we look upon the resurrection as merely a physical resuscitation. One is that the body would presumably be subject to dying again. Apparently Lazarus and the others restored to life by Jesus eventually died again and were buried. Yet Paul speaks of the new body as "imperishable," in contrast to the "perishable" body that is buried (1 Cor. 15:42). A second problem is the contrast drawn between the "natural [soulish] body" that is sown and the "spiritual body" that is raised (v. 44). There is a significant difference between the two, but we do not know the precise nature of that difference. Further, there are explicit statements that

exclude the possibility that the resurrection body will be purely physical. Paul says near the end of his discussion of the resurrection body, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50). Jesus’s retort to the Sadducees, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30), seems to carry the same implication. Finally, there is the problem of how one’s body can be reconstituted from molecules that may have become part of another person’s body.[2101] Cannibalism presents the most extreme example of this problem. Human bodies serving to fertilize fields where crops are grown and the scattering of human ashes over a river from which drinking water is drawn are other cases in point. A ludicrous parody of the Sadducees’ question, “At the resurrection whose wife will she be?” (Mark 12:23), arises, namely, “At the resurrection whose molecules will they be?”

What we have, then, is something more than a post-death survival by the spirit or soul or revivification of the body as it was. There is a utilization of the old body, but a transformation of it in the process. Some sort of metamorphosis occurs, so that a new body arises. This new body has some connection or point of identity with the old body, but is differently constituted. Paul speaks of it as a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44), but does not elaborate. He uses the analogy of a seed and the plant that springs from it (v. 37). What sprouts from the ground is not merely that which is planted. It issues from that original seed, however.[2102]

The philosophical problem here is the basis of identity. What is it that marks each of us as the same individual at birth, as an adult, and in the resurrection? The adult is the same person as the child, despite all the change that goes on within the human body. Similarly, despite the transformation that will occur at resurrection, we know from Paul that we will still be the same person.[2103]

It is sometimes assumed that our new bodies will be just like that of Jesus in the period immediately following his resurrection. His body apparently bore the physical marks of his crucifixion, and could be seen and touched (John 20:27). Luke 24:28–31, 42–43, and John 21:9–15 seem to indicate that he ate. It should be borne in mind that Jesus’s exaltation was not yet complete.[2104] The ascension, involving a transition from this space-time universe to the spiritual realm of heaven, may well have produced yet another transformation. The change that will occur in our bodies at the resurrection (or, in the case of those still alive, at the second coming) occurred in two stages in his case. Our resurrection body will be like Jesus’s present body, not like his body between his resurrection and ascension. We will not have those characteristics of Jesus’s post-resurrection

earthly body that are inconsistent with the descriptions of our resurrection bodies (e.g., physical tangibility and the need to eat).

We conclude that there will be a bodily reality of some type in the resurrection. It will have some connection with and derive from our original body, and yet there will be a transformation or metamorphosis. An analogy here is the petrification of a log or a stump. While the contour of the original object is retained, the composition is entirely different.[2105] We have difficulty in understanding because we do not know the exact nature of the resurrection body. It does appear, however, that it will retain and at the same time glorify the human form. We will be free of the physical imperfections and needs we had on earth.

Of Both the Righteous and the Unrighteous

Most of the references to the resurrection are to the resurrection of believers. Isaiah 26:19 speaks of the resurrection in a fashion that indicates that it is a reward. Jesus speaks of the "resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:14). In his statement to the Sadducees he declares that "those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Luke 20:35). He affirms to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25–26). In Philippians 3:11 Paul expresses his desire and hope that he will "somehow [attain to] the resurrection from the dead." Neither the Synoptic Gospels nor Paul's writings make explicit reference to unbelievers being raised from the dead.

On the other hand, a number of passages do indicate a resurrection of unbelievers. Daniel 12:2 says, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." John reports a similar statement of Jesus: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28–29). Paul, in his defense before Felix, said, "However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:14–15). And since both believers and unbelievers will be present at and involved in the last judgment, we conclude that the resurrection

of both is necessary. Whether they will be raised simultaneously or at two different times will be discussed in the following chapter.

The Final Judgment

The second coming will also issue in the great final judgment. For those who are apart from Christ and consequently will be judged to be among the unrighteous, this is one of the most frightening prospects regarding the future. For those who are in Christ, however, it is something to look forward to, for it will vindicate their lives. The final judgment is not intended to ascertain our spiritual condition or status, for that is already known to God. Rather, it will manifest or make our status public.[2106]

A Future Event

The final judgment will occur in the future. In some cases God has already made his judgment manifest, as when he took righteous Enoch and Elijah to heaven to be with him, sent the destructive flood upon the earth (Gen. 6–7), and destroyed Korah and those who participated with him in the rebellion (Num. 16). A New Testament example is God's striking down Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). Friedrich Schelling, among others, maintained that the history of the world is the judgment of the world; that, in other words, the events that occur within history are in effect a judgment upon the world. Yet this is not the whole of the Bible's statements about judgment. A definite event is to occur in the future. Jesus alluded to it in Matthew 11:24: "But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." On another occasion he spoke clearly of the judgment he would execute in connection with the future resurrection (John 5:27–29). There is an extended picture of this judgment in Matthew 25:31–46. While preaching in the Areopagus, Paul declared that God "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Later Paul talked to Felix about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). He wrote to the Romans, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5). The author of the letter to the Hebrews put it clearly and directly: "People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb.

9:27). Other clear references include Hebrews 10:27; 2 Peter 3:7; and Revelation 20:11–15.

Scripture specifies that the judgment will occur after the second coming. Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done” (Matt. 16:27). This idea is also found in Matthew 13:37–43; 24:29–35; and 25:31–46. Similarly, Paul wrote, “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God” (1 Cor. 4:5).

Jesus Christ the Judge

Jesus pictured himself as sitting on a glorious throne and judging all nations (Matt. 25:31–33). Although God is spoken of as the judge in Hebrews 12:23, several other references make clear that he delegates this authority to the Son. Jesus himself said, “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. . . . And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:22, 27). Peter told the gathering in Cornelius’s house, “[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). Paul informed the Athenians that God “has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). And Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). Second Timothy 4:1 states that Christ is to judge the living and the dead.

It appears that believers will share in the judging. In Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:28–30 Jesus suggests that the disciples will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. We are also told that believers will sit on thrones and judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2–3; Rev. 3:21; 20:4). While we are not told the exact details, Christ will apparently permit the saints to share in this work.

The Subjects of the Judgment

All humans will be judged (Matt. 25:32; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27). Paul warns that “we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Rom. 14:10). Every secret will be revealed; all that has ever occurred will be evaluated. Some have

questioned whether the sins of believers will be included—that would seem to be unnecessary inasmuch as believers have been justified. But the statements concerning the review of sins are universal. Louis Berkhof's perspective on this matter is probably correct: "Scripture leads us to believe that [the sins of believers] will be [revealed], though they will, of course, be revealed as *pardoned* sins."[2107]

In addition, the evil angels will be judged at this time. Peter writes that "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [Tartarus], putting them into chains of darkness to be held for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Jude 6 makes an almost identical statement. The good angels, on the other hand, will participate in the judgment by gathering together all who are to be judged (Matt. 13:41; 24:31).

The Basis of the Judgment

Those who appear will be judged in terms of their earthly lives.[2108] Paul said that we will all appear at the judgment: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus said that at the resurrection all will "come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:29). While one might infer from Matthew 25:31–46 that it is the doing of good deeds that makes the difference, Jesus indicated that some who claim and who even appear to have done good deeds will be told to depart (Matt. 7:21–23).

The standard on the basis of which the evaluation will be made is the revealed will of God. Jesus said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day" (John 12:48). Even those who have not explicitly heard the law will be judged: "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12).

The Finality of the Judgment

Once passed, the judgment will be permanent and irrevocable. The righteous and the ungodly will be sent away to their respective final places. There is no hint that the verdict can be changed. In concluding his teaching about the last judgment, Jesus said that those on his left hand "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25:46).

Implications of the Second Coming and Its Consequents

1. History will not simply run its course, but under the guidance of God will come to a consummation. His purposes will be fulfilled in the end.
2. We as believers should watch for and work in anticipation of the sure return of the Lord.
3. Our earthly bodies will be transformed into something far better. The imperfections we now know will disappear; our everlasting bodies will know no pain, illness, or death.
4. A time is coming when justice will be dispensed. Evil will be punished, and faith and faithfulness rewarded.
5. In view of the certainty of the second coming and the finality of the judgment that will follow, it is imperative that we act in accordance with the will of God.

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Millennial and Tribulational Views

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe three millennial views pertaining to the end times.
2. Inspect and evaluate three millennial views of the end times and select the view that most fully encompasses the teachings of Scripture.
3. Identify and describe two tribulational views and briefly discuss certain mediating positions of the tribulation.
4. Analyze and evaluate the views of the tribulation and judge which most fully expresses the teaching of Scripture.

Chapter Summary

The millennium is the earthly reign of Jesus Christ. Three main millennial views have developed concerning the end times. An amillennial view takes the position that there will be no earthly reign of Christ, and that the Scripture passages that are debated do not refer to any future extent of time. The postmillennial view regards the millennium to be in progress preceding the second coming of Christ. The final view, premillennialism, has gained the most respect among current evangelical Christians. This view holds that the second coming will precede the millennium (the earthly rule of Christ). The premillennial view has also created controversy about the role of the tribulation and the church. Those who

advocate pretribulationism believe that Christ will rapture the church before the great tribulation on earth. Another view is the posttribulationist view, which maintains that Christ's coming will occur after the great tribulation. Other views have been offered, but the evidence of Scripture seems to agree most with the posttribulationist view.

Study Questions

- What three millennial views have developed in Christian theology concerning the end times, and how do they differ?
- What evidence may be found to support the premillennial view of the end times?
- In what ways are the tribulational views similar to each other? In what ways do they differ?
- For what reasons does posttribulationism seem to be the more probable view?
- How would you describe your own approach to the millennial views?

Outline

Millennial Views 1107

Postmillennialism

Premillennialism

Amillennialism

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Resolving the Issues

Over the years there has been considerable discussion in Christian theology regarding the chronological relationship between Christ's second coming and certain other events. In particular, this discussion has involved two major questions. (1) Will there be a millennium, an earthly reign of Jesus Christ; and if so, will the second coming take place before or after that period? The view that there will be no earthly reign of Christ is termed amillennialism. The teaching that the return of Christ will inaugurate a millennium is termed premillennialism, while the belief that the second coming will conclude a millennium is postmillennialism. (2) Will Christ come to remove the church from the world before the great tribulation (pretribulationism), or will he return only after the tribulation (posttribulationism)? This second question is found primarily in premillennialism. We shall examine in turn each of the millennial and then the tribulational views.

Millennial Views

Although all three millennial positions have been held virtually throughout church history, at different times one or another has dominated. We will examine them in the order of their major period of popularity.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism rests on the belief that the preaching of the gospel will be so successful that the world will be converted. The reign of Christ, the locus of which is human hearts, will be complete and universal. The petition, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," will be actualized. Peace will prevail and evil will be virtually banished. Then, when the gospel has fully taken effect, Christ will return. Basically, then, postmillennialism is an optimistic view.

The first three centuries of the church were probably dominated by what we would today call premillennialism, but in the fourth century an African Donatist named Tyconius propounded a competitive view.[2109] Although Augustine was an arch opponent of the Donatists, he adopted Tyconius's view of the millennium. This interpretation was to dominate eschatological thinking throughout the Middle Ages. The millennium does not lie in the future, but has already begun. The thousand years began with Christ's first coming. In support of this view, Augustine cited Mark 3:27: "In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's

house.” In Augustine’s understanding of this verse, the strong man is Satan and the plundered goods represent people who were formerly under his control but are now Christian. Satan was bound at the time of the first coming of Christ and will remain bound until the second coming. Since Satan is therefore unable to deceive the nations, the preaching of the gospel is highly successful. Christ reigns on earth. At the end of this millennial period, however, Satan will be loosed for a short time before being finally subdued.[2110]

As difficult as it seems to reconcile this view with what is happening in our time, it made better sense in Augustine’s context. Christianity had achieved unprecedented political success. A series of circumstances had led to the conversion of the emperor Constantine in 312, so that Christianity was granted tolerance within the empire and became virtually the official religion. The church’s major opposition, the Roman Empire, had capitulated. While the progress of the church would be gradual rather than sudden, it would be sure. No dates were set for the completion of the millennium and the return of Christ, but it was assumed that they would come to pass about the year 1000.[2111]

With the end of the first millennium of church history, it became necessary to revise somewhat the details of postmillennialism. The millennium was no longer viewed as a period of a thousand years, but as the whole of church history. Postmillennialism was most popular during periods in which the church appeared to be succeeding in its task of winning the world. It came to particular popularity in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a period of great effectiveness in world missions as well as a time of concern about and progress in social conditions. Consequently, it seemed reasonable to assume that the world would soon be reached for Christ.

As we have suggested, the major tenet of postmillennialism is the successful spread of the gospel. This idea is based on several Scripture passages. In the Old Testament, scriptures such as Psalms 47, 72, and 100; Isaiah 45:22–25; and Hosea 2:23 make it clear that all nations will come to know God. In addition, Jesus said on several occasions that the gospel would be preached universally prior to his second coming. A prime example of this teaching is found in Matthew 24:14. Inasmuch as the Great Commission is to be carried out in his authority (Matt. 28:18–20), it is bound to succeed. Often the idea of the spread of the gospel includes the concomitants of the gospel—transforming effects on social conditions will follow from the conversion of large numbers of hearers. In some cases, the belief in the spread of the kingdom has taken on a somewhat more secularized form, so that social transformation rather than individual conversions is considered the sign of the kingdom. For example, the social gospel movement in the late nineteenth century aimed at Christianizing the

social order, culminating in a change of the economic structure. Discrimination, injustice, and conflict would then wither away, and wars would be a thing of the past. This form of postmillennialism was usually accompanied by a generalized concept of divine providence: God was seen as working outside the formal boundaries of the church. So on two occasions in the twentieth century, significant numbers of German Christians identified God's working in the world with political movements of their time: Kaiser Wilhelm's war policy in the teens, and then Hitler's Nazism in the 1930s.[2112] Emphasizing social transformation, liberals, insofar as they held a millennial view, were generally postmillennialists, but not all postmillennialists were liberal. Many of them envisioned an unprecedented number of conversions, with the human race becoming a collection of regenerated individuals.[2113]

In postmillennial thought, the kingdom of God is viewed as a present reality, here and now, rather than a future, heavenly realm. Jesus's parables in Matthew 13 give us an idea of the nature of this kingdom. It is like leaven, spreading gradually but surely throughout the whole. Its growth will be extensive (it will spread throughout the entire world) and intensive (it will become dominant). Its growth will be so gradual that the onset of the millennium may be scarcely noticed by some. The progress may not be uniform; indeed, the coming of the kingdom may well proceed by a series of crises. Postmillennialists are able to accept what appear to be setbacks, since they believe in the ultimate triumph of the gospel.[2114]

In the postmillennial view the millennium will be an extended period, but not necessarily a literal thousand years. Indeed, the postmillennial view of the millennium is frequently based less on Revelation 20, where the thousand-year period and the two resurrections are mentioned, than on other passages of Scripture. The very gradualness of the coming of the kingdom makes the length of the millennium difficult to calculate. The point is that the millennium will be a prolonged period of time during which Christ, even though physically absent, will reign over the earth. One essential feature that distinguishes postmillennialism from the other millennial views is that it expects conditions to become better, rather than worse, prior to Christ's return. Thus it is a basically optimistic view. Consequently, it fared rather poorly in the twentieth century. Convinced postmillennialists regard the distressing conditions of the twentieth century as merely a temporary fluctuation in the growth of the kingdom. They indicate that we are not as near the second coming as we had thought. This argument, however, has not proved persuasive to large numbers of theologians, pastors, and laypersons.[2115] With the growing success of the gospel in third

world countries, there could be a revival of the popularity of postmillennialism in the coming years.

Two other features of some more recent postmillennial thought also are worth noting. One is Christian Reconstructionism, a movement taking its inspiration initially from the work of Rousas Rushdoony, which advocates the application of biblical teaching to all areas of life, including the public sphere.[2116] Another is preterism, an approach to biblical prophecies that sees many prophecies as having been fulfilled in the history of the church, including applying those regarding the great tribulation to the persecution of Christians in the first century.[2117]

Premillennialism

Premillennialism is committed to the concept of an earthly reign by Jesus Christ of approximately a thousand years (or at least a substantial period of time). Unlike postmillennialism, premillennialism sees Christ as physically present during this time; it believes that he will return personally and bodily to commence the millennium. This being the case, the millennium must be seen as still in the future.

Premillennialism was probably the dominant millennial view during the early period of the church. Christians of the first three centuries had a strong expectation of an early return of Christ, inaugurating the millennium. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and several other significant early theologians held to this view.[2118] Much of the millennialism of this period—often termed "chiliasm," from the Greek word for "thousand"—had a rather sensuous flavor. The millennium would be a time of great abundance and fertility, of a renewing of the earth and building of a glorified Jerusalem.[2119] This tended to repulse the Alexandrian school of Clement, Origen, and Dionysius. A major factor in the decline of chiliasm was Augustine's view of the millennium, which we discussed earlier. In the Middle Ages, premillennialism became quite rare, often restricted to the mystical sects.

About the middle of the nineteenth century, premillennialism began to grow in popularity in conservative circles. This was partly due to the fact that liberals, insofar as they had a millennial view, were postmillennialists, and some conservatives considered anything associated with liberalism to be suspect. The growing popularity of the dispensational system of interpretation and eschatology also lent impetus to premillennialism, especially among conservative Baptists, Pentecostal groups, and independent fundamentalist churches.

The key passage for premillennialism is Revelation 20:4–6:

> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Premillennialists observe that here is evidence of a thousand-year period and two resurrections, one at the beginning and the other at the end. They insist on a literal and consistent interpretation of this passage. Since the same verb—ἔζησαν (*ezēsan*)—is used in reference to both resurrections, they must be of the same type. The amillennialist, or for that matter the postmillennialist, is usually forced to say that they are of different types. The usual explanation is that the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, that is, regeneration, while the second is a literal, physical, or bodily resurrection. Thus those who take part in the first resurrection will undergo the second as well. Premillennialists, however, reject this interpretation as untenable. George Beasley-Murray observes that it attributes confusion and chaotic thinking to the biblical author.[2120] Henry Alford a century ago contended that if one resurrection is a spiritual coming to life and the other a physical coming to life, "then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."[2121] George Ladd says that if ἔζησαν means bodily resurrection in verse 5, it must mean bodily resurrection in verse 4; if it does not, "we have lost control of exegesis."[2122]

All of these scholars are sensitive to the fact that context can alter the meanings of words. They note, however, that in this case the two usages of ἔζησαν occur together, and nothing in the context suggests any shift in meaning. Consequently, what we have here are two resurrections of the same type, involving two different groups at an interval of a thousand years. It also appears from the context that those who participate in the first resurrection are not involved in the second. It is "the rest of the dead" (οἱ λοιποί τῶν νεκρῶν—*hoi loipoi tōn nekrōn*) who do not come to life until the end of the thousand years. Although it is not said that they will come to life at that point, the implication is that they will. There is an obvious contrast between those involved in the second resurrection and those in the first.

It is also important to observe the nature of the millennium. Whereas the postmillennialist thinks that the millennium is being introduced gradually,

perhaps almost imperceptibly, the premillennialist envisions a sudden, cataclysmic event. In the premillennialist view, the rule of Jesus Christ will be complete from the very beginning of the millennium. Evil will have been virtually eliminated.

According to premillennialism, then, the millennium will not be an extension of trends already at work within the world. Instead, there will be a rather sharp break from conditions as we now find them. For example, there will be worldwide peace. This is a far cry from the present situation, where worldwide peace is a rare thing indeed, and the trend does not seem to be improving. The universal harmony will not be restricted to humans. Nature, which has been "groaning as in the pains of childbirth," awaiting its redemption, will be freed from the curse of the fall (Rom. 8:19–23).[2123] Even animals will live in harmony with one another (Isa. 11:6–7; 65:25), and the destructive forces of nature will be calmed. The saints will rule together with Christ in this millennium. Although the exact nature of their reign is not spelled out, they will, as a reward for their faithfulness, participate with him in his glory.

All premillennialists also anticipate that Israel will have a special place in the millennium. They disagree, however, as to the nature of that special place. Dispensationalists hold to a continuing unconditional covenant of God with national Israel, so that when God has completed his dealings with the church, he will return to his relations with national Israel. Jesus will literally sit on David's throne and rule the world from Israel. All the prophecies and promises regarding Israel will be fulfilled within the millennium, which will therefore have a markedly Jewish character. Nondispensationalists put much less emphasis on national Israel, holding instead that Israel's special place, being spiritual in nature, will be found within the church. Israel will be converted in large numbers during the millennium.[2124]

Premillennialists also hold that the millennium will be a tremendous change from what immediately precedes it, namely, the great tribulation. The tribulation will be a time of unprecedented trouble and turmoil, including cosmic disturbances, persecution, and great suffering. While premillennialists disagree as to whether the church will be present during the tribulation, they agree that the world situation will be at its very worst just before Christ comes to establish the millennium, which will be, by contrast, a period of peace and righteousness.

Amillennialism

Literally, amillennialism is the idea that there will be no millennium, no earthly reign of Christ. The great final judgment will immediately follow the

second coming and issue directly in the final states of the righteous and the wicked. Amillennialism is a simpler view than either of the others that we have been considering. Its advocates maintain that it is built on a number of relatively clear eschatological passages, whereas premillennialism is based primarily on a single passage, and an obscure one at that.

Despite amillennialism's simplicity and the clarity of its central tenet, it is in many ways difficult to grasp. This is partly because, its most notable feature being negative, its positive teachings are not always expounded. It has sometimes been distinguished more for its rejection of premillennialism than for its affirmations. Also, in dealing with the very troublesome passage of Revelation 20:4–6, amillennialists have come up with a rather wide variety of explanations. One wonders at times whether these explanations reflect the same basic view or quite different understandings of eschatological and apocalyptic literature. Finally, it has not always been possible to distinguish amillennialism from postmillennialism, since they share many common features. Indeed, various theologians who have not addressed the particular issues that serve to distinguish the two views from one another—among them Augustine, John Calvin, and B. B. Warfield—have been claimed as ancestors by both camps. What the two views share is a belief that the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 is to be taken symbolically. Both often hold as well that the millennium is the church age. Where they differ is that the postmillennialist, unlike the amillennialist, holds that the millennium involves an earthly reign of Christ.

In light of the problems in trying to grasp amillennialism, its history is difficult to trace. Some historians of doctrine have found amillennialism in the *Epistle of Barnabas*,[2125] but this is disputed by others. It is clear that Augustine, whether or not he should be classified as an amillennialist, contributed to the formulation of the view by suggesting that the figure of one thousand years is primarily symbolic rather than literal. It is likely that postmillennialism and amillennialism simply were not differentiated for much of the first nineteen centuries of the church. When postmillennialism began to fade in popularity in the twentieth century, amillennialism was generally substituted for it, since amillennialism is much closer to postmillennialism than is premillennialism. Consequently, amillennialism has enjoyed its greatest recent popularity in the period since World War I.

When amillennialists deal with Revelation 20, they usually have the whole book in view. They see the book of Revelation as consisting of several sections, seven being the number most frequently mentioned. These several sections do not deal with successive periods of time; rather, they are recapitulations of the same period, the period between Christ's first and second comings.[2126] It is

believed that in each of these sections the author picks up the same themes and elaborates them. If this is the case, Revelation 20 does not refer solely to the last period in the history of the church, but is a special perspective on its entire history.

Amillennialists also remind us that the book of Revelation as a whole is very symbolic. They note that even the most rabid premillennialists do not take everything in the book of Revelation literally. The bowls, seals, and trumpets, for example, are usually interpreted as symbols. By a simple extension of this principle, amillennialists contend that the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 might not be literal either. In addition, they point out that the millennium is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture.[2127]

The question arises, If the figure of a thousand years is to be taken symbolically rather than literally, what does it symbolize? Many amillennialists utilize Warfield's interpretation: "The sacred number seven in combination with the equally sacred number three forms the number of holy perfection, ten, and when this ten is cubed into a thousand the seer has said all he could say to convey to our minds the idea of absolute completeness."[2128] The references to a "thousand years" in Revelation 20, then, convey the idea of perfection or completeness. In verse 2 the figure represents the completeness of Christ's victory over Satan. In verse 4 it suggests the perfect glory and joy of the redeemed in heaven at the present time.[2129]

The major exegetical problem for amillennialism, however, is not the one thousand years, but the two resurrections. Among the variety of amillennial opinions about the two resurrections, the one common factor is a denial of the premillennial contention that John is speaking of two physical resurrections involving two different groups. The most common amillennial interpretation is that the first resurrection is spiritual and the second is bodily or physical. One who argued this at some length is Ray Summers. From Revelation 20:6 ("Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them") he concludes that the first resurrection is a victory over the second death. Since it is customary in eschatological discussions to consider the second death to be spiritual rather than physical, the first resurrection must be spiritual as well. The first death, which is not mentioned but implied, must surely be physical death. If it is to be correlated with the second resurrection as the second death is with the first resurrection, the second resurrection must be physical. The first resurrection, then, is the new birth; those who experience it will not come into condemnation. The second resurrection is the bodily or physical resurrection that we usually have in view when we use the word "resurrection." All those who participate in the first resurrection also

participate in the second resurrection, but not all of those experiencing the second resurrection will have partaken of the first.[2130]

The most common premillennial criticism of the view that the first resurrection is spiritual and the second physical is that it is inconsistent in interpreting identical terms (ἔζησαν) in the same context. Some amillennialists have accepted this criticism and have sought to develop a position in which the two resurrections are of the same type. James Hughes has constructed such a view. He accepts the premillennialist point that the first and second resurrections must be understood in the same sense.[2131] He suggests, however, a logical possibility the premillennialists seem to have overlooked: both resurrections may be spiritual.

