THE PRIVILEGE PROMISE POWER & PERIL OF DOCTRINAL PREACHING



– THOMAS J. NETTLES –

Tom Nettles brings a rare combination to bear on the subject of doctrinal preaching. As one who has given his academic life to the discipline of historical theology, he has studied the best— and often the worst— examples of doctrinal influences on the church over the last two thousand years, and especially since the Protestant Reformation. The insight of such study informs his deep conviction about power of biblical preaching, and the results have been organized in this book. Tom writes as a practitioner of what he commends. I highly recommend it.

—Tom Ascol
Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida

* * *

For many long years it has been my conviction that the Church needs fewer statesmen, managers of the mundane, leaders of pep rallies, and clowns. What we need is more Pastor/Theologians, men who know how to teach doctrine while preaching expositionally through books of the Bible. Tom Nettles has called our attention to this lost art. May the book be read by many.

—David Miller
President and Founder of *Line upon Line Ministries*

* * *

It is a long road from the pulpit ministry of Jonathan Edwards to that of Joel Osteen. In *The Privilege, Promise, Power, and Peril of Doctrinal Preaching*, Thomas J. Nettles takes readers down that road and makes keen observations as an historian-theologian along the way. Nettles believes that evangelicals have traded theocentric preaching for anthropocentric. He advocates a return to doctrinal preaching, sermons that propagate doctrine and are the product of doctrine. Nettles' historical analysis of leading pulpit figures is charitable, but his biblical-theological conclusions are full of the fierce conviction of a man who loves the church and understands the power and priority of preaching. If you care about preaching this is a book you should read.

—David E. Prince
Assistant Professor of Christian Preaching,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Pastor, Ashland Avenue Baptist Church

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I have known and enjoyed Dr. Tom Nettles as my professor, colleague, and friend, but my greatest enjoyment of him is as a preacher of the Word of God, particularly as a skilled expositor who delivers doctrinal application that resonates in the hearts of believers. This book fills a lamentable and long-time void in the field of homiletics. In fact, I know of no other text that weaves exegesis, application, theology, and history into a comprehensive model of doctrinal preaching. For years I have lamented the lack of a good text for doctrinal preaching, but this one was worth the wait. It will stand as the model for faithful doctrinal preaching for years to come.

— Hershael W. York
Victor & Louise Lester Professor of Preaching
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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PRIVILEGE, PROMISE, POWER & PERIL

OF DOCTRINAL PREACHING

Thomas J. Nettles

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This book is dedicated to long-time friends who have served as models of doctrinal preachers.

Bill Ascol,

Tom Ascol,

Fred Malone,

Joe Nesome,

Phil Newton

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Prologue

By its very nature, Christian preaching is doctrinal. The person that stands in a pulpit that is established for the purpose of interpreting God, man, life, evil, and good gives a message that influences the views of his audience in each of these areas. An amazingly concise summary of Paul's message to an unbeliever about faith in Christ involved his reasoning about "righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment" (Acts 24:25). Messages may emphasize the importance of well-stated doctrine founded on a commitment to biblical coherence and clarity, or they may communicate various degrees of imprecision and unconcern about doctrine. Either way, a view of truth and a worldview are being communicated that establish a framework for life for those who hear.

This book is an argument for a clearly stated, biblical, systematic, historically Reformed, confessional doctrinal commit-ment as a necessary element of true expository preaching. Etymology, syntax, immediate context, author, and historical location all contribute to expository accuracy, but no message is complete until the overall canonical doctrinal message is explored. How does the message of the passage relate to the mature doctrinal outcome of revealed truth?

I develop this thesis with three doctrinally oriented exegetical chapters. The case is set forth in chapters 1 and 2 and illustrated in biblical context in chapter 13. In between, chapters 3 through 12 play out a historical progression of doctrinal preaching in which a clear shift occurs from theocentric to anthropocentric preaching. The discussion of Jonathan Edwards in two chapters serves as a paradigm of the use of sound doctrine as a dominant element of expository preaching. Asahel Nettleton, discussed briefly in chapter 5, perpetuated the Edwardsean vision, not perfectly but with a high degree of consistency. After that, I seek to illustrate how a shift gradually diminished the importance of full-bodied theology as an element of exposition. Other techniques of communication began to replace doctrine as human power and human well-being replaced divine prerogative, divine power, and divine glory as the chief purpose of Christian preaching.

With the exception of one, my reading and research gave me a substantial respect for each of these preachers used to illustrate this change. Even in their most histrionic antics, their sincerity came through, as would be verified in their most poignant moments of appeal. Charles Finney was determined to alter the Edwardsean orientation of doctrine and preached with clear and insistent doctrinal intent. Some of his more radical departures from evangelical thought gratefully did not pass unaltered into future generations. Admiration for his zeal and much of his distinctive appeal, however, were passed along from generation to generation. Dwight L. Moody's heart and passion for souls should be a desideratum for every minister of the gospel. This kind, unwearying, visionary, entrepreneurial evangelist endured caricature and unkindness from many of his detractors in both the church and the broader culture. Samuel Porter Jones and Billy Sunday, even with all the hoopla, bombast, and sentimentality and doctrine-decrying, reductionistic declamation showed, nevertheless, a true concern for souls. They demonstrated admirable courage, perseverance, and an ability to be resilient under relentless criticism. Billy Graham deservedly won a universal reputation for earnestness, clarity, power, integrity, compassion, evangelistic zeal, and evangelical cultural engagement. The ministry of Joel Osteen is impressive for his amazing ability to make pure self-interest seem like Christian truth.

The prevailing and consistent factor that passed from generation to generation in popular American Christianity as represented by these unique personalities is Finney's insistence on the human will as the final court of adjudication in the matter of salvation. Thus, we find carefully constructed techniques of communication as an equal partner with increasingly diminished doctrine as evangelistic appeal. I have written in pursuit of isolating that determinative doctrinal issue and consequent shift in sermonic content and style. That shift not only changed evangelism but the importance of coherent doctrine as intentionally elemental to Christian preaching.

The focus is on this progression of evangelists because, of four theological dynamics that interacted in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the evangelist

emerged as the tutor for the broad Christian culture in America. Liberalism, as the initial provocateur, emerged as the theological manifestation of modernism challenging the entire received fabric of historic Christianity from the Bible, its source of authority, to the credibility of virtually every doctrine along the confessional spectrum of Christian truth. Second, the most scholarly and thoroughly confessional response came from the Princeton Theologians of the last part of the nineteenth century, most notably B. B. Warfield and, eventually, J. Gresham Machen. Their analysis was profound and provided fodder for other responses but was limited in audience. Another source of doctrinal interaction came from a broader selection of pastors, theologians, evangelists, missionaries, scientists, and biblical scholars who wrote about particular matters of doctrinal importance in a series of twelve pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals.* That series was eventually combined into four volumes and was instrumental in defining the Fundamentalist movement. The fourth ingredient, however, was the more populist and crowd-orientated response of the itinerant evangelist. Their preaching reached the masses and carried some of the elements of the other responses to liberalism to the broader culture. From one stage to the next, however, confessional coherence and doctrinal detail and comprehensiveness decreased. The emphases of the evangelists began to define what was acceptable preaching and theology in the churches. As late as 2018, doctrinal discomfort within the Southern Baptist Convention has led one of its leading thinkers to depict a denominational doctrinal discussion as a contest between a Billy Graham orientation or a Calvinist orientation.

Billy Graham sought to transform the reputation of the evangelist. He would not blast the political establishment, inveigh against amusements, criticize the mainline churches, nor ridicule serious theology but sought to find ways to include each of these spheres of influence into his evangelistic efforts. Even with his more conciliatory approach, he maintained continuity with the past in his view of the determining power of the human will. Since the evangelists had operated on this premise, such anthropocentrism had achieved the position of traditional orthodoxy despite its speckled confessional history.

Joel Osteen represents the triumph of man-centeredness in the evangelical pulpit. Though his emphases are shocking, they draw upon the theological concession of the power of the human will and the priority of human well-being as central to Christian theology.

One anomalous phenomenon is discussed in chapter 12. The view that revelatory gifts from the Holy Spirit continue in the church beyond the apostolic age challenges the principle of *sola scriptura* and the sufficiency of Scripture. How do we stand in need of a word of knowledge, a revelation, a word of comfort, a motivation for hope beyond the fullness of doctrine contained in the written word of both testaments? Though there are sound, doctrinally-oriented, Reformed expository preachers among the continuationists, the concession that some knowledge of the divine will, some encouragement, some hope, some revealed statement of truth might be needed beyond the wise application of canonically established truth moves the Christian life and the body of Christian truth to a shared foundation. *Most of what we need is in Scripture, but some of what we need will come along in the nick of time*. This establishes instruction on a basis other than the doctrine of Scripture and dilutes the urgency and finality of doctrinal preaching.

Preaching is doctrinal. When pursued within a fully canonical, historically confessional context, one may expect its effects, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to develop a people that will “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). A divine appointment to preach the gospel is a marvelous privilege, filled with promise for eternal blessings when imbued with effectual power from the Holy Spirit. If, however, untruths make their way into the proclamation, affirming that the sinner’s power can overrule the divine purpose, the way forward is perilous.

— Tom J. Nettles

1. Greater Things Than These You Will Do

Jesus expected the preachers of the church for which he was dying to preach doctrine (Mark 13:9–11; 14:8, 9; Luke 9:1, 2; 24:44–49). That liberal mantra that espoused the deceitful dichotomy that “Christianity is not a dogma but a life” has been matched by the equally puzzling evangelical proposition that “living the Book is better than knowing the Book,” announced by Matt Chandler at the Converge conference. Such minimization of the importance of doctrine and robust knowledge of the whole of Scripture has served as the devil’s death angel, smothering the church’s witness to the truth in many a generation.

There Is No Preaching without Doctrine

Such a creed produces half-hearted and pusillanimous attempts at doctrine study and a pulpit fervent in flattering itself with its supposed relevance. Seeking to be practical by targeting the daily tensions and difficulties of parishioners, the pulpit often occupies itself with serving up an interminable menu of helpful advice from the Bible for all kinds of life-situation pickles into which Americans immerse themselves.

The situation creates an image reminiscent of Gary Larson’s “Far Side” vision of the boneless chicken farm. Doctrines are like bones; they were never intended to sit out by themselves. They are grotesque and dry in such a setting. Their intended function, however, is to provide definition, strength, uprightness, distinction, and proportion to a body. A human being would be a useless, unfunctioning blob without them. Churches and the people within them will be just as silly and useless without biblical doctrine.

Sermons also are amorphous unless supported by doctrine. Scripture advice without the foundation and framework of Scripture doctrine—practice without theory— will last only through the specific event addressed. Other crises and relational difficulties will call for a new set of practical steps.

One may see the same effect in expository messages which ignore the larger doctrinal witness of Scripture. In reality, these are not expository messages. Individual passages are meaningless until seen within the complete storyline of Scripture. The meaning of any text includes what the entire biblical witness contributes to it. The doctrinal portion of the interpretative task cannot be omitted.[i]

In a brief article entitled “The Gospel Idea of Preaching,” R. L. Dabney argued that since the preacher “is simply to make the people see and feel what is in the word of God, preaching should usually be what is popularly known as ‘expository.’” Exposition is not done, however, when all the attention is paid to a solitary proposition singled out from its connection “to the exclusion of those truths which God has placed beside it.” No, “the Scriptures are a whole,” and individual passages “must be unfolded in their connection.” If one departs from that method to preach topically upon a single proposition, it should still be a true exposition, “an evolution of the meaning of the spirit in that text.”[ii]

J. I. Packer described how relentlessly doctrinal the Puritans were in their preaching. After explaining the primary importance that preaching be “expository in its method,” Packer points out that “Puritan preaching was *doctrinal in its content.*” He continues:

> The Puritans received the Bible as a self-contained and self-interpreting revelation of God’s mind. This revelation, the ‘body of divinity’ as they called it, is, they held, a unity, to which every part of the ‘best of books’ makes its own distinct contribution. It follows that the meaning of single texts cannot be properly discerned till they are seen in relation to the rest of the ‘body’; and, conversely, that the better one’s grasp of the whole, the more significance one will see in each part. To be a good expositor, therefore, one must first be a good theologian. Theology— truth about God and man— is what God has put into the texts of Scripture, and theology is what preachers must draw out of them.[iii]

Preachers Are Not to Be Purveyors of Boneless Chickens

Another observation must be taken just as seriously, however, for there is no such thing as non-doctrinal preaching. Proclamation from the Christian pulpit establishes doctrine; it inculcates a worldview even in the absence of robust confessional theology. Its hearers become boneless chickens floundering in life with the slimmest apparatus of truth, deceived concerning reality by the many truthless propositions they have been fed from the pulpit. The results of such doctrinal preaching can be traced historically. I am seeking to argue for a fully confessional, biblical exposition in preaching that bears in mind a matured panoramic display of biblical truth as presented in the creeds and confessions of orthodox, evangelical, Reformed Christianity.

Clearer than Jesus

Jesus, in fact, expected gospel preaching not only to be constituted by doctrine, but it necessarily should be more clearly and insistently doctrinal than the message he himself preached. He did not expect them to use his preaching as a model for content. Of course, they were to preach at least everything that he preached and include every assertion he made about himself and the work the Father sent him to do. They were, however, to do greater things than he. This text, found in John 14:12, presupposes the preaching of the gospel as a more excellent work than physical healing, such as the healing of the blind man in the ninth chapter, or even raising one from the dead, such as the raising of Lazarus in the eleventh chapter.

In John 12:37 the Gospel writer remarks, “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.” The work of the apostles in preaching, however, under the new covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit, would bring thousands to faith because the working of the Spirit in gospel preaching to bring about belief is a greater work than the work of the Spirit in the performance of miracles. For this reason, Paul prayed that the Ephesians might know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (Eph. 1:19). The divine power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him above all “rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named” (v. 21), placed us objectively in Christ in that work of redemption,

a work that cannot possibly fail, and then experientially raised us from our deadness of trespasses and sin in the work of regeneration (Eph. 2:1–6).

In the apostles' preaching, and likewise in ours, is fulfilled the request of the Greeks to see Jesus and, thus, the drawing of all men to him (John 12:27, 32). The setting forth of the glory of God in the redemptive work of Christ (John 12:27–30; 2 Cor. 4:4–7) and the knowledge of Jesus—the way, the truth, and the life—that comes through that preaching will be the means of greater works than the miracles of Jesus himself.

The eternal order surpasses infinitely the temporal not only in duration but in quality. Laboring for the bread that endures to eternal life is a good infinitely beyond laboring for the bread that perishes. Even so, engagement in that ministry to which are affixed the blessings of the imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:23–25) surpasses in excellence of nature any ministry of physical healing or restoration of physical life.

This was the essential rationale for Christ's incarnation and ministry all along, but only in the apostolic preaching would its fuller dimensions be explored and exposed. Subsequent to his resurrection, Jesus not only gave a program and authority for the expansion of the gospel to all the world (Matt. 28:19, 20), he initiated the expanded doctrinal understanding of the apostles, established preaching as the means of its propagation, and commanded silence until the empowering and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit should be outpoured (Luke 24:45–49). The authority of Jesus establishes not only our motivation and power but our matter.

When I speak of doctrinal preaching, I intend two things by it. One, preaching should propagate doctrine. The inculcation of some particular teaching of divine revelation arising from its immediate context and placed in a complementary relationship with the whole biblical context should be one goal of every sermon. It is possible to view oneself as an expository preacher and completely miss the mark. If a mature expression of coherently arranged biblical doctrine does not serve as an indispensable element of one's interpretive grid or become a major point of the expository conclusion, biblical exposition fails.

Two, preaching is the product of doctrine. One's preaching should be a

conscious reflection of theology. What you say, how you say it, to whom you say it, and how you conceive its usefulness will arise from your personal systematic theology. You will function honorably or poorly based on two related ideas: the character of your theology itself and the degree to which you fix your attention to its practical outworking.

This chapter will argue that all preaching is doctrinal preaching (for good or for ill), and therefore, any expositional preaching of any text is doctrinal in content. The aim of this chapter is to convince you to be self-consciously doctrinal preachers, in season and out of season, with a triangular reinforcement to your sense of call. First, your doctrinal content should transcend that of Moses and Elijah and consistently be a clearer witness to the person and work of Christ than that of John the Baptist. Second, your preaching is to be more *kerygmatically* doctrinal than that of Jesus. Third, as new covenant ministers, neither your style nor content should veil Christ. You must be utterly and insistently clear in the exposition of "present" truth (2 Peter 1:12 KJV) and unflaggingly hold before the consciences of your hearers the full implications of what it means that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead.

More than a Prophet

In his first letter, Peter reminds his readers that the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ has brought them "joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8). They also recognize the eschatological dimensions of this when they realize that the end, or goal, of their faith is the salvation of their souls. None of them, however, had seen the Lord Jesus in the flesh ("whom having not seen, you love"), and even now, though his physical presence and historical work are not before their eyes, they nevertheless believe and thus have joy.

From what source came their knowledge of this Christ? Peter says it plainly. These things were reported by those who "preached the good news" (v. 12) to them. They preached the gospel in a way that the prophets could never have done, though the prophets foresaw many elements of it. They preached the gospel in a way that John the Baptist never did, though he pointed to the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. They preached the gospel in a way that Christ himself in his

earthly ministry could not, for even those to whom the secrets of the kingdom would be revealed could not bear these truths at that time (John 16:12).

When Peter compared gospel preachers to Old Testament prophets he wrote:

> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:12)

Peter does not deny that the prophets spoke truly and clearly about this gospel. In fact, he mentions specifically that they knew the Messiah would bring "salvation," which would consist of his suffering and following glory, and that it was all the result of grace. When all the prophecies are added together, an amazing picture emerges into which only the Lord Jesus perfectly fits (Luke 24:25–27).

Seeing this glory only in prospect—the bits and pieces of it separated by years and multifaceted historical contexts in the life of Israel, its promises seemingly too demanding for fulfillment in one person, its humiliating aspects too unworthy of his power and beauty—made the actual appearance and fruition startling and new. When Peter, therefore, wrote in 1 Peter 1:25, "This word is the good news that was preached to you," he recognized that all the Messianic work was written beforehand by the prophets.

He pointed out, nevertheless, that its fulfillment in Christ gives a pristine and unforeseen clarity to it. Gospel proclamation, therefore, exceeds the prophetic utterances by as far as Christ's person exceeds the words spoken about him. "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your *faith* and *hope* are in God" (1 Peter 1:20–21, emphasis added).

Faith denotes loving submission to the propitiatory work and perfect

righteousness of Christ as constituting the only substance of forgiveness and right standing in God's sight. The Father's satisfaction with Christ's life and death is seen in his raising him from the dead. This action opens the door into the blessing of faith. *Hope* includes confident and joyful expectation of seeing the glory of God and dwelling in his presence. It anticipates a personal state of holiness, righteousness, incorruptibility, and joy for eternity. These two, faith and hope, come together in this one face, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter supports this by pointing to Isaiah's affirmation of the certainty and eternality of the word of God in Isaiah 40. Specifically, Isaiah predicted the coming of salvation when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Isa. 40:5). He will come with a strong arm to rule as well as a gentle arm to carry his sheep in his bosom (Isa. 40:10, 11). This revelation of the glory of God was inaugurated when Christ was manifested in these last times for us. Preaching the gospel fulfills all that Isaiah envisioned in the incorruptibility of the word of God (Isa. 40:6–8).

Peter continued this theme in his second letter when he wrote of his being an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ (2 Peter 1:16). This personal knowledge of Christ by eyewitness and divine revelation constitutes the word of prophecy being made "more sure" (1:19 KJV). Christ's own person and work brings into sharp focus all that the prophets had said about him. This word of the prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit, can never be seen now in any other light than the light of Christ. The history of revelation requires that we never read the Old Testament isolated from the person and work of Christ. Peter was insistent that his readers be established in the "present truth" (1:12 KJV), that is, the truth as now seen in the light of Christ. He issued severe warnings against those who would recede from the fullness of knowledge that exists in Christ and would bring in "destructive heresies" (2:1). The people were to "remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through their apostles" (3:2). The prophets now may be interpreted more clearly, surely, and evangelically through the word given to the apostles.

The apostolic ministry, and that of those who follow in their train, is preeminently a doctrinal ministry. A relentless exposition of the gospel of

justification by faith and all its biblical implications and applications is at the heart of Christian ministry. The deity and humanity of Christ, his substitutionary, propitiatory death, his resurrection and ascension, the coming of the Spirit, the condemnation of sinners and the corruption of their hearts, the nature and necessity of the new birth, the true nature of saving faith, evangelical repentance, imputed righteousness, progressive sanctification, the nature of assurance, resurrection, judgment, heaven, hell—a synthesized wholeness of truth should inform every expository sermon in such a way as to forestall any being "carried away with the error of lawless people" but rather that they might "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:17, 18).

Jesus himself taught that gospel ministry surpassed in excellence the ministry of the prophets. Jesus placed John the Baptist above all the prophets prior to him, indeed, above all other persons: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). At least this much is clear from the text—John's prophetic greatness directly conforms to his being the messenger sent before the face of the Messiah. Jesus emphasized, "This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you'" (Matt. 11:10; see also Mal. 3:1). John the Baptist was the prophet nearest to the Christ and would announce him in person, thus being "more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9).

Greatness in the things of God is proportionate to what one knows, believes, loves, and announces concerning the person and work of Christ. John was greater, therefore, than all prophets who preceded him precisely because he pointed to Christ himself and said, "Behold, the lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." Christ affirmed John's greatness even though John, from prison, had to send messengers to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). The answer Jesus gave evidently would be sufficient for John (vv. 4–6).

But greater than John is he who is least in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, those who are not offended in Christ (Matt. 11:6), those to whom the Son has revealed the Father, who have come to Christ to find rest, who see and believe the fulfillment of the sign of the prophet Jonah

(Matt. 12:39), who recognize that a greater than Jonah and a greater than Solomon is here (Matt. 12:41, 42), and who are able to point to the crucified and risen One as the sole way of salvation are greater than John the Baptist. Their greatness is measured in terms of their knowledge of Christ's completed work, their submission to it, and their clarity, faithfulness, and persistence in proclaiming it.

Apparently, John's message was single-minded: repentance in light of the coming of the kingdom of God. He never varied from it; it was mortally provocative and relevant to the sins of the age as well as the universal sins of the heart. Failure to attract attention—whether hate, fear, or submission—was never one of John's problems. Now that the One to whom John pointed has come and completed the sacrificial portion of the redemptive work, every preacher of the gospel pointing back to this Christ should have his plate full and overflowing with biblical texts eleven months pregnant with doctrinal instruction. Christ and him crucified is the wisdom of God and the power of God; no preacher can ever unpack everything that is there. No human life is long enough to preach all that Peter called the "present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). Present Christian preaching in light of both substance and clarity is greater than that of John the Baptist.