Hughes contends that Revelation 20:4–6 is a description of disembodied souls in the intermediate state. He cites as evidence the fact that those who are involved in the first resurrection are termed "souls" (v. 4). Further, he argues that ἔζησαν should be interpreted not as an ingressive aorist ("they came to life"), but as a constative aorist ("they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"). He concludes that the first resurrection is the ascension of the just soul to heaven to reign with Christ; there is nothing here about the body coming to life. Those who participate in this resurrection are the "living" dead. The "dead" dead, by contrast, have no part in the first resurrection and will suffer the second (spiritual) death. Their souls survive the first (physical) death, but will never come to life. Though both groups are physically dead, the former are spiritually alive during the thousand years; the latter are not. While some commentators have inferred from verse 5 ("the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended") that the "dead" dead will come to life at the end of the millennium, Hughes renders the clause in question, "They did not live during the thousand years, nor thereafter." And what, then, of the second resurrection? Hughes regards it as highly significant that the term "second resurrection," which pertains to the survival of just and unjust souls during the intermediate state, is not to be found in Revelation 20. Unlike the first resurrection, then, the second resurrection is virtually hypothetical. Like the first, however, it is spiritual in nature. Thus, Hughes has managed to interpret the two occurrences of ἔζησαν consistently.[2132]

Another feature of amillennialism is a more general conception of prophecy, especially Old Testament prophecy, than is found in premillennialism. We have noted that premillennialists tend to interpret biblical prophecy quite literally. On the other hand, amillennialists frequently treat prophecies as historical or symbolic rather than futuristic. As a general rule, prophecy occupies a much less important place in amillennial than in premillennial thought.

Finally, we should observe that amillennialism usually does not display the optimism typically found in postmillennialism. There may be a belief that preaching of the gospel will be successful, but great success in this regard is not necessary to the amillennial scheme, since no literal reign of Christ, no coming of the kingdom before the coming of the King, is expected. This has made the amillennial view more credible than postmillennialism in the twentieth century. This is not to say that amillennialism is like premillennialism in expecting an extreme deterioration of conditions before the second coming. Yet there is nothing in amillennialism to preclude such a possibility. And because no millennium will precede the second coming, the Lord's return may be at hand. For the most part, however, amillennialists do not engage in the type of eager searching for signs of the second coming that often characterizes premillennialism.

Resolving the Issues

The issues separating these views are large and complex, but on close analysis can be reduced to a comparative few. We have noted in the course of this treatise that theology, like other disciplines, is often unable to find one view that is conclusively supported by all of the data. What must be done in such situations is to find the view that has fewer difficulties than do the alternatives.

The postmillennial view has much less support at the present time than it did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This should not in itself persuade us to reject the position. We must, however, seek the reasons for the decline in postmillennialism, for they may be determinative of our conclusions. Here we should note that the optimism of postmillennialism regarding gospel proclamation seems somewhat unjustified. There has been a decline in evangelistic and missionary success. In parts of the world the percentage of the population actually practicing the Christian faith is very small. Further, many Muslim countries are closed to Christian missionary endeavor of a conventional type. On the other hand, we must not be oblivious to the fact that in parts of the world, notably Africa and South America, Christianity is thriving, and is beginning to approach majority status. Even many formerly communist countries are now open to missionaries. Who can tell what lies in store for the preaching of the gospel?

There are also strong biblical grounds for rejecting postmillennialism. Jesus's teaching regarding great wickedness and a cooling off of the faith of many before his return seems to conflict quite sharply with postmillennial optimism. The absence in Scripture of a clear depiction of an earthly reign of Christ

without his physical presence seems to be another major weakness of this position.

This leaves us with a choice between amillennialism and premillennialism. The issue comes down to the biblical references to the millennium—are they sufficient grounds for adopting the more complicated premillennial view rather than the simpler amillennial conception? It is sometimes contended that the whole premillennial conception rests on a single passage of Scripture, and that no doctrine should be based on a single passage. But if one view can account for a specific reference better than can another, and both views explain the rest of Scripture about equally well, then the former view must certainly be judged more adequate than the latter.

We note here that there are no biblical passages with which premillennialism cannot cope, or which it cannot adequately explain. We have seen, on the other hand, that the reference to two resurrections (Rev. 20) gives amillennialists difficulty. Their explanations that we have here two different types of resurrection or two spiritual resurrections strain the usual principles of hermeneutics. The premillennialist case appears stronger at this point.

Nor is the premillennialist interpretation based on only one passage in the Bible. Intimations of it are found in a number of places. For example, Paul writes, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:22–24). Paul uses the adverbs ἔπειτα (*epeita*—v. 23) and εἶτα (*eita*—v. 24), which indicate temporal sequence. He could have used the adverb τότε (*tote*) to indicate concurrent events, but he did not do so.[2133] It appears that just as the first coming and resurrection of Christ were distinct events separated by time, so will there be an interval between the second coming and the end.[2134] We should also observe that while the two resurrections are spoken of explicitly only in Revelation 20, there are other passages that hint at either a resurrection of a select group (Luke 14:14; 20:35; 1 Cor. 15:23; Phil. 3:11; 1 Thess. 4:16) or a resurrection in two parts (Dan. 12:2; John 5:29). In Philippians 3:11, for example, Paul speaks of his hope of attaining “the resurrection from the dead.” Literally, the phrase reads “the out-resurrection out from among the dead ones” (τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν—*tēn exanastasin tēn ek nekrōn*). Note in particular the prefixed preposition and the plural. These texts fit well with the concept of two resurrections. Accordingly, we judge the premillennial view to be more adequate than amillennialism.

Tribulational Views

An additional issue is the relationship of Christ's return to the complex of events known as the great tribulation. In theory, all premillennialists hold that there will be a great disturbance of seven years' duration (that figure need not be taken literally) prior to Christ's coming. The question is whether there will be a separate coming to remove the church from the world prior to the great tribulation or whether the church will go through the tribulation and be united with the Lord only afterward. The view that Christ will take the church to himself prior to the tribulation is called pretribulationism; the view that he will take the church after the tribulation is called posttribulationism. There are also certain mediating positions that we will mention briefly at the conclusion of the chapter. In practice, these distinctions are drawn only by premillennialists, who tend to devote more attention to the details of the end times than do the advocates of either postmillennialism or amillennialism.

Pretribulationism

Pretribulationists hold several distinctive ideas. The first concerns the nature of the tribulation. It will indeed be a *great* tribulation. Whereas some other eschatologists emphasize the difficulties and persecutions experienced by the church throughout its history, pretribulationists stress the uniqueness of the tribulation. It will be quite unparalleled within history. It will be a period of transition concluding God's dealings with the Gentiles and preparing for the millennium and the events that will transpire therein. The tribulation is not to be understood as in any sense a time for disciplining believers or purifying the church.

A second major idea of pretribulationism is the rapture of the church. Christ will come at the beginning of the great tribulation (or just prior to it, actually) to remove the church from the world. This coming in a sense will be secret. No unbelieving eye will observe it. The rapture is pictured in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with [the dead in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." Note that in the rapture Christ will not descend all the way to earth, as he will when he comes with the church at the end of the tribulation.[2135]

Pretribulationism, then, maintains that there will be two phases in Christ's coming, or one could even say two comings. There will also be three resurrections. The first will be the resurrection of the righteous dead at the

rapture, for Paul teaches that believers who are alive at the time will not precede those who are dead. Then at the end of the tribulation there will be a resurrection of those saints who have died during the tribulation. Finally, at the end of the millennium, there will be a resurrection of unbelievers.[2136]

This all means that the church will be absent during the tribulation. We can expect deliverance from the tribulation because Paul promised the Thessalonians that they would not experience the wrath God will pour out upon unbelievers: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9); "Jesus . . . rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10).

But what of the references in Matthew 24 that indicate that some of the elect will be present during the tribulation? The disciples' asking what would be the sign of Jesus's coming and of the end of the age (24:3; cf. Acts 1:6) occurred within a Jewish framework. And accordingly, Jesus's discussion here pertains primarily to the future of Israel. The Gospel uses the general term "elect" rather than "church," "body of Christ," or any similar expression. It is elect Jews, not the church, who will be present during the tribulation. This distinction between Israel and the church is a determinative and crucial part of pretribulationism, which is closely allied with dispensationalism. The tribulation is viewed as being the transition from God's dealing primarily with the church to his reestablishing a relationship with his original chosen people, national Israel.[2137]

There is, finally, within pretribulationism a strong emphasis that the Lord's return is imminent.[2138] Since his return will precede the tribulation, nothing remains to be fulfilled prior to the rapture. Indeed, dispensationalism holds that all prophetic Scripture applying to the church was fulfilled in the first century. Moreover some general antecedents of the eschaton can certainly be seen today: the faith of many is growing cold and wickedness is increasing. (In actuality, these are antecedents of Christ's coming at the end of the tribulation. That some of them are already in place suggests a later increase in these phenomena). His coming for the church, then, could occur at any time, even within the next instant.

Jesus urged watchfulness upon his hearers, since they did not know the time of his return (Matt. 25:13). The parable of the ten virgins conveys this message. Just as in the time of Noah, there will be no warning signs (Matt. 24:36–39). The wicked knew nothing until the flood came and took them away. The coming of the Lord will be like a thief in the night (Matt. 24:43), or like the master who returns at an unexpected time (Matt. 24:45–51). There will be sudden separation. Two men will be working in the field; two women will be grinding at the mill. In each case, one will be taken and the other left. What clearer depiction of the

rapture could there be? Since it can occur at any moment, watchfulness and diligent activity are very much in order.[2139]

There is another basis for the belief that Christ's return is imminent. The church can have a blessed hope (Titus 2:13) only if the next major event to transpire is the coming of Christ. If the Antichrist and the great tribulation were the next items on the eschatological agenda, Paul would have told the church to expect suffering, persecution, anguish. But instead he instructs the Thessalonians to comfort one another with the fact of Christ's second coming (1 Thess. 4:18). Since the next event, to which the church is to look forward with hopeful anticipation, is the coming of Christ for the church, there is nothing to prevent it from happening at any time.[2140]

Finally, pretribulationism maintains that there will be at least two judgments. The church will be judged at the time of the rapture, and rewards for faithfulness will be handed out. The church will not be involved, however, in the separation of the sheep and goats at the end of the millennium. Its status will have already been determined.

Posttribulationism

Posttribulationists maintain that the coming of Christ for his church will not take place until the conclusion of the great tribulation. They avoid use of the term "rapture" because (1) it is not a biblical expression, and (2) it suggests that the church will escape or be delivered from the tribulation, a notion that runs contrary to the essence of posttribulationism.

A first feature of posttribulationism is a less literal interpretation of the events of the last times than is found in pretribulationism.[2141] For instance, while pretribulationists take the word שָׁבַע (*shabua'*) in Daniel 9:27 to be an indication that the great tribulation will be literally seven years in duration, most posttribulationists hold merely that the tribulation will last a substantial period of time. Similarly, pretribulationists generally have a concrete conception of the millennium; in their view, many prophecies will be literally fulfilled within the thousand-year period. Indeed, it is to be inaugurated when Christ's feet literally stand upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). The posttribulationist's understanding of the millennium is much more generalized in nature; for example, it will not necessarily be one thousand years in length.

According to posttribulationism, the church will be present during and experience the great tribulation. The term "elect" in Matthew 24 (after the tribulation, the angels will gather the elect—vv. 29–31) should be understood in the light of its usage elsewhere in Scripture, where it means "believers." Since

Pentecost, the term “elect” has denoted the church. The Lord will preserve the church during, but not spare it from, the tribulation.

Postmillennialists draw a distinction between the wrath of God and the tribulation. The wrath (ὀργή—*orgē*) of God is spoken of in Scripture as coming upon the wicked—“whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (John 3:36); “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Rom. 1:18; see also 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 6:16–17; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). On the other hand, believers will not undergo the wrath of God—“we [shall] be saved from God’s wrath through [Christ]” (Rom. 5:9); “Jesus . . . rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:10); “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath” (1 Thess. 5:9).[2142] Scripture makes clear, however, that believers will experience tribulation. The overwhelming majority of the occurrences of the noun θλίψις (*thlipsis*) and the corresponding verb θλίβω (*thlibō*) refer to tribulation saints endure. The noun is used to denote persecution of the saints in the last times (Matt. 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev. 7:14). This is not God’s wrath, but the wrath of Satan, the antichrist, and the wicked against God’s people.[2143]

Tribulation has been the experience of the church throughout the ages. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). Other significant references are Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; and 2 John 7. While posttribulationists draw a distinction between tribulation in general and the great tribulation, they believe that the difference is one of degree only, not of kind. Since the church has experienced tribulation throughout its history, it would not be surprising if the church also experiences the great tribulation.

Posttribulationists acknowledge that Scripture speaks of believers who will escape or be kept from the impending trouble. In Luke 21:36, for example, Jesus tells his disciples, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” The word here is ἐκφεύγω (*ekpheugō*), which means “to escape out of the midst of.” A similar reference is found in Revelation 3:10: “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.” The preposition translated “from” actually means “out from the midst of.” Posttribulationists argue, then, that the church will be kept from the midst of the tribulation, not that it will be kept away from the tribulation, which would

ordinarily require the preposition ἀπό (*apo*).[2144] In this respect, we are reminded of the experience of the Israelites during the plagues on Egypt.

Of additional significance in Revelation 3:10 is the verb τηρέω (*tēreō*—"keep"). When a dangerous situation is in view, it means "to guard." It appears with the preposition ἐκ in only one other place in the New Testament, John 17:15: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." Here τηρέω is contrasted with αἴρω (*airō*), which means "to lift, raise up, or remove." The latter verb very accurately pictures what the pretribulationist holds Jesus will do with the church at the time of the rapture. To be sure, Jesus here is talking about the situation of his followers in the period immediately following his departure from earth, not the tribulation. The point, however, is that if John had desired to teach in Revelation 3:10 that Jesus would "rapture" the church, the verb αἴρω was certainly available. The apostle apparently had in mind here what he did in the latter half of John 17:15, a guarding of believers from the present danger rather than a deliverance of them from the presence of such danger.[2145]

The posttribulationist also has a different understanding of Paul's reference in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to our meeting the Lord in the air. The pretribulationist maintains that this event is the rapture; Christ will come secretly *for* the church, catching believers up with him in the clouds and taking them to heaven until the end of the tribulation. Posttribulationists like George Ladd, however, in light of the usage of the term ἀπάντησις (*apantēsis*—"meeting") elsewhere in Scripture, disagree. There are only two other undisputed occurrences of this word in the New Testament (Matt. 27:32 is textually suspect). One of these references is in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, an explicitly eschatological parable. When the bridegroom comes, the announcement is made, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet [εἰς ἀπάντησιν—*eis apantēsin*] him!" (Matt. 25:6). What does the word signify in this situation? The virgins do not go out to meet the bridegroom and then depart with him. Rather, they go out to meet him and then accompany him back to the wedding banquet. The other occurrence of the word (Acts 28:15) is in a noneschatological historical narrative. Paul and his party were coming to Rome. A group of the believers in Rome, hearing of their approach, went out to the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet (εἰς ἀπάντησιν) them. This encouraged Paul, and the group then continued with him back to Rome. On the basis of these usages, Ladd argues that the word ἀπάντησις suggests a welcoming party that goes out to meet someone on the way and accompanies the person back to where he or she came from. So our meeting the Lord in the air is not a case of being caught away, but of meeting

him and then immediately coming with him to earth as part of his triumphant entourage. It is the church, not the Lord, that will turn around at the meeting.[2146]

Posttribulationists have a less complex understanding of the last things than do their pretribulational counterparts. For example, there is in posttribulationism only one second coming. Since there is no interlude between the coming of Christ for the church and the end of the tribulation, there is no need for an additional resurrection of believers. There are only two resurrections: (1) the resurrection of believers at the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium, and (2) the resurrection of the ungodly at the end of the millennium.

Posttribulationists also see the complex of events at the end as basically unitary. They believe that this complex of events is imminent, although they usually do not mean that the coming itself is imminent in the sense that it could occur at any moment. They prefer to speak of the second coming as *impending*.[2147] Their blessed hope is not an expectation that believers will be removed from the earth before the great tribulation, but rather a confidence that the Lord will protect and keep believers regardless of what may come.[2148]

Mediating Positions

Because there are difficulties attaching to both pretribulationism and posttribulationism, a number of mediating positions have been created. Three major varieties may be noted. The most common is the midtribulational view. This holds that the church will go through the less severe part (usually the first half, or three-and-a-half years) of the tribulation, but then will be removed from the world.[2149] In one formulation of this view, the church will experience tribulation but be removed before the wrath of God is poured out. A second type of mediating position is the partial rapture view. This holds that there will be a series of raptures. Whenever a portion of believers are ready, they will be removed from earth.[2150] The third mediating position is imminent posttribulationism. While the return of Christ will not take place until after the tribulation, it can be expected at any moment, for the tribulation may already be occurring.[2151] None of these mediating positions has had large numbers of proponents, particularly in recent years. Accordingly, we will not deal with them in detail.[2152]

Resolving the Issues

When all considerations are evaluated, there are several reasons why the posttribulational position emerges as the most probable:

1. The pretribulational position involves several distinctions that seem rather artificial and lacking in biblical support. The division of the second coming into two stages, the postulation of three resurrections, and the sharp separation of national Israel and the church are difficult to sustain on exegetical grounds. The pretribulational view that the prophecies concerning national Israel will be fulfilled apart from the church and that, accordingly, the millennium will have a decidedly Jewish character cannot be easily reconciled with the biblical depictions of the fundamental changes that have taken place with the introduction of the new covenant.

2. Several specifically eschatological passages are better interpreted on posttribulational grounds. These passages include the indications that elect individuals will be present during the tribulation (Matt. 24:29–31) but will be protected from its severity (Rev. 3:10), descriptions of the phenomena that will accompany the appearing of Christ, and the reference to the meeting in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

3. The general tenor of biblical teaching fits better the posttribulational view. For example, the Bible is replete with warnings about trials and testings believers will undergo. It does not promise removal from these adversities, but ability to endure and overcome them.

This is not to say that there are no difficulties with the posttribulational position. For example, there is in posttribulationism relatively little theological rationale for the millennium. It seems to be somewhat superfluous.[2153] But all in all, the balance of evidence favors posttribulationism.

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Final States

Chapter Objectives

At the conclusion of this chapter, you should be able to achieve the following:

1. Recognize and describe the two final states of humanity that have clearly been revealed in Scripture.
2. Identify and define heaven in relation to the final state of the righteous.
3. Identify and define the punishment of future judgment.
4. Recognize and understand the impact of the doctrine of the final states and how it relates to the present life of the Christian.

Chapter Summary

The future condition of the human individual is largely determined by the decisions made in this present life. These decisions affect the outcome for each individual for all eternity. For the righteous, eternal life in the presence of the Lord will be the result. For the wicked, eternal punishment constituting the banishment from the presence of God will be the consequence. The judgment of both the righteous and the wicked will also include degrees of reward and punishment.

Study Questions

- What is the last judgment, and what makes it so significant to Christian theology?
- How is the term “heaven” used in Scripture, and why are there so many different uses of it?
- In Christian theology, why is it so critical to believe in and understand the implications of hell?
- What is involved in the punishment of the wicked, as suggested in Scripture?
- How do your personal views regarding the final state affect your theology?

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When we speak of the final states, we are in a sense returning to the discussion of individual eschatology, for at the last judgment every individual will be consigned to the particular state he or she will personally experience throughout all eternity. Yet the whole human race will enter these states simultaneously and collectively, so we are really dealing with questions of collective or cosmic eschatology as well. The subject of the future states is one on which there is a great deal of speculation and misinformation. Yet, surprisingly, relatively little is said in systematic theology texts on these matters, particularly on the matter of heaven.[2154]

Final State of the Righteous

The Term "Heaven"

There are various ways of denoting the future condition of the righteous. The most common, of course, is "heaven." Yet the term itself needs to be examined, for מַעַם ׳ (*shamayim*) and οὐρανός (*ouranos*) are used in basically three different ways in the Bible. The first is cosmological.[2155] The expression "heaven and earth" (or "the heavens and the earth") is used to designate the entire universe. In the creation account we are told, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18; see also 24:35; Luke 16:17). He referred to the Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25). Heaven (οὐρανός) is the firmament in which the stars are set (Matt. 24:29), the air (Matt 6:26), the place where lightning (Luke 17:24) and rain (Luke 4:25) originate. Second, "heaven" is a virtual synonym for God.[2156] Among examples are the prodigal son's confession to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Luke 15:18, 21); Jesus's question to the Pharisees, "John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (Matt. 21:25); and John the Baptist's declaration, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven" (John 3:27). Most notable is Matthew's repeated use of the expression "kingdom of heaven" where Luke in parallel passages has "kingdom of God." Writing to a Jewish audience, who would not pronounce the name *Yahweh*, Matthew used "heaven" as a synonym for God.

The third meaning of the word "heaven," and the one most significant for our purposes, is the abode of God.[2157] Thus, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). He often spoke of "your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1; 7:11; 18:14) and "my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19). The expression "heavenly Father" conveys the same idea (Matt. 5:48; 6:14, 26, 32; 15:13; 18:35). Jesus is said to have come from heaven: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (John 3:13; see also 3:31; 6:42, 51).[2158] Angels come from heaven (Matt. 28:2; Luke 22:43) and return to heaven (Luke 2:15). They dwell in heaven (Mark 13:32), where they behold God (Matt. 18:10) and carry out the Father's will perfectly (Matt. 6:10). They are even referred to as a heavenly host (Luke 2:13).

It is from heaven that Christ is to be revealed (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7). He has gone away to heaven to prepare an eternal dwelling for believers. We do not know the precise nature of this activity, but it is apparent that he is

readying a place where believers will fellowship with him: “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:2–3).

As God’s abode, heaven is obviously where believers will be for all eternity. For Paul said, “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with [the dead in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:17). We know that this Lord with whom we shall ever abide is in heaven, in the presence of the Father: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17; see also Acts 1:10–11). He is now there: “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence” (Heb. 9:24). Consequently, to be with Christ is to be with the Father in heaven. The believer is to make preparation for heaven: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19–20). Peter writes that believers have been born anew “and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven” for them, “who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:4–5). Paul similarly speaks of “the hope stored up” for believers “in heaven” (Col. 1:5) and of a future time when all things in heaven and on earth will unite in Christ: God has a will “to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10).

The Nature of Heaven

Heaven is, first and foremost, the presence of God. In Revelation 21:3 the new heaven is likened to the tabernacle, the tent where God had dwelt among Old Testament Israel: a great voice from the throne said, “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” God’s intention from the beginning, to have fellowship with humans, led first to his creating the human race, then to his dwelling in the tabernacle and temple, then to his coming in the incarnation, and finally to his taking humans to be with him (heaven). Sometimes, especially in popular presentations, heaven is depicted as primarily a

place of great physical pleasures, a place where everything we have most desired here on earth is fulfilled to the ultimate degree. Thus heaven seems to be merely earthly (and even worldly) conditions amplified. The correct perspective, however, is to see the basic nature of heaven as the presence of God, from which all of the blessings of heaven follow.

The presence of God means that we will have perfect knowledge. In this regard, the Catholic tradition has made much of the idea that in heaven we will have a beatific vision of God.[2159] While perhaps overemphasized, this concept does lay hold upon the important truth that for the first time we shall see and know God in a direct way. Paul makes the comment that at present "we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. . . . Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:9–12). John speaks of the effect God's presence will have on the believer: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Heaven will also be characterized by the removal of all evils. Being with his people, God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The very source of evil, the one who tempts us to sin, will also be gone: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). The presence of the perfectly holy God and the spotless Lamb means that there will be no sin or evil of any kind.

Since glory is of the very nature of God, heaven will be a place of great glory.[2160] The announcement of Jesus's birth was accompanied by the words, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). Similar words were spoken at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem: "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). The second coming of Christ will be in great glory (Matt. 24:30), and he will sit on his glorious throne (Matt. 25:31). Jesus told the multitude that he would come "in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Images suggesting immense size or brilliant light depict heaven as a place of unimaginable splendor, greatness, excellence, and beauty. The New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven from God is described as made of pure gold (even its streets are pure gold) and decorated with precious jewels (Rev. 21:18–21). It is likely that while John's vision employs as metaphors those items that we think of as being most valuable and beautiful, the actual splendor of heaven far exceeds

anything that we have yet experienced. There will be no need of sun or moon to illumine the New Jerusalem, for "the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev. 21:23; see also 22:5).

Our Life in Heaven: Rest, Worship, and Service

We are told relatively little about the activities of the redeemed in heaven, but there are a few glimpses of what our future existence is to be. One quality of our life in heaven will be rest.[2161] The writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes much of this concept. Rest, as the term is used in Hebrews, is not merely a cessation of activities, but the experience of reaching a goal of crucial importance. Thus, there are frequent references to the pilgrimage through the wilderness en route to the "rest" of the Promised Land (Heb. 3:11, 18), attainment of which was the completion of an extremely difficult and toilsome endeavor. A similar rest awaits believers: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience" (Heb. 4:9–11). The people being addressed here are the "holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling" (3:1). Heaven, then, will be the completion of the Christian's pilgrimage, the end of the struggle against the flesh, the world, and the devil. There will be work to do, but it will not involve fighting against opposing forces.

Another facet of life in heaven is worship.[2162] A vivid picture is found in Revelation 19:

> After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" [vv. 1–4]

Then a voice from the throne exhorted the multitude to praise God (v. 5), and they did so (vv. 6–8).

We find similar accounts elsewhere in Scripture. For example, Isaiah recounts a vision he had of the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. One seraph called to another, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3). From these sketches of heaven it appears that its

inhabitants regularly praise and worship God. Consequently, we may expect that the redeemed will be engaged in similar activity following the Lord's coming, the great judgment, and the establishment of his heavenly kingdom. In this sense, genuine believers will continue activity they engaged in while on earth. Our worship and praise here and now are preparation and practice for future employment of our hearts and voices.

There will evidently be an element of service in heaven as well.[2163] For when Jesus was in the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, he told his disciples that they would judge with him: "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Later, at the Last Supper, he said, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30). It is not clear just what is involved in this judging, but apparently it is service or work done on behalf of the King. There may well be a parallel here to the dominion the humans were originally intended to exercise in the garden of Eden. They were to serve as underlords or vicegerents, carrying out God's work on his behalf. In the stewardship parable in Matthew 25:14–30, the reward for work done faithfully is greater opportunity for work. Because that parable occurs in an eschatological setting, it may well be an indication that the reward for faithful work done here on earth will be work in heaven. Revelation 22:3 tells us that the Lamb will be worshiped by "his servants."

There is also a suggestion that in heaven there will be some type of community or fellowship among believers: "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:22–24). Note also the reference to "the spirits of the righteous made perfect"—heaven is a place of perfected spirituality.[2164]

Issues regarding Heaven

One of the disputed questions regarding heaven is whether it is a place or a state. On the one hand, it should be noted that the primary feature of heaven is closeness and communion with God, and that God is pure spirit (John 4:24).

Since God does not occupy space, which is a feature of our universe, it would seem that heaven is a state, a spiritual condition, rather than a place.[2165] On the other hand, there is the consideration that we will have bodies of some type (although they will be "spiritual bodies") and that Jesus presumably continues to have a glorified body as well. While placelessness may make sense when we are thinking of immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body seems to require place. In addition, parallel references to heaven and earth suggest that, like earth, heaven must be a locale. The most familiar of these references is, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10).[2166] We must be mindful, however, that heaven is another realm, another dimension of reality, so it is difficult to know what features of the world apply as well to the world to come, and what the term "place" means in relation to the eschaton. It is probably safest to say that while heaven is both a place and a state, it is primarily a state. The distinguishing mark of heaven will not be a particular location, but a condition of blessedness, sinlessness, joy, and peace.[2167] Life in heaven, accordingly, will be more real than our present existence.

A second issue concerns the question of physical pleasures. Jesus indicated that there will be in the resurrection, presumably the life hereafter, no marrying or giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35). Since sex is in this life to be restricted to marriage (1 Cor. 7:8–11), we have here an argument that there will be no sex in heaven. The high value Paul places upon virginity (1 Cor. 7:25–35) suggests the same conclusion.[2168] What of eating and drinking? Revelation 19:9 refers to the "wedding supper of the Lamb." And Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). In view of the fact that the references to Christ and the church as bridegroom and bride are symbolic, as is Christ as the Lamb, the marriage supper is presumably symbolic as well. Although Jesus ate in his resurrection body (Luke 24:43; cf. John 21:9–14), it should be borne in mind that he was resurrected but not yet ascended, so that the transformation of his body was probably not yet completed. The question arises, If there is to be no eating nor sex, will there be any pleasure in heaven? It should be understood that the experiences of heaven will far surpass anything experienced here. Paul said, "'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no human mind has conceived'—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9–10). It is likely that heaven's experiences should be thought of as, for example, suprasexual, transcending the experience

of sexual union with the special individual with whom one has chosen to make a permanent and exclusive commitment.[2169]

A third issue relates to the question of perfection. Within this life we gain satisfaction from growth, progress, development. Will not, then, our state of perfection in heaven be a rather boring and unsatisfying situation?[2170] Must there not be growth if heaven is really to be heaven? This assumption rests on process thought, the conception that change is of the essence of reality. A heaven without change is impossible or incredible. Some also argue that since children go to heaven, there must be growth in heaven so that they can attain maturity.[2171]

While there is existential force to the contention that we cannot be satisfied unless we grow, this is an illegitimate extrapolation from life as now constituted. Frustration and boredom occur within this life whenever development is arrested at a finite point, stopping short of perfection. If, however, one were to fully achieve, if there were no feeling of inadequacy or incompleteness, there would probably be no frustration. The stable situation in heaven is not a fixed state short of one's goal, but a state of completion beyond which there can be no advance. The satisfaction that comes from progress occurs precisely because we know we are closer to the desired goal. Reaching the goal will bring total satisfaction. Therefore, we will not grow in heaven. We will, however, continue to exercise the perfect character that we will have received from God. John Baillie speaks of "development *in* fruition" as opposed to "development *towards* fruition."[2172]

There also is the question of how much the redeemed in heaven will know or remember. Will we recognize those close to us in this life? Much of the popular interest in heaven stems from expectation of reunion with loved ones. Will we be aware of the absence of relatives and close friends? Will we remember sinful actions done and godly deeds omitted in this life? If so, will not all of this lead to regret and sorrow? With regard to these questions we must necessarily plead a certain amount of ignorance. It does not appear, from Jesus's response to the Sadducees' question about the woman who had outlived seven husbands, all of them brothers (Luke 20:27–40), that there will be family units as such. On the other hand, the disciples were evidently able to recognize Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). This fact suggests that there will be some indicators of personal identity by which we will be able to recognize one another.[2173] But we may infer that we will not recollect past failures and sins and missing loved ones, since that would introduce a sadness incompatible with "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

A fifth question is whether there will be varying rewards in heaven. That there apparently will be degrees of reward is evident in, for example, the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27).[2174] Ten servants were each given one pound by their master. Eventually they returned differing amounts to him and were rewarded in proportion to their faithfulness. Supporting passages include Daniel 12:3 ("Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever") and 1 Corinthians 3:14–15 ("If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames").

The differing rewards or degrees of satisfaction in heaven are usually pictured in terms of objective circumstances. For instance, we might suppose that a very faithful Christian will be given a large room in the Father's house; a less faithful believer will receive a smaller room. But if this is the case, would not the joy of heaven be reduced by one's awareness of the differences and the constant reminder that one might have been more faithful? In addition, the few pictures we do have of life in heaven evidence no real difference: all are worshiping, judging, serving. A bit of speculation may be in order at this point. As we pointed out in chapter 3, speculation is a legitimate theological activity, as long as we are aware that we are speculating. May it not be that the difference in the rewards lies not in the external or objective circumstances, but in the subjective awareness or appreciation of those circumstances? Thus, all would engage in the same activity, for example, worship, but some would enjoy it much more than others. Perhaps those who have enjoyed worship more in this life will find greater satisfaction in it in the life beyond than will others. An analogy here is the varying degrees of pleasure different people derive from a concert. The same sound waves fall on everyone's ears, but the reactions may range from boredom (or worse) to ecstasy. A similar situation may well hold with respect to the joys of heaven, although the range of reactions will presumably be narrower. No one will be aware of the differences in range of enjoyment, and thus there will be no dimming of the perfection of heaven by regret over wasted opportunities.[2175]

Final State of the Wicked

Just as in the past, the question of the future state of the wicked has created a considerable amount of controversy in our day. The doctrine of an everlasting punishment appears to some to be an outmoded or sub-Christian view.[2176] It, together with angels and demons, is often one of the first topics of Christian

belief to be demythologized. Part of the problem stems from what appears to be a tension between the love of God, a cardinal characteristic of God's nature, and his judgment. Yet, however we regard the doctrine of everlasting punishment, it is clearly taught in Scripture.

The Bible employs several images to depict the future state of the unrighteous. Jesus said, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt. 25:41). He likewise described their state as outer darkness: "But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12). The final condition of the wicked is also spoken of as eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46), torment (Rev. 14:10–11), the abyss (Rev. 9:1–2, 11), the wrath of God (Rom. 2:5), second death (Rev. 21:8), eternal destruction and exclusion from the face of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:9).

If there is one basic characteristic of hell, it is, in contrast to heaven, the absence of God or banishment from his presence. It is an experience of intense anguish, whether it involves physical suffering or mental distress or both.[2177] There are other aspects of the situation of the lost individual that contribute to its misery. One is a sense of loneliness, of having seen the glory and greatness of God, of having realized that he is the Lord of all, and then of being cut off. There is the realization that this separation is permanent. Similarly, the condition of one's moral and spiritual self is permanent. Whatever one is at the end of life will continue for all eternity. There is no basis for expecting change for the better. Thus, hopelessness comes over the individual.

The Finality of the Future Judgment

It is important to recognize the finality of the coming judgment. When the verdict is rendered at the last judgment, the wicked will be assigned to their *final* state.[2178] Nothing in Scripture indicates that there will be opportunity for belief after a preliminary period of punishment.

To some the finality of the judgment seems contrary to reason, and even perhaps to Scripture. Indeed, there are some passages of Scripture that seem to indicate that all will be saved. Paul, for example, wrote, "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9–10). And speaking of the future, he declared "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil.

2:10–11). On the basis of such references, it is contended that those who in this life reject the offer of salvation will, after their death and Christ's second coming, be sobered by their situation and will therefore be reconciled to Christ.[2179]

Unfortunately, however, as appealing as this view is, it cannot be maintained. For one thing, the passages cited do not really teach what the universalist claims they teach. The reconciliation, the uniting of all things, is not a restoration of fallen humanity to fellowship with God, but a restoration of harmony within the creation by, among other actions, putting sin into subjection to the Lord. It is not a matter of humans' accepting God, but of his quelling their rebellion. And while it is indeed true that every knee will bow and every tongue confess Christ as Lord, we must picture the wicked not as eagerly joining forces with the Lord, but as surrendering to a conquering army, so to speak. There will be an acquiescence in defeat, not a joyful commitment.

Furthermore, Scripture nowhere gives indication of a second chance. Surely, if there is to be an opportunity for belief after the judgment, it would be clearly set forth in God's Word.

Beyond these considerations, there are definite statements to the contrary. A finality attaches to the biblical depictions of the sentence rendered at the judgment; for example, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), although it relates to the intermediate rather than the final state, makes clear that their condition is absolute. It is not even possible to travel between the different states: "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us" (v. 26). We must therefore conclude that restorationism, the idea of a second chance, must be rejected.[2180]

The Eternality of Future Punishment

Not only is the future judgment of unbelievers irreversible, but their punishment is eternal. We do not reject merely the idea that all will be saved; we also reject the contention that none will be eternally punished. The school of thought known as annihilationism, on the other hand, maintains that although not everyone will be saved, there is only one class of future existence. Those who are saved will have an unending life; those who are not saved will be eliminated or annihilated. They will simply cease to exist. While granting that not everyone

deserves to be saved, to receive everlasting bliss, this position maintains that no one deserves endless suffering.

B. B. Warfield maintained that there are three different forms of annihilationism: pure mortalism, conditional immortality, and annihilationism proper.[2181] Pure mortalism holds that the human life is so closely tied to the physical organism that when the body dies, the person as an entity ceases to exist. This is primarily a materialistic view, although it also is found at times in pantheistic forms.[2182] Pure mortalism has not been popular in Christian circles, since, in contradiction to the biblical doctrine of humanity's creation in the image of God, it makes the human little more than an animal.

The second form of annihilationism, conditional immortality, maintains that the human being is by nature mortal. Death is the end. In the case of those who believe, however, God gives immortality or eternal life, so that they survive death or are restored to life. In some understandings of conditional immortality, God simply allows the unbeliever to pass out of existence.[2183] Others hold that all will participate in the resurrection, but that God then will simply allow the unrighteous to pass out of existence again. Eternal death is for them just that. Their second death will last forever.

The third form of annihilationism is most deserving of the title. It sees the extinction of the evil person at death as a direct result of sin. Humans are by nature immortal and would have everlasting life but for the effects of sin. There are two subtypes of annihilationism proper. The first sees annihilation as a natural result of sin. Sin has such a detrimental effect that the personality of the individual gradually dies out. Thus, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) is taken quite literally. Sin is self-destruction. After a certain length of time, perhaps proportionate to the sinfulness of the individual, those who are not redeemed wear out, as it were. The other type of pure annihilationism is the idea that God cannot and will not allow the sinful person to have eternal life. There is punishment for sin. The punishment need not be infinite, however. After a sufficient amount of punishment has been endured, God will simply destroy the individual self. It should be noted that in both subtypes of annihilationism proper, the soul or self would be immortal but for sin.[2184]

The problem with all of the forms of annihilationism is that they contradict biblical teaching. Several passages assert the endlessness of the punishment of the wicked. Both the Old and New Testaments refer to unending or unquenchable fire. Isaiah 66:24, for example, says, "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." Jesus uses the same images to describe the punishment of sinners: "If your hand

causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'" (Mark 9:43–48). These passages make it clear that the punishment is unending. It does not consume the one upon whom it is inflicted and thus simply come to an end.

In addition, there are several instances where words like "everlasting," "eternal," and "forever" are applied to nouns designating the future state of the wicked: fire or burning (Isa. 33:14; Jer. 17:4; Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7), contempt (Dan. 12:2), destruction (2 Thess. 1:9), chains (Jude 6), torment (Rev. 14:11; 20:10), and punishment (Matt. 25:46). To be sure, the adjective αἰώνιος (*aiōnios*) may on a few occasions have reference to an age, that is, a very long period of time, rather than to eternity. Usually, however, in the absence of a contrary indication in the context, the most common meaning of a word is the one in view. In the cases we have cited, nothing in the contexts justifies our understanding αἰώνιος as meaning anything other than "eternal." The parallelism found in Matthew 25:46 is particularly noteworthy: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." If the one (life) is of unending duration, then the other (punishment) must be also. Nothing in the context gives us warrant to interpret the word αἰώνιος differently in the two clauses. John A. T. Robinson comments:

> The genuine universalist will base nothing on the fact (which is a fact) that the New Testament word for eternal (*aionios*) does not necessarily mean everlasting, but enduring only for an indefinitely long period. For he can apply this signification to "eternal punishment" in Matt. 25.46 only if he is willing to give exactly the same sense to "eternal life" in the same verse. As F. D. Maurice said many years ago now, writing to F. J. A. Hort: "I did not see how *aionios* could mean one thing when it was joined with *kolasis* and another when it was joined with *zoe*" (quoted, J. O. F. Murray, *The Goodness and the Severity of God*, p. 195). To admit that the two phrases are not parallel is at once to treat them with unequal seriousness. And that a true universalism must refuse to do.[2185]

A problem arises from the fact that Scripture speaks not merely of eternal death (which one might interpret as meaning that the wicked will not be resurrected), but of eternal fire, eternal punishment, and eternal torment as well. What kind of God is it who is not satisfied by a finite punishment but makes humans suffer for ever and ever? This seems to be beyond the demands of justice; it appears to involve a tremendous degree of vindictiveness on the part of God. The punishment seems to be out of all proportion to the sin, for

presumably, all sins are finite acts against God. How does one square belief in a good, just, and loving God with eternal punishment? The question must not be dismissed lightly, for it concerns the very essence of God's nature. The fact that hell, as often understood, seems to be incompatible with God's love, as revealed in Scripture, may be an indication that we have misunderstood hell.

We should note, first, that whenever we sin, an infinite factor is invariably involved. All sin is an offense against God, the raising of a finite will against the will of an infinite being. It is failure to carry out one's obligation to him to whom everything is due. Consequently, one cannot consider sin to be merely a finite act deserving finite punishment.

Further, if God is to accomplish his goals in this world, he may not have been free to make human beings unsusceptible to endless punishment. God's omnipotence does not mean that he is capable of every conceivable action. He is not capable of doing the logically contradictory or absurd, for example. He cannot make a triangle with four corners.[2186] And it may well be that those creatures that God intended to live forever in fellowship with him had to be fashioned in such a way that they would experience eternal anguish if they chose to live apart from their Maker. Humans were designed to live eternally with God; if they pervert this their destiny, they will experience eternally the consequences of that act.

We should also observe that God does not send anyone to hell. He desires that none should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). God created humans to have fellowship with him and provided the means by which they can have that fellowship. It is a human's choice to experience the agony of hell. His or her own sin sends the person there, and his or her rejection of the benefits of Christ's death prevents escape. As C. S. Lewis has put it, "the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*." [2187] Sin, then, is the human being in effect saying to God throughout life, "Go away and leave me alone." Hell is God's finally replying, "You may have your wish." It is God's leaving the person to himself or herself, as that individual has chosen.

Degrees of Punishment

We should observe, finally, that Jesus's teaching suggests that there are degrees of punishment in hell. He upbraided those cities that had witnessed his miracles but failed to repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! . . . If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Matt. 11:21–24). There is a similar hint in the parable of the faithful and faithless stewards: "That servant who

knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:47–48).

The principle here seems to be, the greater our knowledge, the greater is our responsibility, and the greater will be our punishment if we fail in our responsibility. It may well be that the different degrees of punishment in hell are not so much a matter of objective circumstances as of subjective awareness of the pain of separation from God. This is parallel to our conception of the varying degrees of reward in heaven (pp. 1132–33). To some extent, the different degrees of punishment reflect the fact that hell is God's leaving a sinful human with the particular character that the person fashioned for himself or herself in this life. The misery one will experience from having to live with one's wicked self eternally will be proportionate to one's degree of awareness of precisely what one was doing when choosing evil.

Implications of the Doctrine of the Final States

1. The decisions that we make in this life will govern our future condition not merely for a period of time, but for all eternity. So we should exercise extraordinary care and diligence as we make them.
2. The conditions of this life, as Paul put it, are transitory. They fade into relative insignificance when compared with the eternity to come.
3. The nature of the future states is far more intense than anything known in this life. The images used to depict them are quite inadequate to fully convey what lies ahead. Heaven, for example, will far transcend any joy that we have known here.
4. The bliss of heaven ought not to be thought of as simply an intensification of the pleasures of this life. The primary dimension of heaven is the presence of the believer with the Lord.
5. Hell is not so much a place of physical suffering as it is the awful loneliness of total and final separation from the Lord.
6. Hell should not be thought of primarily as punishment visited on unbelievers by a vindictive God, but as the natural consequences of the sinful life chosen by those who reject Christ.

7. It appears that although all humans will be consigned either to heaven or to hell, there will be degrees of reward and punishment.

Concluding Thoughts

Chapter Objectives

At the end of this section, you should be able to do the following:

1. Evaluate the importance of ideas throughout history, particularly those of the Christian gospel.
2. Identify and describe the relationship of correct belief to the practice of the Christian faith.
3. Comprehend the role and significance of theology for an appreciation of the greatness and grandeur of God.

Chapter Summary

The examination and communication of ideas has determined the course of civilization. Theology has served in this role. Consider, for example, how it has affected the development of schools and hospitals. But theology must never become an end in itself or a source of prideful speculation. It must lead to a witness of the gospel and an appreciation for and worship of the greatness and grandeur of God.

Study Questions

- How have theological ideas affected the course of Western civilization? How have theological ideas affected American culture? What implications do you see for theology affecting other cultures?

- Why is correct belief important? How can correct belief lead to the sin of pride?
- If done appropriately, how can the study of theology lead to witness and communication of the gospel and ultimately to appreciation and worship of the greatness and grandeur of God?

We have come to the end of a lengthy examination of ideas. Not only have we looked at many different topics; we have also noted a variety of conceptions on these different topics. It may be well to conclude our study of systematic theology by putting such an endeavor into a proper context. Are ideas really that important? With some persons, a concern for immediate experience or a desire for instant application may tend to overshadow theoretical considerations. As a result, the value of a writing such as this may appear doubtful. To be sure, the reader who has come this far may well be assumed not to share such an estimation of the value of ideas. Yet a quick review of the role that concepts play may be in order.

To a large extent, our world is what it is because of ideas that have been conceived, evaluated, and verified. The concept of instantaneously transmitting pictures over long distances, considered fantastic a century ago, has become a reality, and the nature of culture and society has been altered as a consequence. The idea of the equality of the various human races and the need for justice among them greatly influenced the course of the last half of the twentieth century. The idea of the dialectic that Karl Marx borrowed from Georg Hegel and modified into his own scheme of dialectical materialism may have seemed abstract and irrelevant to many people when he first propounded it. Nevertheless, it greatly affected not only the understanding but also the experience of countless numbers of persons throughout the world. And who could have foreseen the influence that Charles Darwin's strange conception of the origin of species would have upon the world? Adolf Hitler's idea of the super race and of Aryan supremacy led to the death of approximately six million Jews.

More significant than the impact of these ideas is that of the concepts that form the central basis of Christianity. The idea that God entered the world in human form, was crucified, and rose from the dead seems incredible to many. Yet the world is a far different place from what it would be if there had not been millions who believed and proclaimed this message. How many hospitals, how many institutions of higher education have come into being because of the driving force of those who went forth in the name of the one they believed to be

God Incarnate! The impact that Christianity had upon the first-century world and the subsequent development of history is directly related to the revolutionary ideas that it presented about who Jesus Christ is and what the meaning of life is.

The issue of correct belief is ever so important in our time. We find numerous shadings of religious ideas. And we also encounter myriad conceptions of Christian lifestyle, which are rooted in differing doctrinal conceptions. Our particular understanding of basic concepts, for example, the relationship between grace and works, has a profound influence on what we do in our Christian lives and the spirit in which we do it. Hence, right belief is imperative.

Yet even if our beliefs are pure and correct, that is not enough in itself. For correct belief and theological mastery are of no value in and of themselves in the sight of the Lord. Imagine, if you will, a group of theological students and practicing theologians appearing before the Lord on the day of judgment and, in echo of Matthew 7:22, pleading, "Have we not studied *Christian Theology* in your name? Have we not expounded the fundamental teachings of Christianity in your name?" The Lord will reply, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." Doctrine is important, but its importance lies in the contribution it makes to our relationship with God. Without that, the finest theology, most eloquently enunciated, is merely "a resounding gong or clanging cymbal." The point being made here is that our beliefs (our official theology, based upon objective teachings of Scripture) must be put into practice (which is, so to speak, our unofficial theology). If we are to bring our actual practice into conformity with our beliefs, we will have to reflect and even meditate upon those beliefs. Perhaps this is part of what Paul meant when he spoke of being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

There are certain dangers associated with the study of theology. There are certain theological diseases to which one is exposed and may contract as a result of this endeavor. Helmut Thielicke has described several of them quite vividly in his *Little Exercise for Young Theologians*. One of the most common and most serious is the sin of pride. When we have acquired a considerable sophistication in matters of theology, there is a danger that we will regard that knowledge as something of a badge of virtue, something that sets us apart as superior to others. We may use that knowledge, and particularly the jargon we have acquired, to intimidate others who are less informed. We may take advantage of our superior skills, becoming intellectual bullies.[2188] Or our knowledge of theology may lead us to a type of theological gamesmanship, in which the arguing of one theory against another becomes our whole purpose in life. But this is to convert what should be the most serious of matters into a sport.

In this connection we should remember the words of Jesus that we are to become like little children; God has hidden his truth from the wise of this world and revealed it to babes (Matt. 11:25). We should not underestimate the theological acumen and sensitivity of those who have not engaged in theological studies in a formal sense. There is what Thielicke calls "the spiritual instinct of the children of God."[2189] Many laypersons, although unskilled in the official theological sciences, nonetheless have experience in the Christian life that sometimes gives them insight far surpassing that of many professional theologians. When Jesus spoke of sending the Holy Spirit, who would guide believers into all truth (John 16:13), he did not restrict his promise to seminary graduates.

We should not conclude from this last point, however, that theology is not an intellectual endeavor. It calls for rigorous logical and critical thinking. To construct a systematic theology, we must think systematically. That is to say, we cannot proceed in an eclectic fashion. Although we will draw on insights wherever they may be found, we will always seek to think in a coherent fashion. We will not knowingly incorporate into our system ideas resting on presuppositions that are contradictory to each other. There will, of course, be mysteries we do not fully comprehend. But the systematic theologian, not readily accepting of opacity, will endeavor to plumb them.

Beyond the logical or rational character of theology, there is also its aesthetic character. There is the potential, as we survey the whole of God's truth, of grasping its artistic nature. There is a beauty to the great compass and the interrelatedness of the doctrines. The organic character of theology, its balanced depiction of the whole of reality and of human nature, should bring a sense of satisfaction to the human capacity to appreciate beauty in the form of symmetry, comprehensiveness, and coherence.

Theology is not simply to be learned, understood, and appreciated, however. There is the additional issue of communication of the message. What we have given in this volume is the basic content of the Christian world-and-life view, and thus of the message that all human beings are called on to accept. That content will need to be continually reexpressed, however. In attempting to walk the tightrope between the timeless essence of the doctrines and a particular contemporary expression of them, we have leaned toward the former when a choice had to be made. This approach has left a need for restatement of the doctrines in ways that will make them accessible to more people. This need results in part from the fact that I am an educated, middle-class, North American white male. Although I have ministered in a pastoral role to blacks, Hispanics, and the lower economic classes, the basic orientation of these writings is to the

type of students who currently enroll in American evangelical seminaries. Although these student bodies have become more diverse in recent years, they still tend to be rather WASPish. Much work needs to be done in tailoring the content of the theology to third world audiences. There is also a need for adaptation of this theology vertically. For it is written primarily for seminary students. It is encouraging to find laypersons studying this volume. Yet real theology is capable of being expressed even to children.

In part the communication of theology will be aided by the realization that theology need not always be expressed in discursive or didactic form. Sometimes a story communicates better. Jesus demonstrated this repeatedly through his use of parables. In the twentieth century, C. S. Lewis showed that theology can be placed in the form of winsome stories, even children's stories. Narrative theology has communicated profound truth with dynamic effect.[2190] Yet we need to bear in mind the difference between theological reflection and the communication of the content of doctrine. The more precise categories of reflective, discursive thought are still essential for the actual formulation of theology.