Greater Works than These

In John 14:12, Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever believes in me . . . greater works than these will he do." What did Jesus mean by such an audacious statement? What could be greater than the deaf hearing, the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, and the dead being raised? When Jesus both healed and forgave the lame man let down through the roof, which of these two actions was the greater? The text leads us to deduce that forgiveness is greater. Though it is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," since no immediate verification is possible, and harder to say, "Take up your bed and walk," since failure of verification would immediately discredit Jesus, the harder of the two to perform is actually forgiveness. Creating and controlling the physical realm merely calls for omnipotence; forgiveness calls for ineffable absolutism in the moral realm combined with infinite wisdom, impeccable holiness, and a

means to achieve a just reconciliation of moral enemies. The latter is harder but could only be done by one who also could do the former. For this reason, after Jesus sent word to John about the physical healing, he added, “And the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:5).

Jesus’s work could hardly be distinguished from his words. They were consistent with each other and verified one another. Jesus told Philip, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10). To the Jewish leaders who sought to pin the charge of blasphemy on him he said, “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works”—the message that he wanted them to believe was “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:37–38).

Now just believing the *circumincession* is not the same as saving faith, but it was a prerequisite for a saving understanding of the gospel. That the man Jesus was also one in essence, purpose, and power with the Father is not the gospel but is a *sine qua non* of the gospel. The acknowledgment of this truth necessarily preceded and prepared for the events of the cross. Not until Peter could confess, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), could Jesus begin telling about his eventual betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. Until then he must teach them slowly.

Jesus’s parables meet this requirement perfectly. A two-fold purpose ran through the parables: spiritual truth necessary for living well before God, on the one hand, and understanding the character and task of the Messiah, on the other. They enforce these purposes by degrees, at different levels of clarity and with disciplined aggressiveness. Some parables, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, had immediate and clear application to the spiritual and/or cultural issues of the day while exploring at least one of the radical elements of divine forgiveness. While it answers the question “Who is my neighbor,” bringing immediate conviction to the existential situation, in a more profound way it pointed to Jesus as the only true neighbor, the only one who loved his neighbor as himself, who laid down his life even for his enemies. Post-resurrection revelation would enlarge the field of interpretation and application of such

parables.

Other parables intend a different type of instruction. While all the parables, at an abstract level, may bear close scrutiny in developing theories of education and communication, Jesus did not give them as a model of how we are to preach. They were specially adapted means to provide a temporary check to the possibility of ignorant enthusiasm toward his status as Messiah or preemptive destruction for blasphemous claims. They led to both disclosure and obscurity (Mark 4:11, 12, 25). Often after giving a parable to the crowd, Jesus would take his disciples aside and explain to them the meaning: “He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mark 4:34).

At the end of his ministry, immediately before his arrest and crucifixion, a level of understanding emerged which prompted his disciples to say, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God” (John 16:29–30). Even at that moment, however, their more mature and even essential understanding of the gospel was yet future. Jesus had said only a few moments before, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (v. 12). His goal was not to teach them all things necessary for true gospel preaching; his main teaching task was to fix in their hearts that he indeed came from the Father in the fullest sense and that the cross he faced in Jerusalem was not a mistake or tragic detour of purpose. Instead, he prepared them to understand this event as necessary and constitutive of his redemptive Lordship. His preeminent functional task was to accomplish the work of redemption.

The event of the cross would be completed by Christ himself—he would experience the unmitigated wrath of God, and he would not be spared and, therefore, be able to utter the words of historical finality: “It is finished.” The content for communication of this event, however, came under the work of the Spirit. He would glorify Christ and take the things of Christ and show them to the apostles, in conformity with the purpose of the Father. As he guided them into all truth, Peter would learn that “[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to

sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). He would also learn that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Only later would John be able to say, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The culmination of redemptive history came in the events of the cross. The culmination of revelatory history came in the post-resurrection, post-ascension work of the Holy Spirit in unveiling the mystery of the gospel of the cross to the apostles and prophets. Paul states this clearly in Ephesians 3:3, 5: “How the mystery was made known to me by revelation . . . which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

Paul’s insistent exposition of the utter and absolute necessity of preaching the cross of Christ, with its content of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, he explained by affirming, “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7).

Paul made clear that this message of the cross was revealed to him by the Spirit of God. In no other way could it have been known. Paul strained the edges of exuberance in giving the Colossians some insight into this transcendent apostolic task. In his ministry to the body of Christ (that is, the church), Paul was commissioned “to make the word of God fully known” (Col. 1:25). By this he meant that the fullness of revelation would come in that age so that all that had been mysterious would be brought into the full light of divine revelation. This mystery had been “hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints” (v. 26). It is to them, the saints (a word Paul uses to describe those set apart by the Holy Spirit to believe the gospel), that “God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27).

Both the time and manner of the appearing of the fullness of this revelation regulate the task of its proclaimers. That message demands

that everything spoken to God's temple must conform to it. Maturity has come in the gospel. Any attempt to live and teach in the typological, ceremonial, and preparatory compromises and pollutes the fullness of truth and grace that were brought by Jesus Christ (Acts 15:11; John 1:16-18). Any message not spoken in the full light of Christ's redeeming cross is vain and will come to nothing in the day of judgment. The message of the steward who speaks of the mystery will be the full range of doctrines implied in the cross.

2. Ministers of the New Covenant

David Larsen, in his discussion of narrative preaching, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, warns against any "notion of jettisoning conceptual or propositional preaching" and refuses to "capitulate to the modern preference for images as over against ideas"; he nevertheless wants to see evangelicals become open to a responsible use of narrative, in a manner he described as "intelligently and skillfully," to "counteract our present tendency to overintellectualize Christianity."[iv] Christianity (the fullness of the person and work of Christ) can be under-believed, under-loved, and under-practiced, but I am unaware of any current dangers in overintellectualizing Christianity. The majesty of its truth and its explanatory value will always transcend the capacity of our intellects. We cannot make it appear to be more intellectually challenging than it is. Larsen's intent, however, is on target—that the literary charm of the entire corpus of Holy Scripture should inform our preaching style.

Larsen punctuates his discussion with reminders that preaching cannot forsake the theological task. Preparation involves four areas: spiritual, exegetical, theological, and homiletical prepar-ation. He is convinced that the analogy of faith and the analogy of Scripture demand that narrative preaching be seen within the larger theological picture. As well as faithfulness to the immediate contextual intention of a passage, one must also see his interpretation "of a given text in the light of the whole. . . . The preacher is inevitably a theologian in this sense." Larsen is at cross-purposes with the "growing evangelical impatience with theology and doctrine. . . . The abdication of theology with its insistence on the glorious, transcendent, Almighty God will lead to the humanizing horizontalization of Christianity." He recognized that narrative preaching tends toward mere moralism, that is, "sweet advice, gentle nudgings toward more benevolent behavior, unctious elaborations of the obvious without any emphasis on the divine dynamisms."[v]

These healthy caveats, however, could be supported by a more sustained biblical defense of the necessity of the theologically driven

sermon. More than just a reminder that our preaching must acknowledge a larger theological framework, the progress of biblical revelation and redemptive events make a certain kind of theological preaching a theological requirement.

In his discussion of preaching the parables, Larsen agrees with Henry Mitchell that the parables are “far more powerful than abstract essays and sermons, expressing symbolically that which escapes the narrow bounds of literal, direct discourse.”[vi] While we may agree that parables have many qualities about them far more intriguing than “direct discourse,” we must not think that justifies substituting parables for sermons. Nor must we concede it to be a violation of the purpose of a parable to include the larger picture of redemptive history in interpreting and preaching it.

Post-modern skepticism has revived fascination with narrative. Unsure of telling anyone what to believe or of rebuking and correcting, narrative is a kinder, gentler way of talking and allows more latitude for each individual to insert his own needed meaning into the presentation. Sometimes evangelicals see the parables in this light. Since Jesus taught through parables, they reason, it must be the best method for communicating the biblical message. Much of the preparation time is spent, not in exegesis, but in writing a story. Supposedly biblical truths, perhaps even redemptive in nature, are couched within the narrative. The congregation, then, is supposed to draw helpful conclusions. The minister may even suggest some meaningful lessons from the story.

This method has several problems. First, the pastor has no messianic “secret” to unfold by degrees. Second, he has no firsthand intuitively present knowledge of the heavenly realm that he may use as a foundation for a carefully constructed story having a controlled meaning in all its parts. All his knowledge of divine things comes from the propositions of Scripture. Third, this is an unwarranted use of the parable. Such a use misperceives the redemptive/historical place of the use of parables in the ministry of Jesus. It substitutes a means of communication that on some occasions was purposefully partial and ambiguous for the more direct proclamation implied by the later and

clearer light of redemptive truth. Fourth, the minister of the gospel has specific instructions to give himself consistently to the careful teaching of doctrine. We must avoid laying before ourselves the temptation to substitute our words for God's. In making full proof of his ministry the preacher must "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Preachers have the calling to preach the gospel in a way that even Christ himself could not have done during his life on earth. The Holy Spirit taught the apostles many things that they could not bear during that time. We now are heirs of that fuller explication of Christ's glory. To preach in such a way that God shows his glory in the face of Christ constitutes the high calling of the gospel ministry. Jesus would not approve the kind of hampered exegesis that omits the larger picture of his passion and the interpretation of that passion through the Spirit's ministry to the apostles. The biblical flow of redemption history and Jesus's own expectations require an application of that knowledge to the entire canon. Any exposition which draws to a close before opening the window to allow christological light to brighten its dusk must bear John's judgment: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). Far beyond the temporary earthly healing of body parts or resuscitation of a dead body or even the contemporary fascination with pulpit therapy for fragmented emotions, our ministry points, by the power of the Spirit and the completed work of Christ, to redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

While it would be insensitive and foolish to ignore how fallen humanity perceives its needs, it would be spiritual betrayal to allow those perceptions to go unchallenged or, at least, unrefined. In John 6, Jesus himself unveiled the temporal values and fleshly-mindedness of his followers who looked for bread instead of salvation. Some ministers spend time giving friendly advice and succor to those who are distressed and depressed in the manner of Ahab, when Naboth refused him his vineyard, or who are upset like Haman at the exaltation of Mordecai.

The wisdom and ability to carefully analyze and redirect perceived needs or culturally driven pressures in terms of biblically defined issues

arise from the pastor's careful attention to doctrine. This doctrine establishes a worldview in which the human situation is dominated by a picture of rebellion, corruption, and the sentence of condemnation. It details an answer to this predicament in the reconciling work of Christ. The eventual fulfillment of our humanity comes only in conformity to Christ, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren when our vile bodies are changed and fashioned according to his glorious body: "Greater things than these ye shall do."

A Well-Defined Calling

The ministry to which Christian preachers are called carries with it a doctrinal expectation couched within the nomenclature of the position. In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Paul called himself a "minister of Christ" and a "steward of the mysteries of God" (KJV). In 2 Corinthians 3:6, he said that God had made them "able ministers of the new testament," or covenant. In addition to being an apostle having the "glorious gospel . . . committed to [his] trust" (1 Tim. 1:11 KJV), he was a preacher and a teacher of the Gentiles "in faith and verity" (1 Tim. 2:7 KJV), or "faith and truth" (NASB), or as the NIV states paraphrastically, "of the true faith to the Gentiles."

In fact, all of Paul's instructions in his first letter to Timothy focus on the means and conditions by which God's church will be established in the truth of the gospel and be enabled to preach that undiluted gospel to the world. He is jealous for the "knowledge of the truth" (2:4), and he sees the church as the "pillar and buttress of the truth" (3:15) defined in a confessional christological summary. A good minister teaches his people and nourishes himself on "the words of the faith and . . . good doctrine" (4:6); he gives himself to a public ministry of teaching and pays close attention to his doctrine for the sake of his salvation and that of those who hear him (4:16); and he is to be aware that the one who advocates a doctrine different from that he received from Paul is conceited and deprived of the truth (6:4-5).

So many challenges to God's truth arise from the human heart and the conditions of a fallen world that a minister must give himself full time to guarding "what has been entrusted" and protecting others from going "astray from the faith" (6:20, 21 NASB). There is never a time when a

straightforward exposition of those revealed mysteries of God is irrelevant or inappropriate for a congregation.

Clarity

Several qualifications characterize this minister of the new covenant. First, the minister is not a candidate for awards in rhetoric or elegant adornment of language. His first intention is to use plain, clear, bold speech. His manner of preaching is not clever or creative; he avoids the superficiality of artfulness in communication and focuses on forthrightness and clarity in setting forth the truth. Any subtlety of communication which has the effect of hiding the great doctrines of the faith or seeks to avoid a chin-to-chin confrontation with the world's system is not characteristic of new covenant ministry. Any substitution for preaching or attempt to appeal to the worldly interests of the unregenerate at the appointed time for the gathering of God's people to hear God's Word is alien to new covenant ministry.

Paul said, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (2 Cor. 3:12), or "we use great plainness of speech" (KJV). That means, as he explains further, that a new covenant minister does not handle the Word of God deceitfully, but "by setting forth the truth plainly" (2 Cor. 4:2 NIV), he commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. One defining aspect of the new covenant is its open boldness of setting forth the truth. Under Moses, a veil remained over the covenant's final outcome. That veil is removed, however, in Christ. We stare now at the full glare of truth in the face of Christ. The veiling of the gospel no longer is in the partial and incomplete body of revelation or a promised-only-but-unfulfilled redemption. Plainness of speech concerning the revealed mystery constitutes the sober obligation as well as the glorious privilege of the gospel minister. We will investigate more on this issue in the final chapter.

Spirit and Truth

Second, a minister of the new covenant functions with full awareness of utter dependence on the Spirit for success. Now that the revelatory veil

is removed, the veiling exists only in the coldness and spiritual deadness of human hearts. The knowledge of the glory of God shines in the gospel about Christ. Those who can't see it have only their moral depravity and submission to Satan to blame (Eph. 2:1, 2; 2 Cor. 4:4). Seeing the fullness of its truthfulness lies in seeing it in the person and work of Christ, for in Christ, the veil is removed. He himself is its fulfillment. In the new covenant, the Spirit so identifies with the purpose of Christ in the ministry of righteousness that all his ministry is bound up in showing us Christ— "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). That is, in opening our hearts to relish the beauty of his holiness, all the work of the Spirit is bound up finally in showing the sinner Christ (2 Cor. 4: 5, 6; 3:18).

The truth to which the heart is opened by the Spirit must be set forth boldly and with careful attention to the integrity of its content. This work is done with the joyful confidence of knowing that the Spirit is even more earnest than we about this and infinitely more competent. In addition, he is eternally and constitutionally more solicitous for the glory of Christ as the means of uniting sinners with each other and with God through the redemptive love of the triune God.

The nature of the new covenant ministry, from the standpoint of the preacher, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the identity of the people of God as the people of new birth, requires it. The ministry of these last days has "surpassing glory" (2 Cor. 3:10 NIV) for its content. The ministry under Moses consisted of great glory in that the character of God and the immutability of his holiness had an awe-inspiring display in the giving of the law. This glory, however, was the harbinger of death.

Law and Gospel

A third qualification, therefore, of the new covenant minister is his learning to discern the relation between law and gospel. The new covenant, by contrast with the extrinsic glory of the law, writes the law not on tablets of stone but by the Spirit in the hearts of his people. Now the law functions no longer as a mortician but, by the Spirit, as an elixir purifying the heart for future bliss. The beauty of Christ gradually unfolds, and the image of our future dawns on our consciousness through a

proper understanding of that law (2 Cor. 3:3-8; 1 John 3:1-9). The road to hope, purity, and healed relationships under the new covenant leads through a wholesome and fulsome understanding of the relationship between law and gospel, justification and sanctification, present mortification and future glorification. Any minister acting consistently with his call must give himself to this understanding and to the task of preaching these fundamentals to his people until the lies of the world are knocked out of their minds and replaced with these biblical truths.

The old covenant glory brought condemnation. God's character shone brilliantly in this reality, and old covenant history demonstrates the relentless prosecution of death and judgment from Eden to the last words of this covenant: "Lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction" (Mal. 4:6). Having begun with the creation of heaven and earth, it ends with the contemplation of smiting the earth with the full force of the justly condemnatory sentence of God. Within this same law, however, is found the promise of the "Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2 KJV). Condemnation, a "great wrath from the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 7:12 KJV) comes because of the breaking of the law (Zech. 5:1-4; Mal. 2:8-10). But God will bring salvation (Zech. 8:3, 7, 13-15. et al.). This healing, prosperity, and justification somehow are bound up with a substitutionary fulfillment of the law (Zech. 3; 6:9-15; 12:9-13:1; 13:7-9). When the shepherd, the fellow of God, is struck (Zech. 13:7), a remnant is gathered to be refined as silver and proven as gold.

This surpassingly excellent covenant, which honors the law without bringing condemnation and grants forgiveness and righteousness without forsaking justice, calls for unashamed, unrelenting proclamation. The obligation to this falls with peculiar weight on the shoulders of the heirs of the apostolic message, those faithful men who have been entrusted with the gospel. The new covenant minister must be able to unite with the voice of Paul that, despite trouble, perplexity, persecution, punch-happy opposers, and the sentence of death, "We believe, therefore we have spoken" (2 Cor. 4:13, author's translation).

Apostolic Succession

Ministers of the new covenant emulate the apostles in tasks that

indeed are imitable. This succession does not extend from ordination in unbroken organic succession. Ministers of the gospel succeed the apostles in the proclamation of their message and the embracing of their sufferings. Peter, Paul, and John are our models as new covenant ministers. Their writings consist of reiterations of their preaching. All three remind their readers that they now write what they have spoken before (Gal. 1:8-11; 1 Cor. 4:14-17; 2 Peter 1:12-15; 1 John 1:3-5; 2:7-9; 21-26; 3:5, 6; 5:13).

In these apostolic writings no dichotomy exists between doctrine and devotion, right thinking and right action, and divine truth and the divine life in human hearts. Their constant message can be summed up in the words of John, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God” (2 John 9), or of Paul when he speaks to the Corinthians of the gospel he preached to them: “By which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain” (1 Cor. 15:2). In their writings one will find the exposition, reiteration, interpretation, and application of doctrine.

In Galatians, Paul reminds the readers that he preached and applied a large number of vital doctrines: the revelatory nature of the gospel, substitutionary atonement and the centrality of the cross in redemption, the incarnation, union with Christ, justification by faith, adoption, the relation between the moral and ceremonial law, regeneration as the fulfillment of circumcision, the relation between law and gospel, the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant, the work of the Spirit, the conflict between Spirit and flesh, the nature of Christian freedom, evidences of true saving faith, Christian stewardship, support of the ministry, church discipline, and passing or implicit references to other doctrines.

Paul emphasized that his doctrinal expositions had nothing to do with an effort to please men. The source of the doctrine was God, and the one whose favor he courted was God (Gal. 1:10). John Broadus took account of this when he said, “In regard to preaching *unpopular* doctrines, such as Election before some audiences, Future Punishment, Depravity, and even Missions before others; one comprehensive rule may be given, Be

faithful and fearless, but skilful and affectionate."[vii]

In a brief section of ethical admonition in Colossians 3:1-17, Paul supports his exhortations with the doctrines of resurrection, mortification of sin, the ascension of Christ, union with Christ, the return of Christ, sin, the wrath of God in judgment, regeneration and the new principle of spiritual life, creation, the image of God, the passing of the ceremonial law, election, forgiveness, atoning grace, love as the unifying principle of reality, reconciliation, calling, and fundamentals of worship.

To survey other letters of Paul as well as the writings of Peter and John overwhelms one's consciousness with a view of all reality interpreted from a divine viewpoint. Eternity, time, the past, the present, the future, the visible world, the invisible world, created things, and the Uncreated One all come under the purview of their teaching. Everything is applied naturally to the lives of their readers. A full six-month preaching strategy could be absorbed by preaching the doctrinal content and connections of Ephesians 1:1-14 and then unpacking the practical outworking of that doctrine in Ephesians 5:1-21.

Having escaped the corruption in the world caused by lust and having turned from idols to serve a God who is alive and real, an entirely new way of acting and thinking must be promoted—a life and mind consistent with the God who is there. Truth operating by love constitutes the foundation for a worldview which both analyzes and harnesses the energies of art, music, philosophy, history, science, economics, sociology, psychology, and any other imagination that may be corrupted and set against the knowledge of Christ.

One would not be surprised that the apostles were doctrinal preachers faithful to protect and proclaim the deposit of faith granted by revelation. They also, however, considered themselves *fellow-elders* and expected their contemporaries, and subsequent generations until "the Chief Shepherd appears" (1 Peter 5:4), to feed the flock of God. Until the heavens dissolve in fire and the elements melt with fervent heat and the place wherein dwelleth righteousness appears, preachers must teach the truth that accords with godliness.

Doctrine is relevant because it is a matter of divine revelation. Its relevance for God's people is not dependent on the atmosphere of a culture, nor is the duty of a minister to preach it dependent unconditionally on the ability of a people to receive it. Our goal in preaching should be perfection and unity of the faith, a final fullness and congruity between head knowledge and heart affection that the New Testament recognizes as *understanding*. This fulfills the role of prophet, brings healing to the nations, even life from death, and is a test of being a faithful steward of the mysteries of the new covenant.

Conclusion

The Old Testament gives a sobering look at the consequences of unfaithful priests and shepherds. The priest is a "messenger of the Lord of Hosts"— the people should "seek the law at his mouth" and his "lips should keep knowledge" (Mal. 2:7 KJV). Broadus remarked that doctrine is "the preacher's chief business. Truth is the lifeblood of piety, without which we cannot maintain its vitality or support its activity." And preaching doctrine, "the entire body of Scripture teaching upon any particular subject, when collected and systematically arranged," is the preacher's "chief means of doing good."[viii]

The unfaithful priest, however, turns blessings into curses and fosters treachery among the people, making them an abomination before God (Mal. 2:8-11). Unfaithful shepherds may be given to the people as a judgment upon them, creating the grounds for judgments against the shepherds also. Zechariah envisioned being given the tools of a foolish shepherd (Zech. 11:15), so that instead of seeking the lost, binding the wounded, and feeding the hungry, the shepherd feasted on the flock and destroyed their means of protection. God says about that shepherd, "Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!" (Zech. 11:17).

In considering such warnings, we must carefully follow the implications of similar admonitions given by the writer of Hebrews: "For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every

transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard” (Heb. 2:2-3).

3. Jonathan Edwards's Theory of Doctrinal Preaching

Jonathan Edwards's preaching was a display of agony for the souls of men. Edwards noted on Luke 22:44, "Christ, in these strong cries and tears, wherein he wrestled with God in a bloody sweat for the success of his sufferings in the salvation of the elect, hath given us example how we should seek our own salvation, and the salvation of others, whose souls are committed to our care."[ix] This consumed his life.

A Preacher First and Last

The profundity of Edwards's musings in an effort to subdue his entire being— body, mind, affections, and will— to the glory of God produced such a variety of tantalizing ideas that historians of thought have lamented his captivity to an antiquarian system that bound his mind to reflection on "irrelevancies." What a waste to spend one's time and energies thinking about God and his revelation to men! It is true that Edwards "continues to inspire, convict, enrage, and beguile as no other American Puritan."[x]

Theologians and brothers Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr found Edwards's analysis of human nature transcendently engaging and far more profound than the facile optimism of early twentieth-century psychology. Vernon Parrington lamented that religion had robbed America of a great scientist. Atheist Perry Miller saw Edwards as "infinitely more than a theologian" and "one of America's five or six major artists." He said that while Edwards wrote from "a primitive religious conception which often seems hopelessly out of touch with even his own day," his insights into science and psychology were "so much ahead of his time that our own can hardly be said to have caught up with him." He is "unique, an aboriginal and monolithic power."[xi]

Miller contended in a profound but only half-true proposition: "The real life of Jonathan Edwards was the life of his mind."[xii] Ola Elizabeth

Winslow was more on target when she wrote, “The traceable outline of external events is of distinctly secondary importance; the inner curve of spiritual experience is all important.” Indeed, she reported, Edwards had “wrestled with the angels” and “in terms of genius Jonathan Edwards was the first of his race.”[xiii]

Each of these enthusiastic admirers relegated Edwards’s theological heritage simply to an accidental historical curiosity unrelated to the true power of his mind. Nothing, however, was more fitting for the insatiable energy of his mind than the subjection of it to the heart. Only in that combination could any mortal learn to contemplate and meditate on the infinite joy and beauty of the knowledge of God. Should his thinking and probing of the affections have been closed within the confines of an atheological world, he would not have soared, no matter how transcendent his natural genius. His observations and meditations would soon seem banal, outmoded, and surpassed by the science, technology, and psychology of subsequent generations. Given the field of infinity, however, nothing could hold him down. Only the ultimate incomprehensibility of God and a conscientious commitment to the credibility and sufficiency of divine revelation would serve as a check to his speculations; at the same time, that provided the most invigorating and endlessly challenging aspect of his thought and practice.

Had he been stripped of God and human sin as true subjects in the world of thought, he would be a forgotten man. These polarities provided Edwards an endless subject matter. Given his worldview, held tenaciously and conscientiously, his gifts serve every generation and press us all forward. He saw himself as a preacher and interacted profoundly with issues of reason, revelation, and human affections for the sake of being a more searching and truthful proclaimer of the gospel. He refuted the gods of his contemporaries, shredded the facile and congenial deism and the self-congratulatory anthropocentric enlightenment philosophies, and opened the door to an endless exploration of the God of the Bible. All this was done that he might be a better preacher.

Preaching Theory

Particularly important is Edwards's concentration on preaching as the premiere human activity. This is the ordained way in which the redemptive accomplishment of Christ will come into human experience. Edwards studied simplicity in style in order that the power of the message would be in the assertions, and reassertion, of the truth. Each sermon consisted, generally, of a text, a doctrine, and a set of applications. The text was usually short but explained in a brief expository manner within a canonical context. From this was derived a doctrine, usually a single sentence of the leading truth of the passage which he would then expand with several propositions. Third, Edwards would reiterate the doctrine in an intense manner as he applied every aspect of it with its several implications to the congregation.

Andrew Fuller, while encouraging a young minister to pursue "unity of design" in his sermons, made comments on preaching and opined that "the human mind is so formed as to delight in unity." He used Jonathan Edwards as his leading example. Though in some respects Edwards's sermons are inimitable, "yet in this, they are worthy of notice." They are built on "one great leading truth: and that truth is the spirit of his text, and serves for the title of his sermon." Referring to a publication of thirty-three sermons, Fuller noted how the title of each sermon throws "an amazing light upon the text." Fuller pointed out that "the sentiment expressed in the title he calls the *doctrine* of the text; and all he says is to *illustrate, establish*, or *improve* it." He encouraged his young friend to seek to reduce his sermons to a title, and he would see that "many of what are called sermons would be found to require three or four titles to answer their contents; which at once proves that, properly speaking, they are not sermons."[xiv]

In preaching, Edwards proclaimed and applied the many doctrines which compose the revelation of Scripture. He searched for appropriate words, analogies, and images and engaged in as much precision and elaboration as a particular text in light of the whole of revelation required. His aim was to strike home to the conscience the necessity of the soul's relish for the beauty of God. Everything in the Bible required him to do this.

The introduction to *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* describes Edwards's commitment to the task of preaching:

> The central vehicle for revivalism was pulpit oratory, and for virtually his entire life Edwards was first and foremost a preacher. The efflorescence of scientific, philosophical, and later, psychological rumination took place within a context of weekly preaching on the Word. . . . These sermons . . . under-girded almost all of his philosophical work and lent that work much of its urgency. Ultimately, Edwards' ideas, vision, and insights were applied to the central task of converting hardened sinners in the pews from love of self-righteousness to disinterested love of God and divine righteousness. (*Reader*, xvii)

Edwards developed his sermons in accordance with an idea that included both experiential and theoretical components. At the experiential level, he did not share his grandfather Solomon Stoddard's idiosyncratic defense of the usefulness of unregenerate ministers. Though God might sovereignly use such through the power of the gospel itself, the minister's self-consciousness must rest on a deep experience of the grace of God. This undergirded an understanding of the true nature of saving faith. He must not be a "blind leader of the blind" but be fully acquainted with "experimental religion, and not ignorant of the inward operations of the Spirit of God" (*Works*, 2:957).

At the theoretical level, he called into service all the intellectual powers with which he so abundantly was endowed, for the minister must be "pure clear and full in his doctrine." He must "not lead his people into errors, but teach them the truth only" and show himself "well acquainted with the written word of God, mighty in the Scriptures, and able to instruct and convince gainsayers" (*Works*, 2:957).

In all this Edwards reflects most worthily his Puritan heritage. Self-examination concerning an experience of saving grace, precise analysis of biblical components of the objective work of God outside of us, and a morphology of the work of the Spirit within us constituted the constant task of the Puritan minister. All these were necessary if he were to be a curer of souls. Edwards was in dead earnest in this calling.

Experiential Preparation

Edwards's own spiritual encounter served as a background for the intensity of his sermonic application. He recorded, in May or June of 1721, his first memory of "that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since." It came to him on reading the words "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen." These became a path for his soul to "a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing" ever experienced before. His whole experience became concentrated in a desire to "enjoy that God, and be rapt up in him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him for ever!" His prayers now were engaged "with a new sort of affection" (*Reader*, 283–84). He pointed to an identifiable experience in which the union of affection and doctrine became a necessary element in his thought:

> From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations on them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him. . . . The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of soul, that I know not how to express." (*Reader*, 284)

These impressions, ever enlarging and intensifying, formed the basis of his life's work. His analyses of revival, religious affections, the will, original sin, true virtue, and the end for which God created the world showed the same grand assumption—that human purpose is fully constituted in a new sense and relish for the excellence and holy beauty of the divine being.[xv]

Precisely this quality fascinated Edwards when he first heard of Sarah Pierrepont. In a famous description of his then-future bride, Edwards remarked how the young lady from New Haven was "beloved of that

almighty Being, who made and rules the world," in such palpable experiences that "she expects after a while to be received up where he is . . . to be ravished with his love and delight forever." This consciousness fills her with "a strange sweetness in her mind, and singular purity in her affections" so that "you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world" (*Reader*, 281).

That the ministry should experience these graces was axiomatic to Edwards. In a sermon on John 5:35, "He was a burning and shining light," Edwards illustrates the necessity of both heat and light in a true gospel minister. A burning light has a heart filled with ardor; his ministrations are done in fervency and zeal:

> His fervent zeal, which has its foundation and spring in that holy and powerful flame of love to God and man, that is in his heart appears in the fervency of his prayers to God . . . and in the earnestness and power with which he preaches the word of God, declares to sinners their misery, and warns them to fly from the wrath to come, and reproves and testifies against all ungodliness; and the unfeigned earnestness and compassion with which he invites the weary and heavy laden to their Saviour; and the fervent love with which he counsels and comforts the saints; and the holy zeal, courage, and stedfastness, with which he maintains the exercise of discipline in the house of God, notwithstanding all the opposition he meets with in that difficult part of the ministerial work. (*Works*, 2:957)

Genuine and lasting heat, however, comes only from true light. Zeal, no matter how high it is pitched, abstracted from the spiritual understanding of truth, will produce bluster but neither love nor holiness. Edwards begins part III, section IV of *Religious Affections*: "Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge." Any affection not arising from "light in the understanding" most certainly is not spiritual (*Works*, 281–82).

This light in the understanding, however, is not mere information, nor only a notional understanding of true doctrine. Spiritual understanding of

Scripture involves having “the eyes of the mind opened to behold the wonderful, spiritual excellency of the glorious things contained in the true meaning of it” (*Works*, 1:285). These truths always were in the Scripture, but the eyes were blind to their excellency.

A heightening of affections by the increase of spiritual understanding may arise from seeing “the amiable and bright manifestations of the divine perfections, the excellency and sufficiency of Christ, the suitableness of the way of salvation by him and the spiritual glory of the precepts and promises of the Scripture” (*Works*, 1:285). The sight of the glory of these gospel elements gives an intuitive certainty of their truthfulness. This Spirit-taught certainty constituted one of the chief labors of the apostolic ministry, according to Edwards. Hear Paul describe the goal of his labors in proclamation to the Gentiles—he prayed that “their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” (Col. 2:2).

Edwards argued that this assurance of knowledge was not irrational or opposed to reason but could only arise from the work of the Spirit changing the heart and opening the spiritual eyes to see the “fitness and suitableness of this way, the admirable wisdom of the contrivance, and the perfect answerableness to our necessities of the provision that the gospel exhibits.” When this true sense of divine beauty is given, “the soul discerns the beauty of every part of the gospel scheme.” Such assurance is essential experiential preparation for preaching (*Works*, 1:291).

Theoretical Preparation

Edwards would teach us that effective preaching involves substantial theoretical commitments prior to engagement in the practice. The first in importance, and that which would determine the direction of each sermon and the substance of its application, would be an integrated grasp of orthodox doctrine. This will be illustrated throughout the discussion of Edwards’s integration of doctrine into his sermons.

A close second in determining the content and structure of sermons is one’s grasp of the character of the canon. True and needful knowledge of

God comes through Holy Scripture. “It is only the word of God, contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us christian divinity.” The Scriptures comprehend “all christian doctrines as they are in Jesus, and all christian rules directing us in living to God by Christ” (*Works*, 2:158).

Supporting those convictions, Edwards labored to express a cogent understanding of the relation between reason and affections and the appropriate use of words and arguments in light of that relationship. Knowledge of Scripture consists of natural, rational, or speculative knowledge, on the one hand, and practical, spiritual heart knowledge, on the other. The latter is most essential but cannot exist without the former. Edwards noted, “It is intended that we should seek the former *in order* to the latter.” While the latter is of “greatest importance,” one must of necessity have a speculative knowledge, for “it is of infinite importance in this respect, that without it we can have no spiritual or practical knowledge” (*Works*, 2:158). Toward what affect should each sermon move in light of these issues, and what stewardship of both language and truth rests upon the preacher of the gospel?[xvi]

Consistency of the Canon

His view of the progress and coherence of biblical revelation clearly penetrates every aspect of his preaching. Though the quantity of revelation increased throughout the history of the Bible, its quality was of one piece, and its purpose was always single. The same qualitative or essential content was present in the gospel in every biblical epoch; thus, the gospel never altered from age to age, and evangelical faith always exhibited the same character. Man’s duty has always been to love God with a benevolent love because of the infinity of God’s being and his unique self-existence, and with complacent love because of his infinite loveliness and perfection. Since the fall, it has always been necessary to find favor with this God only through the mediatorial sacrifice of the seed of the woman— the Son of God.

The fullness, however, or quantity of the revelation has not always been the same but gradually has increased until the fulfillment of all in the incarnation, passion, and exaltation of Christ. An even greater display of

it all remains to be revealed at the appearance of Christ, but it will still be of the same quality as that given in Eden. This mode of interpretation and development struck Edwards as “most beautiful and entertaining” (*Reader*, 323).

For Edwards, therefore, the whole of Scripture comes to bear on every individual text. Seemingly “harmless” texts are given an ineffable awesomeness. To see this clearly, one need only remind himself that “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” arose out of the text in Deuteronomy 32:35, “Their foot shall slide in due time.”

Reason in Service of Revelation

The use of reason was not seen as antithetical to biblical exegesis but as demanded by it and harmonious with it. Many things that are revealed come with such consistency, internal reasons for credibility, and give such coherence to observable phenomena that one’s reason “may rest satisfied in them.” This ease of rational rest, however, should not make us think that the revelation was unnecessary. As Edwards explained, “For, though reason may be sufficient to confirm such a declaration after it is given, and enable us to see its consistence, harmony, and rationality, in many respects; yet reason may be utterly insufficient first to discover these things” (*Works*, 2:485).

Revelation of the being, character, and purpose of an infinite being will yield propositions to be affirmed and easily stated as to their being true in themselves, without giving any revelation as to how such propositions are so. God certainly is revealed as one being, unrivaled in his perfections and alone to be worshipped; yet this one God exists eternally in three persons of distinct personal attributes without any compromise of the singular essence of deity. The Savior is one person, but this one person exists as a being with two distinct natures: the divine nature of the Son of God and a fully human nature. These are clear propositions to be affirmed, but how they are so is not revealed.

Given this understanding, we observe that even in his most extended discussions from reason, his guiding premises are derived from biblical texts. Edwards’s “A Dissertation Concerning the end for which God

created the World" is an example of conscious and extended application of reason parallel to scriptural exegesis. Reason thus informed and sanctified must be pressed, after the Anselmic model, to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christian doctrine and that the God of the Bible is the only possible God. His philosophical musings about the nature of the universe were fueled by his view of the excellence of the triune God.

Amid the relentless application of critical thought to basic biblical propositions, we must not miss Edwards's undiminished pessimism about unaided reason making any progress at all in deciding matters of infinite importance. Inherent tensions within reality would strictly forbid the possibility of reason moving toward unity and resolution. "The best reasoner in the world," Edwards asserts, "endeavouring to find out the causes of things, by the things themselves, might be led into the grossest errors and contradictions, and find himself, at the end, in extreme want of an instructor." Reason, uninstructed by revelation, affords not a single historical example of any person or people that "emerged from atheism or idolatry, into the knowledge or adoration of the one true God" (*Works*, 2:476).

At the same time, Edwards had simple confidence in the God-given faculty when applied to the existing body of revelation, and he encouraged his parishioners in this regard:

> You all have by you a large treasure of divine knowledge, in that you have the Bible in your hands; therefore be not contented in possessing but little of this treasure. God hath spoken much to you in the Scriptures; labour to understand as much of what he saith as you can. God hath made you reasonable creatures; therefore let not the noble faculty of reason or understanding lie neglected. (*Works*, 2:161)

Sensible Applicable of Truth

Edwards was more forceful even than his Puritan progenitors in his method of application. All his doctrine was application, and all his application was doctrine. He used the commentaries of Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, and Philip Doddridge to great advantage and, like those commentators and the Puritan writers which he often read, linked the

task of interpretation to application.

He could not settle for mere cognition of abstract concepts or applicatory methods that engaged in a simple exchange of words of theology for words of morality. He sought not moralism but true piety. The preacher must aim at producing godly affection and piety, a truly evangelical spirituality. This involved the kind of exposition of doctrine in which the hearer senses that his eternal well-being is bound up with the accurate appropriation of the truth. Edwards spoke of himself as having, at the point of his conversion, a “new sense of things” (*Reader*, 281). He often employed vocabulary of “sensible” and “sensibility.” By this language the great theologian/preacher pointed to a state in which both the mind and the affections united in the cognitive understanding and approval of a biblical idea as if the senses themselves had recorded it on the consciousness as an invincible and indelible fact.

In a sermon, therefore, the preacher must seek to overcome the “prejudices of nature.” On Genesis 19:14, “but he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting,” Edwards remarked, “The reason why men no more regard warnings of future punishment, is because it don’t seem real to them.” And again from the same sermon, “This opposition of nature to divine truth causes that the being of God and another world don’t seem real to them.” The preacher must seek to combine rational conviction with sensory awakening to the truth— that is, the commitment and subjection of one’s affections to the idea. As he reached the applicatory part of the sermon he told his hearers, “The improvement we shall make of this doctrine shall be to offer some considerations to make future punishment seem real to you.”[xvii]

In speaking of “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” Edwards urged his fellow ministers not only to “ascribe to him all the glory of redemption” but to “increase in a sensibleness of our great dependence on God” and to mortify “a self-dependent and self-righteous disposition” (*Works*, 2:7).

Though the preacher must try in word and passion to reach the heart, only the Spirit of God does this finally. The *doctrine* of a sermon on Hosea 5:15 demonstrating this truth was worded “That it is God’s manner

to make men sensible of their misery and unworthiness, before he appears in his mercy and love to them" (*Works*, 2:830).

The truths that are revealed in the word of God convey the content of the notion or the proposition, but "seeing the excellency of the doctrine" only comes "immediately from the Spirit of God." Saving faith always involves "such a conviction of the truths of religion" as comes "from a sense of their divine excellency" (*Works*, 2:14-15). He closed a sermon on the conversion of the Philippian jailer with this exhortation:

> It is impossible that a man should love that, and freely choose that, and rejoice in that, in which he sees no excellency. But if your eyes were opened to see the excellency of Christ, the work would be done. You would immediately believe on him; and you would find your heart going after him. It would be impossible to keep it back. But take heed that you do not entertain a wrong notion of what it is, spiritually to see Christ. If you do, you may seek that which God never bestows. Do not think that spiritually to see Christ, is to have a vision of him as the prophets had, to see him in some bodily shape, to see the features of his countenance. Do not pray or seek for any such thing as this. But what you are to seek is, that you may have a sight of the glorious excellency of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him, in your heart. This is a spiritual sight of Christ. This is that for which you must cry to God day and night. God is the fountain of spiritual light. He opens the eyes of the blind. He commands the light to shine out of darkness. It is easy with God to enlighten the soul, and fill it with these glorious discoveries, though it is beyond the power of men and angels. (*Works*, 2:829)

In his preaching, therefore, one observes close biblical exegesis, instruction in doctrine, extended analogies and images drawn from nature (for "there is an analogy between the divine constitution and disposition of things in the natural and in the spiritual world" [*Works*, 2:957]), a firm commitment to Scriptural typology, and confident attempts both at the rational demonstration of divine truth and urgent appeals to believe divine truth. Not only in content but in verbal impression Edwards sought to do all that was consistent with the infinite importance and infinite loveliness of the subject matter.

Preaching Practice

None would doubt that Edwards was full of doctrine and apt instruction and that from a literary standpoint his appeals to the conscience and heart were incomparably compelling. Some doubt exists, however, concerning how effective, and affective, Edwards was in delivery. With contemporaries so naturally gifted as Whitefield, Tennent, and Davenport, Edwards probably would not be considered among the first rank of dramatic preachers. Granting that, I would still argue that Edwards was committed in theory to a delivery style commensurate with the importance and urgency of his subject.

Stomping and Shouting

In his *Life of Jonathan Edwards*, Samuel Hopkins observes:

> As he wrote his Sermons out at large for many Years, and always wrote a considerable part of most of his publick Discourses; so he carried his Notes into the Desk with him, and read the most that he had wrote; yet he was not so confined to his Notes, when he had wrote at large, but that, if some Thoughts were suggested while he was speaking, which did not occur when writing, and appeared to him pertinent and striking, he would deliver them; and that with as great propriety and fluency, and oftner with greater pathos, and attended with a more sensible good effect on his Hearers, than all he had wrote. Tho', as has been observed, he was wont to read so considerable a part of what he delivered; yet he was far from thinking this the best way of preaching in general; and look'd upon his using his Notes so much as he did, a Deficiency and Infirmity. And in the latter part of his Life was inclined to think it had been better, if he had never accustomed himself to use his Notes at all.[xviii]

In his profoundly provocative introduction to Edwards's New York sermons, Wilson Kimnach provides manuscript evidence that Edwards worked diligently to secure a style of preaching suitable for oratorical presentation. The manuscript prepared for the publication of his first

printed sermon, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” shows differences from the manuscript used in its delivery. This is even more strikingly true in comparing the different recensions of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Sometimes these changes for publication indicate Edwards’s awareness that he is much better in print than in person and that his peculiar field of influence was to be the printed page.[xix]

An argument could also be made that these differences indicate a style of delivery designed to arrest the attention of the audience and enhance the power of vocal delivery. In addition, they show sensitivity to the demands of his immediate pastoral charge. The earlier sermons include marks in the manuscripts to remind Edwards of the necessity of liveliness and to create the opportunity for extemporaneity. Kimnach argues that the marks can only be explained “in terms of pulpit delivery”:

> Apparently, Edwards desired to make his delivery more dynamic and flexible, and the “pick up line” was his compromise, for the time between reading and *memoriter* delivery. Placed before each sentence or phrase containing a major thought or illustration, the lines enabled Edwards to do at least two things. First, he could look up from the manuscript more easily without losing his place, or without as much careful review of the sermon just before preaching. Second, the lines would make his delivery more flexible in a formal sense. If he desired to speak extemporaneously within the context of the written sermon, or if he desired to leave out certain sections for some reason, the lines would provide so many “handles” subdividing the text of the written sermon by which he could adjust the relationship between the sermon as written and the sermon as spoken.[xx]

These observations about literary style serve only to underscore what Edwards himself argued about the manner of preaching. Edwards’s mythical mildness and detachment in delivery was entered as a polemical device in the early nineteenth century to shame the perpetrators of the wildness of the camp meeting revival on the frontier. In his *Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical*, Benjamin Trumbull devoted well over one hundred pages to the New England awakening of

the eighteenth century. He reported that Edwards calmly read the sermon and responded to his listeners' spiritual distress with a request that they be silent so that he could be heard. Such an example should shock the shameless Methodists into greater order and decorum.