I am convinced that real theology, good theology, will enhance the reader's awareness of the greatness and grandeur of God. When Moses met God in the burning bush (Exod. 3), he was filled with a sense of his own unworthiness, his own sinfulness. Peter, too, when he realized that he was in the presence of a perfect and powerful Lord, was struck with awe (Luke 5:8). If we have genuinely grasped the significance of the truths that we have studied, we will have a similar reaction. Certain of the topics covered point us more directly and effectively to what God is like and what he does, but all have that effect to some degree. My purpose in writing will have been achieved only if the reader has come to love the Lord more and is better able to communicate that love to others.

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Endnotes

Preface

1. Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).
2. E.g., Philip Jenkins, *The Coming Christendom*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
3. Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), xix.
4. Major Garrett, "The Center Falls Apart," *National Journal*, February 25, 2011, http://nationaljournal.com/the-center-falls-apart-20110225?mrefid=site_search.
5. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 319–25.
6. Patricia Cohen, "The New Enlightenment: Digital Keys for Unlocking the Humanities' Riches," *New York Times*, November 16, 2010; "Analyzing Literature by Words and Numbers," *New York Times*, December 3, 2010; "In 500 Billion Words, New Window on Culture," *New York Times*, December 16, 2010.
7. Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011), 100–108.
8. If God grants me the time and strength, I hope to be able to write a guidebook to critical theological thinking, a subject I have taught once at Baylor University.

Part 1: Studying God

Chapter 1. What Is Theology?

9. William P. Alston, "Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:141–42.
10. Ibid.
11. "Religion, Social Aspects of," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., *Macropaedia*, 15:604–13.
12. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
13. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).
14. A. C. McGiffert, in *Protestant Thought before Kant* (New York: Harper, 1961), obviously thinks of Kant as a watershed in the development of Protestant thought even though Kant was a philosopher, not a theologian.
15. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Transcendental Analytic," 1.2.2.
16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1.2.2.5.
17. Albrecht Ritschl, "Theology and Metaphysics," in *Three Essays*, trans. Philip Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 149–215.
18. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 4.
19. Note that Stanley Grenz's statement that "card-carrying" evangelicals "reduce[d] essential Christianity to adherence to basic doctrines" is inaccurate (Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 91–92).

20. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 6–15.

21. John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 42.

22. Ibid., 50–51.

23. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 32–41.

24. Ibid., 79–84.

25. Henry J. Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1937). An example of modernizing Jesus can be found in the nineteenth-century reconstructions of the life of Jesus. George Tyrrell said of Adolf von Harnack's construction of Jesus that "the Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well" (*Christianity at the Cross-Roads* [London: Longmans, Green, 1910], 44).

26. Henry J. Cadbury, "The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," *Interpretation* 3 (1949): 331–37. Examples of people who archaize themselves are those who try to form communities after the pattern of the early Christian church as it is described especially in Acts 4–5, or those who try to settle the question of the validity of drinking alcoholic beverages on the basis of New Testament practice, without asking in either case whether societal changes from biblical times to the present have altered the significance of the practices in question.

27. James Smart, in *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 10, rejects this idea that biblical theology was a movement, accepting instead only our second meaning of biblical theology. He is therefore more optimistic about the future of biblical theology than is Brevard Childs.

28. James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

29. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

30. An example is W. D. Davies's conception of "the resurrection body" of 2 Cor. 5 (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* [London: SPCK, 1955], 310–18). Cadbury comments regarding neo-orthodoxy, "It is not much different from modernization since the current theology often is simply read into the older documents and then out again. It is the old sequence of eisegesis and exegesis. I do not mean merely that modern words are used to describe the teaching of the Bible like 'demonic' or 'encounter' and the more philosophical vocabulary affected by modern thinkers. Even when the language is accurately biblical, it does not mean as used today what it first meant" ("The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," 333).

31. Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:418–32.

32. Johann Philipp Gabler, "Von der richtigen Unterscheidung der biblischen und der dogmatischen Theologie und der rechten Bestimmung ihrer beider Zeile," in Otto Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit; ihre methodischen Probleme bei Johann Philipp Gabler und Georg Leorenz Bauer und deren Nachwirkungen* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1972), 272–84; John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980): 133–58.

33. Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 99–122.

34. E.g., Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–89).

35. E.g., Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949).

36. Some of the theologians who discuss topics like the "Hebrew mind," "functional Christology," and the "unity of human nature" fail to recognize the presuppositions they bring to their analyses (existentialist, functionalist, and behaviorist, respectively). Another case in point is Jack Rogers's analysis that the principles of biblical inspiration propounded by the "Old Princeton" theologians were based on Scottish commonsense realism ("The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers [Waco, TX: Word, 1977], 39). In the same volume, there is no equally specific analysis of Rogers's own

position. He characterizes it merely as Platonic/Augustinian as opposed to Aristotelian, a misleading oversimplification.

37. Millard J. Erickson, "The Church and Stable Motion," *Christianity Today*, October 12, 1973, 7.

38. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, or the Phases of Human Progress*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Reason in Common Sense* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 284.

39. Cyclical views of history hold that instead of making progress toward a goal in a more or less straight-line fashion, history is simply repeating the same patterns. Cyclical views are often pessimistic. A religious example is Hinduism, with its belief in repeated reincarnations of the soul.

40. Philosophical theology is theologizing that draws on the input of philosophy rather than using merely biblical materials. Traditionally, such philosophical theology utilized metaphysics very heavily. In the twentieth century, it tended to utilize logic (in the broadest sense of that word), thus becoming more analytical than speculative or constructive.

41. Although philosophy cannot prove the truth of Christian theology, it can evaluate the cogency of the evidence advanced, the logical validity of theology's arguments, and the meaningfulness or ambiguity of the concepts. On this basis philosophy offers evidence for the truth of Christianity, without claiming to prove it in some conclusive fashion. There are philosophical and historical evidences that can be advanced, but not in such a way as to offer an extremely probable induction.

42. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 52–70.

43. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*. For a more recent example of this approach, see Norman Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

44. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/1.

45. Cf. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), 33; Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 89.

46. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.3.

47. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.4.4.

48. Ibid., art. 5.

49. Rudolf Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (New York: AMS, 1979), chap. 1, "The Rejection of Metaphysics."

50. A German term meaning, derivatively, "knowledge." It is usually rendered "science," but in a broader sense than that English word ordinarily conveys. There are *Naturwissenschaften* (sciences of nature) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (sciences of spirit). The word usually denotes an organized discipline of knowledge.

51. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 7–8.

Chapter 2. The Possibility of Theology

52. William Dean, *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 4.

53. John Herman Randall Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), chaps. 11–15.

54. While for our purposes theological criticism is of greater interest, it is notable that similar critiques were arising from the broader intellectual community. See, for example, Anthony Standen, *Science Is a Sacred Cow* (New York: Dutton, 1950).

55. Carl Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

56. For a popular but more extensive sketch of postmodernism, see my *Postmodern World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002). For a more technical examination and evaluation of postmodernism, see my *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

57. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii–xxv.

58. To the extent that third world Christians have become familiar with postmodernism, some of them have seen some elements of postmodernism, such as its rejection of reason as the sole source of knowledge,

as valid and usable in their theology. They have, however, been wary of its tendency toward pluralism, and thus toward syncretism. Wonsuk Ma, "Biblical Studies in the Pentecostal Tradition: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1999), 63–68.

59. James W. Sire, "On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody: Logocentricity and Postmodernity," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 106.

60. John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: Reply to Derrida," *Glyph* 1 (1977): 198–208.

61. Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc abc . . . ," *Glyph* 2 (1977): 162–254.

62. John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14n10.

63. Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 170.

64. Derrida admitted as much (*Writing and Difference* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 280–81).

65. Paul J. Griffiths, "Philosophizing across Cultures, or How to Argue with a Buddhist," *Criterion* 26, no. 1 (1987): 10–14.

66. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 87.

67. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 80–85.

68. William Hamilton, "The Death of God Theologies Today," in Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 46–50.

69. E.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973); James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

70. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 17–19.

71. James McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

72. John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 62–67.

73. I made the point on one occasion that all views are conditioned and transitory and that postmodernism would be supplanted and that the process was perhaps already underway. A postmodern evangelical theologian present asked how I could be sure that postmodernism would someday become passé. I replied that I was not sure, but that since every other view had sooner or later been supplanted, the burden of proof was on him to argue that the process would not continue. The discussion immediately shifted to other issues.

74. John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 59–60.

75. Clark Pinnock, "Between Classical and Process Theism," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 316–17; Richard Rice, "Process Theism and the Open View of God: The Crucial Difference," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 165–66; William Hasker, "An Adequate God," in Cobb and Pinnock, *Searching for an Adequate God*, 216–17.

76. In a panel discussing the differences and relative merits of the modern and postmodern views, I raised the question of the status of our discussion itself, asking whether our discourse was a modern or postmodern one, or what. One panelist, an avowed postmodernist, responded, "I don't understand the question."

77. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1966), 12–13.

78. Robert Bierstadt, introduction to *The Social Determination of Meaning*, by Judith Willer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 3.

79. We should note again that this is not an original insight of postmodernism. It can be found at many points in the history of human thought, although not with the recent refinement. It goes back at least as far as the discussion in Plato's *Theaetetus.*

80. Mary Ruth Yoe, "Market Force," *University of Chicago Magazine* 99, no. 3 (January–February 2007): 30.

81. Alan R. White, "Coherence Theory of Truth," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 2:132.

82. William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," in *"Pragmatism," and Four Essays from "The Meaning of Truth"* (New York: Meridian, 1955), 132.

83. Ibid.

84. Timm Triplett, "Recent Work on Foundationalism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1990): 96. While Triplett uses the term "empirical," one could broaden the conception of correspondence by substituting the term "synthetic," referring to any proposition in which the predicate adds something not implicit in the subject.

85. Ibid., 93.

86. Ibid., 101.

87. Robert Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136.

88. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*, 2nd exp. ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009).

89. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 280–81.

90. Bernard Mayo, *Ethics and the Moral Life* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 9–14.

91. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centring in the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 4. For those who maintain that faith in Jesus can be present without something as elaborate as belief that he was the Son of God, a rereading of Matt. 16:13–20 may be instructive.

92. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

93. I have a strong conviction that those who speak and write about the life of the church must be able to practice at least some of the skills they are seeking to inculcate in their students. For this reason I personally continued to engage in local church ministry throughout my seminary teaching and administrative career, and as a dean, with the strong approval of the school's board, instituted a requirement that in order to receive tenure, full-time faculty members whose own educational preparation did not include all of the areas their students were required to study would have to acquire such competencies themselves, and that those who had never engaged in full-time ministry must obtain ministry experience, on a concurrent basis. As difficult as it was, I am grateful that my entire graduate education was done while serving as a full-time pastor of local congregations.

94. For many years, the Association of Theological Schools had an Issues Research Advisory Committee. When funding finally came to an end, the committee held a final summary conference. The chairman, in summarizing the findings of the several years of research, began by observing that the number one problem in theological education was lack of integration between the theoretical and the practical disciplines.

Chapter 3. The Method of Theology

95. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); idem, *The Christian Faith*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

96. Karl Barth, *God, Grace, and Gospel* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), 57–58.

97. Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968). In 1963, E. V. Z. Verlag of Zurich issued a reprint of the original German edition—*Der Römerbrief Unveränderter Nachdruck der ersten Auflage von 1919.*

98. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1–44.

99. Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1964), 15–47.

100. Note, for example, John Cobb’s abandonment of the idea of writing a systematic theology. David Ray Griffin, “John B. Cobb, Jr.: A Theological Biography,” in *Theology and the University: Essays in Honor of John B. Cobb, Jr.*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Joseph C. Hough Jr. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 238–39.

101. Henry J. Cadbury, “The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves,” *Interpretation* 3 (1949): 332–33.

102. Examples are Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Scribner, 1968); John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1966); Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987–94); Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997–99); James William McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986, 1994); Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Ted Peters, *God—the World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2002–5); Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Daniel P. Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007).

103. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), chap. 6.

104. Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

105. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–20.

106. Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 20.

107. Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Boston: Houghton, 1926), 61, italics added.

108. I once taught a doctoral seminar in a Latin American institution, in which one of the students declared that “systematic theology is a phenomenon of the modern period.” My response was that Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Calvin among others would probably find that a very strange observation.

109. This point is often overlooked in discussions of methodology. David K. Clark’s *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) contains excellent discussions of many important issues in current theological methodology, but nowhere really lays out a sequential procedure for formulating a theology.

110. We are not suggesting here, as did Charles Hodge, that the process is a parallel to the method of science. There are many significant differences between the two disciplines. We are simply proposing an inductive approach to the contents of Scripture. Note that Kevin Vanhoozer links the methodology of Carl F. H. Henry with that of Hodge, and, in a typically postmodern move, labels this the “Hodge-Henry hypothesis.” His own approach, which he terms *theodrama*, reflects his own more aesthetic orientation, and does not receive a similarly hypothetical characterization, leaving the impression that it is simply the way things are (“Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” in *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger [Wheaton: Crossway, 2005], 93–129).

111. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76).

112. James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 206–62; Gerhard Kittel, *Lexicographia Sacra*, Theology Occasional Papers 7 (London: SPCK, 1938)—German version in *Deutsche Theologie* 5 (1938): 91–109.

113. I reserve the term “tools” for the actual instruments used in biblical study, such as lexicons and grammars. Some exegetes use “tools” of certain critical methodologies, thus giving an impression of

concreteness and objectivity they may not deserve.

114. A more extensive discussion of the methodology of biblical study will be undertaken in chapter 5.

115. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 270–73.

116. In chapter 5, we will examine and evaluate some of the critical methods of biblical research practiced historically and currently.

117. There are various ways in which this can be done. One essential approach is reading theology written by those from different cultures. Even better is personal interaction with such Christians and theologians. I have personally found that serving on the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance for thirty years and serving multiracial congregations and teaching in third world countries periodically has been of great help. Interaction with Christians from many other countries and cultures, while sometimes uncomfortable, is a good sensitizing process. Writing one's own intellectual autobiography is another good way to come to grips with the particularity of one's own outlook. For a more extensive description of this process, see my *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 241–42.

118. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:1–8.

119. E. Ross-Hinsler, "Mission and Context: The Current Debate about Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14 (1978): 23–29.

120. For example, the modern missionary takes the particular culture into consideration when deciding which of the many complementary motifs of the Christian doctrine of the atonement to stress. In an African culture, where sin is viewed as oppressive, enslaving darkness, it might be wise to emphasize the power of God to overcome evil (what Gustaf Aulén has called the "classical view" of the atonement) as a beginning point leading to the other motifs in the doctrine. Examples of ways in which Christians have attempted to utilize cultural conceptions in expressing Christology in African contexts will be examined in chapter 34. See Henry Johannes Mugabe, "Christology in an African Context," *Review and Expositor* 88, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 343–55. Crucial to the task is determining which of these cultural themes can be employed without distorting the Christian message.

121. It should be noted, however, that some laypeople are serious students of theology, reading widely and deeply, and are functioning at a level that may exceed that of many pastors.

122. Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), vii–ix.

123. An integrative motif should be broad enough to account for the doctrine of creation, something that motifs that focus on redemption fail to do. Lewis and Demarest's identification of God's "eternal purposes revealed in *promises* to do gracious things for his *redeemed people*" is a recent evangelical example (Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 1:26).

124. Stanley J. Grenz (*Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 138n4) incorrectly identifies my integrative motif as the doctrine of Scripture. In his own work, he tends to utilize his integrative motif overtly and at times rather rigidly, as seen in his *Theology for the Community of God* and his treatment, with Roger Olson, of twentieth-century theology as revolving around the categories of transcendence and immanence (*20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992]).

125. James Orr, in his *Progress of Dogma*, observed that the exposition of doctrines did not proceed in a uniform fashion for all doctrines, but that some were developed earlier in response to specific challenges, while others were given extensive attention later, in some cases several centuries later ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 21–30).

126. For a more complete discussion of this dimension of theological method with application to one particular doctrine, see Paul Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 272–76.

Chapter 4. Contextualizing Theology

127. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1–44.

128. Ibid., 1–2. By myth, Bultmann means imagery drawn from the perceived world by which humans try to express their understanding of themselves and of the unseen spiritual powers.

129. “Dogma,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 4:947–48.

130. G. Ernest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller, *Book of the Acts of God* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

131. Harry E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 99–101.

132. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 49–66.

133. I once met a very literal-minded traditional Christian who actually believed that Paul was saying here that believers who are alive at the time of the Lord’s return will not hinder the resurrection of the dead.

134. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).

135. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

136. William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 1, *Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 141–42.

137. Ibid.

138. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 20–43.

139. Hordern, *New Directions*, 1:146–47.

140. Ibid., 148–49.

141. These issues will be discussed at greater length in chapter 8.

142. While this may seem to be an argument from silence, some more general applicability needs to be indicated if a command is to be distinguished from all the situation-specific commands that Jesus gave (e.g., the command to bring the loaves and fishes to be multiplied, a command that had to be repeated for a second instance).

143. Fosdick, *Modern Use of the Bible*, 110.

144. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 93.

145. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 136.

146. E.g., *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 62.

147. I prefer different terminology than principles, especially when dealing with doctrine rather than ethics. It is the essence or the basic concept that we are seeking to preserve and reexpress. William Webb uses the terminology of “abstracted meaning” (“A Response to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,” in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, gen. ed. Gary T. Meadors [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 64).

148. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 316.

149. Ibid.

150. Meadors, *Moving beyond the Bible*, 62, 73, 100–101, 159.

151. Note Walter Kaiser’s complaint that after rereading Vanhoozer’s chapter numerous times, he still does not understand how it is to function concretely (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “A Response to Kevin J. Vanhoozer,” in *Moving beyond the Bible*, 204). The problem may not be exclusively Kaiser’s. It is interesting to note that in his responses to the contributions of other authors to that volume, Vanhoozer is much clearer and more specific than in his unfolding of his own view.

152. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 407.

153. The contributors to the *Moving beyond the Bible* volume, when they apply their method to cases, tend to emphasize more the ethical than the doctrinal issues, despite the title of the book, “Moving beyond

the Bible to *Theology*."

154. Perhaps this is why some of the best work in this area is being done by practicing ministers. It is helpful to test one's method by preaching continuously through one of the books of the Pentateuch, including even the genealogies.

155. Much of the discussion by professional biblical and theological scholars focuses on the temporal and cultural gap between the biblical situation and that of the interpreter, leaving the dimension of breadth to the missiologist and of height to the youth and children's workers.

156. The terminology here differs somewhat from that in the previous schema of transformers and translators. The use of these terms, or at least the identification of the variables involved, may be advantageous in light of the tendency, commended by many postmodernists, to gain advantage by labeling, while resisting labeling of their own view, in such a way as to make their view seem less extreme or undesirable. Note, for example, the tendency both in politics and in theology to identify one's position as "progressive," rather than "liberal," and a contradictory position as "fundamentalist" or "extreme right." Such an endeavor is actually a case of stipulative definition, working from the end of the term, rather than the definition.

157. It was theologians such as this that caused a humanist, John Herman Randall, to say that "to the impartial observer," the liberal positions seem to display "a fondness for esoteric 'reinterpretation' that may approach in its effects actual hypocrisy" (*Remaking the Modern Mind*: *A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age*, rev. ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940], 542).

158. It is interesting that those of more conservative theology have often been among the more aggressive users of innovative delivery systems. Conservative ministries have dominated the use of radio and television, for example.

Chapter 5. Two Special Issues: *Biblical Criticism and Theological Language*

159. For general introductions to the various types of criticism, the reader is referred to the Guides to Biblical Scholarship series published by Fortress Press (Philadelphia): Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (1971); Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (1971); Walter E. Rast, *Tradition History and the Old Testament* (1972); Ralph W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament* (1974); Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (1975); J. Maxwell Miller, *The Old Testament and the Historian* (1976); William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (1970); Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (1969); Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (1969); William Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (1973); Daniel Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* (1976).

160. Historically, it was documentary analysis of the Pentateuch into four documents, J, E, D, and P, that was the first manifestation of this. Recently some evangelicals have begun to espouse this approach, which is now almost two hundred years old, and which seems to contradict the traditional evangelical conception of biblical inerrancy. See, e.g., Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

161. Basil Redlich, *Form Criticism: Its Value and Limitations* (London: Duckworth, 1939), 9.

162. Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 18.

163. Ibid., 20.

164. Ibid., 21–23.

165. Redlich, *Form Criticism*, 73–77.

166. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels," in Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research* (New York: Harper, 1941), 46–52.

167. Rudolf Bultmann,*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 4.

168. George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 153.

169. James Price, *Interpreting the New Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961), 159.

170. Redlich, *Form Criticism*, 79.

171. Ladd, *New Testament and Criticism*, 158.

172. Clark Pinnock, “The Case against Form Criticism,” *Christianity Today*, July 16, 1965, 12.
173. Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 258.
174. Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 41.
175. Price, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 160.
176. Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961), 93–170; cf. Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and Its Beginnings: A Study in the Limits of “Formgeschichte”* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1957).
177. Price, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 161.
178. Ibid., 160.
179. F. F. Bruce, “Are the New Testament Documents Still Reliable?” in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), 53.
180. Edgar Goodspeed, *Matthew, Apostle and Evangelis*t (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1959).
181. Gunther Bornkamm et al., *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).
182. Joachim Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 21–30.
183. Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?*, 69.
184. William A. Walker, “A Method for Identifying Redactional Passages in Matthew on Functional and Linguistic Grounds,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 76–93.
185. R. S. Barbour, “Redaction Criticism and Practical Theology,” *Reformed World* 33 (1975): 263–65.
186. Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?*, 78.
187. Grant R. Osborne, “The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): 313–14.
188. Barbour, “Redaction Criticism and Practical Theology,” 265–66.
189. Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 301.
190. Daniel Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis*? (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 7.
191. Ibid., 15.
192. Ibid., 22–23.
193. Ibid., 36–52.
194. Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 495–96.
195. Jean-Marie Benoist, *The Structural Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1978), 216.
196. Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), xvi; Robert C. Culley, “Response to Daniel Patte,” in *Semiology and Parables: An Exploration of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism for Exegesis*, ed. Daniel Patte (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976), 156–57; Vern S. Poythress, “Philosophical Roots of Phenomenological and Structuralist Literary Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978–79): 165–71.
197. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 496.
198. Fred W. Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis: The Eve of Historical Criticism,” *Semeia* 51 (1990): 51.
199. Ibid., 335.
200. Stanley Fish, “Who’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser?” in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 68–86.
201. Susan Wittig, “A Theory of Multiple Meanings,” *Semeia* 9 (1977): 75–105.
202. James L. Resseguie, “Reader Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 307–24.
203. Robert Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark*

(Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

204. Jouette M. Bassler, "The Parable of the Loaves," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 157–72.

205. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

206. Jeffrey Stout, "What Is the Meaning of a Text?" *New Literary History* 14 (1982): 1–12.

207. Stephen Fowl, "The Ethics of Interpretation, or What's Left Over after the Elimination of Meaning," in *The Bible in Three Dimension: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 379–80.

208. Ibid., 380.

209. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), sec. 66.

210. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), sec. 455.

211. Christopher Norris, *The Contest of Faculties: Philosophy and Theory after Deconstruction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 159.

212. Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1974), 177, 383.

213. Ibid., 40.

214. Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985), 118.

215. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 79.

216. Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 145–49.

217. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 78–79.

218. M. D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81.

219. Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 15–49.

220. Reginald H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), 91–104.

221. Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?*, 40.

222. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 1:37.

223. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 3.

224. *The Age of Analysis*, ed. Morton White (New York: New American Library, 1955), 207–8. A priori statements are logically prior to and independent of sensory experience; a posteriori statements are logically posterior to and dependent on sensory experience.

225. Ibid., 209.

226. Rudolf Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (New York: AMS, 1979), 17.

227. John Macquarrie, *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 108–9.

228. Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, 26–31.

229. Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic, and God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 58.

230. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 11e, 12e.

231. Ibid., 19e.

232. William Hordern, *Speaking of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 49–52.

233. Ibid., 132.

234. John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 169–99.

235. Ferré, *Language, Logic, and God*, 161. See also his *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Scribner, 1967).

236. Charles W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 1–9.

237. Ferré, *Language, Logic, and God*, 148.

238. Morris, *Theory of Signs*, 6, 29–42.

239. Ferré, *Language, Logic, and God*, 162.

240. Ibid., 162–63.

241. Ibid., 164–65.
242. Ibid., 161–62.
243. David Ray Griffin, “Postmodern Theology and A/Theology,” in *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 31.
244. Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 28.
245. Ibid., 30. See also Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
246. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 193. The idea was suggested by Joseph Jastrow’s *Fact and Fable in Psychology*.
247. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 30–35.
248. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 12.
249. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 17.
250. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 108.
251. Searle, *Speech Acts*, 23–24.
252. John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3.
253. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 14–15.
254. James Wm. McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994), 42–43.
255. Ibid., 158–61.
256. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 283–307.
257. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 90–92.
258. Ibid., 93–104.

Part 2: Knowing God

Chapter 6. God's Universal Revelation

259. James Leo Garrett considers these matters not to be general revelation, but merely borrowing from the content of the doctrine of providence (*Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 1:45). The same, however, could be said of the other two loci of general revelation, with respect to the doctrines of creation and humanity.

260. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 17–39; Edward Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 80–116; Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 119–25.

261. William Barclay, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 24–28.

262. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 80.

263. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 852.

264. Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 81–82.

265. E. H. Gifford, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: John Murray, 1886), 63.

266. Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 175–76; John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation of the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 222.

267. Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy*, 26, 92, 94, 96; Sanders, *No Other Name*, 153.

268. Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 243.

269. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.2.

270. Thomas's fourth proof in effect argues that because there are degrees of perfection in the universe, there must somewhere be the ultimate perfection.

271. René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 1:180–81.

272. Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Appendix: "Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God"; idem, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, "Logic," para. 51; idem, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 2.3.

273. Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String, 1941); idem, "Formal Validity and Real Significance of the Ontological Argument," *Philosophical Review* 53 (1944): 225–45.

274. E.g., John H. Hick and Arthur C. McGill, *The Many-Faced Argument* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

275. An outstanding example is Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), part 2.

276. Karl Barth, *God, Grace, and Gospel* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), 57–58.

277. Barth was the principal author of the Barmen Declaration, which rejected the pro-Nazi "German Christian" movement.

278. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), II/1, 121.

279. Karl Barth, "No!," in Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles / Centenary Press, 1946), 62.

280. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 93.

281. Karl Barth, *Revelation*, ed. John Baillie and Hugh Martin (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 49.

282. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 108.

283. Ibid., 119.

284. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963).

285. John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

286. William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999).

287. E.g., William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

288. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1.

289. For a fuller statement of this possibility, see Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

290. Alistair McGrath, "A Particularist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 177–80; J. I. Packer, *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1986, 25; idem, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 121–23; Stuart Hackett, *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 244; John Stott, *The Authentic Jesus* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1985), 83. In the nineteenth century, this view was taught by both Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 842–44; and William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 906–10. For a collection of essays dealing with these issues see William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, eds., *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

291. Specifically, John Piper contends that if some could be saved without consciously believing in Christ, it would be a dishonor to him and would not accord him the glory that is his (*Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 132, 134). He also maintains that even before the coming of Christ no one was saved by general revelation (13n23). It appears that Piper's control belief of the centrality of the glory of God has skewed his exegesis.

292. Ibid., 119–20; Douglas Geivett and Gary Philips, "Response to Alistair McGrath," in Okholm and Philips, *Four Views on Salvation*, 194–95. Geivett and Philips's position is more philosophically sophisticated and nuanced. They acknowledge that from the statement "All those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved," it is not possible to deduce "Only those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved." They recognize the incompatibility between the latter proposition and "Some who do not respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved" but feel that because of the importance of the issue one must choose between the two statements and say, "As a purely practical matter, it seems the better part of wisdom to hold that only those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved," which seems a rather weak statement. Actually their formulation of the proposition they reject is inaccurately stated, being potentially interpretable as "Some who may hear the explicit preaching of the gospel but do not respond in faith will be saved," something none of the authors mentioned above would hold. A more accurate statement would be "Some may be saved who respond in faith without hearing the gospel." As stated, they appear to confuse two separate issues: (1) how much must one know and believe to be saved? and (2) how much may one know and reject and still be saved? A further problem for this position is failure to draw the consequences of their position for the question of the salvation of infants.

293. Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 131–41. Piper's argument rests on the assertion that the coming of Christ changed the basis of reception of salvation, which he supports rhetorically by the use of strong adjectives, such as "great" (132), "immense" (132), "massive" (133, 134), "profound" (134), "stupendous" (140), "tremendously important" (140), "tremendous" (141), "decisive" (141), and "major" (163). His exegetical argument assumes, but does not prove, that the mystery of Christ revealed (Eph. 3:4–10) as well as the reference to "no other name" (Acts 4:12) means that there must now be conscious faith in Christ. He also commits the logical fallacy that Geivett and Philips refuse to commit: "We have noticed above that Peter said in Acts 10:43, 'Everyone who *believes in him* receives forgiveness of sins *through his name*.' . . . In order to believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, you must believe on his name. Which means that

you have to have heard of him and know who he is as a particular man who did a particular saving work and rose from the dead" ("Response to Alistair McGrath," 150).

294. Piper says that "we are left to speculate that the fitness of the connection between faith in Christ and salvation will be preserved through the coming to faith of children whenever God brings them to maturity in heaven or in the age to come" (140n26). In some ways there is a parallel between this speculation about those physically incapable of believing and John Sanders's concept of "postmortem evangelism" of those who did not hear the gospel during their lifetimes.

295. The index to Piper's book includes only three references to Romans 2, none of which are to verses 13–16. He leaves untreated the issues related to those verses.

296. Clark Pinnock interprets the uncertainty of the present author, Bruce Demarest, J. I. Packer, and others regarding how many will be saved without exposure to special revelation as certainty that no one will (*Wideness in God's Mercy*, 162–63). Yet his own attempt to justify the hope that "hordes will be saved" through "the faith principle" rests on some rather forced exegesis (ibid., 159–68). See, further, Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?*, 136–39.

297. Writing from the primarily Hindu culture of India, evangelical theologian Ken Gnanakan comes to a similar conclusion ("Pluralism and Some Theological Implications," unpublished paper presented at the World Evangelical Theological Commission Consultation, Wheaton, IL, June 18–22, 1990).

298. Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 126n15.

299. Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 323.

300. Emil Brunner called this the "law of proximity," or the "law of closeness of relation" (*Truth as Encounter* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], 54–56; idem, *Revelation and Reason: the Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946], 383).

Chapter 7. God's Particular Revelation

301. Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951), 74.

302. Ibid., 75.

303. Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 36–37.

304. Ibid., 39.

305. Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *Journal of Religion* 41 (1961): 196.

306. G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM, 1952), 107.

307. Ibid., 50–58.

308. David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 37.

309. John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 64.

310. Ibid.

311. Ibid., 33.

312. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/1, 124–25.

313. Ibid., 127.

314. Ibid., 158–59.

315. Ibid., 60–61.

316. Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

317. Gilkey, "Cosmology," 198–200.

318. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 45–46.

319. Ibid., 133.

320. Ramm, *Special Revelation*, 54.

321. Ibid., 59–60.

322. James Barr, “The Interpretation of Scripture. II. Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology,” *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 196.
323. Wright, *God Who Acts*, 103.
324. Barr uses the expressions “in history” and “through history” interchangeably; in this context he means what we have been labeling “revelation in history.”
325. Barr, “Interpretation of Scripture,” 197.
326. Ibid.
327. Vincent Taylor, “Religious Certainty,” *Expository Times* 72 (1960): 51.
328. C. H. Dodd, *The Bible Today* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 351.
329. Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 85–108.
330. William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 316.
331. Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 112–13.
332. Ibid., 84–89.
333. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 268–69.
334. Edward Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 29–30.
335. William Hordern, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 72.
336. Ibid., 80–82.
337. Brunner, *Our Faith*, 11.
338. Brunner, *Divine-Human Encounter*, 110.
339. Ibid.
340. Ibid., 111–12.
341. Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 98.
342. John Newton Thomas, “How Barth Has Influenced Me,” *Theology Today* 13 (1956): 368–69.
343. John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 161–68.
344. Ibid., 168–75.
345. Ibid., 175–80.
346. Ibid., 188–92.
347. Bruce McCormack, “The Being of Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism,” in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent E. Bacote, Laura C. Miguelez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2004), 73n41.
348. Ibid., 64.
349. Ibid., 64–65.
350. Ibid., 65.
351. Ibid., 66.
352. Ibid., 70.
353. Ibid., 74.
354. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), xiii.
355. McCormack, “Being of Scripture Is in Becoming,” 75.
356. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), 61, italics added.
357. Kenneth L. Pike, “Language and Meaning: Strange Dimensions of Truth,” *Christianity Today*, May 8, 1961, 27.
358. Ramm, *Special Revelation*, 161–87.
359. Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).
360. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 78. Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical*

Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 77–112.

361. Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 362–63.

362. Terrence Tilley, *Story Theology* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985); George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); Darrell Jodock, "Story and Scripture," *Word and World* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 128–39; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*.

363. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Logic, Second Division: Transcendental Dialectic, book II, chapter II, section 2.

364. Georg Hegel, *Science of Logic*. Hegel did not himself use the terms "thesis," "antithesis," "synthesis."

365. Soren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 262–63.

366. Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology*: *God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 31–35.

367. Morrison, *Has God Said?*, 225–28.

368. Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 10–15, 45–49. This hypothesis will be developed further in the chapters on transcendence-immanence and miracles.

Chapter 8. The Preservation of the Revelation: *Inspiration*

369. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 44.

370. James Martineau, *A Study of Religion: Its Sources and Contents* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889), 168–71.

371. Auguste Sabatier, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion* (New York: James Pott, 1916), 90.

372. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 211–22.

373. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 79.

374. John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible* (Murphreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1969), 192, 261–91. Rice accepts the term *dictation* but disavows the expression *mechanical dictation*.

375. E.g., Calvin, commenting on 2 Tim. 3:16, says that "the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasures of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit" (*Commentaries on the Epistles of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 137–42; cf. J. I. Packer, "Calvin's View of Scripture," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John W. Montgomery [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974], 102–3; Marvin W. Anderson, *The Battle for the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], 76–78).

376. Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951), 131–65.

377. Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

378. Paul Schantz, *A Christian Apology* (New York: Pustet, 1891–96); cf. Honore Copieters, "Apostles," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1907), 1:628.

379. Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 26; James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 19.

380. John N. Oswalt, "Canonical Criticism: A Review from a Conservative Viewpoint," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 3 (September 1987): 322.

381. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, 175–97.

382. Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Meaning: Strange Dimensions of Truth," *Christianity Today*, May 8, 1961, 28.

383. For a more fully developed theory of a trinitarian doctrine of inspiration, see Jeremy Begbie, “Who Is This God? Biblical Inspiration Revisited,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no. 2 (1992): 275–82.

384. Eugen Fink, “Die phänomenologische Philosophie Edmund Husserls in der gegenwärtigen Kritik,” *Kantstudien* 38 (1993): 319–83.

385. It should be observed that 2 Pet. 1:20–21 refers to the authors, while 2 Tim. 3:16 refers to what they wrote. Thus the dilemma of whether inspiration pertains to the writer or the writing is seen to be a false issue.

Chapter 9. The Dependability of God’s Word: *Inerrancy*

386. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 90–104.

387. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 15.

388. Ibid., 81–83.

389. Michael Baumann has offered some helpful guidelines for stating the doctrine of inerrancy to avoid tactical mistakes that preclude a fair hearing (“Why the Noninerrantists Are Not Listening: Six Tactical Errors Evangelicals Commit,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 3 [September 1986]: 317–24). For a philosopher’s defense of the rationality of belief in inerrancy against some of the more common misunderstandings and even misrepresentations of the doctrine, see J. P. Moreland, “The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy,” *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 76–86.

390. Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 165–66.

391. Roger Nicole, “The Nature of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 71–95.

392. Daniel Fuller, “Benjamin B. Warfield’s View of Faith and History,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11 (1968): 75–83.

393. Jack Rogers, “The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority,” in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word, 1977), 41–46. See also James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 217–18.

394. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1955), 311.

395. Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 112–14, 119, 134–39, 145–47.

396. Emil Brunner, *Our Faith* (New York: Scribner, 1936), 9–10; idem, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), 36–37.

397. David Hubbard, “The Irrelevancy of Inerrancy,” in Rogers, *Biblical Authority*, 151–81.

398. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 25–26.

399. Augustine, *Letter* 82.3.

400. *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, “Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Third Sermon: Matt. 7:15–33, Instruction concerning False Prophets,” 42 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 4:282.

401. Ibid., First Sunday after Epiphany, Luke 2, 41–52, “Jesus among the Doctors, or An Example of Cross-Bearing,” 29, 2:30.

402. Ibid., Third Christmas Day, John 1, 1–14, “Christ’s Titles of Honor; His Coming; His Incarnation; and the Revelation of His Glory,” 22, 1:171.

403. *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–), 26:295.

404. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.3.

405. For a treatment of the claims that Calvin in his commentaries admitted errors in the biblical text, see J. I. Packer, “Calvin’s View of Scripture,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1933), 95–114.

406. Richard Lovelace, “Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives,” in Nicole and Michaels, *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, 26–36.

407. Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 219–22.

408. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 113–63.

409. Ibid., 23–68.

410. B. B. Warfield, “The Real Problem of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951).

411. Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

412. Louis Gaussen, *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (Chicago: Moody, 1949), 214–15.

413. Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 165–66.

414. Everett Harrison, “The Phenomena of Scripture,” in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 237–50.

415. Edward Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 109–11.

416. Harrison, “Phenomena of Scripture,” 249.

417. Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 179–81.

418. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, 195–97.

419. Calvin argues that quotation of the Old Testament by a New Testament writer does not guarantee the correctness of the Old Testament text. But in such cases the argument of the New Testament writer does not depend on an incorrect point in the quotation. Thus, while Luke may quote from an inaccurate Septuagint text, the point he is making is based on something in the Septuagint text that is absolutely correct —*Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:263–64; cf. idem, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 2:364.

420. See Everett Harrison, “Criteria of Biblical Inerrancy,” *Christianity Today*, January 20, 1958, 16–17.

421. Stanley Grenz (*Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 135–36) contends that having criticized Carnell’s view of inerrancy, I actually accept and extend this principle. Grenz, however, fails to note the distinction I make between reporting that something was said or written, and affirming something, without attributing it to another source, as well as my contention that not everything even an apostle said was necessarily inspired by the Holy Spirit, unless that claim is made. The distinction between the false proposition “There is no God” and the true proposition “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 53:1) also eluded another postconservative theologian, who, in his blog, labeled this distinction “ludicrous.”

422. E.g., E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967); cf. Walter Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 117–47.

423. Conservative biblical scholars have offered plausible explanations of issues such as the relationship of biblical material to ancient Near Eastern literature, and the New Testament authors’ handling of Old Testament materials. G. K. Beale addresses a number of these problems and cites other evangelical biblical scholars who do so (*The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicals: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]).

424. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 377.

425. Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 34; Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 16–18.

426. Robert Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

427. William Alston, “Two Types of Foundationalism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 7 (1976): 165–85.

428. Roderick M. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

429. W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).

430. Timm Triplett, "Recent Work on Foundationalism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (April 1990): 93–116.

431. Nancey Murphy and James Wm. McClendon Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (April 1989); Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Rodney Clapp, "How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals Be Nonfoundationalists?" in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Liberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 81–92; F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

432. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 29–30.

433. Audi, *Structure of Justification*, 134.

434. For a more extended defense of foundationalism and a demonstration that it and coherentism are not mutually exclusive, see Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), chaps. 12 and 13. See also idem, "Foundationalism: Dead or Alive?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 20–32.

435. William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 1, *Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 83.

436. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, 156–59.

437. Reported in Harrison, "Phenomena of Scripture," 239.

Chapter 10. The Power of God's Word: *Authority*

438. Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 10, 12.

439. In a postmodern context, veracious authority is considerably diminished in context. Where opinions are freely expressed, often without supporting argument and without responsibility for their effects, where blogs abound and an online encyclopedia that can be edited by readers frequently determines belief, the impact of veracious authority is quite different from what it was in earlier periods.

440. Results of *Christianity Today*–Gallup Poll of American religious opinion—data supplied by Walter A. Elwell, author of "Belief and the Bible: A Crisis of Authority?," *Christianity Today*, March 21, 1980, 20–23.

441. S. E. Donlon, "Authority, Ecclesiastical," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1:1115.

442. Albert Henry Newman, *A History of Anti-Pedobaptism* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), 62–67.

443. William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* and the *Horae Paulinae* (London: Longman, Brown, 1850).

444. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 176.

445. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 676–77.

446. Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 13–15.

447. A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant* (New York: Harper, 1961), 146.

448. In one church, a decision was to be made on two proposed plans for a new sanctuary. One member insisted that the Lord had told him that the church should adopt the plan calling for the larger sanctuary. His basis was that the ratio between the number of seats in the larger plan and the number in the smaller plan was five to three, exactly the ratio between the number of times that Elisha told Joash he should have struck the ground and the number of times he actually struck it (2 Kings 13:18–19). The church eventually divided over this and similar issues.

449. Augustine, *The City of God* 9.16.

450. Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.12; *De libero arbitrio* 2.12.34.

451. Daniel Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 189–98.

452. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7, 9.

453. Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 170–81.

454. In a review of my *Evangelical Left*, James Leo Garrett Jr. thought he detected a shift in my view from recognizing several authorities in my *Christian Theology* to recognizing the Bible alone (review of *The Evangelical Left*, by Millard Erickson, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 42, no. 1 [Fall 1999]: 91). A closer and more perceptive reading of my point on this distinction would have prevented this blunder. It should be noted that the second edition of *Christian Theology*, published after *The Evangelical Left*, retained this distinction and had appeared before his review was published. Stanley Grenz, seeking to argue that I had shifted to the right, repeated the misunderstanding (*Renewing the Center* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 141–42).

455. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.8.

456. E.g., Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*, 177–78.

457. Of special value is the series of commentaries being edited by Thomas Oden under the title of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* and published by InterVarsity Press.

458. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

459. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 19–20.

Part 3: What God Is Like

Chapter 11. The Greatness of God

460. J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

461. E.g., Stephen Charnock, *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

462. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, 61–66.

463. My reservations generally fall along two lines. One is the oversimplification of the wide diversity among Greek philosophies. The other is that frequently, those bringing the charge are uncritical about the influences on their own thought. What is pictured as the "Hebraic" versus the "Hellenistic," itself something of a false distinction, often is the result of reading Scripture through another set of philosophical spectacles, such as existentialist, behaviorist, functionalist, or process preconceptions. At times this dependency is acknowledged, but is made a virtue, since the resulting view is therefore more consonant with contemporary views. This, however, disregards the fact that in all periods, the current view is not an unconditioned or a final view.

464. Bruce A. Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 4 (December 1986), 431–46.

465. John Feinberg, *No One like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), xxv–xxvi, 31–32.

466. In philosophical discourse and in general usage, "property" is virtually synonymous with "quality," "characteristic," or "attribute."

467. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 1:158.

468. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*.

469. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 55.

470. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 247–49.

471. Ibid.

472. Edgar Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1927), 222.

473. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 55.

474. James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, 36th ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1957), 48.

475. Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 33–34.

476. E.g., Charles Hartshorne, *Beyond Humanism: Essays in the Philosophy of Nature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1937), 5.

477. Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Humanities, 1962), 1:90–105.

478. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:245.

479. G. T. Manley, "Hinduism," in *The World's Religions*, ed. J. N. D. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 107.

480. Because personality certainly involves emotions, there has been considerable discussion in recent years of divine passibility and impassibility. Some, such as Kazoh Kitamori, have gone so far as to speak of the pain of God (Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* [Richmond: John Knox, 1965]). It seems best to think of God having empathy, rather than sympathy, for humans and their feelings. In other words, he understands what we are feeling, but does not necessarily experience that same emotion himself personally. See Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 129–32. For a practitioner's discussion of empathy and sympathy, see James T. Hardee, "An Overview of Empathy," *The Permanente Journal* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 51–54.

481. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:40–45.

482. Apart from the question of whether existence is a predicate, the Bible does make it very clear that God exists.

483. Earlier theologies referred to God's *aseity*, suggesting that God is the cause of his existence, but this terminology can be misleading and is therefore not used in this book.

484. According to recent thought in quantum mechanics, God may not even be limited to the three spatial dimensions with which we are familiar. I will address this more fully when discussing divine transcendence in chapter 13 (pp. 282–90).

485. See James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), especially his criticism of Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

486. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

487. I have discussed the question of divine foreknowledge in much greater depth in *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

488. Jesus taught his disciples this important lesson, in Matt. 7:11: "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

489. Apart from the anthropomorphism involved in the conception of God "lifting," the usual form of the paradox reveals a misunderstanding of mass and gravity. If God made an infinite physical object, it would be weightless, since it would be the only physical object in the universe and consequently there would be no other physical object to attract it or for it to attract. The same consideration, in modified form, can be seen to apply to less-than-infinite objects, within a finite universe.

490. John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 14.

491. Ibid., 21.

492. Ibid., 44–45.

493. Ibid., 47.

494. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 524–30.

495. Daniel Day Williams, "How Does God Act? An Essay in Whitehead's Metaphysics," in *Process and Divinity: The Hartshorne Festschrift*, ed. William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1964), 177.

496. I have addressed this philosophy more fully in my *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 49–66, as well as *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 243–73.

497. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985); William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 143–62.

498. Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 33; Clark H. Pinnock, "Between Classical and Process Theism," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 313–14.

499. Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 26–35.

500. Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 121–24.

501. Interestingly, the free will theists allow for an occasional coercive intervention by God to guarantee realization of his objectives (William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 142; David Basinger, "Practical Implications," in ibid., 159). If this is the case, however, the difference between the open view and the free will theists' understanding of traditional theism is not one of kind, but of degree: God intervenes or coerces according to both theologies, but not as frequently in the former as in the latter.

502. E.g., Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 35–36; Norman Geisler, "Process Theology," in *Tensions in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 268.

503. For a more extensive exposition and critique of the openness-of-God theology, see my *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*

Chapter 12. The Goodness of God

504. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 73.

505. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 872.

506. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 297.

507. E.g., Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* 1.12.

508. William of Ockham, *Reportatio* 3.13C, 12CCC.

509. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 567–73.

510. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 144–54.

511. E.g., Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Gruder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 314.

512. John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 31–33, 114.

513. See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*.

514. Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), 227–28.

515. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*: *The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 86–102.

516. Recent discussions in such fields as economics have focused attention on what has come to be known as the "moral hazard." This is the idea that if we rescue people from the painful consequences of unwise behavior, we create the expectation that such intervention will occur in the future as well, and therefore encourage additional unwise behavior.

517. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 1:377–78.

518. William Mann, "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 18 (1982): 464.

519. Ibid., 461.

520. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

521. Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 113–18.

522. I have explored at somewhat greater length the doctrine of simplicity in my book *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), chap. 10.

523. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 52.

524. Joshua Massey [pseud.], "Should Christians Use 'Allah' in Bible Translations?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 (July 2004): 284–85.

525. Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 69.

Chapter 13. God's Nearness and Distance: *Immanence and Transcendence*

526. Just how difficult it is even for a theologian to keep this in mind and to understand the expressions of transcendence as metaphors can be seen in David Wells's rejection of the "nearness" and "distance" metaphors (Jer. 23:23 notwithstanding): "If God's holiness is distant—that is, not a present reality—the church loses its moral life" (*God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 92n4).

527. Colin Gunton, "Transcendence, Metaphor, and the Knowability of God," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 31 (1980): 509.

528. Borden Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), 17.
529. Ibid., 18.
530. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 88.
531. James Orr, *God's Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 201–2.
532. Bowne, *Immanence*, 23.
533. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 89.
534. John Herman Randall Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 559.
535. John Fiske, *Through Nature to God* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 54. Cf. Randall, *Modern Mind*, 555–56.
536. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1919).
537. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 377–89.
538. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 114–18.
539. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:235–41.
540. Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?*, ed. James Luther Adams (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 82.
541. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:245.
542. Ibid., 127, 289. Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 84–85, and Rollo May's description of meditation in *Paulus: Reminiscences of a Friendship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 94–96.
543. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 49, 165.
544. Ibid., 69–70.
545. Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate: A Study of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (New York: Harper, 1959), 146–65.
546. John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 53.
547. David Ray Griffin, *A Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 181–82.
548. Lewis Ford, *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 20–21.
549. Norman Pittenger, "Process Thought as a Conceptuality for Reinterpreting Christian Faith," *Encounter* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1968): 15.
550. Schubert Ogden, "The Reality of God," in *Process Theology: Basic Writings*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman, 1971), 124–25.
551. Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Time* (New York: Scribner, 1939).
552. Edward Scribner Ames, *Religion* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), 133.
553. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 29–44.
554. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief: Abdruck der neuen Bearbeitung* (Zurich: E. V. Z. Verlag, 1967), 11–12.
555. Ibid., 315.
556. Ibid., 11.
557. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/1, 188–90.
558. Martin Heinecken, *The Moment before God* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1956), 81–83.
559. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 369.
560. Heinecken, *Moment before God*, 90–93.
561. Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 7–15.
562. Frederick Herzog, "Towards the Waiting God," in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, ed. Frederick Herzog (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 59–61.

563. William Lane Craig, “Timelessness & Temporality,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 129–60.

564. Alan Padgett, “Eternity as Relative Timelessness,” in Ganssle, *God and Time: Four Views*, 92–110.

565. Albert Einstein, *The Meaning of Relativity*, 5th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 31.

566. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1996), 25–28.

567. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 12–40.

Chapter 14. God’s Three-in-Oneness: *The Trinity*

568. Ricardo Barbosa de Sousa, “The Trinity and Spirituality,” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 1, no. 2 (2006): 11–14.

569. There are divergent interpretations of this passage, e.g., Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1961); Ralph Martin, *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). But I would call the reader’s attention to Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 235n89; Leon Morris, *The Lord from Heaven: A Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); Paul D. Feinberg, “The Kenosis and Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Analysis of Philippians 2:6–11,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s. 1 (1980): 21–46. Morris, for example, comments: “It cannot be maintained that Paul was thinking of a Jesus who was no more than human. Phil. ii. 5ff. is a passage which demands for its understanding that Jesus was divine in the fullest sense” (74).

570. Theodore Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 179.

571. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 187.

572. G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), 20.

573. Ibid.

574. Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 33–40, 43–48; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), III/1, 183–201.

575. Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 257–60.

576. George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 31.

577. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 61.2; 128.3.

578. Tertullian, *Apology* 21.11–13.

579. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 53; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.28.

580. Athanasius, *On the Decrees of the Nicene Synod (Defense of the Nicene Council)* 5.24; *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* 2.26; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.30.

581. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam* 1.

582. Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 3.23.4.

583. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam* 29.

584. Basil, *Letters* 38.8.

585. Ibid., 38.5; 214.4; 236.6.

586. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 413.

587. Ibid., 433.

588. Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*: *Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 18.

589. Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

590. Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 179–83.

591. Augustine, *On the Trinity* 1.9.19.

592. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.12.2.

593. For a more complete analysis of the debate, see my *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009).

594. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8.10.

595. Augustine, *Confessions* 13.11.

596. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 9.2–8.

597. Ibid., 10.17–19.

598. Ibid., 14.11–12.

Part 4: What God Is Does

Chapter 15. God's Plan

599. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 109.

600. B. B. Warfield, "Predestination," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 4.

601. Ibid., 7–8.

602. Ibid., 15.

603. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), 88.

604. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 353–54.

605. J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 78.

606. Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 157.

607. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 393–95.

608. The implications of this view of the divine plan will be discussed at greater length in connection with the doctrines of providence and salvation.

609. This view is based on what is known as "compatibilistic freedom": human freedom is compatible with (in this case) God's having rendered certain everything that occurs. See Antony Flew, "Compatibilism, Free Will, and God," *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 231–32.

610. Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952). In Leibniz's view, God knows the realm of essences that contains an infinite number of possibilities. Among the attributes of each possible individual are every decision one will ever make and the course of action one will follow in every situation one encounters. God, foreknowing the infinite possibilities, chooses to bring into existence the individual who will freely decide to respond to every situation precisely as God intends. By so doing, God renders *certain*, but not *necessary*, the free decisions and actions of the individual. This distinction is crucial to understanding the position being developed in this chapter.

611. John Feinberg, *No One like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 501–36.

612. B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 90–91. In the final analysis, the exact relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom is necessarily a mystery. It is important, however, not to invoke "mystery" prematurely. We must go as far as we can with our human reasoning and understanding before we label something a mystery.

613. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 638–39.

614. Some have attempted to argue for libertarian freedom on the basis of Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy in physics. E.g., Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*: *A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 108–11. Two brief observations need to be made, however: (1) the analogy between physical objects or energy and human will is not necessarily sustainable, and (2) even in physics, the inability to predict both location and velocity on the subatomic level does not carry over to unpredictability on a more macro scale.

615. Jack Cottrell, "The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 111–13.

616. In this regard, some would contend that the "free will theists" are adopting the logical implications of the Arminian view. See, e.g., Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 143–62; William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The*

Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 147–50.

617. This position is actually closer to the view known as "Molinism" (Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988]).

618. This is what is often referred to as "middle knowledge," the knowledge of all the possibilities. While this is sometimes seen as an alternative to Calvinism, and some forms of Calvinism do not depend on it, it can well be incorporated into a moderate Calvinism. Where our view differs from a bare middle knowledge view is in the "suasive" work God does with respect to humans, subsequent to creation.

619. This statement of the logical order of God's decrees reflects the variety of Calvinism known as sublapsarianism. The varieties of Calvinism will be discussed at greater length in chapter 43.

620. Randall G. Basinger acknowledges this analogy, but maintains that there is a significant dissimilarity because God's power over humans is total ("Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique," in Pinnock, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 202).

621. E.g., Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1976).

622. E.g., B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).

Chapter 16. God's Originating Work: *Creation*

623. Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, "בָּרָא," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:246.

624. Werner Foerster, "κτίζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 3:1029.

625. Ibid., 1025.

626. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 135.

627. John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (New York: Westminster, 1976), 65.

628. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

629. Plato, *Timaeus*; Aristotle, *Metaphysics.*

630. Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 48.

631. Ibid., 58–59.

632. Ibid., 65.

633. Ken Gnanakan of India has responded to Lynn White Jr.'s criticism of Christianity for the despoiling of nature by arguing that the Christian doctrine of creation should lead to responsible stewardship, not selfish exploitation, of nature. "Creation, New Creation, and Ecological Relationships," in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 126–54.

634. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 94–95.

635. Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: Dover, 1960). In recent years, an increasing number of scientists, on the basis of the scientific data alone, have begun to speak of "intelligent design" as an option.

636. Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, 70.

637. Ibid., 27–28.

638. *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 4n3.

639. George McCready Price, *The New Geology* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923).

640. Philip H. Gosse, *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (London: John Van Voorst, 1957).

641. Edwin K. Gedney, "Geology and the Bible," in *Modern Science and Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1948), 23–57.

642. N. H. Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 29–55.

643. P. J. Wiseman, *Creation Revealed in Six Days* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948).

644. For a very complete survey of views attempting to relate the data of geological science and the meaning of יום (*yom*), see Walter L. Bradley and Roger Olsen, "The Trustworthiness of Scripture in Areas Relating to Natural Science," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 299–301.

645. Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 201–11. The reader is referred to this volume for detailed treatments of several of these views.

646. Ibid., 183–88.

647. E. A. Speiser, trans., "Akkadian Myths and Epics," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 94; H. L. Ginsberg, trans., in "Ugaritic Myths, Epics and Legends," ibid., 134, 144, 150.

648. Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict*, 44.

649. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Lexicon*, 568. מִין derives from a word meaning to split the earth (in plowing), and thus became a term for division.

650. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 466–74.

651. Russell L. Mixter, *Creation and Evolution*, 5th ed. (Goshen, IN: American Scientific Affiliation, 1962), 22–23.

652. Philip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991).

653. William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities*, Cambridge Studies in Probability, Induction and Decision Theory (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

654. Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

655. Stuart Kauffman, "Intelligent Design, Science or Not?" in *Intelligent Thought: Science versus the Intelligent Design Movement*, ed. John Brockman (New York: Vintage, 2006), 169–78.

656. E.g., Daniel Dennett, "The Hoax of Intelligent Design and How It Was Perpetrated," in Brockman, *Intelligent Thought*, 33–49.

657. William A. Dembski, in *Intelligent Design: William Dembski and Michael Ruse in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 40.

658. William A. Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Tough Questions about Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 77.

659. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 12.

Chapter 17. God's Continuing Work: *Providence*

660. This concept of preservation differs somewhat from Augustus H. Strong's concept of preservation. In his view (*Systematic Theology* [Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907], 410), preservation is the maintaining in existence of all that is. However, one gets the impression that Strong has only the physical universe or physical matter in mind, not human beings. Further, he seems to be thinking only of the end of preservation, and not the means, which he regards as a matter of government. In our view, on the other hand, preservation includes providing the means for humans to remain in existence. See G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 74–89.

661. G. C. Joyce, "Deism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), 4:5–11.

662. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 179.

663. Karl Heim, *Glaube und Denken* (Hamburg: Furche, 1931), 230.

664. Berkouwer, *Providence of God*, 72.

665. Ibid., 74.

666. Jack Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

667. For an extensive and very competent treatment of providence from the perspective of a soft determinism, see John S. Feinberg, *No One like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 625–734.

668. Texts that seem to speak of human working and divine working as more coextensive usually receive scant if any treatment. In *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, for example, the only reference to Philippians 2:12 and 13 is a brief statement noting that Calvin appealed to it (Bruce R. Reichenbach, “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility,” 289).

669. Sanders acknowledges that some may find “that the explanations of various scriptural texts discussed above are strained and unconvincing” (*The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, 2nd ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 139), but advances them nonetheless. It is advocates of exhaustive foreknowledge that Sanders is referring to, but readers may judge for themselves the adequacy of his explanations.

670. Ibid., 84–85.

671. Ibid., 138.

672. Ibid., 139.

673. Although Sanders claims to be rebutting his critics in his revised edition, his argument is seriously flawed. He attempts to restrict his opponents’ appeals to Scripture to the specific situation described, even though he generalizes from his own use of narrative passages. He fails to respond to well-known criticisms of the open theist view, such as the explanations of fulfilled prophecy and the failure to apply consistently the literalistic hermeneutic. In this latter regard, Clark Pinnock is more consistent, considering the possibility that God has a body (*Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 33–35). Sanders also fails to interact with John Feinberg’s thorough analysis in *No One like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), not even mentioning Feinberg’s book in his bibliography, even though it had been published six years earlier. He also persists in characterizing the differences as between Calvinism and Arminianism, and describes his opponents’ views inaccurately, at times even engaging in ad hominem argument (316n4). Cf. his earlier comparison of those who disagreed with him to “the Taliban,” in his plenary address to the Evangelical Theological Society, “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?” (Colorado Springs, CO, November 15, 2001).

674. Jack Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in Pinnock, *Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 99.

675. Ibid., 107–9.

676. Ibid., 111–13. In some cases, according to the advocates of general providence, God can accomplish his purpose only by unilateral action, overruling free will. This being the case, the objection is not to God’s coercive action per se, but only to its frequency. It should be noted, however, that on the compatibilist view, this is not coercion, but rather persuasion.

677. Ibid., 98–106. While this is a correct observation in some cases, it misses the point of some of the citations, namely, that if God’s unilateral action is acceptable in some cases, in principle human freedom is not inviolable. The specific principle involved is that a single exception will invalidate a universal statement.

678. For a more thorough and evenhanded discussion, see Feinberg, *No One like Him*, 625–734.

679. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 423–25.

680. Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 207.

681. Karl Heim, *Christian Faith and Natural Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 15.

682. Quoted in Berkouwer, *Providence of God*, 162–63.

683. Quoted in Karl Barth, *Theologische Existenz Heute* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1934), 10.

684. Patrick Nowell-Smith, “Miracles,” in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 245–48.

685. Bernard Ramm, *A Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 156–61. A simpler explanation is that a miracle of refraction resulted in a prolongation of light.

686. E.g., David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 10.1.
687. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 59–61.
688. Michio Kaku, a quantum physicist, has a section of his book discussing such "miracles," which he interestingly entitles "To Be a God" (*Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* [New York: Anchor, 1994], 45–49).
689. It is disappointing to observe that theologians who specialize in the relationship between science and theology have taken little note of this potentially fruitful source of insight. Nancey Murphy, for example, whose first doctorate was in philosophy of science, shows no awareness of these developments.

Chapter 18. Evil and God's World: *A Special Problem*

690. David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, part 10.
691. John Feinberg, *Theologies and Evil* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), 3.
692. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 63–64.
693. Edgar S. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1940), 336.
694. Ibid., 337.
695. Ibid.
696. Ibid., 242.
697. Ibid., 245.
698. Ibid., 314.
699. Ibid., 311–12.
700. Ibid., 314.
701. Ibid., 337.
702. Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 288–90.
703. Ibid., 290.
704. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 39.
705. Henry Nelson Wieman, in Henry Nelson Wieman and W. M. Horton, *The Growth of Religion* (New York: Willett, Clark, 1938), 356.
706. John Sanders has objected (*The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, 2nd ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 241–42) to my contention that open theism's treatment of the problem of evil is a subclass of finitism. His complaint is correct in the sense that God has chosen to create, and to create the kind of world he did. I would point out, however, that open theism's view of the future is such that God *cannot* know certain future occurrences, and therefore is unable to deal with evil because he does not know what to do. This can be avoided only by God acting in an unusual manner, overriding one consequence of the type of creation he has made. It was the use of this type of argument by Gregory Boyd in his interaction with his father that in a sense gave open theism its first broad exposure. (*Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity* [Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008], 38–39). One cannot have it both ways.
707. Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 221.
708. Ibid., 222.
709. Ibid., 237–38.
710. Ibid., 238–39.
711. Ibid., 239–40.
712. Ibid., 240.
713. Ibid.
714. Ibid.
715. Ibid., 241.
716. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1.33.2.

717. Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings* (Boston: Trustees under the will of Mary Baker Eddy, 1924), 21.

718. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Trustees under the will of Mary Baker Eddy, 1934), 71.

719. Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 45.

720. Eddy, *Science and Health*, 348.

721. Ibid., 378.

722. The death of Mary Baker Eddy presented a real problem for Christian Science, for supposedly someone of her faith should have overcome it. She had never really recognized death, for she never prepared an official funeral ceremony, although she had provided orders of service for other occasions. Some of her followers did not believe that she had died; some expected her to be resurrected. The officers of Christian Science, however, issued an official statement that they were not expecting her return to the world. See Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 188–89; cf. Ernest S. Bates and John V. Dittemore, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Truth and the Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), 451.

723. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

724. Norman Geisler, *The Roots of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 43.

725. Feinberg, *Theologies and Evil*, 6.

726. Ibid., 4–5.

727. Antony Flew, "Compatibilism, Free Will, and God," *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 231–32.

728. Despite his rejection of the argument that genuine human freedom and a guarantee that humans will do what God desires them to do are incompatible, Feinberg virtually restates a mild form of it with his concept of human "desires."

729. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 33–34.

730. Feinberg, *Theologies and Evil*, 51. John G. Milhaven, "Objective Moral Evaluation of Consequences," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 410.

731. The verb is עָוָה (*'awah*)—Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 730.

732. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 119–20.

733. Ibid., 123, 128.

Chapter 19. God's Special Agents: *Angels*

734. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), III/3, 369.

735. Ibid., 370.

736. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.6.

737. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De caelesti hierarchia in usum studiosae iuventutis*, ed. Petrus Hendrix (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), chap. 2.

738. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.91.

739. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.50–52.

740. Ibid., 1.113.

741. Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica, sive systema theologicum* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1715), 1.629.

742. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:636.

743. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 5.

744. Billy Graham, *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975).

745. John Macartney Wilson, "Angel," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:132.

746. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 1852), 187–202.

747. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 449.

748. Willem A. VanGemeren, "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 320–48.

749. Wilson, "Angel," 134.

750. A. J. Maclean, "Angels," in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1916), 1:60.

751. Wilson, "Angel," 135; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 2:748.

752. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:27.

753. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3, 520.

754. Ibid., 523.

755. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 966.

Part 5: Humanity

Chapter 20. Introduction to the Doctrine of Humanity

756. This could of course also be said (and indeed will be said) of other doctrines, such as the atonement. But it is particularly true of the doctrine of humanity.
757. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:5.
758. Ibid., 18–22.
759. Ibid., 59–66.
760. Ibid., 83–86.
761. See, e.g., Barbara Schoen, "Identity Crisis," *Seventeen*, February 1966, 134–35.
762. Michael J. Nakkula, *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
763. "An Elusive Illusion: A Scientific Exhibition Examines What Makes Human Beings Individuals," *The Economist*, December 17, 2009, print edition. http://www.economist.com/node/15124990.
764. Brendan Lynch, "Man vs. Machine," *Boston Herald*, October 26, 2011, 4.
765. On behavioristic psychology, see, e.g., Paul Young, *Motivation of Behavior: The Fundamental Determinants of Human and Animal Activity* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1936). For a novel depicting an ideal society built on the use of behavioristic conditioning, see B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).
766. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1933), 103–5.
767. Ibid., 105–8.
768. Ibid., 108–10.
769. Ibid., 132–52; Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (New York: Washington Square, 1960), lectures 17 and 21.
770. Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, 115–16; idem, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958).
771. Joseph Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 83.
772. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 89–90.
773. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: Modern Library, 1936).
774. Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Norton, 1929), 47–48, 56–57.
775. Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 312–15.
776. Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).
777. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 210.
778. Thomas C. Oden, *The Intensive Group Experience* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).
779. Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 305–64.

Chapter 21. The Origin of Humanity

780. Karl Barth, *Credo* (New York: Scribner, 1962), 190.
781. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 88n1.
782. Ibid., 85–86.
783. Ibid., 86–87.
784. Ibid., 88.
785. Borden P. Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), 29–30.

786. Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 13–19.

787. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6th London ed. (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, n.d.), 473.

788. Walter E. Lammerts, *Why Not Creation?* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), and idem, *Scientific Studies in Special Creation* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971).

789. For an exposition of deistic evolution, see Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844; repr., Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1969).

790. On theistic evolution, see Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 466–67.

791. On progressive creationism, see Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 236–62.

792. Benjamin B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1952), 238.

793. Donald R. Wilson, "How Early Is Man?" *Christianity Today*, September 14, 1962, 27–28.

794. Paul H. Seeley, "Adam and Anthropology: A Proposed Solution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 22, no. 3 (September 1970): 89.

795. James W. Murk, "Evidence for a Late Pleistocene Creation of Man," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 17, no. 2 (June 1965): 37–49.

796. Jane Goodall and Hugo van Lawick, "My Life among Wild Chimpanzees," *National Geographic Magazine* 124 (August 1963): 307–8.

797. Murk, "Evidence," 46–47.

798. Bertram S. Kraus, *The Basis of Human Evolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 282.

799. E. K. Victor Pearce, *Who Was Adam?* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1970).

800. F. K. Farr, "Cain," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1937), 1:538–39.

801. Seeley, "Adam and Anthropology," 89.

802. James O. Buswell III, "Adam and Neolithic Man," *Eternity* 18, no. 2 (February 1967): 39.

803. T. C. Mitchell, "Archaeology and Genesis I–XI," *Faith and Thought* 91 (Summer 1959): 42.

804. Recent work based upon DNA evidence argues for a common ancestor of the human race, somewhere in Africa, between 40,000 and 200,000 years ago.

805. See p. 348.

806. Herod accepted the adulation of the crowd ("the voice of a god, and not of a man"). Because he failed to give God the glory, he was struck dead (Acts 12:20–23).

Chapter 22. The Image of God in the Human

807. Gerhard von Rad, "εἰκών," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:390–92; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:122.

808. Charles Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (London: Epworth, 1956), 29–30, 94–95.

809. Le Grand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1958), 16–17.

810. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 388.

811. David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 58–69.

812. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.93.

813. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

814. Cairns, *Image of God*, 114–20.

815. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:60–70.

816. Ibid., 2:141.

817. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.

818. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:32 (John 1:4).

819. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 55–57.

820. Ibid., 60.

821. Ibid., 105–6.

822. Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 168–69.

823. Karl Barth, "No!," in *Natural Theology*, by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles/Centenary Press, 1946), 87–90.

824. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), III/1, 197–98.

825. Ibid., 184.

826. Ibid., III/2, 41.

827. Ibid., 47, 222.

828. Ibid., 88–89.

829. Ibid., 208.

830. Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 92.

831. G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 70.

832. Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 27.

833. Thomas S. Rees, trans., *Racovian Catechism* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1818; Lexington, KY: American Theological Library Association, 1962), 2.1.

834. Norman Snaith, "The Image of God," *Expository Times* 86, no. 1 (October 1974): 24.

835. Ibid.

836. Sigmund O. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:57.

837. Snaith, "Image of God," 24.

838. Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God*, 27.

839. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:92.

840. Anthony A. Hoekema emphasizes that the human does not simply *have* or *bear* the image, but *is* the image of God. He combines what we have described as the relational and functional views into what he terms the functional aspect, or the broader sense of the image, as compared to the structural or narrower sense (*Created in God's Image* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 65–73).

841. John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Scribner, 1939), 30.

842. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 229.

843. There is a sense in which this view expresses Aristotle's teleological view that something is most fully what it is when actively fulfilling its functioning. In the locker room of the YMCA of which I am a member there appear several warning signs: "Be sure your locker is locked." I am frequently reminded, when seeing such a sign, that Aristotle would have said that a locker is only really a locker when it is locked.

844. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:127.

845. Cairns, *Image of God*, 57.

846. Charles Sherlock contends that the Bible does not so much tell us what the image *is*, but rather what it *involves*: "Thus the image of God can be seen only as we live it out" (*The Doctrine of Humanity* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996], 41).

847. Communicable attributes of God are those qualities of God for which at least a partial counterpart can be found in his human creations.

848. Stanley Grenz's argument that Jesus is the best clue to the image seems to overlook this distinction completely (Stanley J. Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear

Linearity of Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 [December 2004]: 617–28).

849. Dorothy Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King* (New York: Harper, 1943), 225; Cairns, *Image of God*, 30.

850. Cairns, *Image of God*, 133.

851. See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:294–96 (Gen. 9:5–7).

Chapter 23. The Constitutional Nature of the Human

852. Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 116–17.

853. Ibid., 106–7; cf. R. S. Peters and C. A. Mace, "Psychology," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:1–2.

854. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 191–92.

855. Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ*, 2nd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 93.

856. Ibid., 97.

857. Ibid., 192–95.

858. William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1901), 182–83.

859. Ibid., 186.

860. Ibid., 188.

861. Ibid., 449.

862. L. Harold DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 150–51.

863. Ibid., 151.

864. Ibid.

865. Ibid., 155.

866. Harry E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 99–100.

867. Ibid., 100–101.

868. Ibid., 98.

869. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 998–1003, 1015–23.

870. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London: SCM, 1952), 9.

871. Ibid., 12.

872. Ibid., 13–16.

873. Ibid., 18.

874. Ibid., 19.

875. Ibid., 26–33.

876. Ibid., 13n19.

877. H. Wheeler Robinson, "Hebrew Psychology," in *The People and the Book*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 362.

878. Ibid., 366.

879. James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 36.

880. Ibid.

881. Ibid.

882. Ibid.

883. Ibid.

884. Ibid., 37.

885. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 72.

886. Ibid.

887. Henry J. Cadbury, "The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," *Interpretation* 3 (1949): 331–37.

888. Robert E. Longacre, review of four articles on metalinguistics by Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language* 32, no. 2 (1956): 302.
889. Antony Flew, *A New Approach to Psychical Research* (London: Watts, 1955), 75–76.
890. Ibid., 77–78.
891. Bruce Reichenbach, "Life after Death: Possible or Impossible?" *Christian Scholar's Review* 3, no. 3 (1973): 235.
892. Ibid., 236.
893. Ibid.
894. Terence Penelhum, *Religion and Rationality* (New York: Random House, 1971); idem, *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (New York: Humanities, 1970)—summarized in Richard L. Purtill, "The Intelligibility of Disembodied Survival," *Christian Scholar's Review* 5, no. 1 (1975): 16.
895. Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, 68–78.
896. Ibid., 73–74.
897. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946), 198.
898. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 65–69.
899. Bruce Reichenbach, *Is Man the Phoenix?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 82–84.
900. See ibid., 146–53, esp. 152–53.
901. Paul Helm, "A Theory of Disembodied Survival and Re-embodied Existence," *Religious Studies* 14, no. 1 (March 1978): 19.
902. Ibid., 17.
903. Ibid., 22–23.
904. Ibid., 15–16, 25–26.
905. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), 236–71.
906. The most complete recent study combining biblical, philosophical, and scientific considerations in support of what he terms "holistic dualism" is John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae examine the case for a dualism similar to what we have described here, and contend that "metaphysics and morality are intimately connected and that our dualist view of the body and soul provides the most compelling account of human personhood and its moral dimension" (*Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 10). A briefer statement of the same view can be found in J. P. Moreland, "A Defense of a Substance Dualist View of the Soul," in *Christian Perspectives on Being Human: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Integration*, ed. J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciocchi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 55–79.
907. Reichenbach, "Life after Death," 240.

Chapter 24. The Universality of Humanity

908. William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973).
909. Ibid., 3–5.
910. Josiah Priest, *Bible Defense of Slavery: Origin, Fortunes and History of the Negro Race*, 5th ed. (Glasgow, KY: W. S. Brown, 1852), 33.
911. Thorton Stringfellow, *Slavery: Its Origin, Nature, and History Considered in the Light of Bible Teaching, Moral Justice, and Political Wisdom* (New York: J. F. Trow, 1861), 35.
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916. J. A. MacCulloch, “Adultery,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), 1:122.

917. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), III/1, 194–97.

918. Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 35–48.

919. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), 617.

920. Donald W. Shaner, “Women in the Church,” *Foundations* 23 (July–September 1980): 221.

921. This is not to say that there are no biblical principles that apply to these issues, but that these issues are not *directly* dealt with here.

922. Sometimes it is alleged that Deborah only went with Barak and that Jael was the one to slay Sisera because of Barak’s unwillingness to take his responsibility (vv. 8–9), indicating that God uses women in leadership only when no man is available. The text, however, indicates that Deborah was already leading Israel (v. 4).

923. Shaner, “Women in the Church,” 222.

924. For suggestions on the role of the church in relationship to older persons, see such works as Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg, *The Church and the Older Person* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Paul B. Maves and J. Lennart Cedarleaf, *Older People and the Church* (New York: Abingdon, 1949); *Spiritual Well-Being of the Elderly*, ed. James A. Thorson and Thomas C. Cook Jr. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1980); Robert W. McClellan, *Claiming a Frontier: Ministry and Older People* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1977).

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926. Rebecca Slater, Anne Cantarella, Shiromi Gallella, Alan Worley, Stewart Boyd, Judith Meek, and Maria Fitzgerald, “Cortical Pain Responses in Human Infants,” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 26, no. 14 (April 5, 2006): 3662–66.

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Part 6: Sin

Chapter 25. The Nature of Sin

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940. Walther Günther, "Sin," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:577.
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948. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 160. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 730.
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950. Smith, *Doctrine of Sin*, 15.
951. Ibid., 21.
952. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Lexicon*, 19–20.
953. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 1:271–73.
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955. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 567.
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963. Ibid., 81.

964. Quoted in Tennant, *Origin and Propagation*, 82.
965. Tennant, *Origin and Propagation*, 84.
966. Ibid., 86.
967. Ibid., 90.
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973. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner, 1941), 1:182.
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975. Ibid., 181.
976. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reider Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 61.
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983. Ibid., 44.
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1008. Ibid., 170.
1009. Ibid., 171.
1010. Ibid., 191.
1011. Ibid., 197.
1012. Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Meridian, 1956), 84–91.
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1014. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), 35–37.
1015. M. G. Kyle, "Temptation, Psychology of," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 5:2944–2944B.

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1017. Ibid., 44.
1018. Ibid.
1019. See p. 257.
1020. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 730.
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1022. Smith, *Doctrine of Sin*, 51.
1023. Ibid., 47.
1024. L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Karma," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), 7:673–76.
1025. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 260. Arminians generally tend to agree with Calvinists, rather than Pelagians, on this point. See H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 1:34–37, 91–95.
1026. See Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* 1.2.
1027. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 295.
1028. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 258–59.
1029. Augustine makes a similar point in distinguishing between being "mortal" and being "subject to death" (*Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.3).
1030. Some Old Testament commentators regard these narrative passages as "doublets" (multiple accounts of the same incident) rather than as records of three separate events. For a conservative position on this matter, see Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1949), 83.
1031. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1973).

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1033. Ibid., 34.
1034. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 362–63.
1035. Smith, *Doctrine of Sin*, 36.
1036. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 637–38; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 246.
1037. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.8–9.