Edwards's own testimony makes the construction of a different scenario possible. After delivering "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry" God in Enfield in July 1741, Edwards heard of rising complaints about the alleged sensationalism of Awakening preaching. Supposedly, preachers raised the affections of the congregations too high. It was probably not only in defense of his friends Whitefield and Tennent and others that Edwards argued for the necessity of lively preaching. An insipid, dry kind of delivery utterly betrayed the magnitude of the issues at stake.

To those who complained, Edwards asked if the affections were raised by the truth and if the height of raising was justified by the importance of the subject. "If the subject is by its own nature worthy of very great affection," Edwards observes, "then speaking of it with very great affection is most agreeable to the nature of that subject, or is the truest representation of it, and therefore has most of a tendency to beget true ideas of it in the minds of those to whom the representation is made." For his own part Edwards expressed the desire to "raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of the subject" (*Works*, 1:391).

To those under a sense of misery Edwards would offer no false comfort. "I am not afraid to tell sinners who are most sensible of their misery, that their case is indeed as miserable as they think it to be, and a thousand times more so; for this is the truth" (*Works*, 1:392).

Too many in his day focused narrowly on "extent of learning, strength of reason, and correctness of method and language," but for the most proportionate correctness of perception, the people needed something else. "Men may abound in this sort of light, and have no heat," Edwards judged. "Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched" (*Works*, 1:391).

Edwards argued that Scripture presents a different mode of preaching from that highly touted by the established clergy of his day. “Cry aloud; . . . lift up your voice like a trumpet,” the Lord told Isaiah (Isa. 58:1). Correspondingly, what he told Ezekiel, “Clap your hands and stamp your foot” (Ezek. 6:11) were further instructions, all with the intent of enforcing the infinite importance of the message. A large number of other Scriptures command, exhort, and predict a crying out in gospel proclamation giving the clear impression that “a most affectionate and earnest manner of delivery, in many cases, becomes a preacher of God’s word” (*Works*, 1:391).

4. Jonathan Edwards's Practice of Doctrinal Preaching

Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, in his article "Edwards and the New England Theology," contended that the "richest fruit" of Edwards's studies came in his preaching.[xxi] Warfield judges rightly, for a single Edwards sermon is a marvel of doctrinal instruction. Each is a study in incisive, elaborate, and detailed statements of doctrinal truth replete with all the necessary distinctions and historical allusions.

Though much of the precision and fullness of argument was fashioned and inserted for publication, the manuscripts show that in his sermons he endeavored "clearly and distinctly to explain the doctrines of religion, and unravel the difficulties that attend them, and to confirm them with strength of reason and argumentation, and also to observe some easy and clear method . . . for the help of the understanding and memory" (*Works*, 1:391).

Doctrine, however, never stands abstracted from the claims of God and his truth on the human soul. Edwards was, in Warfield's words, as "arresting and awakening as he was instructive"; his sermon instruction in doctrine always came with a view to grip the heart with conviction, confession, repentance, adoration, or other responses implicit within the doctrine.

Because he was himself filled with "the profoundest sense of the heinousness of sin," Edwards "set himself to arouse his hearers to some realization of the horror of their condition as objects of the divine displeasure, and of the incredible goodness of God in intervening for their salvation." Warfield continued:

> Side by side with the most moving portrayal of God's love in Christ, and of the blessedness of communion with Him, he therefore set, with the most startling effect, equally vivid pictures of the dangers of unforgiven sin and the terrors of the lost estate. The effect of such

preaching, delivered with the force of the sincerest conviction, was overwhelming.[xxii]

Wrenching Application

Illustrations of the methodology abound. The power of Edwards' approach can be seen by isolating the applicatory element of human duty or affection which should be the natural outflow of an unbiased and unalloyed reception of true doctrine. Revealed truth must relate to the whole person. The mind should not resist anything that is *clearly* demonstrated to be true, nor should the affections lag behind, for all truth lays its fitting claim on the heart as well as the head.

The Fitting Affect of Preaching the Doctrine of God

In his treatment of Theology proper, Edwards unfolded the divine attributes with a view to convince the hearers of the perfection of joy found in knowing and contemplating this ineffably perfect being for himself. Conversely, he demonstrated the infinite criminality of giving anything less than perfect worship and the danger of graceless knowledge of God's attributes.[xxiii]

In a message entitled "The Christian Pilgrim,[xxiv] Edwards described heaven as the place where "our highest end, and highest good, is to be obtained." Since we are made for God, "we attain to our highest end" only when we are "brought to heaven." In this world, we have a "very imperfect knowledge of him" and "a very imperfect conformity to God, mingled with abundance of estrangement." We can serve him "but in a very imperfect manner" and always "mingled with sin." But in heaven, "we shall be brought to a perfect union with God, and have more clear views of him." There will be no remaining sin to hinder a perfect service of God. Seeing him as he is will so alter our affection, so purify our hearts in a flame of divine love, that we will glorify him "to the utmost of the powers and capacities of our nature."

Since God is the highest good of the reasonable creature and

“enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied,” the full enjoyment of God in heaven “is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here.” All human loves and comforts “are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance.” Earthly goods “are but scattered beams, but God is the sun.” They are but small streams, “but God is the fountain”; drops, but “God is the ocean.” Edwards continues:

> Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives; to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labour for or set our hearts on, any thing else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness? (*Works*, 2:244)

The Fitting Affect of Preaching the Absolute Perversity of Sin

Conversely, a failure to appreciate the beauty and loveliness of the divine nature is the essence of sin. Edwards reasons particularly strongly on this in “True Grace distinguished from the Experience of Devils.” In this sermon, Edwards traveled the full spectrum of systematic and experimental theology to isolate the one thing by which true grace may be identified. His assumption, or doctrine, is built on James 2:19: “Nothing in the mind of man, that is of the same nature with what the devils experience, or are subjects of, is any sure sign of saving grace” (*Works*, 2:41).

This one thing Edwards pinpoints as “an apprehension or sense of the supreme holy beauty and comeliness of divine things, as they are in themselves, or in their own nature.” Though they once had it, “while they stood in their integrity,” they now and forever will be entirely destitute of this. “Nothing else belonging to the knowledge of God, can be devised, of which he is destitute. It has been observed, that there is no one attribute of the divine nature, but what he knows, with a strong and very affecting conviction” (*Works*, 2:48).

The “supreme beauty of the divine nature” only engenders hate in Satan. His understanding of the attributes of God gives him “an idea and

strong sense of his awful majesty, but no idea of his beauty and comeliness." The application of all his powers through thousands of years to understand God's ways and purposes, his taking, "things in all possible views, in every order and arrangement" brings him no closer to seeing as beautiful "that wherein the beauty of the divine nature does most essentially consist, viz. his holiness, or moral excellence." Instead, the devil and his demons "hate such a holy Being the worse, for his being infinitely wise, and infinitely powerful, etc. more than they would do, if they saw in him less power and less wisdom"(*Works*, 2:48).

That unregenerate men share the same view of God as the devils is the theme of his sermon "Men naturally are God's Enemies." Men are "enemies in the natural relish of their souls." When they learn that God is an "infinitely holy, pure, and righteous Being" their distaste for Him increases for that very reason. His omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, and even mercy are all hated because these attributes are holy, and he will never be "otherwise than he is, an infinitely holy God" (*Works*, 2:131).

The Fitting Affect of Preaching the Fullness of Christ's Person and Work

Edwards's applicatory scheme in Christology, both the incarnation and the atonement, was to convince his hearers of the wisdom and the inviolability of the character of God while demonstrating the infinite approvedness, suitability, beauty, and perfection of Christ. As in Theology, these discussions have the frightful reality of human depravity as their foil.

In "Unbelievers condemn the Glory and Excellence of Christ," Christ's attributes emerge in a brilliance that makes human depravity despicable and repulsive. Sinners neither love nor have honor for the glory and excellence of Christ. They have no desires to enjoy or be conformed to the glorious beauty of Christ. Not only do they have no value for his glory, they are "enemies to him on that very account." His glorious perfections are the very ground of that "enmity and opposition" which enflames their hearts against him. Edwards reasoned:

By being such an holy and excellent Saviour, he is contrary to your lusts and corruptions. If there were a Saviour offered to you that was agreeable to your corrupt nature, such a Saviour you would accept. But Christ being a Saviour of such purity, holiness, and divine perfection, this is the cause why you have no inclination to him, but are offended in him. (*Works*, 2:62–63)

Christ's incarnation shows the superiority of divine wisdom to created wisdom. A consistent theme of Edwards, this idea carries the day in "The wisdom of God displayed in the Way of Salvation." If, indeed, the Son of God be substituted in the sinner's stead, then he becomes obligated to suffer the punishment deserved by the sinner. But how could one "who is essentially, unchangeably, and infinitely happy, suffer pain and torment?" And how could the object of God's infinitely dear love suffer his wrath? Created wisdom would never have superseded these difficulties. "But divine wisdom hath found out a way, viz. by the incarnation of the Son of God." Though a great mystery, yet impossible to us, "it was no mystery to divine wisdom" (*Works*, 2:143).

Christ is a glorious person perfectly fit as Saviour. He has sufficient power, wisdom, merit, and love to "satisfy justice, and fulfil the law for us." The wisdom of God through the incarnation procures "perfect and everlasting happiness." In Christ's work, we may "see God face to face . . . [and] converse and dwell with God in his own glorious habitation." The most abundant riches, the most substantial satisfying pleasures, "all needed earthly good things while here; and glory, for both body and soul hereafter, for ever," are purchased by Christ.

Despite such rich provision, sinners "remain in the same miserable state and condition, . . . in a famishing, perishing state." And "you remain dead in trespasses and sins," Edwards warned, "under the dominion of Satan; in a condemned state, having the wrath of God abiding on you, and being daily exposed to the dreadful effects of it in hell." In light of such extreme pleasure, on the one hand, and danger, on the other, Edwards pled with his hearers to "turn to God through Jesus Christ, be numbered among the disciples and faithful followers, and so be entitled to their privileges" (*Works*, 2:155).

The Fitting Affect of Exposing False Ideas of Faith

The reader of Edwards's sermons quickly learns that the doctrinal nexus he conceives hardly allows one doctrine to be considered without feeling the immediate implications it has for others. Edwards focused particular energy on the connection of the whole system of divine truth to human depravity and spiritual affections. As heir to the Puritans and particularly influenced by his grandfather, Edwards's purpose in this spiritual surgery was to strip his hearers of all false ideas of faith. He would agree with his grandfather Solomon Stoddard who wrote, "Multitudes of souls perish thro' the ignorance of those that should guide them in the Way to Heaven; Men are nourished up with vain Hopes of being in a State of Salvation, before they have got half the Way to Christ."[xxv]

Edwards observed that many allowed common operations of the Spirit, or even extraordinary human gifts, to serve as sufficient evidence of God's saving favor. In such misjudgment, many had been deceived and "established in a false hope" (*Works*, 2:45). Preaching should interrupt the false but dangerous rest of self-centered subterfuges to which sinners flee. "Multitudes have been deluded" by a false view of faith and conversion. Conversion manifests a "new sense of things" which consists of a "glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God" along with "supreme amiableness" of Jesus Christ and salvation by him.

The heart must sense what the head perceives. An omnipotent power speaks light into the heart, overcomes all opposition, and "inclines the soul to Christ" (*Works*, 2:49). With unrelenting logic and alarming warnings, Edwards pursued the hiding sinner in every recess of the mind and heart to disabuse him of any misconceptions of the nature of saving faith. His art in making doctrine its own application is without rival in the history of Christian preaching:

Therefore it is manifest, from my text and doctrine, that no degree of speculative knowledge of religion is any certain sign of true piety. Whatever clear notions a man may have of the attributes of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of the two covenants, the economy of

the persons of the Trinity, and the part which each person has in the affair of man's redemption; if he can discourse never so excellently of the offices of Christ, and the way of salvation by him, and the admirable methods of divine wisdom, and the harmony of the various attributes of God in that way; if he can talk never so clearly and exactly of the method of the justification of a sinner, and of the nature of conversion, and the operations of the Spirit of God, in applying the redemption of Christ; giving good distinctions, happily solving difficulties, and answering objections, in a manner tending greatly to enlighten the ignorant, to the edification of the church of God, and the conviction of gainsayers, and the great increase of light in the world; if he has more knowledge of this sort than hundreds of true saints of an ordinary education, and most divines; yet all is no certain evidence of any degree of saving grace in the heart. (*Works*, 2:43)

No speculative knowledge, no speculative assent, no sense of distress and terrors about sin and evil or the future, no work of the law on men's hearts is a sure sign of conversion. In fact, so bound are sinners to themselves and their own self-interest that only an act of sovereign grace can bestow this gift. It is most clearly at the point of depravity that Edwards demonstrates the coherence of his Calvinism with all the doctrines of salvation. This sense of the sublimity of God's holiness "is what flesh and blood cannot impart"; only God can bestow it, and it is the "special benefit which Christ died to procure for his elect, the most excellent token of his everlasting love; the chief fruit of his great labors, and the most precious purchase of his blood" (*Works*, 2:50).

Edwards showed an ability to maintain a principle relentlessly, and no matter how many details and specific points were included in that general truth, they all must apply in accordance with the principle. He did not want to allow sinners rest in anything short of the distinguishing principle of saving grace.

The Fitting Affect of Preaching the Duty and Urgency of True Faith

Though this grace was applied in a sovereign manner in accordance

with an eternal decree, and though only the elect finally would be its recipients, all must put themselves in the way of faith and pursue it with great pains, though in the end they die at mercy's door. Edwards regularly exhorted all "to seek those distinguishing qualifications and affections of soul" which are distinctive of salvation (*Works*, 2:50).

He looked at salvation as a great undertaking to be firmly, universally, and perseveringly pursued. Though none can merit it, and it is sovereignly bestowed by free and sovereign grace, yet "men have no reason to expect to be saved in idleness, or to go to heaven in a way of doing nothing" (*Works*, 2:53).[xxvi] Sinners should seek to do all the duties that God requires of them and do them devotedly and constantly. Salvation is a great work which requires all energy and a daily taking up the cross. Men must be diligent in the use of "the means of grace, and be anxiously engaged to escape eternal ruin" and afterwards "to persevere in the duties of religion till the flood [of death] come."

Clearly this cannot be done to merit salvation, but such labor is necessary "in order to their being prepared for it." No one can be prepared for salvation "without seeking it in such a way as hath been described." Such seeking gives a "proper sense of their own necessities, and unworthiness"; it predisposes them to "prize salvation when bestowed"; and it makes the seeker "properly thankful to God for it." Men should be willing to engage in this business no matter how great and difficult it is, seeing that their own salvation is at stake (*Works*, 2:51–57).

The Fitting Affect of Preaching about the Nature and Certainty of Hell

To serve as a goad to prompt seeking, Edwards preached so as to convince his hearers of the reality of hell that they might contemplate all of its revealed characteristics with a view to avoid going there. Edwards invoked all his literary, philosophic, and exegetical powers and stretched his art of oratory to convince them of the rationality, justness, and, therefore, certainty of eternal punishment. They should feel the emptiness of any hope that hell either has no existence or only temporal existence; they should not consider for a moment that hell is reserved for

only the most heinous criminals or is tempered with mercy. He dug deeply into a lifetime of observations and analyses to develop images to dissuade them of any hope that the experience of hell might be punctuated with reprieve (*Works*, 2:44).

Edwards preached many sermons on this subject, not because he harbored a masochistic delight in the subject of hell, but for three reasons. One, the subject demonstrated the power of worldly affections over the reasoning capacity. In his sermon entitled “The unreasonableness of indetermination in Religion,” Edwards enforced the unreasonableness of delay because of the infinite importance of the issue of eternal life. Also, we are reasonable creatures and invested with all the capacities to weigh the evidence, determine the truthfulness of Christian doctrine, and to make “a wise choice for ourselves”:

> He hath given man so much understanding, as to make him capable of determining which is best; to lead a life of self-denial, and enjoy eternal happiness, or to take our swing in sinful enjoyments, and burn in hell forever. The question is of no difficult determination. (*Works*, 2:59)

The complicating factor, however, involves fallen affections. God offers heaven with “self-denial and difficulty” as the way to it, and sinners are not willing to have it on these conditions. On the other hand, God offers the “world and the pleasures of sin to men,” but not alone. Connected with it is eternal misery. Those halting between two opinions “would divide heaven from the holiness and self-denial which are the way to it, and from the holiness which reigns in it.” On those terms they would be glad to have heaven. By the same token, if they could divide sin from hell, “then they would fully determine for ever to cleave to sin.”

As Edwards enforced the urgency of immediate determination in this matter, he reasserted, “Consider those things which have been said, showing the unreasonableness of continuing in such irresolution about an affair of infinite importance to you” (*Works*, 2:60). Though warned often of the boundless fury of the wrath of God, like the shoreless ocean of Noah’s flood, the unregenerate act more brutish than animals in thrusting themselves on the sword of God’s wrath. They act like the mad prophet

Balaam who insisted on going forward though an angel with sword drawn stood in the way (*Works*, 2:57).

Two, Edwards preached the doctrine of hell that none should doubt the infinite criminality of refusal to love an infinitely lovely being. In "Unbelievers condemn the glory of Christ," the infinite excellencies of the redeemer both in his person and his work are set forth by compelling images, analogies, and theological arguments. Edwards showed that God the Father has infinitely high affections for Christ and his work. "Is he thus worthy of the infinite esteem and love of God himself?" he asks. "And is he worthy of no esteem from you?" If not, then you must be aware of your danger, for "such guilt will bring great wrath." If a saviour would be offered who did not have such glorious perfections and excellencies and was not so opposite your lusts and corruptions, you would accept him well enough. But Christ's divine perfections offend you. Consider how provoking your unbelief is to God the Father and "what wrath it merits from the Son whom you treat thus" (*Works*, 2:63).

Three, the preaching of hell highlights the power and gratuity which actuates saving grace. Edwards loved to exalt the wisdom and grace of God and the glory of Christ in redeeming the elect from punishment. In themselves, the elect are "miserable captives of sin and Satan, and under obligations to suffer eternal burnings." But Christ is above all evil in "what he did to procure redemption for us." And when the devils and "all their instruments" are cast into the lake of fire to their consummate and everlasting misery, the saints shall be delivered everlastingly from it. "The work of redemption," Edwards said, "is the most glorious of all God's works that are made known to us":

> And this is one thing wherein its glory eminently appears, that therein Christ appears so gloriously above Satan and all his instruments; above all guilt, all corruption, all affliction, above death, and above all evil. (*Works*, 2:216)

John Gerstner has said, "Edwards spent every waking moment trying to keep people out of hell."[xxvii] Titles of sermons preached on this subject are: "Wrath Upon the Wicked to the Uttermost"; "The Wicked

useful in their destruction only"; "Men naturally God's Enemies"; a series of sermons on "The Future Punishment of the Wicked"; and "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In the day of wrath, the damned themselves will have a clear conviction of its justice:

> We have this expression often annexed to God's threatenings of wrath to his enemies, "And they shall know that I am the Lord:" This shall be accomplished by their woful experience, and clear light in their consciences, whereby they shall be made to know, whether they will or not, how great and terrible, holy and righteous, a God Jehovah is, whose authority they have despised; and they shall know that he is righteous and holy in their destruction. This all the ungodly will be convinced of at the day of judgment, by the bringing to light of all their wickedness of heart and practice; and setting all their sins, with all their aggravations, in order, not only in the view of others, even of the whole world, but in view of their own consciences. . . . When the King of heaven and earth come to judgment, their consciences will be so perfectly enlightened and convinced by the all-searching Light they shall then stand in, that their mouths will be effectually stopped, as to all excuses for themselves, all pleading of their own righteousness to excuse or justify them, and all objections against the justice of their Judge, that their consciences will condemn them only, and not God. (*Works*, 2:44)

The Fitting Affect of Preaching Sovereign Grace Alone

Seeing that such punishments are just heightens the concept that salvation is by grace alone. This was a marvelous truth to Edwards, and he desired his hearers to know that their hope rested in the mercy of God alone. Salvation must be by the almighty working of God both externally and internally, objectively and subjectively.

He sorted out for his parishioners how unreasonable they would be to imagine that they could put God under obligation to have respect to anything they did while still his enemy. None of their prayers, reading, attending, or preparation of any sort would change either the justness of the verdict of condemnation or the enmity of their hearts. Such shows of

respect and kindness are abhorrent to God. It equals treachery like that of Joab, who inquired concerning Amasa's health while he thrust a knife into him. Edwards looked to the sinner as a Joab in his pretensions to approach God, saying:

> What if you do pray to God? Is he obliged to hear the prayers of an enemy? What if you have taken a great deal of pains, is God obliged to give heaven for the prayers of an enemy? He may justly abhor your prayers, and all that you do in religion, as the flattery of a mortal enemy. (*Works*, 2:140)

Grace, therefore, is necessary in such a condition. All our blessings "are what we have by purchase; and the purchase is made of God." All the blessings come from God; he gives the price for the purchase, or rather, he gives the purchaser, and God is the purchaser. "Yea God is both the purchaser and the price; for Christ, who is God, purchased these blessings for us, by offering up himself as the price of our salvation" (*Works,* 2:5).

In order to purchase eternal life, he sacrificed himself. "By the sacrifice of himself (Heb. vii. 27)," those for whom he died "have all their objective good in God," and also "have all their inherent good in God." Objectively, God himself is their good; inherently their own internal excellence and their pleasure comes by a "kind of effusion of God on the soul." By Christ's righteousness, we also have purchased for us the favor of God and "satisfying happiness," that is, a happiness that is "fully answerable to the capacity and cravings of our souls." He has purchased for us an eternal vision of God, conversation and communion with him, conformity to him, and eternal praise of him. Christians are possessors of all things, incorruptible riches in heaven (*Works,* 2:5, 145-46).

But he also makes them qualified for these gifts. We must repent and believe, but "as we cannot do this of ourselves, Christ has purchased this also for all the elect." Their perseverance in holiness that he purchased by his death has made sure that all remaining sin will be taken out of their hearts at death: "They shall be made perfectly holy." Everything outside of us and inside of us is the result of purchase and is bestowed in a sovereign way:

Christ has purchased all, both objective and inherent good: not only a portion to be enjoyed by us; but all those inherent qualifications necessary to our enjoyment of it. He has purchased not only justification, but sanctification and glorification; both holiness and happiness. (*Works*, 2:146-47)

This aspect of the preaching cries for our attention, for at this very point preaching was notably altered from the second decade of the nineteenth century to the present. When Edwards noticed a tendency in some of the Boston preachers to compromise on this aspect of the message, he preached, at a public lecture in Boston in 1831, a message entitled "God Glorified in Man's Dependence." His second point of "Use" at the close of the sermon serves as a prophetic warning for the future of preaching:

> Hence those doctrines and schemes of divinity that are in any respect opposite to such an absolute and universal dependence on God, derogate from his glory, and thwart the design of our redemption. And such are those schemes that put the creature in God's stead, in any of the mentioned respects, that exalt man into the place of either Father, Son or Holy Ghost, in any thing pertaining to our redemption. However they may allow of a dependence of the redeemed on God, yet they deny a dependence that is so *absolute* and universal. They own an entire dependence on God for *some* things, but not for others; they own that we depend on God for the gift and acceptance of a Redeemer, but deny so absolute a dependence on him for the obtaining of an *interest* in the Redeemer. They own an absolute dependence on the Father for giving his Son, and on the Son for working out redemption, but not so entire a dependence on the Holy Ghost for *conversion*, and a being in Christ, and so coming to a title to his benefits. They own a dependence on God for *means* of grace, but not absolutely for the benefit and success of those means; a partial dependence on the power of God, for obtaining and exercising holiness, but not a mere dependence on the arbitrary and sovereign grace of God. They own a dependence on the free grace of God for a reception into his favour, so far that it is without any proper merit, but not as it is without being attracted, or moved with any excellency. They

> own a partial dependence on Christ, as he through whom we have life, as having purchased new terms of life, but still hold that the righteousness through which we have life is inherent in ourselves, as it was under the first covenant. Now whatever scheme is inconsistent with our *entire* dependence on God for all, and of having all of him, through him, and in him, it is repugnant to the design and tenor of the gospel, and robs it of that which God accounts its lustre and glory. (*Works*, 2:7)

The Wave of the Future

A theory of preaching which confronted and denied that very idea which Edwards considered paramount changed not only the doctrinal content of preaching but eventually relegated doctrine to the ignoble status of the "missing link" in the process. The converting power of the will became more prominent than the effectual work of the Spirit. That exchange, in turn, diminished the place of truth as the medium fit for the converting work of the Spirit. As conversion came to be more in the hands of men, sinners were less and less convinced that they were in the hands of an angry God. The power and passion of Edwards receded into the distant past of literary curiosities to be viewed with puzzlement in high school American Literature classes. Even more tragic, however, in reducing Edwards to an antiquarian interest is the reduced sense of glory and absolute importance that resides in the heart of many of us who have the sobering responsibility of being entrusted with "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

5. Tensions Surrounding Faithful Proclamation

In the last chapter the applicatory nature of Edwards's preaching was emphasized. It should have been clear also that his application arose from the doctrinal content of the text he preached. His philosophical and metaphysical thinking and writing served in a supportive role. That kind of argumentation, except where it was specifically exegetical, was not brought into the pulpit. All his reasonings had the effect of informing his own thought processes, protecting him from insidious theological errors and intensifying his passion as a gospel preacher. That which his congregation heard was undiluted biblical truth unfolded in its connections to the rest of the Bible and applied to the soul.

Metaphysical Mutations

Gradually, subsequent to Edwards, some who followed him, though they continued the good practice of preaching doctrine in an expository context, also began to bring the metaphysics of their thought into the pulpit. This was prompted largely by the opposition of a moderate, or liberalized, theological group in New England who felt that the followers of Edwards were introducing a "new divinity" and, perhaps more upsetting, were destroying the standing order of the churches in their social context.

Joseph Conforti described the excitement this way:

> The development of doctrinal parties with opposing approaches to covenant theology in the middle of the eighteenth century animated the intellectual life of New England's churches. Not since the first decade of New England history was theology debated with such zeal. Not since the Antinomian crisis of the 1630's were charges of heresy so prevalent nor the boundaries of New England Calvinism so sharply disputed. Not since the first generation of Puritans experienced the shift from dissenting sect to established church, symbolized by the Half-way Covenant, was the ecclesiastical structure of Congregationalism so altered. Now the strife-ridden established

church assumed a pluralistic cast as theological parties made a mockery of New England's communal socio-religious ideals. While the old causes of church disputes— salary problems, ecclesiastical practices, and clerical incompetence— remained, theology emerged as a critical issue in quarrels between ministers and congregations with a degree of fervor that had not been experienced in over a hundred years. The doctrinal creeds and confessions of faith instituted in the 1750's precipitated numerous ecclesiastical controversies.[xxviii]

Though exciting and, at least at some level of interaction, unavoidable, this controversy had two debilitating effects on the so-called New Divinity. One, it created a polemical mind-set which often penetrated the sermons delivered to the parish congregations; two, their efforts to create philosophical consistency in their message made them less helpful as biblical expositors. Sometimes it drove them to hurtful alterations of historically evangelical truth. Robert Dabney (1820–98) likened this to "feeding the flock inside the fold with the bristling missiles which should have been hurled at the wolves without."[xxix]

The Conflict over New Measures Now, but by No Means

The Second Great Awakening in its New England expression demonstrated, at least to the minds of the New Divinity preachers, the validity of their message and method. One of the shifts characteristic of these thinkers concerned the use of means. Though sanctioned for almost two centuries within Puritanism, New Divinity preachers, perhaps except for Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), dropped the method of encouraging sinners to use the proper means of conversion. Lyman Beecher (1775–1863) refers to this in his autobiography:

> I remember the last time I ever saw Dr. Dwight living. There was a time when a question came up among us about the doings of unregenerate men. Taylor and I pushed for immediate repentance, I didn't go quite so far as Taylor. Instead of *using means of grace,* reading, prayer, etc. we drove them up to instant submission. Dr. Dwight, however, felt as though there might be some use of means.

So, though Taylor was his amanuensis, there arose a kind of feeling between them and among the students, and Dr. Dwight felt a grief as though it had produced some coldness.[xxx]

Nothing less than immediate submission to the demands of the gospel would do. An unregenerate sinner under the means of grace was in a worse condition in himself and more odious to God than an unregenerate sinner not under the means of grace. The New Divinity preachers greatly lamented the slumber which the abuse of the “use of means” had produced in the Congregational churches.

Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844)

The most effective evangelist in the New Divinity camp was Asahel Nettleton, whom Lyman Beecher called “the greatest benefactor which God has given to this nation.”[xxxi] Another close observer of Nettleton and the theological developments of the early nineteenth century, R. S. Smith, noted, in 1848, “But taking him all in all, and for the times in which he lived, we do believe that no light has since arisen, of equal splendor, and that no principles or measures essentially differing from his, can be expected to succeed as well.”[xxxii]

From 1811 until controversy and sickness interrupted his labors, the revivals under Nettleton’s preaching were remarkable for deep conviction, extended sobriety of spirit, close experiential application of the doctrines of Calvinism in preaching, large numbers of conversions, and long-term usefulness of those converted in his meetings. His method of instruction to the unconverted agreed with that proposed by Beecher. At the close of a meeting in Farmington, Nettleton impressed the urgency of repentance upon his congregation:

Do any of you begin to realize that you are altogether without excuse for not repenting now? It is even so. Hardness and impenitency of heart are awful sins in the sight of God. Do any of you begin to feel that if you do not repent now, you never shall? This, in all probability, is a correct conclusion. If you now resist the Spirit, and turn

back to stupidity, there is the greatest reason to fear that you will slumber on in impenitence till you perish."[xxxiii]

In Lee, Connecticut, pastor Mr. Hyde recorded the manner of Nettleton's dealing with sinners:

> The ruined and helpless state of sinners, the exceeding wickedness of their hearts, and the awful consequences of neglecting the great salvation, have been explicitly stated on these occasions, and pressed on the minds of the inquirers. They have not been directed to take any steps *preparatory* to their accepting of Christ: but, being acquainted with the nature and terms of the Gospel, repentance towards God and faith in Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost, have been enjoined upon them as their *immediate duty and only safe course.*[xxxiv]

Conjoined with this pressing for immediate repentance was the deep conviction that the sinner, dead in sin and bound in selfishness, had no moral propensity for such repentance. The lack of any relish for spiritual truth or delight in holiness rendered the call for repentance morally impossible to obey. He followed the distinction drawn by Edwards between a moral and a natural inability. Nettleton said that "the sinner will not do what he can." Those who deny this, that is, who "deny the distinction between natural and moral inability" call upon the sinner to do what they themselves acknowledge absolutely impossible. When Nettleton stated, "This I do not admit," he suggested that he did not accept an absolute impossibility of repentance, for men had all the natural capacities by which they could be sorry for misdeeds and determine to mend their ways. True repentance, however, was a moral impossibility until the moral propensities of the unregenerate sinner were altered by the Spirit's power in regeneration. [xxxv]

The capacities of natural ability, however, rendered resistance more criminal, duty more immediate, and the work of the Spirit no less essential. Only the regenerating work of the Spirit to open the sinner's eyes and change his heart so that the duty of immediate repentance

appeared desirable would bring this transaction to pass. The preaching, therefore, of Nettleton and those like him just as surely emphasized salvation as a work of sovereign grace: The sinner must repent immediately but is utterly dependent on God to grant repentance. “But if the sinner will not do what he can,” Nettleton preached, “there is the same necessity of almighty power to make him willing to do what he *can* as there would be to . . . do for him what he could not” (*Repentance*, 71).

Nettleton explored fully this tension, present to some degree in virtually all his sermons, from the text “Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (Jer. 31:19 KJV). The doctrine drawn from the text is “Genuine repentance does not precede regeneration.” A kind of repentance, filled with terror and a sense of self-preservation may, and often does, precede regeneration, but that repentance which implies love to God and hatred to sin is the result only of regeneration. If the sinner can exercise repentance without regeneration, then he can exercise every Christian grace without it—this renders the new birth unnecessary. But the true nature of repentance, its coexistence with saving faith, and its implication of love to God determine that it cannot arise in the heart of flesh which in itself is enmity against God:

> *When God takes away the heart of stone and gives an heart of flesh*— then God *grants repentance.* A new heart is a penitent heart. Regeneration is necessary because sinners have hard, impenitent hearts. And this is the glorious effect of the power of God in the act of regeneration. It reduces the rebel into submission. It melts the stubborn heart into repentance. When God regenerates and grants repentance, he does it by *one decisive act.* (*Repentance*, 63)

Having demonstrated that evangelical repentance does not precede regeneration, Nettleton must issue the correlative truth that “I have not asserted that the sinner is not under obligations to repent before regeneration. That it is not the *duty* of the sinner to repent before God changes the heart, that we have not asserted. It *is* his duty” (*Repentance*, 63). If all of this seems rather absurd, Nettleton was prepared to allow that appearance. In fact, he would state the

apparent absurdity in as clear language as possible:

> There are many who think they see a great inconsistency and absurdity running through almost every discourse which they hear. “Ministers contradict themselves, they say, and unsay; they tell us to do, and then tell us that we cannot do.” This difficulty some of our hearers see and state for themselves; others think they see it, but cannot state it. This difficulty I am calculating to state in all its absurdity, “You sometimes call upon sinners to believe and repent; and then tell them that faith and repentance are the gift of God. You call upon them to do what needs almighty power to effect.” My hearers, this is correct. We are guilty of all this absurdity; and the Bible talks just so too. (*Repentance*, 64)

Because one’s inability is moral and not natural, and because repentance, faith, and love are immediate duties, the minister has no warrant to give instructions to sinners for any action other than to make himself a new heart and immediately to repent and immediately to have faith. “If he does not preach faith, and repentance, and love to God, he does not preach the gospel, nor urge them to do anything which God regards” (*Repentance*, 67, 68).

The urgency concerning immediate repentance did not prompt Nettleton to flippant or undiscerning means of dealing with souls. Nettleton’s discussion of these doctrinal interactions was not done only in his study but were vital doctrines with which his preaching was consistently interlaced. He preached the full range of doctrines to his hearers. The Rev. R. S. Smith called his system of doctrine “old fashioned New England orthodoxy.” Smith also reported that, though Nettleton sought to avoid public controversy on these issues, he was “faithful and zealous for the doctrines of grace,” and preached “them plainly on proper occasions.”[xxxvi] This was a vital element of evangelistic instruction to his audience.

According to Bonar and Tyler’s chronicle of Nettleton, Heman Humphrey said that “neither Caesar nor Napoleon ever studied the art of war with greater assiduity, than [Nettleton] did the heavenly art of

winning souls to Christ." Those who observed Nettleton felt that his "*thoroughness, caution, and discrimination*" deserved being studied. "It was difficult to say which he made plainest—their danger or their duty; their immediate duty to repent, or the certainty that, without being drawn and renewed by the Spirit of God, they never would repent." Though their duty was immediate, their hearts were hard and deceitful; the tendency of a sinner would always be to rely on animal feelings or carnal repentance. Nothing could be more dangerous for the sinner or more irresponsible in a minister than to allow affections to pass as genuine without convincing evidence:

> His grand aim was to instruct his hearers as thoroughly, and point out the differences so clearly, as to make it difficult for them to get hopes at all without good spiritual evidence on which to found them. Knowing how apt persons are to cling to their hopes, whether good or bad, he depended much more on holding them back, till they had good evidence, than upon shaking them from their false foundations.[xxxvii]

Nettleton's theology moved him to call for immediate repentance—no delay in turning from sin and reaching out to Christ in trust. Ironically, however, his theology gave him a necessary caution about trusting immediate responses if they were not in the context of sufficient understanding and evidence. The "use of means" crept its way through the back door of his evangelistic practice through his view of the relation between regeneration and repentance and faith. The human will was not supreme and had no transformational power; God alone could and would save according to his purpose and power. Immediate decisions, therefore, though morally necessary and naturally possible, were seldom viewed with perfect confidence apart from observation of the fitting operations of gospel means on the sinner's soul. This tension must soon break down, and it would break in favor of the human will.

6. Finney's Challenge to Doctrinal Preaching

The metaphysical journey of the New England theology could not rest in maintaining that tension. Under Nathan W. Taylor (1786-1858), the constructor of the New Haven theology, the sensationally controversial step was taken that the sinner had the power of contrary choice against his moral inability. For Taylor, it was not only true that a sinner could repent if he *would*, but also he could repent if he won't. Transferring this idea into its practical outworking in the pulpit was the special call of Charles G. Finney.

Radical Extension of New England Theology

In 1824, Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875), remarkably like Nettleton in many of his emphases, began an itinerant preaching ministry which would endorse the Jacksonian spirit of self-sufficiency and place its stamp upon evangelism for the brave new world scarcely fifty years old. Born in Warren, Litchfield County, Connecticut, Finney moved with his family to Oneida County, New York, in 1794. His parents were not believers, and he was reared absent any gospel privileges. After common schools in the area and then preparatory school, he returned to New York to study law with Benjamin Wright. He said that he was "almost as ignorant of religion as a heathen."[xxxviii]

When he began to attend church under the preaching of George W. Gale, he claimed to be "rather perplexed than edified by his preaching" and said that Gale was a "hyper-Calvinist." Nevertheless, hyper-Calvinism or not, Finney soon was under deep conviction and on October 10, 1821, resolved to settle the issue of his soul's salvation once and for all. Into a grove of woods he went and determined, "I will give my heart to God or I will never come down from here." But still his pride surfaced at every rustling of the leaves, and he found, "I cannot pray, My heart is dead to God, and will not pray."

He reproached himself for the rash promise that he would now be obliged to break. Upon considering the text, "Then shall ye seek me and

shall find me, when you search for me with all your heart," he concluded that such a search meant a "*voluntary trust* instead of an *intellectual state.*" Promise after promise came before him (some that he did not remember as ever having read), and they fell not so much into his "intellect as into my heart, to be put within the grasp of the voluntary powers of my mind; and I seized hold of them, appropriating them, and fastened upon them with the grasp of a drowning man" (*Memoirs,* 21).

Having lost all sense of guilt, he initially felt that he had committed the unpardonable sin, but soon felt that he had met the Lord Jesus face to face. Later in the evening, so he reported, "The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed *to go through me,* body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves, and waves of liquid love." After another few episodes Finney believed "that the Spirit of God had taken possession of my soul." He entered not only into a state of justification but of "present sanctification" (*Memoirs,* 25).

Great evangelistic success in giving his testimony and stirring admonitions led him to believe, as well as others, that he should enter the ministry. Encouraged to go to Princeton, he declined, for he was confident that "they had been wrongly educated; and they were not ministers that met my ideal at all of what a minister of Christ should be" (*Memoirs*, 47).

He entered into controversy with his pastor, George Gale, over the doctrine of the atonement, refusing to accept his position that "Jesus literally paid the debt of the elect, & fully satisfied retributive justice." His view was that "Jesus only satisfied public justice & that that was all that the government of God could require." Further discussions only led to more controversy, for Finney could not receive Gale's views on "atonement, regeneration, faith, repentance, the slavery of the Will or any of their kindred doctrines." Had Finney thought that those doctrines constituted Christianity, he would have been forced "to be an infidel" (*Memoirs*, 55).[xxxix]

Natural Ability Equals Full Ability

The theological positions Finney adopted embodied the intellectual tendency of the New Haven theology and showed his maturing in the direction of his first instincts. Election was built on pervasive and perfect foreknowledge and included those “whom God foresaw could be converted under the wisest administration of his government.” Sin is purely voluntary and includes nothing communicated by imputation, either of guilt or of corruption. Regeneration, therefore, is a voluntary alteration of one’s affections— that is, the sinner’s actual changing the controlling preference of the mind. If God operates on the sinner by providence and through his Spirit, to the highest degree that he can as one moral agent to another, and this operation is in vain, “there remains nothing more, which as a moral governor, he can do to save him.”[xl] Moral inability is an absurdity. The entire system of imputation is immoral, from Adam’s fall and its implications, through Christ’s death because of sin, to a declaration of righteousness on the basis of another’s obedience. “Strange grace this,” so Finney wrote in his *Systematic Theology,* “that requires a debt to be paid several times over, before obligation is discharged!” He believed that the atonement was general since it has no organic and necessary connection with the forgiveness of sins but is only an expedient on the part of God to jolt the sinner to achieve salvation through his own repentance.

Given this entire system, Finney seemed to assert that entire sanctification was essential if one were to be saved. “The command to be holy implies the practicability of becoming so,” Finney argued in his consistent application of Pelagian assumptions. “I meet with some professed Christians who on this subject have really no hope,” he continued. “They feel the need of being holy, but they are in despair of attaining it before they die. Now these Christians claim to be believers, but they are not,” since they do not hold to the fundamental premise of salvation “He shall save his people from their sins.”

A Theology of Revival

Though departing so radically from the prominent revivalists of previous generations, Finney shared many of their convictions about revival, including his older peers. One, in times of declension, revival was

needed. Two, spiritual life exceeded infinitely in importance all other areas of life. Three, revival and revival preaching must be built on theological principle. Four, though criticized about the sensational character of some of his methods, he believed that extended "excitements" were detrimental to revival, and he was a severe opponent of "enthusiasms." Five, he also believed in the necessity of repentance that involved a complete reorientation of the ultimate intention of the will. His description of true repentance has overtones of Edwards humming in the background:

There is no way, therefore, for the sinner to escape from the commission of sin, but to cease to be selfish. While selfishness continues, you may change the form of outward manifestation, you may deny one appetite or desire for the sake of indulging another; but it is and must be sin still. The desire to escape hell, and to obtain heaven may become the strongest, in which case, selfishness will take on a most sanctimonious type. But if the will is following desire, it is selfishness still; and all your religious duties, as you call them, are only selfishness robed in the stolen habiliments of loving obedience to God. (ST, 126)

New Lebanon Conference

Finney, however, pursued a course of action in his revivals that gave rise to reports of gross abuse. He claimed that "those brethren were grossly deceived by information that they received from some source." This "unreliable information" consisted of about twenty-nine categories of problems characterizing the revivals of Oneida County, New York, preached by Finney (*Memoirs,* 141, 142).[xli] An amazing stream of letters and pamphlets, sermons and reviews of sermons, and accusations and denials followed. This came to a climax in the New Lebanon Conference in the summer of 1826 in which Lyman Beecher and Asahel Nettleton expressed their opposition to the New Measures reportedly employed by Finney. A resolution to avoid the use of destructive measures was adopted, and Finney suggested that a resolution against "lukewarmness" in religion also be adopted. Finney continued to insist that most of the accusations were founded on erroneous reports and that no "wildness, . . . fanaticism, . . . heresy" or

anything deplorable was used (*Memoirs,* 226).[xlii]

Unbound

He did know from the beginning, however, that his theology was a departure from the Westminster standards. Finney did not hide his disdain and disgust for what he thought was a dead and irrational theological heritage, one which could under no circumstances support his views of preaching in revival. In the preface to his Theology, Finney compared the confession to the pope: “Those who have adopted that confession of faith and catechism as an authoritative standard of doctrine, have absurdly adopted the most obnoxious principle of Popery.” The only difference is that an unchanging standard like the confession is worse. “A living Pope,” he contended, “is better than a dead and stereotyped confession of faith, that holds all men bound to subscribe to its unalterable dogmas and its unvarying terminology” (ST, xii). At least the pope might change.

While this viewpoint presented cases of conscience to his Presbyterian contemporaries to whom he initially pledged his fellowship, the changes he prompted in preaching illustrated colorfully the outcome of his challenge to the confession. He set revival preaching ablaze with words and measures designed to awaken the “dormant moral powers” of sinners.

Revitalizing Semi-Pelagianism

At the end of the day, the changes Finney brought centered both on his theological direction as well as on his supposed use of startling measures, both sustained by his unremitting rationalism. Edwards, and Nettleton after him, integrated more fully the senses, affections, and feelings into their doctrines of sin and conversion. Will, or choice, arose from the affections as a loving guide to the intellect. True repentance, therefore, could only be effected by the Spirit’s renovation of the soul, a capture of both mind and heart. Right action proceeds directly from knowledge of truth empowered by sanctified desire, or affection.

Finney, on the other hand, would insist that “desire” is “constitutional,” that is, intrinsically an element of human nature, a “phenomenon of the sensibility.” Being, thus, a “purely involuntary state of mind,” in itself it can produce no action “nor can it . . . have moral character.” For this reason he did not see “selfishness” or a selfish ultimate intention as a manifestation of depraved affections, but as a purely voluntary action. It is the submission of the will to desire rather than to reason. Sin is always unreasonableness. “Obedience to moral law, as it is revealed in the reason, is virtue,” says Finney; while “obedience to the sensibility in opposition to the reason is sin” (ST, 119).