1038. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.
1039. Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 89–90.
1040. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 640–46.
1041. By "original sin" we mean the dimension of sin with which we begin life, or the effect the sin of Adam has upon us as a precondition of our lives.
1042. John Ferguson, *Pelagius* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1956), 40.
1043. Ibid., 47.
1044. Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: Seabury, 1968), 82–83.
1045. Pelagius, *Exposition of Romans* 5:15, 12.
1046. Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin* 1.3.
1047. Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius* 16.
1048. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 359.
1049. Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 51.
1050. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 361.
1051. The tradition that Arminius was a convinced Calvinist who was assigned to defend the Reformed faith and in the process of "defending" it was converted to the contradictory view is highly suspect. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 138–41.
1052. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:121–28. The quotation is from 135.
1053. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 242–43.
1054. Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* 1.8–11.
1055. Ronald H. Nash, *When a Baby Dies: Answers to Comfort Grieving Parents* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 59.
1056. Ibid., 60–61. A similar position is taken by R. Albert Mohler and Daniel L. Akin ("The Salvation of the 'Little Ones,'" *Southern Seminary Magazine: The Tie* 74, no. 2 [Summer 2006]: 4–5). John Piper endorses the view of Nash as well as of Mohler and Akin (*Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 133n27).
1057. Augustine, *Treatise* 3.14.
1058. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 663.
1059. J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 2:162.

Chapter 29. The Social Dimension of Sin

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1061. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1962).
1062. E.g., John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 140–62; Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 63–77; Richard J. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 85–116.
1063. Stephen Mott, "Biblical Faith and the Reality of Social Order," *Christian Scholar's Review* 9, no. 3 (1980): 228–29.
1064. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 11.
1065. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 776.
1066. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 17; cf. Mott, "Biblical Faith," 229.
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1068. Mouw, *Politics*, 89–90.
1069. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 145.
1070. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 35.

1071. Langdon Gilkey, “The Political Dimensions of Theology,” *Journal of Religion* 59, no. 2 (April 1979): 155–57.

1072. See, e.g., M. A. Schuckit, “An Overview of Genetic Influences in Alcoholism,” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 36, no. 1 (January 2009), 5–14.

1073. Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 21, 24–25, 26–27.

1074. David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 81–82.

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Part 7: The Person of Christ

Chapter 30. Contemporary Issues in Christological Method

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1097. Ibid., 23–25.

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1101. Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 6th ed. (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1962), 430.

1102. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 57.

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1113. E.g., Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

1114. See also our discussion of the historical reliability of the Gospels including the work of the Scandinavian school in Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 383–429.

1115. E.g., Michael Wilkins and J. Moreland, eds., *Jesus under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); Paul R. Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

1116. *Melanchthon and Bucer*, Library of Christian Classics 19, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 21–22.

1117. *What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1:198.

1118. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 2:355–75.

1119. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:150.

1120. Ibid., 151–52.

1121. While this view was given particular exposure and impetus through the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), it had many earlier expressions. Stephen Neill recalls the Girton Conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union (1921) in such a way as to make *The Myth of God Incarnate* seem like a case of déjà vu. See Stephen Neill, "Jesus and Myth," in *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 66–67.

1122. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels," in *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research*, by Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin (New York: Harper, 1941), 62–76; idem, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 34–44.

1123. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 102–12.

1124. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: Nisbet, 1937), 104–5.

1125. Maurice Wiles, "Christianity without Incarnation?" in Hick, *Myth of God Incarnate*, 3–6.

1126. Ibid., 15–23.

1127. Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in Hick, *Myth of God Incarnate*, 27–28.

1128. John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in Hick, *Myth of God Incarnate*, 168–70.

1129. Ibid., 180–84.

1130. Brian Hebblethwaite, "Incarnation—The Essence of Christianity?" *Theology* 80 (1977): 85–91.

1131. Ian Ramsey, "Paradox in Religion," in *Christian Empiricism*, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 107.

1132. Neill, "Jesus and Myth," 61.

1133. Ibid.

1134. Charles Moule, "Three Points of Conflict in the Christological Debate," in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, ed. Michael Goulder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 137.

1135. Brian Hebblethwaite, "The Uniqueness of the Incarnation," in Goulder, *Incarnation and Myth*, 189–91.

Chapter 31. The Deity of Christ

1136. Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), 144.

1137. Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus's Teaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 114.

1138. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 473.

1139. George E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 177.

1140. Stein, *Method and Message*, 132.

1141. For an excellent discussion of the use by the New Testament writers of *theos* with respect to Jesus, see Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

1142. There has been considerable discussion of the significance of the anarthrous construction. Whereas this construction ordinarily indicates "quality of," it is often used to distinguish the predicate from the subject in cases where the order is inverted. Note, however, that in the statements "the Word was the God" and "the God was the Word," the subject and the predicate are coextensive. There would therefore have been no point, if the order was inverted, in omitting the definite article unless the author was expressing quality rather than identity. This is underscored by the companion clause "the Word was with God."

1143. See our earlier discussion of this passage (pp. 295–96).

1144. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1961).

1145. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 232.

1146. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1984), 7, 69, 136.

1147. Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," in *Sharing Jesus in the "Two Thirds" World*, ed. Vinay Samuela and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 100–103.

1148. William Childs Robinson, "Lord," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 328–29.

1149. Examples are *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981); *Did the Resurrection Happen? A Conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew*, ed. David Baggett (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

1150. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 62–63.

1151. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 134.

1152. Pannenberg actually has six steps in his presentation, but we have here somewhat simplified the case that he makes.

1153. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 67.

1154. Ibid., 67–68.

1155. Ibid., 68–69.

1156. Ibid., 69.

1157. Ibid., 98.

1158. Ibid., 100–101.

1159. Ibid., 89.

1160. Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, eds., *Jesus's Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate between William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Gary R. Habermas, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); David Baggett, ed., *Did the Resurrection Happen? A Conversation with Gary Haberman and Antony Flew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009); Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011).

1161. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 47.

1162. Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.65. For a discussion of the varied types of Ebionite views, see J. F.

Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), 63–68.

1163. Athanasius, *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* 16.

1164. Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians*.

1165. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 3.

1166. Ibid.

1167. Ibid., 3–4.

1168. Ibid., 4.

1169. Ibid., 9.

1170. E.g., Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 271–72; idem, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 47.

1171. Cullmann, *Christology*, 3.

1172. James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

1173. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 70–72.

1174. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 341.

1175. Robinson, "Lord," 329.

1176. James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 47–81.

1177. Fuller does not agree with Cullmann that the Christology of the New Testament is purely functional. He maintains that the mission to Gentiles involved ontic affirmations that in turn raised ontological questions (*Foundations*, 247–57).

1178. Henry J. Cadbury, "The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," *Interpretation* 3 (1949): 332.

1179. Edward Gibbon, *History of Christianity* (New York: Peter Eckler, 1891), 371.

1180. I once produced a church bulletin in which congratulations were extended to a couple who had been "untied in marriage." The inversion of letters was corrected and the faulty bulletins destroyed before becoming public.

Chapter 32. The Humanity of Christ

1181. The virgin birth will be discussed at length in chapter 34.

1182. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 1:236–39.

1183. Leon Morris, *The Lord from Heaven: A Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 45.

1184. E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), 68–69.

1185. Morris, *Lord from Heaven*, 48.

1186. James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 150–51.

1187. Leonard Hodgson, *And Was Made Man: An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (London: Longmans, Green, 1928), 27.

1188. Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 5.

1189. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 141.

1190. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), 80.

1191. Ibid., 81.

1192. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 291.

1193. Ibid., 292. There is a dispute as to whether Apollinarius was a dichotomist or trichotomist. For purposes of simplicity, we will treat him as a dichotomist.

1194. Ibid., 293.

1195. Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 263.

1196. Bethune-Baker, *Early History of Christian Doctrine*, 242.
1197. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 296.
1198. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 11–20.
1199. It should be observed that Barth in his later writing modified some of his more extreme views of the transcendence of God. See *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), 47.
1200. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946).
1201. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/1, 188.
1202. Ibid.
1203. Ibid.
1204. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 37.
1205. Ibid., 37–38.
1206. See 132–34.
1207. E.g., René Padilla and Mark Lou Branson, *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 83; Emilio A. Núñez, *Liberation Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 236.
1208. There are those, of course, who contend that Jesus did sin. Among them is Nels Ferré, who detects in Jesus's behavior a lack of perfect trust in the Father, which constitutes the sin of unbelief. But Ferré's exegesis is faulty, and his view of sin heavily influenced by existential, rather than biblical, concepts. See *Christ and the Christian* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 110–14.
1209. A. E. Taylor, in *Asking Them Questions*, ed. Ronald Selby Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 94.
1210. This is reminiscent of our discussion of free will—while we are free to choose, God has already rendered our choice certain. See pp. 328–31.
1211. Morris, *Lord from Heaven*, 51–52.

Chapter 33. The Unity of the Person of Christ

1212. See also Millard J. Erickson, "The Church in Stable Motion," *Christianity Today*, October 12, 1973, 7.
1213. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 293.
1214. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 311–12.
1215. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), 274–75.
1216. Friedrich Loofs, *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Lenox Hill, 1975), 41, 60–61; J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 82–100.
1217. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 311.
1218. Loofs, *Nestorius*, 45–53.
1219. A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ in Its Physical, Ethical, and Official Aspects*, 2nd ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1892), 50–51.
1220. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 330–31.
1221. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1:262–63.
1222. Bethune-Baker, *Early History of Christian Doctrine*, 284.
1223. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1919), 2:62. The word rendered "Person" is the Greek *prosōpon*, and "Subsistence" is the translation of the Greek *hupostasis*.
1224. Robert L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: Methuen, 1896), 2:151–61.
1225. A. Hauck, "Adoptionism," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 1:48–50.
1226. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/2, 149–50.
1227. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 92–93.

1228. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1914), 463–90.

1229. Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Scribner, 1891), 172.

1230. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, 117.

1231. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), 46–47.

Chapter 34. The Virgin Birth

1232. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Man from Nazareth as His Contemporaries Saw Him* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949), 158–60.

1233. John Herman Randall Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 542.

1234. Choan Seng-Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975), 33–35; idem, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 9.

1235. Borden P. Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 542.

1236. James Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1907), 1–29.

1237. Until recently, Roman Catholic theologians adhered to the fourth-century threefold formula regarding Mary's virginity: *ante partum, in partu, et post partum* ("before, in, and after the birth"). See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 517–18. The "brothers and sisters" of Jesus have been explained either as children of Joseph by an earlier marriage or as Jesus's cousins. See J. Blizzer, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967).

1238. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 417. Raymond Brown uses the term "virginal conception" (*The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* [New York: Paulist, 1973], 27–28).

1239. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.10.

1240. Orr, *Virgin Birth*, 190–201.

1241. Edward J. Carnell, "The Virgin Birth of Christ," *Christianity Today*, December 7, 1959, 9–10.

1242. L. Harold De Wolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 230–32.

1243. E.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953); Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2.

1244. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 48–51, 239–43.

1245. Ibid., 34–35.

1246. Ibid., 35.

1247. Raymond E. Brown, "Virgin Birth," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), supplementary volume, 941. While we have expressed reservations about the utility of form criticism (pp. 96–98), it is significant that even on its premises, there is support for the early existence of this tradition.

1248. Orr, *Virgin Birth*, 83.

1249. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 33.

1250. Ibid.

1251. Brown, "Virgin Birth," 941; cf. *Birth of the Messiah*, 35n. In the latter work, Brown supports his basic argument (that Joseph and Mary were not the source of the tradition) by emphasizing the differences between Matthew and Luke. He assumes, for instance, that if Joseph had told Mary of the annunciation to him, it would have appeared in Luke's account. Similarly, if Mary supplied Luke with information, she must have mentioned the Magi and the flight into Egypt. Despite his acquaintance with redaction criticism, Brown seems to ignore the possibility that Luke may have made selections from what Mary told him. Note also that if the virgin conception is true, James should be thought of as Jesus's *half* brother, not his brother.

1252. Brown, "Virgin Birth," 941.

1253. Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.28, 32, 69.

1254. Ethelbert Stauffer, “Jeschu ben Mirjam,” in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 119–28.

1255. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 541.

1256. A. C. McGiffert, *The Apostles’ Creed: Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1902), 122–28.

1257. J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1930), 4.

1258. See ibid., 7.

1259. Ignatius, *Ephesians* 18.2–19.1.

1260. Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 7.

1261. Ibid., 43.

1262. Brown, *Virginal Conception*, 54; G. A. Danell, “Did St. Paul Know the Tradition about the Virgin Birth?” *Studia Theologica* 4, fasc. 1 (1951): 94.

1263. Brown, *Virginal Conception*, 56–61.

1264. Plutarch, *Numa* 4.4.

1265. Dale Moody, “Virgin Birth,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4:791.

1266. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 143.

1267. Otto Piper argues that the church fathers, particularly Tatian and the Valentinian Gnostics, thought of the preexistence of Christ and the virgin birth in tandem—“While in the writings of John and Paul the preexistence of Christ is practically a substitute of the Virgin Birth, it serves in those fathers as evidence of the preexistence” (Otto A. Piper, “The Virgin Birth: The Meaning of the Gospel Accounts,” *Interpretation* 18, no. 2 [April 1964]: 132).

1268. See pp. 379–82.

1269. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.10. Carl F. H. Henry comes close to this position when he says, “It may be admitted, of course, that the Virgin Birth is not flatly identical with the Incarnation, just as the empty tomb is not identical with the Resurrection. The one might be affirmed without the other. Yet the connection is so close, and indeed, indispensable, that were the Virgin Birth or the empty tomb denied, it is likely that either the Incarnation or the Resurrection would be called in question, or they would be affirmed in a form very different from that which they have in Scripture and historic teaching. The Virgin Birth might well be described as an essential, historical indication of the Incarnation, bearing not only an analogy to the divine and human natures of the Incarnate, but also bringing out the nature, purpose, and bearing of this work of God to salvation” (“Our Lord’s Virgin Birth,” *Christianity Today*, December 7, 1959, 20).

1270. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), 79–86.

1271. Karl Barth appears to have held the position that Jesus took on himself the same fallen nature we now possess: his sinlessness consisted in his never committing actual sin (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956], I/2, 151–55).

Part 8: The Work of Christ

Chapter 35. Introduction to the Work of Christ

1272. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.15.

1273. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 58–59.

1274. Ibid., 58.

1275. Ibid., 58–65. Berkouwer speaks of a "threefold office" (65) and of three aspects of the one office.

1276. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 366–86.

1277. C. F. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925); Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 1:1–41.

1278. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:463.

1279. See George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 65–67.

1280. William Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 62.

1281. Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), 124–31.

1282. Some African theologians have used the traditional African concept of chief as a way of expressing Jesus's lordship. See François Kabasélé, "Christ as Chief," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Mayknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 103–15.

1283. Wolfgang Friedrich Gess, *Die Lehre von der Person Christi, Entwickelt aus dem Selbstbewusstsein Christi und aus dem Zeugnis der Apostel* (Basel: Bahnmeier, 1856), 304.

1284. Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Scribner, 1891), 172.

1285. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 703–4.

1286. This was the view of the divines of the University of Giessen in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See Clarence A. Beckwith, "Christology," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 3:57–58.

1287. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* 2.10.

1288. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 2–4. See such critiques as John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

1289. A. C. McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed: Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1902), 6–7.

1290. Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology; or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1917), 27. Note that this is not an official dogma of the Catholic Church, and is not mentioned by name in the 1992 catechism of the Catholic Church (632–37).

1291. Friedrich Loofs, "Descent to Hades (Christ's)," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), 4:656–57.

1292. Edgar C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: Methuen, 1906), 159.

1293. For a more extensive discussion of the interpretation of this passage and of the whole issue of a possible opportunity for faith after death, see Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), chap. 9, especially 165–73.

1294. Samuel Rayan, "Indian Theology and the Problem of History," in *Society and Religion: Essays in Honor of M. M. Thomas*, ed. Richard Taylor (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1976), 188.

1295. Daniel Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 181–82; cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 96–97.

1296. For a more complete discussion of the resurrection body of Jesus, see Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 565–76. The

position taken here is essentially the same as that of James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), 196–202.

Chapter 36. Theories of the Atonement

1297. Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Lutterworth, 1934), 435–36.
1298. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 5.
1299. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 28.
1300. For a comparative presentation of several views of the atonement, see *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).
1301. Faustus Socinus, *De Jesu Christo servatore* 1.1.
1302. Faustus Socinus, *Christiane religionis institutio* 1.667.
1303. Socinus, *De Jesu Christo servatore* 1.3.
1304. Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 3:26; 5:5.
1305. Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 26.
1306. Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Scribner, 1866), 130–31.
1307. Ibid., 132.
1308. Ibid., 154.
1309. Ibid., 154–55.
1310. Ibid., 155.
1311. Ibid., 156.
1312. Ibid., 220.
1313. Ibid., 223–25.
1314. L. W. Grenstad, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920), 290.
1315. John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), 199.
1316. Hugo Grotius, *A Defense of the Catholic Faith concerning the Satisfaction of Christ against Faustus Socinus* (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1889), chap. 5.
1317. Ibid.
1318. Ibid., chaps. 2–3.
1319. Ibid., chaps. 6–7.
1320. Ibid., chaps. 8–10.
1321. Ibid., chap. 5.
1322. Ibid.
1323. Ibid.
1324. Miley, *Atonement*, 245–65.
1325. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 20.
1326. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.1.
1327. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 2:13.
1328. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 13:28.
1329. Ibid.
1330. Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 22.
1331. Ibid., 23.
1332. Ibid., 24.
1333. Ibid., 26.
1334. Ibid., 24.
1335. Gregory the Great, *Morals of Job* 33.15.
1336. See Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* 3.19.

1337. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13.12.
1338. Ibid., 13.14.
1339. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3.27.
1340. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 26–27.
1341. Grenstad, *Short History*, 120–21.
1342. Ibid., 123.
1343. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* 1.7.
1344. Ibid., 1.11.
1345. Ibid., 1.12.
1346. Ibid., 1.13.
1347. Ibid., 1.16–18.
1348. Ibid., 2.8.
1349. Ibid., 2.10.

Chapter 37. The Central Theme of the Atonement

1350. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 497–98.
1351. R. Laird Harris, "פָּר," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:452–53.
1352. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 307.
1353. Ibid., 274.
1354. Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance of the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 890–91.
1355. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 571.
1356. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 424.
1357. Ibid., 425.
1358. C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 94.
1359. A. G. Hebert, "Atone, Atonement," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 28.
1360. Ladd, *Theology*, 429–30. For a more extensive refutation of Dodd's view, see Roger Nicole, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1955): 117–57.
1361. Leon Morris, "The Use of *Hilaskesthai* in Biblical Greek," *Expository Times* 62 (1950–51): 233.
1362. Dodd, *Bible and the Greeks*, 86–87.
1363. Gabriel Abe points out that the concept of propitiation is not simply a Western concept, but fits well with African traditional religion, in which "these sacrifices are offered to calm the wrath of divinities and spirits that are angered in order to remove the sins committed, obtain their favour and restore peace between the offender and the divinity" ("Redemption, Reconciliation, Propitiation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 95 [July 1996], 7).
1364. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 573.
1365. Ibid.
1366. G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3rd rev. ed. (9th English ed.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), 479.
1367. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 630.
1368. Ibid., 631.
1369. Ibid.
1370. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 175.
1371. Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 5:5.
1372. John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 34–38.

1373. For a concise argument for the biblical basis of the penal substitionary view and defense of it against many of the objections, see I. Howard Marshall, “The Theology of the Atonement,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thackeri (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49–68. For a more complete statement by Marshall, see his *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007).

1374. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Last Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182. Whether this is the authors’ own criticism of the penal substitutionary view or their depiction of a caricature of the view has become a matter of some debate.

1375. Steve Chalke, “The Redemption of the Cross,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thackeri, *Atonement Debate*, 38.

1376. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900), 3:473.

1377. Murray, *Redemption*, 31.

1378. Thomas S. Rees, trans., *Racovian Catechism* (1818; repr., Lexington, KY: American Theological Library Association, 1962), 5.8.

1379. Faustus Socinus, *De Jesu Christo servatore* 1.1.

1380. Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 126–36.

1381. Ibid., 140–50.

1382. Ibid., 28–29.

1383. Ibid., e.g., 201.

1384. Ibid., 153–70.

1385. A number of African theologians have noted that, with the strong emphasis in Africa on the evil powers, the motif of the atonement as victory over evil provides an especially effective point of introduction of the doctrine of atonement. Kwame Bediako, “Jesus in African Context: A Ghanian Perspective,” in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 104–12.

Chapter 38. The Extent of the Atonement

1386. See, e.g., Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 92.

1387. R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 64.

1388. Louis Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement through Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), 160.

1389. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:553.

1390. Ibid., 548.

1391. Ibid.

1392. Ibid.

1393. Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 330.

1394. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:296.

1395. Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1869), 383.

1396. Ibid., 376.

1397. Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement*, 157.

1398. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 777–78.

1399. E.g., John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 22:194–97.

1400. Some proponents of limited atonement contend that 1 John 2:2 refers to Christ dying, not for every individual in the world, but for all groups or nations in the world, sometimes asserting a grammatical

parallel to John 11:51–55, and therefore contending that 1 John 2:2 is saying that this is for children of God everywhere. I find this interpretation exegetically unpersuasive.

1401. P. L. Rouwendal, “Calvin’s Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement: Sufficiency, Efficiency, and Anachronism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 319–33.

1402. Ibid., 319–20, 325.

1403. John Piper, “For Whom Did Christ Die? & What Did Christ Really Achieve on the Cross for Those for Whom He Died?” *What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism*, Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff, http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/piper/piper_atonement.html, accessed January 26, 2010. The expression “save themselves” has the effect of caricaturing and misrepresenting the alternative view.

1404. A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (New York: Christian Alliance, 1880), 30–31.

1405. George L. Cole, *God’s Provision for Soul and Body* (Los Angeles: George L. Cole, 1947), 8.

1406. Rowland V. Bingham, *The Bible and the Body: Healing in the Scriptures* (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1952), 56–57.

1407. A. C. Gaebelein, *The Healing Question* (New York: Our Hope, 1925), 74.

1408. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 318.

1409. Ibid., 669–71.

1410. Ibid., 456.

1411. Ibid., 687.

1412. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 578–81.

1413. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 263–64.

1414. Ibid., 78.

Part 9: The Holy Spirit

Chapter 39. The Person of the Holy Spirit

1415. James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 22–30. Orr suggests that the historical order in which the major doctrines have been elaborated reflects their dogmatic order; that is, the doctrine of God was the first to be elaborated and the doctrine of last things the last. On that basis, however, we would expect to find already in the fourth and fifth centuries a full treatment of the Holy Spirit, but it was not until the twentieth century that the doctrine was given extensive attention.

1416. Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.60; cf. Basil, *Homily on Psalm 1*.

1417. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 7, 9.

1418. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 2.30, 3.7.

1419. Clement of Rome, *The Epistle to the Corinthians* 58.2.

1420. Ibid., 46.6.

1421. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam* 2, 3, 8.

1422. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 118.

1423. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.30.9; *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 5.

1424. Irenaeus, *Demonstration* 6.

1425. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.10.75.

1426. Ibid.

1427. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 15.10.

1428. See Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 1.6.

1429. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.20.

1430. Eusebius of Caesarea, *On the Theology of the Church: A Refutation of Marcellus* 3.6.3.

1431. Athanasius, *Letters to Bishop Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit* 1.21, 30.

1432. Ibid., 1.3, 10, 11. The translations reflect the interpretations of the Tropici.

1433. Ibid., 1.2, 20–27; 3.1–6.

1434. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Oration* 5: *On the Holy Spirit* 5.

1435. Basil, *Letters* 159.2.

1436. Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63.

1437. "Filioque Controversy," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 4:312–13.

1438. Bernard Holm, "The Work of the Spirit: The Reformation to the Present," in *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church: From Biblical Times to the Present*, ed. Paul D. Opsahl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 101–4.

1439. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.5.

1440. Ibid., 1.9.1.

1441. John Wesley, letter of June 21, 1784, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 7:222.

1442. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 4th rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), 407–99.

1443. See, e.g., Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730; repr., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1967).

1444. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), 45–46.

1445. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 2:537.

1446. Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1961), 48–49, 52–53; Agnes N. (Ozman) LaBerge, *What Hath God Wrought?*

(Chicago: Herald, n.d.), 29.

1447. Kendrick, *Promise Fulfilled*, 64–68.

1448. Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origin, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 4–11.

1449. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), 17–21.

1450. For statements of the position, see C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996); Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine, 1989). For an analysis and evaluation, see Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Mind and Heart* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), chap. 8.

1451. It has been suggested that a possible antecedent is the masculine noun παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) in verse 7. Its distance from the pronoun makes this a rather unlikely possibility, however.

1452. Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 357–61.

Chapter 40. The Work of the Holy Spirit

1453. A. B. Davidson says, “The genius of the language is not favourable to the formation of adjectives and the gn. [genitive] is used in various ways as explicative of the preceding noun, indicting its material, qualities, or relations” (*Hebrew Syntax* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902], 32).

1454. J. H. Raven claims that the Old Testament references to the “Spirit of God” do not pertain specifically to the Holy Spirit: “There is here no distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Spirit of God in the Old Testament is God himself exercising active influence” (*The History of the Religion of Israel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 164).

1455. For the view that passages like Ps. 104:30 are personal references to the Holy Spirit, see Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 19–20.

1456. Eduard Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit*, trans. Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 10–19.

1457. Wood, *Holy Spirit*, 42–43.

1458. Ibid., 41.

1459. George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 33–35.

1460. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 95.

1461. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 124–25.

1462. Schweizer, *Holy Spirit*, 51.

1463. Dale Moody, *Spirit of the Living God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1976), 40–41.

1464. For a discussion of Jesus’s words to Nicodemus, see Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 130–35.

1465. Donald Gee, *The Pentecostal Movement, Including the Story of the War Years (1940–47)*, rev. ed. (London: Elim, 1949), 10.

1466. Laurence Christenson, *Speaking in Tongues and Its Significance for the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1968), 72–79.