Finney developed this thought to a high degree of clarity and promoted it as foundational to his theory of preaching and conversion. “Selfishness,” he says again, “consists in the will’s yielding itself to the impulses of the sensibility, in opposition to the demands of the intelligence.” Yielding the will to the sensibilities, or desires, is always sinful because always selfish. Even if these desires are looked upon as virtuous rather than vicious, actions done by submission of the will to them remain sinful. They can never be anything other than selfish because they are desires and always contemplate personal pleasure or satisfaction as the ultimate intention. It is only in the intellect that true understanding and evaluation of different courses can be formed:

> Reason was given him to direct him in regard to the choice of the great end of life. It gives him the idea of the eternal and the infinite. It spreads out before him the interests of God and of the universe as of absolutely infinite value. It affirms their value, and the infinite obligation of the sinner to consecrate himself to these interests; and it promises him endless rewards if he will do so. On the contrary, it lays before him the consequences of refusal. It thunders in his ear the terrible sanctions of the law. It points him to the coming doom that awaits his refusal to comply with its demands. But behold, in the face of all this, the sinner, unhesitatingly, in the face of these affirmations, demands, and threatenings, turns away and consecrates himself to the gratifications of his desires with the certainty that he could not do greater despite to his own nature than in this most mad, most preposterous, most blasphemous choice….Total, universal, and

shameless unreasonableness, is the universal characteristic of every selfish mind. (ST, 120-22)

The Preacher's Approach

This position, an exaggeration of the New England theology, brought about a redefinition of the role of the preacher and the Holy Spirit in conversion. In his sermon "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," Finney argues that the change of heart involved in regeneration "consists in changing the controlling preference of the mind in regard to the end of pursuit." This is voluntary change built on the right use of reason: "God only requires of you to choose and act reasonably, for certainly it is in accordance with right reason to prefer the glory of God, and the interest of his immense kingdom, to your own private interest." [xliii]

There are four elements that participate in this change of heart: the sinner, the truth, the preacher, and the Spirit. According to Finney, "The actual turning or change, is the sinners own act." The truth turns him in that it contains the appropriate information presented to the reason. The preacher turns him by presenting the truth and arguing the case as a lawyer would with a jury. The Spirit turns him in the same sense that the preacher does except with greater insight and power. "In speaking of this change," Finney argues, "it is perfectly proper to say, that the Spirit turned him, just as you would say of a man, who had persuaded another to change his mind on the subject of politics, that he had converted him, and brought him over." In the final analysis, however, though these forces cooperate, "God commands you to do it, expects you to do it, and if it is ever done, you must do it" (*Sermons*, 23).

Since no qualitative distinction exists between what the preacher does and what the Holy Spirit does, their work is one and the same. In fact, at times the preacher might, as it were, be a free and clear channel for the Holy Spirit. Finney began his ministry under the conviction that little or no preparation was needed for the pulpit concerning the immediate content of the sermon, but that the Spirit would give the subject and all of its divisions on the spot. At Evans Mills in Jefferson County, New York, Finney recalled, "I had not taken a thought with regard to what I should

preach, —indeed this was common with me at that time. I was full of the Holy Spirit, and I felt confident that when the time came for action, I should know what to preach." That conviction never waned. He spent his time in expansive reading and organizing thoughts by intense reflection and meditation rather than formal sermon preparation. "I depended on the occasion and the Holy Spirit to suggest the text, and to open up the whole subject to my mind," he reported with an implied exhortation to emulate his practice. "Certainly in no part of my ministry have I ever preached with greater success and power than I did when I preached in that way," he reported. "If I did not preach from inspiration, I don't know how I did preach" (*Memoirs,* 67, 94).

No one should say, in light of this testimony, that Finney boasted "of a higher inspiration than is promised to ministers, or than ministers have a right to expect." No, he believed that "all ministers, called by Christ to preach the Gospel, ought to be, and may be in such a sense inspired, as to 'preach the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.'" Christ meant nothing else when he commanded, "Go and disciple all nations; —and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"? It was not only a promise to the apostles but the gospel minister of all ages when Jesus promised, "speaking of the Holy Spirit— 'He shall take of mine and show it unto you.' And also 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you.'" Thus, the work of the minister and the work of the Holy Spirit virtually coalesces into one work, for "all ministers may be & ought to be, so filled with the Holy Spirit that all who hear them shall be impressed with the conviction that God is in them of a truth'" (*Memoirs,* 95-96).

The preacher, therefore, under such an impression, looks to the preaching moment as that time in which the word, as spoken by the preacher, is the time of the most powerful operation of the Spirit. He recorded an occasion of preaching under the power of this impression.

Increasing the Pressure

Finney differed little from Nettleton in his concept of the necessity of the immediacy of repentance. Though in the case narrated above Finney

waited until the next evening to invoke repentance, he generally proceeded on the assumption, depending on his sense of the state of conviction, that there should be no delay in their change of heart. In preaching in Utica, New York, Finney recalled, “Instead of telling sinners to use the means of grace and pray for a new heart we called on them to make themselves a new heart and a new spirit, and pressed the duty of instant surrender to God” (*Memoirs*, 190). Finney, differing greatly from Nettleton on the application of that conviction, taught also that in light of the necessity of such immediate duty, to hold at the same time a moral inability to do so was a moral outrage and a rational absurdity. No, the preacher must be able to tell the sinner “how to change your heart.”

In his sermon by that title, he again emphasized the voluntariness and rationality of the change. The preacher must learn to arrest the attention of the sinner and appeal to the proper motives of conscience. He must be able to convince the sinner that to act thus is right. He holds before the sinner the character of God and the rationality and justness of his requirements as well as the morally compelling nature of the work of Christ. It is then simply a matter of doing the right thing: “Your consent is all that is needed. Be willing to do your duty, and the work is done” (*Sermons*, 50).

Based on this view of the changed heart, Finney had words of instruction to preachers. When the sinner’s attention is thoroughly secured,

> the favorable moment should be seized upon fully to enlighten his mind, and lead him to a right understanding of his responsibilities, and the claims of his Maker. If there is any flagging of the attention, such appeals should instantly be made to the feelings, as to arouse and fix the thoughts; and an anxious watchfulness should be constantly kept up to preserve attention, and enlighten the mind as fast as possible. In this way, you will most effectually aid the operations of the Holy Spirit, push matters to an issue, and secure the conversion of the sinner to God. (*Sermons*, 55)

Organizing for Success

From this basis, Finney inferred the usefulness of “special efforts to promote revivals of religion.” The protracted meeting, “and other measures which are new, are calculated to promote the conversion of sinners. Their novelty excites and fixes attention. Their being continued from day to day, serves to enlighten the mind, and has a philosophical tendency to issue in conversion” (*Sermons*, 56).

Finney’s eventual legacy lay not so much in the continuation of his theology as it did in his promotion of the converting power of the preacher. Although this arose in his practice as the immediate effect of his doctrinal convictions, his practice was seen as both effective and imitable in achieving results. In a portion of his *Memoirs* omitted in the first publication, Finney included an extended discussion of how the preacher must deal with souls:

> With these views of the subject I saw clearly that just at the point where the sinner is thoroughly instructed, and while under the voice of the living preacher with the strong pressure of truth set home by the Holy Ghost upon him, something was needed to induce him to act then and there upon his convictions. I concluded then, and have always thought since, that to call the sinner right out from the mixed multitude to take a stand for God, to be as open and frank in his renunciation of sin before the world as he had been in committing it; to call him to change sides, to renounce the world and come over to Christ, to renounce his own righteousness and accept that of Christ, — in short to do just that which constitutes a change of heart, was just what was needed (*Memoirs*, 323).

This concept of calling the sinner “right out from the mixed multitude to take a stand for God” worked like leaven in American evangelicalism. Gradually, indiscernibly seeping into each pore of the ecclesiastical loaf, versions of Finney’s rationalistic concept of conversion began to puff the evangelistic results.

Though the great prayer revival of 1857 largely escaped the influence of Finney’s idiosyncrasies, the wave of the future was Finney’s formula: “arouse and fix the thoughts” and “push matters to an issue” and gain the consent of the sinner to be willing to do his duty.

Heart Faith and Deep Change

Finney's legacy for doctrinal preaching covers a wide spectrum. Some discussions are well said and edifying—truly and clearly put in the defense of truth. He had no low views of the necessity of repentance and of a heartfelt submission to God and faith in Christ. Belief unaccompanied by zeal for God and mourning for sin was not saving belief. His arguments against atheism, infidelity on the issue of biblical inspiration, and his assault on Unitarianism and Universalism can find, with exceptions to some arguments, resonance among all evangelical Christians. His synthesizing of the indications of general revelation with the facts of special revelation provides an instructive method of doing theology.

On other issues, however, he is so far from a comprehensive biblical synthesis that one may justly suspect an alien assumption governed his process of reasoning. On issues such as regeneration, atonement, election, the entire system of imputation, the persevering nature of true saving faith, the human will, and the relation of holiness to salvation, Finney is at least a puzzle if not positively dangerous.

The perplexity makes itself clear in a sermon entitled "On Believing with the Heart." In discussing his difficulties with the Necessarians, who believe "not the freedom but the bondage of the will," he pointed to Jonathan Edwards as one of the chief perpetrators of this ghastly doctrine that "the will is determined *necessarily* by the strongest motive." He consented that Edwards believed that God is supremely good, not because of, but in spite of the "absurdities of this philosophy." He mentioned others that seemed to have a deep trust in a God of goodness and love and yet believed, and argued forthrightly, for the moral bondage of the human will. "It is often the case," Finney observed, "that men have such heart-confidence in God that they will trust him despite of the most flagrant absurdities" (*Way*, 321, 322).

And yet what he called an absurdity is the very point he adopted as "heart-faith." While he rejected the conclusion that the will always is determined by, or always is as, the strongest motive, he himself asserted

that heart-faith “implies love, and seems in its very nature to unify itself with the affections” (*Way*, 314). Earlier he had called all that arises from desire, or affections, is in itself sin. In this sermon, he taught that “it is quite essential to heart-faith that we have genuine love to God” (*Way*, 320). If we have no love for God, we cannot have heart-faith. Finney, perhaps carelessly, adopted the motive that he had just dismissed as absurd. If love for God is not an internal motive that determines our trust in him, then the whole point of “heart-faith” falls to the ground.

To one who believes that love for God is so alien to the fallen creature that nothing less than a divinely prompted and empowered change of affections necessarily precedes saving faith, Finney’s description of love in relation to heart-faith seems like an argument for the historic Reformed position. He seemed, in fact, ripe for a capitulation to the Reformed doctrine when he stated, “A further condition is, that the soul be inwardly drawn to God” (*Way*, 319). Of course, that is not so with Finney, for in his viewpoint, each person has within him the full moral as well as natural capability of changing his own heart to love and to perfect holiness.

In earlier days, therefore, Finney considered the Reformed emphasis on the internal effectual operations of the Spirit as mere superstition. In this sermon he noted, “There is less superstition in this than I used to suppose, and more faith.” How can this be? It is so because faith comes in spite of one’s system— “Men forget their dogmas and philosophy, and, despite of both, love and confide.” Their intuitive *reason* was one thing— the sensible instincts about God that led them to love and faith. At the same time, their *reasonings* were quite another— the points they asserted that led them to “monstrous notions in philosophy and theology” (*Way*, 322).

This kind of “your heart is better than your theology” approach allows the polemicist to affirm the genuineness of the Christian experience of the other, while arguing that some of the dominant principles of the other’s theology are sub- or anti-Christian. In this same sermon, Finney sets forth heart-faith as carrying one “over the manifold mysteries and difficulties of God’s providence.” These difficulties exist because “no human vision can penetrate to the bottom of God’s providential plans and purposes.” One of these difficulties is God’s permission of sin in the

world. Even the holy in heaven are perplexed by this as a result of their inability to have a perfect “knowledge of God’s plans.” The entrance of sin into the world was a result of God’s plans! But even with such a plan, Finney consents, God still is “good and wise” (*Way*, 323-24, 327).

Yes, even Finney sees it. So why should he resist the reasoning of Edwards in the framework of the entire Reformed theological tradition that affirms that God had a plan for sin’s entrance into the world, and this plan compromises neither his character nor human freedom? The explanation given by Edwards of facts that Finney himself accepts was shoved aside as an absurdity or a monstrous notion. Finney would give his own explanation, but he did not want any explanation to smother the reality of “heart-faith.” He did not “object to their studying the philosophy of every doctrine up to the limits of human knowledge,” but he warned against this endeavor as a temptation to pride that would slaughter simple faith. There was no lack of “substantial testimony to the great doctrines of the gospel,” so that while “their philosophy may stagger the wisest man, . . . the evidence of their truth ought to satisfy all, and alike the child and the philosopher” (*Way*, 328).

The responsibility to do systematic theology lies precisely in what Finney has called “their philosophy,” that is, the implications individual doctrines hold for developing a coherent scheme of thought. The preacher has the stewardship to present the fullness of biblical teaching in a coherent way with a consistent integration with other doctrines. While such an attempt might not answer every question and leads to some perplexity, that should not make any doubt the plain truth of the individual assertions of biblical revelation, or what Finney called “substantial testimony to the great doctrines of the gospel” (*Way*, 328).

This is where the rub comes with Finney and where he prompted the departure of American evangelicalism from overall God-centeredness to overall man-centeredness. The final determining capacity of the human will was the philosophical foundation of Finney’s doctrinal synthesis. The dual obligation of the preacher, therefore, is to reach the will with the truth while confiding in the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and to convince the sinner that the final outcome of the entire enterprise of salvation is in his own hands.

Evangelists' Examination

This brand of crowd management began to work its way by degrees into Baptist life. An effective pastor, writer, and insightful observer of trends in Baptist life, W. E. Hatcher, wrote an article entitled "The Modern Evangelist" for *The Examiner*, a Baptist paper published in New York. Appearing in November 1887, the article summarized the accumulated observations of Hatcher on this developing phenomenon. Hatcher felt great sympathy for the evangelist and acknowledged that in some quarters unjust scorn had been heaped up to counteract the swelling enthusiasm which he sometimes enjoyed. He wrote as one who accepted the office as "abundantly justified by New Testament teaching." Hatcher on other occasions had shown that an evangelist had an "ample and important field and that he ought to be the best helper of the pastor." He suggested that both an evangelist's successes and sacrifices should be commended.

But he saw that dangerous tendencies had arisen creating alarm in many of the most mature and settled ministers. The "strained methods and superficial teachings" of the evangelist have made some reticent to use him, bringing thus on the pastor's head the charges of "Pharisees and hypocrites."

Hatcher felt it was time to defend the pastoral brethren by bringing to the front the reasons for this developing resistance. In virtue, the modern evangelists differ, "but in faults they are one." The final in a list of three Hatcher mentions is entitled "A Man of Method." Though true to many aspects of the gospel, the evangelist's content is overwhelmed by the fever of his technique. Hatcher described it:

> But while he preaches the gospel, he presents it in a dangerously mechanical way. He sometimes reminds one of the street peddler, who has a new nostrum for toothache. He holds up the gospel remedy, and then calls on the sinners to march up and get it. If they accept, he shakes hands with them; if they hesitate, he regales them with a song, and gives them another chance. If they yet refuse, he insists in some partial advance on their part, such as bowing or standing, or holding

up their hand, or some other manifestation. Into these methods many pastors have fallen as well.

Though rejoicing in external proofs of ministry is normal and may be godly, “it is very easy for them to become unduly solicitous as to immediate results.”

Baptists need evangelists, Hatcher concluded. “They need men who have been trained in the schools . . . who are not hankering after newspaper notoriety, who trust in the Holy Spirit and not in methods for producing conversion.” Hatcher was fearful that technique was overwhelming truth.

John A. Broadus, a contemporary of Hatcher, noticed the same tendency and said, “In our restless nation and agitated times, in these days of somewhat bustling religious activity, there has come to be too little of real doctrinal preaching.” [xliv] This judgment was made in 1870. The decline of “real doctrinal preaching” was just beginning. He was spared the worst of it.

7. Following Finney's Formula

With theology contra-intuitively gradually shrinking the sphere of God's influence and expanding the effectuality of human volition and method, doctrinal exposition diminished in preaching and engagement with human sympathy increased. While this manner of preaching and communication is less self-consciously doctrinal, it nevertheless sends a profound theological impression. Proclamation cannot escape being theological, for it is a powerful element in establishing the worldview of those who hear and trust the pulpit.

The omission, therefore, of biblical exposition within the sphere of confessional orthodoxy leaves the default worldview of naturalism, secularism, and pragmatism intact. Christian words surrounding existential sentiment simply provide a veneer for the prevailing propensities and self-absorption of human culture. Man-centered theology leads to minimization of theology which results in the baptism of untransformed human desires.

Moody: The Power and Peril of Simple Zeal

Of all the nineteenth-century evangelists, none has had more staying power in the affections of modern evangelicals than D. L. Moody (1837-99). A friend of Spurgeon, a friend of J. P. Boyce, the conscience of many nineteenth-century financial moguls, an opponent of ungodliness and the developing worldliness of the end of the nineteenth century, an honest, sincere, plain-spoken layman, Moody was high in unction and in compassion. He had great appeal to the masses. They seemed convinced that he was sincerely concerned about them— and he was.

A Genius of Sincerity

He made evangelicalism into an empire through large evangelistic meetings, Bible conferences, publishing houses, and schools. Tens of thousands of people traced their conversion to Christianity to the simplicity and clarity of the presentation of Christ and the unpretentious

sincerity of concern for sinners that unflaggingly characterized the ministry of Dwight L. Moody. Moody was aware that large numbers of professions were not genuine: “I have been forty years in Christian work,” he preached in 1899, “and I have never known God to disappoint any man or woman who was in earnest about their soul’s salvation. I know lots of people who pretend to be in earnest, but their prayers are never answered.”[xlv]

Stan Gundry has issued a deserved reprimand to those who are “unsympathetic to Moody because they saw him as a threat to their own brand of rigid orthodoxy” and, on the other hand, to those who were “simply unsympathetic to any form of orthodoxy.”[xlvi] This short section on Moody is written with admiration for the character, zeal, Bible-centeredness, and unrelenting desire for the propagation of Christ’s saving power to the masses. In pursuit, however, of the historical influences that chipped away at a God-centered, confessionally informed, biblically driven exposition as the chief material of preaching, one cannot ignore the long-term effect of Moody’s influence. The massive good that he did also became an avenue for commendation of his own weaknesses. Though his skill in public speaking and biblical knowledge rose far above his formal education, some of his weaknesses seemed to be strengths and were absorbed into evangelical culture.

Loosely Connected Doctrine

Moody preached with clarity, with earnest appeal, but often was incomplete in his presentation of gospel truth. He did not risk enervating his gospel preaching through polemical engagement. The avoidance, even the ignorance, of metaphysics arguably does not detract from Moody; that which is disturbing is his lack of theological development. Moody was a great admirer of spiritually powerful people— men and women alike— and borrowed from them what he thought was effective. He developed a strong conservative biblically driven stance on individual doctrines but frequently failed to develop the connecting tissues between them.

Stan Gundry located several doctrinal themes in Moody that made their way into his sermons at various points.[xlvii] He did not have a well-developed system but manifested a basically conservative propensity embracing certain influences. Early in his life, he had some Arminian influences settle into his overall doctrinal views. His contact with J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren gave him a sympathy for dispensational thought. He brought Keswick speakers to the Northfield Bible conferences, which moved him to integrate deeper-life ideas into his preaching. Elements of Calvinism are nudged in through his contacts with Charles Spurgeon, Henry Moorhouse, and Andrew Bonar. He also expressed a great admiration for Joseph Parker, who was something of a nemesis to Spurgeon. His revolt against Unitarianism made him wary of any kind of collusion with non-Trinitarianism. It served his ecumenical spirit best to avoid making any definite statements on ecclesiology and the ordinances. Justin Fulton noted concerning this eclecticism, "Moodyism is a growth rather than a policy. It is the name of a movement rather than an organization. It is an attempt to evangelize the millions without instructing them in regard to church obligations, and the necessity of observing the ordinances Christ instituted."[xlviii] Fulton is not exactly right, for Moody encouraged all his converts to attend a Bible-believing church in which they could go to work for the advancement of the gospel. [xlix]

Several themes emerged in Moody's preaching, present in varying degrees and on a sliding scale between opaqueness and transparency. Gundry stated, "Although none of Moody's extant sermons are organized with exactly this outline, examination reveals that the formula conveniently summarizes his understanding of the basics of the gospel."[l] This formula was stated in Moody's *The Way and the Word.*[li] Moody set forth man's condition as one of ruin. Humanity was ruined by the fall and stands in need, therefore, of a saving work. This leads to the second theme, redemption. The blood of Jesus Christ is the redeeming power for man in his state of sin. None can be saved who try to avoid the necessity of a blood atonement for the forgiveness of sins. Third, life in the Spirit and the gift of eternal life is communicated in regeneration—

ruin, redemption, regeneration. Two other *R*'s might be added. *Revelation* points to our dependence on Scripture for truth. Moody unhesitatingly received the full truthfulness of the Bible and that all doctrine must arise from a "Thus saith the Lord." *Return* points to the premillennial return of Christ.

The earnestness and passion of Moody has found no detractors either among his contemporaries or those who have researched his life and ministry. It has been difficult, beyond the simple formulas abstracted above, to find a coherently framed doctrinal system that governed his preaching ministry. He separated doctrine from a personal feasting on Jesus himself: "If you want to know the way of Life, believe that Jesus Christ is a personal Saviour; cut away from all doctrines and creeds, and come right to the heart of the Son of God. If you have been feeding on dry doctrine there is not much growth in that kind of food." Doctrine might lead us to a place of spiritual nourishment like a road going to a place of feasting ("if I take the right one"). But "feeding on doctrines is like trying to live on dry husks."[lii]

The disconnect between "doctrines and creeds" and true spirituality would increase in prominence but also have the effect of generating pointless piety and undefined Christianity. Moody was wonderful in his use of *Cruden's Concordance* and stringing together many passages of Scripture that had the same word in them, but at times one may detect a virtual absence of doctrinal continuity and connection in presenting the logic of thought within a biblical text. Such theological logic would have been aided greatly by a serious appreciation and use of the confessional history of Protestantism.

In a sermon on the new birth, Moody recognized the helpfulness of such purposeful coherence when he stated, "If a man is unsound on this doctrine he will be unsound on almost every other fundamental doctrine in the Bible" (WtG, 22). He would seem to imply that all the doctrines of the Bible are connected, and error in one will surely compromise or even radically alter another. With such a serious task before the preacher, a well-ordered set of doctrines could hardly be viewed as "dry husks." He spoke of the necessity of the new birth and the mysterious nature of its

powerful impact on human actions, morals, and affections as well as a sinner's absolute dependence on God for it.

So necessary is the new birth for salvation that "an unregenerated man would rather be in hell than in heaven." He knew and taught with clarity that every person is in desperate need of a change of nature granted in the new birth. Apparently without conceding the shift, Moody then conflated the new birth with the necessity of faith in Christ, strongly implying that the new birth amounted to "whosoever believeth in him." The new birth is that attainment of eternal life through looking to Christ—"God has provided a remedy and it is offered to all. . . . Look at the Crucified One. Look to Calvary. Bear in mind, sinner, that Jesus died for all. . . . Lift [your eyes] up to Jesus, who took away the sin of the world, and there will be life for you from this hour" (WtG, 30-38).

The very thing that the new birth effects in the heart of the sinner is that which Moody concluded had to be the work of the sinner. In a puzzling conjoining of action and ability on the matter of repentance and faith, Moody stated: "The moment a man made up his mind, God gave him the power." Without giving any hint as to how one makes up his mind before God gives him the power, Moody continued, "God does not ask any man to do what he has not the power to do." Certainly, Moody reasoned, God would not command all men everywhere to repent "if they were not able to do so" (WtG, 75-76).

Moody's *ordo salutis* required repentance prior to faith and faith prior to the new birth; so God must wait until one believes before he can give the new birth. "He has done everything that He could do toward your salvation," Moody informed the sinner. "You need not wait for God to do anything more." In Isaiah 5:4, God himself queries as to what more he could do: "He sent His prophets, and they killed them; then He sent His beloved Son, and they murdered Him. Now he has sent the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin, and to show how we are to be saved." At its most critical existential stage, Moody taught, salvation rested in the willingness of a sinner to look, that is, repent of sin, and believe on Christ, thereby gaining the new birth (WtG, 30–31).

Another difficulty that emerged was Moody's conviction that he was

preaching the gospel when in fact sometimes its truncated presentation belied the results he thought were present. In the winter of 1898-99, within a year before his death, Moody delivered a sermon on revivals at East Northfield, Massachusetts. The winter before, while he was on the Pacific coast, he read an article about himself that said his preaching no longer had the effect that it used to. He said, “I will take note”:

> The next Sunday I was preaching in the Mormon tabernacle in Salt Lake City; there were probably seven thousand people there. I commenced on sin. I believe Mormons are just as much sinners as the rest of us. I bore down as hard as I could on sin; and when I got through, I said:
>
> > “You have heard this. Do you want to break with sin? Are you tired and sick of sin?” I said, “take time to consider; don’t act on the impulse, but just consider. *If* there is one in this house that wants to break with sin, I am going to ask you to rise and stand while I pray.”
> >
> > I put it fair and square, and gave them perhaps five minutes before I brought them to a decision, and do you know, almost the whole crowd rose! Tears rolled down their cheeks.[liii]

He repeated the same sermon in three more places with virtually the same results. The decision time was the same. He gave the congregation time to consider and asked that all who wanted to break with sin stand while he prayed for them. He made no mention of preaching the person of Christ nor the nature of the work of Christ on the cross, but just that he bore down on sin. His conclusion was: “Don’t tell me that the gospel hasn’t the same power it had of old! Don’t tell me that men need any different kind of preaching.”[liv] We may hope that he preached the person and work of Christ to the Mormons, as we should do, but it appears that he thought his truncated presentation was enough.

Reductionism saturated the method of the preacher. Too much truth might quench the Spirit. Extended concern for doctrinal precision saps the true spirituality out of the preaching.[lv]

Sam Jones: Harangue, Abuse, and Comedy

The preaching of Sam Jones (1847–1906) perhaps is the most striking caricature of this method. He forgot the depth and detail of doctrinal instruction given by Finney but adopted his principle that the sinner must be brought to a decision under the living voice of the preacher. Jones said, “Mr. Finney, in my opinion, was the most omnipotent preacher that was ever in the American pulpit.” He emulated the anecdotal plain style of Moody and became known as the “Moody of the South.” A contemporary sympathetic observer noted that his power “lies in his fund of apt anecdotes and illustrations and his inimitable and amusing way relating the same.” Further he commented, “Mr. Jones often uses slang and other uncouth language to attract attention.” The observer compliments him as being “one of the most sensational preachers in the world, yet his meetings produce intense interest and an immense harvest of converts, most of whom ‘stick.’” [lvi]

Jones saw no reason to make the Christian faith too complicated since he believed that creeds and confessions only confused the mind and tended to substitute the head for the heart: “There is nothing in any creed that will take a man to heaven. It’s faith. There is nothing in a creed that will save any man; a creed is nothing but a shadow of truth”; the creed has “no life in it” but is an object of observation. His statement certainly is true that “no creed *per se* ever saved anybody,” for the Bible discloses all one needs to know.[lvii]

Such apparent Bible-centeredness hides the reality that creeds and confessions, rightly used, distill biblical truth from years, yea, generations, of Bible study, theological reflection, and polemical purification. A solid creed is not against the Bible but for it. It does not impose error on us but helps protect us from it.

The most important idea for the evangelist to master, however, in the practice of Sam Jones, is not some obtuse doctrinal conundrum, but how to endear the audience to your message so they will receive it. How does a preacher get a person to decide to change his ultimate intention? The more simply stated, the more likely one is to have success.

Jones preached his first sermon, one week after his conversion, on “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” He reported the sermon as a triumph of the power of passion:

> My exegesis and the critical analysis of the text I have forgotten, but, really, I do not think that either the exegesis or analysis came in on that occasion. I think before I had proceeded far into the text I adopted the plan of a good, old Methodist preacher “in the brush” who shut up his Bible and said: “Brethren, I can’t preach the text, but I can tell my experience in spite of the devil.” And out of a heart gushing full of love to God and the man, I told them of God’s gracious dealings with me. Hundreds were melted to tears, and when the invitation was given for penitents to come forward, they thronged the altar, and I believe many were converted.[lviii]

The theory of preaching that he developed did not fall too far from that initial foray into pulpit ministration. In *Sam Jones’ Own Book*, he explained how Simon Peter Richardson showed him that the pulpit “was not a prison, but a throne; that instead of bars and walls and boundary lines, I might have wings and space as my heritage.” He remembered well when his “involuntary confinement ended and liberty began.” For years, he enjoyed this liberty “and never consulted the theological landmarks or visited the orthodox prison.” As God’s free man, Jones could think God’s thoughts “with as little reverence for the Nicene Creed as for the resolutions of the General conference.” He had no hesitation with this lack of reverence for either, for he was “assured of the human origin of both alike.”[lix]

His Christology was not all that flowered in such a lovely way under this “freedom” from the constraints of orthodoxy; he prayed to be delivered from “some of the phases of orthodoxy, so called.” Jones’s sense of the transforming beauty of the cross was a revolt against the angry God of Jonathan Edwards. One of the “phases of orthodoxy” from which he wished to be delivered was the proposition that Jesus on the cross was a “victim of divine wrath, and a target for divine anger.” Jones considered the picture of Jesus bearing the wrath of his Father to be a

perversion of every concept of love imaginable. “It’s a lie, It’s a lie!” he exclaimed; “God never was mad, nor did he ever shoot the javelin from His great hand at the heart and body of His Son.” Then after citing that God “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” explained, “God never was mad with this world. God never poured out His wrath on His only begotten Son.”[lx]

Contemplating the atonement, Jones gushed, “To stand on some mount of freedom and see that God is love and see that Christ is the manifestation of that love,—how transforming the vision!” With disdain he shouted the hated scenario—“God angry with a world, and with the weapons of his anger drawn, he poured his wrath and anger upon the victim on the cross!”[lxi] To Jones, the idea of substitution and propitiation combined would disfigure the character of God:

> To see in Christ a Saviour loving a sinner and saving a sinner, rather than a victim scarred by divine vengeance and abandoned by divine sovereignty; to see that the pierced side was an open doorway; to see in his hands, prints made by the cruel nails, the marks of his sympathy, and in his cross, my death to sin; and in his resurrection, my hope of eternal life; and realize that in all his works and sufferings and death, there is to me power given to begin, and grace given to continue, and help and weapons with which to conquer, and crowns and harps for my reward![lxii]

The images are inviting, the rhetoric moving, but the theology, little short of liberalism. Saving a sinner through a cross without vengeance makes no room for the vindication of the law of God and thus no ground for forgiveness. Jones did not want to be reminded of divine wrath. He wants the sinner to feel that God operates in such a way to assure me of my comfort, my power, my assurance, my reward. Unfettered by confessions and creeds, set free from responsible exegesis, Jones was able to preach in such a way as to ignore the vindication of God’s justice, his righteousness, his holiness, his law in preference for our happiness and comfort. In short, we are led to believe another gospel. When the corner is turned from God-centeredness to man-centeredness, the

theological deconstruction is endless.

Though Jones would delight in the characterization that he knew very little theology, he was, nevertheless, a master at arresting attention and evoking a decision under the living voice of the preacher. In discussing what it means to believe, Jones said that he had “read a good many books on faith, and I found everything in them as clear as mud. I never read a book on faith that would give a man an intelligent idea of what it meant.” He defined repentance and faith as “adjusting the soul rightly toward God and taking what he is willing to give.” That did not involve any advance in cognition but in “trying to do the will of God,” to live up to the teachings of the Bible, and “following right after God.” Our problem is not knowledge, for we have enough of that, he supposed. Before conversion, Jones believed every line of the Bible and that Jesus was the Son of God. He was just not living up to it. Faith is in doing. “If a man believes anything after he gets religion that he did not believe before, I have never seen it. If I believed anything after I was converted that I did not believe before, I do not know what it is.”[lxiii]

With the gospel becoming ever simpler by the dismissing of the past feverish concerns over biblical and doctrinal details, one may focus on the appeal more than worries about verification of the truth. With such a simple gospel, lengthy doctrinal exposition was not needed. If asked for even a simpler definition of repentance, Jones would respond, “Quit your meanness.”[lxiv]

His definition amounted to a word of advice that was generally manageable and directed toward peaceful human relations. That is a far cry from the catechetical response that defines repentance as a “saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it, unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” Too many words, too many nuances, too much mud.

His success in the pulpit under the umbrella of doctrinal vapidity was a strong doctrinal statement in itself, one filled with peril for the future. Sinners may be converted by immediate appeal to emotion and will.

Words with a doctrinal history of substance may be used, but they are emptied of their content, simplified to manageability, and serve as mere slogans apart from any construction of truth.

His sermons are a mass of funny folksy stories, moralistic meanderings, good-old-days sentimentality, a bit of Jim Crow racism, and confused theology. Sometimes his wandering carried him across the plain of truth, but it is difficult to tell if he knew he was there. He did maintain attention, however, and kept them laughing to the end. The sincerity of Jones's typical appeal cannot be doubted, nor can one fail to lament the grave lack of doctrinal content of preaching and the consequential trivialization of conversion:

> Oh, brother let us never sin! Oh, brother let us endeavor to begin a new life tonight. Brother and sister, let us never die. Let us give ourselves to God and begin eternal life. I want to say, in conclusion, I sympathize with every man that is not a Christian. Will every man that is not a Christian stand up, and by doing so say: "I want to be a Christian."
>
> (A great many person rose to their feet.)
>
> Now before we dismiss the congregation I want every member of any church to stand up and say: "I pledge myself anew to God for a better life. I am going to do better. I am going to set a better example to my children and to my city."
>
> (Almost the whole congregation stood.)
>
> Oh brethren! what a victory for Christ![lxv]

Hopefully. But assuredly a victory for a man-controlled salvation riding the coattails of doctrinally impoverished preaching.

8. Billy Sunday: The Sawdust Trail

Billy Sunday (1862–1935) died on November 6, 1935, a week after preaching, against his doctor's advice.[lxvi] His text for this final sermon was his perennial theme: "What must I do to be saved?" with the burden of the attention on the "I do."

Billy Sunday carried himself with consummate confidence embracing the demeanor of a successful and well-dressed businessman. When he got into the pulpit, however, none of the detachment, undisturbed sophistication, and aplomb of his dapper impression remained, but he took on the persona of a jealous lion, pacing, glaring, growling, and daring any creature to seek to cross him in the territory that was his. His podium and pulpit were his war zone. He could sound tender, savage, imploring, demanding, sympathetic, or outraged. In the early twentieth century he provided American observers an interesting, and sometimes compelling, figure of the zealous evangelist, the American patriot, the social moralist, and the flashy entertainer.[lxvii]

Sunday's ministry had extended moments of transparent evangelical candor and purity interrupted by a self-promoting, moralistic bombast. He never departed from a thoroughgoing commitment to the Bible and the blood but sometimes seemed to smother them with a vindictive absolutism of opinion and an oppressive assertion of soteriological autonomy or cultural moralisms. Roger Bruns wrote, "His message was not grounded in sophisticated theological equation or subtle argument; it was simple, uncomplicated fundamentalist belief, the time-worn biblical stories told powerfully and coarsely in the language of the street and field."[lxviii]

Sunday's mixture of manhood, morals, Americanism, and willfully managed Christianity pushed the envelope toward seeing Christianity as the surest route to achieving the American dream. Robert F. Martin summarized Sunday's overall perspective: "The intricacies of theology

actually mattered little to him, but such doctrine as he espoused conformed largely to a few basic tenets of fundamentalist dogma. He took for granted the mainstream social and economic orthodoxy of his native region, and he equated the evangelical moral code of rural and small town mid and nineteenth-century Iowa with Christian conduct."[lxix] Mixed with admirable zeal for the cause of truth were seeds (fully ready to germinate) of self-affirmation.

An Orphan Boy Who Found a Heavenly Father

Born in Ames, Iowa, in 1862 to William and Mary Jane Sunday, he never saw his father, who contracted an illness and died while serving in the Union army. When Billy was ten years old, his mother sent him and one of his brothers to live in an orphanage in Glenwood, Iowa. Eventually he returned to live with his grandfather, worked jobs as a fireman and a janitor, and was helped to attend high school by a local politician. He learned to love baseball. While Sunday competed with local traveling teams, Cap Anson of the Chicago White Stockings saw him play and signed him to a professional contract. From 1883–91 he played for Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Though he was only mediocre as a hitter, his speed in the outfield and his sideshow potential in racing local track stars made him a valuable asset for the White Stockings. He would often use illustrations and athletic antics from his baseball days while preaching. "I am vehement," he proclaimed, "and I serve God with the same vehemence that I served the devil when I went down the line."[lxx]

In 1886, Sunday was converted through the street preaching of Harry Monroe of the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. After attending several services there, Sunday, being moved by the singing of hymns he had heard as a child, professed conversion to Christ. He reflected on the manner of his conversion as he illustrated how simple and quick a transaction it can be. Though some looked at true religion being initiated by emotional conversions and shouting and raising hands, Sunday said, "I wasn't converted that way, but I do not rush around and say, with gall and bitterness, that you are not saved because you did not get religion the way I did. If we all got religion in the same way, the devil might go to

sleep with a regular Rip Van Winkle snooze and still be on the job" (Ellis, 151-52). The simplicity of the call of Jesus to the disciples set, in Sunday's viewpoint, an imitable example of conversion. "How long did that conversion take?" Sunday queried. "How long did it take him to accept Christ after he had made up his mind? And you tell me you can't make an instant decision to please God?" (Ellis, 151).

After his conversion, Sunday denounced the drinking sessions of his teammates, stopped swearing and gambling, and began to attend Jefferson Park Presbyterian Church. The change in his lifestyle was radical and clearly observed by fans. He also began speaking in churches and YMCA meetings. At church he met Nell Thompson. By winning the affections and approval of her mother, Sunday overcame the objections of Nell's father, and he and Nell married in 1888. On several occasions Sunday confessed, "She was a Presbyterian, so I am a Presbyterian. Had she been a Catholic, I would have been a Catholic—because I was hot on the trail of Nell."[lxxi] She became the organizer and administrator of the campaigns, salvaged the ministry from financial ruin, and gave a comprehensive program of beneficial spiritual activity to each campaign.

In 1891, Sunday was offered a contract in baseball for $3,500 with an immediate payment of $500 for the first month. He refused it and took instead a position at the YMCA for $83 per month.[lxxii] His sermons quite often have anecdotes of encounters, events, persons, and conversations connected with his work there. Sunday sought to give witness to his former teammates and other professional ballplayers. While some former professionals were successful as businessmen or politicians, others' lives fell apart. Sunday sought to see them as often as possible and would "slip them a bill" to help them out (*Sawdust,* 50–61). From 1893 to 1895, Sunday was associated with J. Wilbur Chapman, an urbane, sophisticated, Moodyite evangelist. In that context he learned homiletics, saw the power of conservative theology in preaching, and developed skill in organizing local revival campaigns from erecting a tent to composing a choir.

In 1896 Sunday went out on his own, scheduling meetings on the "kerosene circuit," small towns that still were outside the developing electrical grid of America. He had heard and worked beside the most dominant voices in American evangelism. He had organized campaigns. He was fascinated with the stories of the success of Charles Finney and would now develop his own style, his own message, and his own theory of preaching while on the road. He worked in small towns, and often his "free-will offering" was scarcely enough to pay his way home. "I worked in one whiskey-soaked, gambling-cursed, jay-rube town out in the short-grass country on the kerosene circuit for two weeks and had one hundred and twenty-seven people accept Christ as their Saviour. They gave me thirty-three dollars" (*Sawdust,* 72). That is just over twenty-five cents per soul.

By Any Means Whatever

Sunday clearly was committed to revival services as a chief mean of propagating Christian truth and gaining conversions. "Most people are converted at special revival services," he claimed. "I want to hurl in the teeth, cram it down the throats of those who sneer at revival efforts—preachers included." About nine-tenths of the people who attended his revivals (so he estimated) were converted at a revival. He also estimated that the "chances are about 100,000 to one" that if one is not converted before he is thirty, he will never be converted. The conclusion of all this is "if you are thirty and have not been converted at this revival, you never will be converted." Without revivals, hell would be fuller than it is. "Then think of any low-down, God-forsaken, dirty gang knocking a revival" (Ellis, 381, 382).[lxxiii]

With revival as the chief means of conversion and Christian advance, what were the means of propagating a revival? Billy Sunday obviously had read Finney, considered him one of the great and courageous men of the Christian church, and expressed as his own conviction a paraphrase of Finney's view of revival. To the query, "What is a revival?" Sunday would respond:

> Revival is a purely philosophical, common-sense result of the wise

> use of divinely appointed means, just the same as water will put out a fire; the same as food will appease your hunger; just the same as water will slake your thirst; it is a philosophical common-sense use of divinely appointed means to accomplish that end. A revival is just as much horse sense as that.[lxxiv]

He went on emphasizing the certain relation between cause and effect. “If you do a thing, results always come. The results come to the farmer. He has his crops. That is the result. He has to plow and plant and take care of his farm before the crops come.” Revivals must be judged by the same rules of cause and effect. If one were to plead that “God is sovereign” in the matter of crop production and expect the farmer to do nothing on that basis, “this country will starve to death in two years.” Pleading divine sovereignty in such a case is false doctrine and has caused religion to die out. Revival “has a natural connection of common sense, and I believe,” Sunday insisted, “that when divinely appointed means are used spiritual blessing will accrue to the individuals and the community in greater numbers than temporal blessings.” If one uses the right means, “You can have spiritual blessings as regularly as the farmer can have corn, wheat, oats, or you can have potatoes and onions and cabbage in your garden.” In fact, the response of cause and effect relationship in spiritual matters “follow more surely than temporal blessings.” That in the end, revival is a sovereign work of God accomplished only by an effectual moving of God’s Spirit, Sunday considered obtuse, and he characterized it as “all this tommy-rot of false doctrines.” God will operate only when the church uses the “divinely appointed means,” and no extraordinary operation of the Spirit is needed. We simply follow the biblical instructions, and the revival will come.[lxxv]

He further states that a revival may be expected when Christian people confess and ask forgiveness for their sins and “are willing that God shall promote and use whatever means or instruments or individuals or methods he is pleased to use to promote them.” When some had criticized his absolutism and sensationalism, Sunday responded, “If God should ask you sisters and preachers in an audible voice, ‘Are you willing that I should promote a revival by using any methods or means or

individual language that I choose to use to promote it?' what would be your answer? Yes? Then don't growl if I use some things that you don't like." The one-to-one parallel between himself and God in this retort never seemed to bother him. With unfazed confidence, therefore, he continued, "You have no business to. How can you promote a revival? Break up your fallow ground, the ground that produces nothing but weeds, briars, tin cans and brick-bats. Fallow ground is ground that never had a glow in it."[lxxvi]

And, though criticized soundly in some quarters, Billy Sunday knew how to put a glow in fallow ground. How "divinely appointed" some of the "whatever means" Sunday proposed presents one of the wrenching questions in Sunday's career and the history of revivalism. Crowds soon were so large on the kerosene circuit that he had to expand his capacity by purchasing his own tent, often putting it up himself. When that became too unwieldy (one collapsed under a snowstorm), he required that local sponsors of the campaign build a tabernacle (*Sawdust,* 73). Sawdust was put on the floor both as an acoustical device and to keep down the dust generated by the construction and the normal bareness of the site, usually dirt or plank floors. Thus "the sawdust trail" had a double entendre in the advancing of persons to the front during an invitation.

Originally, Sunday led the music for these meetings personally. According to his testimony, he "did not know a note from a horsefly." More than compensating for that minor issue, he "knew the song and the tune and supplied the vim, ginger and tabasco sauce" (*Sawdust,* 73).

Eventually, Sunday had twenty-six paid staff, musicians, custodians, advance men, and Bible teachers. The most famous of these were Homer Rodeheaver (1880-1955) and Virginia Asher (1869–1937), a vocalist who also directed the women's ministries. Rodeheaver, a noted vocalist and director of choral music, joined Sunday in 1910 and served for twenty years until 1930. He used a trombone that he called a Methodist trombone because often it would "backslide." Others that accompanied Sunday were Fred Fisher, for eleven years; B. D. Ackley, a pianist and secretary, for ten years; and Harry Clarke.

After a few years in smaller cities, Sunday began to go to large cities. In February 1915, *The Christian Index* of Georgia queried concerning the source of Billy Sunday's power and answered that it "is in knowing how to mobilize the forces before the meeting begins, and how to use them during its progress." The editor described the preparation for a meeting in Philadelphia:

> For more than two months before it began, two cottage prayer meetings a week were held in every block of the great city, followed with district prayer meetings. During this period, every citizen in the city was invited once a week to attend the meetings. They were advertised from the pulpit of every evangelical church and every pastor put himself squarely behind the movement. Five thousand picked singers were secured to furnish the music, and a great tabernacle was constructed as designed by Mr. Sunday. Much space in the daily papers was used in advertising the meetings, and worlds of specially prepared printed matter was scattered broadcast. All this and much more was done before Mr. Sunday appeared on the scene. . . . Therefore, from the very first Mr. Sunday was enveloped in a spiritual atmosphere. . . . No wonder he preaches with power; no wonder thousands are being converted, and no wonder large gifts flow into the treasury for the expenses of the meeting. The resultants of preparation, we repeat, is the secret of Mr. Sunday's power.