1467. Anthony Hoekema, *What about Tongue-Speaking?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 16–24.

1468. Stanley D. Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October–December 1963): 311–16; Robert Glenn Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967), 118–29.

1469. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 6.

1470. P. Feine, “Speaking with Tongues,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 11:37–38.

1471. William Sargent, “Some Cultural Abreactive Techniques and Their Relation to Modern Treatments,” in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 42.5 (May 1949): 367–74.

1472. William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), chaps. 4–6.

1473. For a more complete treatment, see Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 152–218.

Chapter 41. Recent Issues regarding the Holy Spirit

1474. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 257.

1475. Ibid., 76.

1476. Ibid., 315.

1477. Ibid., 316.

1478. Ibid., 320.

1479. Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 120–21.

1480. Ibid., 114–56.

1481. Ibid., 190–216.

1482. Ibid., 114.

1483. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature," *Theology* 75, no. 1 (1972): 10.

1484. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 2:76.

1485. Ibid., 79.

1486. Ibid., 80.

1487. Ibid., 82.

1488. Ibid., 1:382.

1489. Ibid., 2:83.

1490. Ibid.

1491. Ibid.

1492. Ibid.

1493. Ibid., 32.

1494. Ibid., 84–85.

1495. Grenz and Olson give probably the best statement when they describe Pannenberg's use of the term as "a conception related to but not to be equated with the field theory introduced in nineteenth-century science" (Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 193). Unfortunately, they do not elaborate sufficiently on the nature of this relationship.

1496. Ted Peters, "Pannenberg on Theology and Natural Science," in *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 114.

1497. Amos Yong, "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World," *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 2 (April 2005): 176.

1498. Ibid.

1499. Ibid., 177.

1500. Ibid.

1501. Ibid., 178.

1502. Ibid.

1503. Ibid., 178–79.

1504. Ibid., 179–80.

1505. Ibid., 181–82.

1506. Ibid., 182–83.

1507. Ibid., 188.

1508. Clinton Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 27.

1509. Frank E. Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1986).

1510. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

1511. C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996).

1512. C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996).

1513. Boyd, *God at War*, 66.

1514. Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti, *The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 40.

1515. Ibid., 61.

1516. Ibid., 63.

1517. Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 269–78.

1518. For a balanced and carefully nuanced statement, see "Deliver Us from Evil—Consultation Statement," by an issue-based gathering on spiritual warfare, at Nairobi, Kenya, August 2000, convened by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Available online at http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/all/nairobi-2000/179-overview.html.

1519. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 3.

1520. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare," 63.

1521. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation," in *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7–20 February 1991*, ed. Michael K. Kinnamon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Also at http://www.cta-usa.org/foundationdocs/foundhyunkyung.html. For a description of the event and reaction to it, see Kirsteen Kim, "Spirit and 'Spirits' at the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1991," *Missiology: An International Review* 32, no. 3 (July 2004): 349–65.

1522. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

Part 10: Salvation

Chapter 42. Conceptions of Salvation

1523. Walter Lowe, “Christ and Salvation,” in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 196–97.

1524. See, e.g., Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

1525. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 26.

1526. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 16.

1527. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 53.

1528. Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching*, 20–21.

1529. Ibid., 21.

1530. Cone, *Black Theology*, 131–32.

1531. Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching*, 24.

1532. Ibid.

1533. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 85; cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 169–75.

1534. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 39–40.

1535. Ibid., 45.

1536. Ibid., 40.

1537. Ibid.

1538. Ibid., 9–16.

1539. Ibid., 35–38.

1540. Ibid., 19–22.

1541. Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 1–20; Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 3–29.

1542. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 278–80.

1543. Ibid., 326–27.

1544. Ibid., 280–82, 373.

1545. Ibid., 344–45.

1546. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

1547. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 40–54.

1548. William Hamilton, “The Death of God Theologies Today,” in Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 48.

1549. Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, ed. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1942), 1:66–75.

1550. Karl Rahner, *Ecclesiology*, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1976), 282.

1551. “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 35.

1552. “Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” in Abbott, *Documents of Vatican II*, 663.

1553. Yves Congar, *The Wide World My Parish: Salvation and Its Problems* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 101–4.
1554. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 30–35, sections 13–16.
1555. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), 6:394.
1556. Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 222–35, 264–74.
1557. Ibid., 275–84.
1558. Cyril Okorocha has shown, however, that because salvation is a holistic matter, it can relate to the primary question of many Africans, the question of power. See "The Meaning of Salvation: An African Perspective," in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 59–92.

Chapter 43. The Antecedent to Salvation: Predestination

1559. E.g., Benjamin B. Warfield took the position that "'foreordain' and 'predestinate' are exact synonyms, the choice between which can be determined only by taste" ("Predestination," in *Biblical Doctrines* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1929], 4). Warfield uses "election" to designate what we are here labeling "predestination."
1560. E.g., Tertullian, *On the Soul* 39.
1561. Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 33.
1562. Augustine, *The City of God* 14.12.
1563. Augustine, *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness* 9.
1564. Although there is some question as to whether Pelagius was actually a monk, he was referred to as a *monachus*. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 357.
1565. Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrius* 16–17.
1566. Ibid., 16.
1567. Pelagius, *Expositions of Romans* 5:15.
1568. Pelagius, *Demetrius* 8.17.
1569. Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin* 1.2, 8, 36.
1570. Pelagius, *Exposition of Romans* 9–10. See also 8:29–30.
1571. Pelagius, *On the Possibility of Not Sinning* 2.
1572. Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.15.
1573. Augustine, *City of God* 13.3, 14; 22.24.2.
1574. Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.5; 3.24.
1575. Augustine, *To Simplician—On Various Questions* 1.2.13.
1576. Augustine, *City of God* 22.1.2.
1577. Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance* 35, 47–48; idem, *On the Predestination of the Saints* 19.
1578. Harry Buis, *Historic Protestantism and Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958), 15.
1579. Ibid., 17.
1580. Anselm, *On Freedom of Choice* 1.
1581. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1.23.4.
1582. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.1.
1583. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 364–66 (Rom. 9:20–21).
1584. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.19.
1585. Theodore Beza, *Tractationes*, 1.171–77.
1586. James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichals and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:247–48.

1587. John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1979).

1588. See, e.g., Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); Duane Edward Spencer, *TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

1589. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:192–205.

1590. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 619–37.

1591. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 61–82.

1592. Benjamin B. Warfield, “Perfectionism,” in *Biblical Doctrines*, 62–64.

1593. Ibid., 65.

1594. Ibid., 53–54.

1595. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 114–15.

1596. Boettner, *Predestination*, 62.

1597. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.7.

1598. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 789–90.

1599. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 31.

1600. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 778–79.

1601. Arminius, *Writings*, 1:252–53.

1602. Eugene W. Lyman, *Theology and Human Problems* (New York: Scribner, 1910), 190–98.

1603. Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1869), 387, 392.

1604. Boettner, *Predestination*, 295.

1605. Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes; or, A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1850), 2:377.

1606. Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 344–45.

1607. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:351.

1608. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1967), 65.

1609. John Wesley, “Free Grace,” in *Works of John Wesley*, 7:376.

1610. Wakefield, *Complete System*, 326–35; Wesley, “Free Grace,” 376–77.

1611. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), II/2, 145–48.

1612. Ibid., 174.

1613. Ibid., 149.

1614. Ibid., 161.

1615. Ibid., 181.

1616. Ibid., 229.

1617. Ibid., 105.

1618. Ibid., 163.

1619. Ibid., 195.

1620. Ibid., 306.

1621. Ibid., 350.

1622. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 103–4; Lothar Coenen, “Elect, Choose,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:536–43.

1623. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 382; Paul Jacobs and Hartmut Krienke, “Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination,” in Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1:695–96.

1624. Abbott-Smith, *Lexicon*, 380, 390; Jacobs and Krienke, “Foreknowledge,” 696–97.
1625. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 394; Jacobs and Krienke, “Foreknowledge,” 692–93.

Chapter 44. The Beginning of Salvation: Subjective Aspects

1626. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 490–91.
1627. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:378.
1628. John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 95–96.
1629. Ibid., 109.
1630. Teresa Okure, “Conversion, Commitment: An African Perspective,” *Mission Studies* 10, nos. 1 & 2 (1993): 110.
1631. Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 55; Fritz Laubach, “Conversion, Penitence, Repentance, Proselyte,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:354.
1632. W. L. Muncy Jr., *A History of Evangelism in the United States* (Kansas City, KS: Central Seminary, 1945), 86–90.
1633. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 636–37.
1634. Ibid., 996–1000.
1635. Otto Michel, “μεταμέλομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 4:626.
1636. Ibid., 628; cf. Laubach, “Conversion,” 356.
1637. Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).
1638. For a more complete treatment of these issues, see Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Mind and Heart* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), chap. 6.
1639. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 45–47.
1640. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 53.
1641. Ibid., 52–53; Jack B. Scott, “אָמַו,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:51–52.
1642. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 459.
1643. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:286; Alfred Jepson, “טָחַ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:89.
1644. Rudolf Bultmann, πιστεύω, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:203.
1645. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 361–62.
1646. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 271–72.
1647. The distinction is often drawn between *assensus* or *credentia* on the one hand and *fiducia* on the other (William Hordern, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], 34–35). Edward Carnell used the terms “general faith” and “vital faith” (*The Case for Orthodox Theology* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], 28–30).
1648. A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant* (New York: Harper, 1961), 142.
1649. Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), 36.
1650. See pp. 216–21.
1651. Augustine, *Letter* 137.15; Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 276–77.
1652. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 290.
1653. See pp. 217–18, 1073.
1654. Millard J. Erickson, “The New Birth Today,” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1974, 8–10.
1655. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 826–27.

1656. James Strahan, “Flacius,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), 6:49.

Chapter 45. The Beginning of Salvation: Objective Aspects

1657. John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

1658. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 1959), 296–97.

1659. Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 2nd ed. (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), 142–57. In its more extreme forms, which Deissmann terms “unio-mysticism,” this view verges on pantheism.

1660. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 96–97.

1661. Eric Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Questions on Their Relations* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956), 314.

1662. Murray, *Redemption*, 166.

1663. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 492–93.

1664. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 842–43; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 18.

1665. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 440.

1666. Ziesler, *Righteousness*, 168.

1667. James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, *New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 2:397; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 30–31.

1668. Gottlob Schrenk, δικαιόω, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 2:214.

1669. Denys Edward Hugh Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 159.

1670. Sandlay and Headlam, *Romans*, 36.

1671. Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 57.

1672. Ziesler, *Righteousness*, 169.

1673. E. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 422–28.

1674. Ibid.

1675. Reginald H. Fuller, “Justification in Recent Pauline Studies,” *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 413–14.

1676. Robert H. Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debate?*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Trier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 18.

1677. John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 55n3.

1678. Ibid., 63–64. The entire section, 53–64, constitutes a thorough exegetical response to the “faith as righteousness” view.

1679. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 464–65.

1680. Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2005), xvi.

1681. Tom Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 160.

1682. Ibid., 161–62. For a critique of this view, see John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 100–116.

1683. Don Garlington, “Imputation or Union with Christ: A Response to John Piper,” *Reformation and Revival* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 76; Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 40–42.

1684. J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 168.

1685. Murray, *Redemption*, 132–34.

1686. This doctrine is somewhat overlooked in theological discussions. Two Reformed treatments are Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987), and Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

1687. François Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 116–27.

1688. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 857.

1689. Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 76–77.

1690. It should be noted that courts hear only actual, not hypothetical, cases. No one can be found guilty or not guilty in advance of the alleged act.

1691. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 493–94.

Chapter 46. The Continuation of Salvation

1692. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 871.

1693. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1953), 5.

1694. Ibid.

1695. Horst Seebass, "Holy, Consecrate, Sanctify, Saints, Devout," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:230.

1696. Otto Procksch, "ἅγιος, ἁγιάζω, ἁγιασμός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 1:113.

1697. Ibid., 111.

1698. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth, 1952), 28.

1699. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (London: William Tegg, 1851), 604–13.

1700. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 879.

1701. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 629.

1702. Finney, *Lectures*, 611–13.

1703. Vladimir Losskyk, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 72.

1704. Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, NY: St. Valdimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 112.

1705. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 50.

1706. F. W. Norris, "Deification: Consensual and Cogent," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, no. 4 (1966): 428.

1707. Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 149–59; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 325–28.

1708. Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Life in the Spirit* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco), 207.

1709. Ibid., 208.

1710. Ibid., 209.

1711. Ibid.

1712. Ibid.

1713. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 516–17.
1714. Ibid., 496.
1715. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 94.
1716. Hermann Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, *Law*, vol. 11 of *Bible Key Words* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 69.
1717. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 497.
1718. G. F. Moore points out that no rabbi would have seen a contradiction here—*Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 3:150–51.
1719. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 510.
1720. See, e.g., John R. Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1944), 13–40.
1721. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 430–68.
1722. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1950), 440–52.
1723. Edward J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 132–37.
1724. Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 119.
1725. Examples of advocacy of conditional forgiveness are Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), and Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving: Learning to Forgive One Another God's Way* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1994). Examples of arguments for unconditional forgiveness are Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), and John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998).
1726. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), 6:73–74.
1727. Arthur H. Lewis, "The New Birth under the Old Covenant," *Evangelical Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January 1984): 37.
1728. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 311.
1729. Lewis, "New Birth," 40.

Chapter 47. The Completion of Salvation

1730. Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1.
1731. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 182.
1732. John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 155.
1733. Boettner, *Predestination*, 185.
1734. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 882.
1735. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 547–48.
1736. *Sententia Remonstrantium* 5.3.
1737. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 350–54.
1738. I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (London: Epworth, 1969), 141.
1739. Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1869), 463–65.
1740. Ibid., 465–66.
1741. Marshall, *Power of God*, 140–47.
1742. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 135–40 (Heb. 6:4–6).
1743. Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 110. Hewitt refers to the three views as, respectively, the "saved and lost theory," the

"non-Christian theory," and the "hypothetical theory." See also Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 165.

1744. H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 226–29.

1745. Westcott, *Hebrews*, 154, 165.

1746. This distinction appears to elude Marshall, who regards the "hypothetical theory" as "a thoroughly sophistical theory which evades the plain meaning of the passage. There is no evidence whatsoever that the writer was describing an imaginary danger which could not possibly threaten his readers" (*Power of God*, 140).

1747. G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 83–124.

1748. John Murray restricts glorification to the time of the resurrection; in his view all believers will be glorified together at the return of Christ (*Redemption*, 174–75). Bernard Ramm, however, looks upon glorification as occurring in connection with face-to-face knowledge of Christ (*Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], 65). The issue here is how to define "glorification." What is its extent; to what events does it apply? The answer will depend in part on one's view of the nature of the intermediate state between death and resurrection (see chap. 55).

1749. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Concordance of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 458–59.

1750. Ramm, *Them He Glorified*, 18.

1751. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 202–3.

1752. Ramm, *Them He Glorified*, 67–69.

1753. Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 102–6.

1754. Ramm, *Them He Glorified*, 103.

Chapter 48. The Means and Extent of Salvation

1755. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 4.

1756. Ibid., 5.

1757. Ibid., 36.

1758. Ibid.

1759. Ibid., 215.

1760. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 7–38.

1761. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 26–27.

1762. Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, ed. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1942), 1:1.

1763. Ibid., 11.

1764. Ibid., 15.

1765. Ibid., 67.

1766. Ibid., 122–23.

1767. Ibid., 126.

1768. Ibid., 126–28.

1769. Ibid., 129–31.

1770. Ibid., 73.

1771. Ibid., 125.

1772. Ibid., 126.

1773. Ibid., 132.

1774. Ibid., 164.

1775. Ibid., 166, 171.
1776. Ibid., 175.
1777. Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 28–37.
1778. Edward J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 70.
1779. Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 1:184.
1780. Johannes Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 234.
1781. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 682–83.
1782. Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 54–55.
1783. Origen, *De principiis* 1.6.2.
1784. Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 118. Boettner maintains that the Bible promises "the ultimate conversion of the large majority of men in all nations."
1785. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:295.
1786. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 842.
1787. Richard Eddy, *A History of Universalism*, in *American Church History*, vol. 10 (New York: Christian Literature, 1894), 458–60.
1788. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).
1789. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond; John Knox, 1960), 60–62.
1790. C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (New York: Scribner, 1954), 118–26.
1791. Origen, *De principiis* 1.6.2.
1792. Nels Ferré, "The Third Conversion Never Fails," in *These Found the Way*, ed. David Wesley Soper (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), 132–33.
1793. Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), 228.
1794. Ibid., 234–37.
1795. Ibid., 237.
1796. Ibid., 244–45.
1797. Ibid., 245.
1798. Ibid., 242–43.
1799. Ibid., 246.
1800. Ibid., 246–47.
1801. Ibid., 248–49.

Part 11: The Church

Chapter 49. The Nature of the Church

1802. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), I/1, 1.

1803. Colin Williams, *The Church*, New Directions in Theology Today, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 11.

1804. Ibid.

1805. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1946), 346.

1806. Carl Michalson, *Worldly Theology: The Hermeneutical Focus of an Historical Faith* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 218.

1807. Williams, *Church*, 20; see also his *Faith in a Secular Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

1808. Walter Ong, "The Word in Chains," in *In the Human Grain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 52–59.

1809. Karl L. Schmidt, "ἐκκλησία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 3:504.

1810. Ibid., 513.

1811. Lothar Coenen, "Church," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:291.

1812. Ibid., 291–92.

1813. Ibid., 294.

1814. Ibid., 295.

1815. Schmidt, "ἐκκλησία," 506.

1816. Coenen, "Church," 303.

1817. Ibid.

1818. E.g., Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 623.

1819. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), suggests over one hundred such instances.

1820. Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 256–60. We are not here claiming that Wainwright is the originator of the three models of the church or of the argument for implicit trinitarianism, as Stanley J. Grenz mistakenly suggests (*Theology for the Community of God*, 607). Grenz cites Kenneth Cauthen as saying that this idea dates to Lesslie Newbigin's *The Household of Faith*, but Newbigin's treatment is both less explicit and less complete than Wainwright's.

1821. E.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 557.

1822. François Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 116–27.

1823. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), 150.

1824. George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 259–60.

1825. Ibid., 260.

1826. Ibid., 259–73.

1827. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 570–71.

1828. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), 4:29–35.

1829. George E. Ladd, "Israel and the Church," *Evangelical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October–December 1964): 207.

1830. Ibid., 209.

1831. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 3.31–34.

1832. Martin Luther, "Preface to Revelation."

1833. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.7.
1834. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1960), 271–74.
1835. Ibid., 274–79.
1836. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 494–97.
1837. D. Nauta, "Church, Nature and Government of: Quakers, 'Plymouth' Brethren, Darbyites, etc.," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Gary G. Cohen (Marshalltown, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2:487–88.
1838. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:27–53.
1839. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899), 591.
1840. Ibid., 590–91.
1841. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 570.

Chapter 50. The Role of the Church

1842. J. C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 1.
1843. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1:117.
1844. James E. Carter, *The Mission of the Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 65–73.
1845. Doug Pagitt, "Response to Mark Driscoll," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 43.
1846. Edmund Clowney, "Toward a Biblical Doctrine of the Church," *Westminster Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (November 1968): 71–72.
1847. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 97–135.
1848. Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 104–17.
1849. Sherwood Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 19–26.
1850. David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 81–82.
1851. Robert M. Price, "A Fundamentalist Social Gospel?," *Christian Century* 96, no. 39 (November 28, 1979): 1183–86. Note readers' replies in vol. 97, no. 3 (January 23, 1980): 78–79.
1852. Harold Lindsell, "The Missionary Retreat," *Christianity Today*, November 9, 1971, 26–27; William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 1, *Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 75–76. See also Herman C. Weber, ed., *Yearbook of American Churches* (New York: Round Table, 1941), 129–38; Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 11–14. Although writing primarily about political liberals and conservatives, Arthur Brooks's findings also apply specifically to religious liberals and conservatives. He found that not only do conservatives greatly surpass their liberal counterparts in charitable giving, but they also do much more in such areas as volunteering their services and donating blood (Arthur C. Brooks, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism* [New York: Basic Books, 2006]).
1853. Gerhard Friedrich, "εὐαγγελίζομαι," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 2:707.
1854. Ibid., 710–12, 721–25.
1855. Ibid., 722.
1856. Ulrich Becker, "Gospel, Evangelize, Evangelist," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:110.
1857. Friedrich, "εὐαγγελίζομαι," 728.

1858. Ibid., 731.
1859. F. F. Bruce, *The Defence of the Gospel in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 37–48.
1860. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1224.
1861. Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 315.
1862. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), 7:492.
1863. Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
1864. Mark Driscoll, "The Emerging Church and Biblicist Theology," in Webber, *Emerging Churches*, 19–38.
1865. Doug Pagitt, "The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology," in Webber, *Emerging Churches*, 119–43.

Chapter 51. The Government and Unity of the Church

1866. Leon Morris, "Church, Nature and Government of (Episcopalian View)," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Gary G. Cohen (Marshalltown, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2:483.
1867. A. G. Hebert, *The Form of the Church* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), 109–23.
1868. Morris, "Church, Nature and Government of," 485.
1869. Gerald F. Modede, *The Office of Bishop in Methodism: Its History and Development* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1946).
1870. Leon Morris, "Church Government," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 126.
1871. Kenneth E. Kirk, "The Apostolic Ministry," in *The Apostolic Ministry*, ed. Kenneth E. Kirk (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), 43.
1872. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Church Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1960), 270–93.
1873. Ibid., 286–87.
1874. Edward J. Gratsch, "The Development of Ecclesiology," in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, ed. Edward J. Gratsch (New York: Alba House, 1980), 157–60.
1875. A. M. Farrer, "The Ministry in the New Testament," in Kirk, *Apostolic Ministry*, 113–82.
1876. Ibid., 181.
1877. Ott, *Catholic Dogma*, 282–85.
1878. Hebert, *Form of the Church*, 110.
1879. S. L. Greenslade, "The Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Ministry of the Church* (London: Canterbury, 1947), 55–61.
1880. Morris, "Church Government," 126–27.
1881. R. Laird Harris, "Church, Nature and Government of (Presbyterian View)," in Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 2:490–92.
1882. *The Constitution of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, vol. 2, *Book of Order* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1967), chap. 9.
1883. Ibid., chap. 11.
1884. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 588–89.
1885. Park Hays Miller, *Why I Am a Presbyterian* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1956), 77.
1886. Charles Hodge, *The Church and Its Polity* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1879), 119.
1887. Harris, "Church," 492.
1888. Ibid., 495; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 581–84.
1889. Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 3:421.

1890. Ibid., 431.
1891. Ibid., 475.
1892. Ibid., 421.
1893. Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1894), 153–59.
1894. William Roy McNutt, *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1935), 21–26.
1895. James M. Bulman, "Church, Nature and Government of (Autonomous View)," in Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 2:478.
1896. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 914–15.
1897. Ibid., 906.
1898. Ibid., 905–6.
1899. Hiscox, *New Directory*, 155.
1900. Harris, "Church," 490.
1901. Morris, "Church, Nature and Government of," 484.
1902. Rufus M. Jones, *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1928), 54–69.
1903. Clarence B. Bass, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Theology of J. N. Darby with Special Reference to Its Contribution to the Plymouth Brethren Movement* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1952), 116.
1904. Karen Ward, "The Emerging Church and Communal Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 168–70.
1905. This approach is in some ways similar to the "redemptive-movement" hermeneutic advocated by William J. Webb, "A Redemptive-Movement Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadows (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 215–48.
1906. See chap. 4.
1907. Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), 238–57.
1908. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 65–75.
1909. Ibid.
1910. Ibid., 81–82.
1911. Ibid., 82–83.
1912. Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 274.
1913. Ibid., 69.
1914. Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 74–75.
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2153. See, however, George E. Ladd, "The Revelation of Christ's Glory," *Christianity Today*, September 1, 1958, 14.

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2163. Morton Kelsey, *Afterlife: The Other Side of Dying* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 182–83.
2164. J. A. Motyer, *After Death: A Sure and Certain Hope?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 74–76.
2165. W. H. Dyson, "Heaven," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1924), 1:712.
2166. Alan Richardson, *Religion in Contemporary Debate* (London: SCM, 1966), 72.
2167. Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 144.
2168. Simon, *Heaven*, 217.

2169. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 165–66. Lewis uses the term “trans-sexual” with much the same meaning as we have here attached to “suprasexual.”

2170. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Wages.”

2171. Edmund G. Kaufman, *Basic Christian Convictions* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1972), 289.

2172. John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (New York: Scribner, 1933), 281.

2173. Motyer, *After Death*, 87.

2174. S. D. F. Salmond, “Heaven,” in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1919), 2:324.

2175. This distinction escapes Craig L. Blomberg, who, apparently unaware of his own assumptions, finds a contradiction within my thought at this point (“Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 [June 1992]: 162). See, further, my *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 92–94.

2176. Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), 233–34.

2177. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:868.

2178. J. A. Motyer, “The Final State: Heaven and Hell,” in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962), 292.

2179. Origen, *De principiis* 1.6.2; 3.6.3. For a contemporary statement of universalism, see John A. T. Robinson, *In the End, God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 119–33.

2180. Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 66.

2181. B. B. Warfield, “Annihilationism,” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 447–50.

2182. Ibid., 447–48.

2183. Edward White, *Life in Christ: A Study of the Scripture Doctrine of the Nature of Man, the Object of the Divine Incarnation, and the Conditions of Human Immortality*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: Elliot Stock, 1878).

2184. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1957), 14.

2185. Robinson, *In the End, God*, 131n8.

2186. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 28.

2187. Ibid., 127–28.

Concluding Thoughts

2188. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 13–20.

2189. Ibid., 25–26.

2190. See Millard J. Erickson, “Narrative Theology in Translation or Transformation?” in *Festschrift: A Tribute to William Hordern*, ed. Walter Freitag (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1985).

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