Two and one-half years later, *The Christian Index* announced in bold headlines "Billy Sunday will Soon Have 'Em 'Hitting the Trail' in Atlanta." For those who could not attend, however, every sermon would be printed in two papers, well-known columnists would cover the entire event from different perspectives, and an illustrator would sketch Billy Sunday and the crowds at the Sawdust Trail. So that no one need miss anything, photographers "will photograph it all." Even beyond that, for "15c a week *The Atlanta Georgian* and *Sunday American* will bring Billy Sunday to them every day."

After the crowd gathered, Sunday did not disappoint them but treated them to an amazing variety of sentiment, emotion, entertainment, energy, and breathtaking rhetorical displays of plain street talk. Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), in a very angry display of vengeful verbiage directed to

Sunday, objected to his talk as “so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips” and resented his “rotten breath belching about hell-fire and hiccupping about this man [Jesus] who lived a clean life in Galilee.” Sandburg, in a non-poetic mood, didn’t “want a lot of gab from the bunkshooter in my religion” especially from a “bughouse peddler of second-hand gospel” who came along “tearing your shirt . . . shaking your fist,” turning somersaults, busting chairs, and standing “on your nutty head.”[lxxvii] His rhetoric was almost a match for Sunday’s!

Sunday’s antics offended not only poets but characters of a rougher hue. He recounts that in Springfield, Illinois, a “big, black-haired, sullen-looking bozo” to Sunday’s right glared at him “from under his wrinkled forehead and squinty eyes.” Soon the intent observer became an assaulter and pulled out a rawhide whip and snapped it around Sunday’s legs with the shout, “I have a commission from God to horsewhip you.” Not wasting even one moment on shyness or perplexity, Sunday jumped from the platform and rushed at him with his fist doubled and retorted, “Well, I have a commission from God to knock the tar out of you, you lobster.” Sunday landed a sound blow on the solar plexus and a left hook to the jaw. “By that time five hundred men were tearing down the aisle, and it took the United States marshal, who happened to be in the tabernacle, and eight cops to rescue him.” Sunday did not prosecute him (*Sawdust,* 74).

Sunday had to deal with criticisms, threats, and caricatures throughout his ministry and even found himself the target of socialists and anarchists.[lxxviii] When accused of being a hypocrite, an insult to Jesus Christ, ignorant, a clown, and dishonest, Sunday responded, “I live as I preach and I defy the dirty dogs who have insulted me and my wife and spread black-hearted lies and vilifications.”[lxxix] Sensing that he was a target of political radicals, he retorted, “Let me be a marked man, and if there are any of them here tonight they had just as well begin right now. I’ll shoot the first one of them that starts anything as full of holes that he’d pass for a sieve anywhere.”[lxxx]

Not all opposition to Sunday was that physical or blatantly hostile. He had heard the mantra of criticism before and had responded, “Don’t worry about my vocabulary, sister; get on your knees and pray for your salvation. Don’t worry about my eccentricities; you’d better look after your own faults.”[lxxxi] Though Sandburg’s piece on Sunday is vitriolic and misrepresents Sunday at several points, Sunday gave him just enough material to lend plausibility to his envenomed free-verse attack.

In light of the persons who came to hear him preach, Sunday defended his diction. To those who said he used “too much slang,” he responded, “The real objection of a lot of them is that they don’t like to be told that they are headed straight for perdition— in a language they can understand.” He looked at his word as plain, honest, and comprehensible. If he hurt people’s sensibilities, they should not spread them all over the floor to be trampled on. Besides, “I would a whole lot rather have their sensibilities blasted,” he reasoned, “than to see their souls blasted.” When he talked about sin, he did not “put a stained-glass window before it”:

> I would rather give a man the straight goods about himself and his God, although he might prefer to have it wrapped up in brown paper and delivered to him in private, than to have what I say relayed to him through half a dozen dictionaries for fear that I might hurt his feelings.”[lxxxii]

In his sermon on booze, Sunday likened Jesus’s casting the devils into the swine to his own opposition to the liquor traffic. “Then the fellows that kept the hogs,” Sunday narrated, “went back to town and told the peanut-brained, weasel-eyed, hog-jowled, beetle-browed, bull-necked lobsters that owned the hogs, that a long-haired fanatic from Nazareth, named Jesus, has driven the devils out of some men and the devils have gone into the hogs, and the hogs into the sea, and the sea into the hogs, and the whole bunch is dead.” Sunday said that if he were a devil, he would rather live in a “good, decent hog than in lots of men.”[lxxxiii]

For his uncompromising stance against the liquor industry, Sunday

“stood for more sneers and scoffs and insults and had my life threatened from one end of the land to the other by this God-forsaken gang of thugs and cut-throats, . . . this low-down bunch than from anyone on earth.” While their threats concerned his temporal well-being, his toward them were more eschatological in nature. Everyone involved in the liquor industry, from its producers to those who vote for it, “ought to go to hell as sure as you live, and I would like to fire the furnace while you are there.”[lxxxiv]

Billy Sunday described Pontius Pilate in terms that he would use to describe a dishonest politician of his own day: “Pilate was a stand-pat, free-lunch, pie-counter, pliable, plastic, lickspittle, rat-hole, tin-horn, weasel-eyed, wardheeling, grafting politician of his day pure and simple. . . . He was a typical machine politician. And there is no more low-down scoundrel on earth than a mere typical machine politician.”[lxxxv] Sunday was able to bring his political and social concerns into his preaching in an oblique, but effective, way.

In preaching on Gethsemane, Sunday sought to bring his auditors to a realization of their danger by shocking them with an apparent profanity:

> You’re a big fool to go to hell, but it will be your own fault if you do. God doesn’t want you to go there, but he can’t stop you. He has sacrificed His Son to keep you out of hell, and what more could He do? I am doing all I can to keep you out of hell. I have stood here and preached to you and I’ve done all that I could, and if you won’t be saved, all right— go to hell.

He followed this, after several illustrations, with an anecdote about J. Wilbur Chapman into which he interspersed this bit of baptized profanity: “If anyone is offended because you ask them to be a Christian, let them go to hell. You’ve done your duty.”[lxxxvi]

He would sometimes insult those whom he sought for Christian conversion: “God despises a coward— a mutt. You cannot be converted by thinking so and sitting still.”[lxxxvii] The sensationalism of this

presentation does not hide the rather obvious picture of a God who waits in virtual impotence before the final ruling authority of the human will.

Amid all the organization, sensationalism, opposition, bombast, and relentless drive, Sunday also stood firmly for some very basic Christian truth and moral principles that often were under attack through the mid-twentieth century. For that he gained appreciation and influence within conservative Christian circles. Riding on the coattails of this sturdy stance for Christian character were views of conversion, faith, decision, discipleship, and doctrine that made it clear that Christianity now was viewed more as the work of man for the benefit of man than the work of God for the glory of God.

Jack-Rabbits and Creeds

Among the public impressions that gave Billy Sunday such popular appeal was his vigorous support of Woodrow Wilson's war effort. Wilson asked Sunday personally to raise the money instead of going overseas to speak to the troops. Sunday told Wilson, "Mr. President, your wish is law with me." He stayed home and "raised one hundred million dollars for Liberty and Victory Loans." The money, at least it was so reported, that came in from the ten-week New York campaign in 1917 all went to the war to end all wars. In addition, 100,000 conversions were reported. Sunday recalled the last day in New York when "7436 people came forward and grasped my hand pledging to accept Christ as their Saviour" (*Sawdust,* 75).

Sunday learned to raise money and handle his money well. With the help of "Ma" Sunday, he became highly solvent financially and was never accused of any misdealings with the money. In addition to a large contribution to the war on Germany, sometimes he would give the entire offering from a campaign to some local charity. He dressed well and dressed his family well. His home in Winona Lake, Indiana, was adequate but modest. Nevertheless, his income was many times that of the average person to whom he was preaching, and newspapers often sought to generate disdain for him on that account.

Sunday, though not primarily bent toward political and cultural issues,

nevertheless was clear on where he stood on many of the stirring questions of the day. Most noted for his opposition to booze and his support of the eighteenth amendment, he never ceased, even after its repeal, to oppose the liquor traffic and describe the devastating social consequences of drunkenness. Describing himself as “the sworn, eternal and uncompromising enemy of the Liquor Traffic,” he described his enemy as a “damnable, dirty, rotten business” and “the sum of all villainies” (*Sawdust*, 68). With powerful images, graphic words, and compelling statistics he worked to prove that it was “the appalling source of misery and crime in the land.” Giving it license to propagate such misery “is the dirtiest, low-down, damnable business on top of this old earth.”[lxxxviii] Sunday also supported women’s suffrage, trod carefully on racial issues but sought to oppose Jim Crow laws, and, though he had friends that were in big business, opposed monopolies and the tendencies to oppress the poor through price control.

Sunday was known also for his energetic assertion of fundamental biblical truth. He defended the Bible as the word of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and the cross of Christ as necessarily connected with salvation. He frequently mentioned Robert Ingersoll and that “big brain of his” as the leading skeptic of the day, had read with some attention a number of other rationalistic critics of orthodox Christianity, and in opposition to their basic agnosticism, challenged them to propose something better than the Bible as the word of God and the cross as the way of forgiveness (Ellis, 424).[lxxxix]

He never entertained doubts about the inspiration of Scripture and the necessity of affirming all that it said: “I believe the Bible is the word of God from cover to cover. I believe that the man who magnifies the word of God in his preaching is the man whom God will honor.” In another sermonic context, Sunday again affirmed, “I believe the Bible is the word of God from cover to cover . . . because it is from the mouth of God; the mouth of God has spoken it.” He pounded the Bible into people. William T. Ellis, a great supporter and admirer of Sunday, summarized, “He is not an interpreter of the Bible but a popularizer of it.” For example, Sunday

ended his paraphrase of the story of David and Goliath in this colorful and memorable way: After having his brothers identify the “big stiff putting up that game of talk” as the “head cheese of the Philistines,” David decided he would “go out and soak that guy” and tell him “where to head in.” David picked up “half a dozen stones, . . . put one of them in his sling, threw it, and soaked Goliath in the coco between the lamps, and he went down for the count. David drew his sword and chopped off his block, and the rest of the gang beat it” (Ellis, 147, 251-52, 254-55.)

Against the liberal rejection of Christ’s deity, Sunday asserted, showing his knowledge of the Apostles’ Creed, “He was either the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, or He was a bastard.” And again, using the moral conundrum of claiming that Christ was good but not God, Sunday put the option to his hearers, “If Jesus Christ wasn’t the Son of God, He was a liar, and all the teachings of the Bible are false.”[xc]

That Jesus is both God and man qualifies him as the only mediator to bring us to God. Sunday had a very straightforward acceptance of substitutionary atonement that was present in most sermons. “Jesus has paid for your sins with his blood,” he repeated in a variety of ways and in the context of many different sermons. “The doctrine of universal salvation is a lie,” he warned. “I wish every one would be saved, but they won’t. You will never be saved if you reject the blood” (Ellis, 428-29).

He did not, however, want to go deeply into theological recitation but was content with exhortation to a decision for Christ. One of the most deflating statements of Sunday, for a full-time preacher of the biblical gospel, was “I don’t know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit does about ping-pong, but I’m on the way to glory” (Ellis, 147). As a rhetorical device, this self-effacement would help him identify with most of those that came to hear and see him preach. Perhaps he was minimizing the impact of the constant introduction of new theologies in the early twentieth century and was affirming the abiding power of the gospel and God’s word. Modern attempts that relativized those absolute realities could contribute nothing to the confident assurance that a simple believer

in Christ and the Bible can have.

Sunday's aphoristic manner of communication, however, tended to trivialize serious theology. As he presented election to his hearers he said, "But you say, some are elected and some are not. On that point I agree with Henry Ward Beecher. He said: 'The elect are those who will and the non-elect are those who won't.'"[xci] Sunday uttered a profound and necessary truth when he stated, "It isn't theology that saves, but Christ; it is not the saw-dust trail that saves, but Christ in the motive that makes you hit the trail" (Ellis, 147). Again, while his statement is true that "nobody is kept out of heaven because he does not understand theology," at times he seems entirely to dismiss the cognitive and assent elements of true faith. Combined with his assault on all intellectual life as subversive of the gospel, he shaved away some important foundational layers of coherence for a persuasive presentation of the gospel.

His tendency to lump together historical theological scholarship with different strands of modern infidelity discredited the very content he sought to communicate. "I have never seen a minister," he chortled, "who preached doctrines and creeds and evolution and all such things who had any real concern for the souls of his people." Insinuating that the mentality that affirms, teaches, and preaches doctrine and creeds is of the same genre as that that affirms the theory of evolution undercuts the foundation for sustaining a proper biblical synthesis for preaching and evangelism. This approach had a powerful tendency to emphasize human decision, existentially detached from a fully persuaded mind, that quite often takes a detour from clearly demonstrated biblical truth.

Spiraling Manward

Sunday's suspicion of theology led to a heightened emphasis on the effectuality of decision. "Your admission into heaven depends upon your acceptance of Jesus Christ. . . . God had promised you salvation on the grounds of your acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Saviour" (Ellis, 425, 417).[xcii] He adopted Finney's insistence on immediate conversion under the living voice of the preacher. While he was more theological

than Sam Jones, he still focused on human gumption as the vital turning point of decision. To those that would not immediately respond he badgered, “Now own up. The truth is that you have a yellow streak. Own up, business men, and business women, and all of you others. Isn’t it so?” (Ellis, 148). “And you tell me you can’t make an instant decision to please God,” he exclaimed in pointing to the call of Matthew. “The decision of Matthew proves that you can. While he was sitting at his desk he was not a disciple. The instant he arose he was. That move changed his attitude toward God. . . . You can be converted just as quickly as Matthew was.” The key was to make a public move (Ellis, 152).

None can doubt the earnest force with which Sunday confronted sinners. His expostulations were based on the biblical phrase in Romans 10, “and confess with thy mouth,” which in his view made his tactics legitimate. “Now, leave God out of the proposition for a minute. Never mind about the new birth— that’s his business,” Sunday reasoned, showing his propensity to minimize his exposition of doctrine to prompt a decision. “Now, never mind about anything but our part in salvation. Here it is: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’” (Ellis, 150). So true, but the omission of doctrine of the new birth tends toward the neglect, or rejection, of the reality. The emphasis is on “our part.”

To those that seemed to struggle long with conviction he proposed, “There is no need of struggling for hours— or for days— do it now. Who are you struggling with? Not God. God’s mind was made up long before the foundations of the earth were laid. . . . ‘Let the wicked man forsake his way’” (Ellis, 152).

The immediacy as well as the full ability of will called for in the New Haven theology was no longer in dispute. They constituted sufficient doctrinal knowledge for any effective preaching. Sunday continued applying the method he had embraced along with its chief theological assumption. “When? Within a month, within a week, within a day, within an hour? No! Now! The instant you yield, God’s plan of salvation is thrown into gear. You will be saved before you know it, like a child being born” (Ellis, 152-53). In Sunday’s theology, God waits on the brink until we move; the new birth is effected in the operation of the sinner’s will, for our movement gives God permission to respond.

Sunday called on his hearers to “cross the line” by a decision to enlist under the banner of Jesus, like a soldier enlisting in the army: “You believe in your heart— confess him with your mouth. . . . Get over the old line. A man isn’t a soldier because he wears a uniform, carries a gun, or carries a canteen. He is a soldier when he makes a definite enlistment.” By the same logic, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile, but public definite enlistment for Christ makes you a Christian” (Ellis, 155). We are not quite sure as to how one could become an automobile by a decision to be one, but public decision is the defining power of becoming a Christian.

In closing a sermon based on Pilate’s question, “What shall I do with Jesus?” Sunday closed by narrating several moving anecdotes and applied their cumulative effect with the appeal:

> What is your answer? Get up and let me look at you. Come on, whoever you are. I don’t give a rap where you came from or who you are in the world. Come on! Come on! Don’t sit down; come on. You wouldn’t sit down if we played the “Star Spangled Banner.” Come on! The cross of Jesus Christ is waving over the crowd. Come on, and give me your hand and stand with me.[xciii]

Just how deeply embedded the power of decisive action had become in evangelistic appeal that it can be compared to standing at the National Anthem is quite staggering. Man-centeredness rises to the level of an axiom; the audacity of such an image vanishes.

On another occasion, when the people seemed seriously stirred by the sermons and events of several evenings of singing, testimonies, special music, and preaching, Sunday, having preached on Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane, addressed the preachers in the crowd and on the platform:

> I believe that if you will pray as you ought to pray, you will have more people at the altar in the next week than you have had in all the weeks that are passed. You have never had the people of this

> community in such a frame of mind as they are in now, and you may never have things as they now are again. Now is the time to save souls. If you can't save them now, God pity you, for you never will. [xciv]

Perhaps we are to dismiss this as harmless hyperbole, but the plain meaning is that God and Billy Sunday have done all that they can do, and now it is up to the ministers of the gospel in their churches to complete the transaction of salvation through use of proper motivational methods. If they can't do it, even God observes as a pitying spectator. How inept they must be not to be able to save these souls who are shivering and staggering on the edge of decision, needing only the faintest breath of persuasive technique to save them.

Then turning to the lost in the crowd, he announced, after affirming that it is easier to get the lost saved than to get the church on its knees, "God can't save you unless you're willing. He won't coerce you into it. . . . He has a plan for each of us. He will use each of us to His glory if we will only let him. We can defeat His plan if we want to."[xcv] In that same light, Sunday advised men to be solid, courageous, determined, and decisive, for "decision determines what life is to become for every man in this world, and also decides it for eternity."[xcvi]

Sunday should have read, contemplated, and absorbed the young Spurgeon's sermon on "Look unto me, and be ye saved," where in his closing lines he exclaimed, "Now, 'Look!' How simple does it seem! And yet it is the hardest thing in the world to bring men to. They never will do it, till constraining grace makes them."[xcvii]

Sunday's agitation over what he perceived as the loss of virtuous and courageous manhood in America drove him to press the gospel and the person of Christ into service to produce a lifestyle of determination to achieve admirable goals. Jesus "never once swerved from the business for which He came into the world," though he had to go through Gethsemane and Calvary to achieve it. He could have veered to the side just a little and missed them both. In looking at Christ, so Sunday

continued his thought, you will find prudence, courage, self-control, faithfulness, charity, unselfishness, benevolence, and sympathy. Any trait that we would consider noble and manly will be found in Jesus. “Never in his whole life,” Sunday exclaimed, “does He speak one single unmanly word, think an unmanly thought or do an unmanly deed.”

This is the dream that David had for Solomon also. “He wanted him to reach out for the top of the mountain. He didn’t want him to be content with a summer house in the valley. He wanted him to own the very best estate in the country where the giants were.” David did not want Solomon to be “an old woman or a sissy sort of a fellow, but a man with knotted muscles on his arms, a big heart in his body and plenty of matter in his head.” He wanted him to aim high, as a king’s son should, knowing that “if his aim was high his endeavor would not be wasted.” This kind of princely manhood “is one of the grandest things in the world, and it is something that counts as nothing else does.” Even so, we should study the life of Christ on the “manward side” and see what true manhood is. That knowledge “will quicken and inspire you to live for God and man as you never lived before.” In looking to Jesus as an example, one does not have to settle for mediocrity in earthly circumstances but can live where the giants are and have princely opportunities surround him.[xcviii]

Sunday also placed Christ’s manhood in the context of eschatological hope and set before his hearers the perfection of Christ’s manhood as an evidence of his deity: “Surely this man was the Son of God,” he proclaimed, and pointed to the hope that “when He shall appear we shall be like Him” as “the most glorious promise for us ever given.”

He Did Not Quit

Though surrounded by sorrow, acerbic criticism, and a waning popularity, Sunday remained constant in his call to preach. Near the end of his life he estimated that he had preached “more than 20,000 times.” He spoke an average of 75 times a month, sometimes as often as 5 sermons a day. He built around 200 tabernacles of all sizes, the largest being in Chicago that could seat 22,000 people. He preached to 80 million people and saw more than one million “hit the sawdust trail”

coming to shake his hand as an indication “to renew their pledges as Christians or to accept Christ as their Saviour” (*Sawdust*, 76, 77). The rise of the entertainment industry and the growing popularity of radio preaching caused Sunday to reduce the size and spectacle of his entourage. One daughter died of MS, one son committed suicide in 1933 after Sunday had bailed him out of debt, and, for two other sons, Sunday bought a shroud of secrecy to keep their indiscretions from public view. Following a mild heart attack in 1935, he ignored his doctor’s advice, kept preaching, and died on November 6th, a week after preaching his last sermon, “What must I do to be saved?”

The Outcome

When theology posits God as the one that establishes opportunities for man, both for eternity and for time, and posits man as the one whose will has final sway in both spheres, the pull of doctrinal gravity always moves downward, manward, earthward—the will and the pleasure of man emerge as the final measure of all things. The loss of theology in preaching has a profound theological impact and produces less insistently expository preaching.

9. Billy Graham's Refurbishment of Populist Evangelism

The mid-twentieth century reeled with financial depression and deeply troubling international tensions culminating in the horrors of World War II. An increasingly noxious relationship between modernist and conservative elements in denominations divided Christian witness in America.

These are not unrelated phenomena; modernism had trashed the worldview that could give a credible interpretation of the brutalities revealed in the war. Some contended that the radical relativism and naturalism that controlled German theology gave intellectual funding to the Fuhrer's focus on ethnic cleansing. Atheistic political ideologies gave justification to systemic atrocities across the globe. Denominational division enervated American Christianity and made attention to internal purity and confessional fidelity a necessary focus that, at the same time, diminished an aggressive outward look for Christian witness.

Into that condition of the churches in America there arose a man whose vision was penetrating into a different but synthesizing dimension of Christian witness. The glue that provided the possibility of synthesis was an experiential kind of evangelism. Both on the mission field and at home, the call to decide for Christ, with a focus on individual autonomy suggested by the personal character of salvation, was a common idea. And with personal commitment to that idea, Billy Graham showed an ability to bring together wildly different viewpoints through that very purpose— concentration on the personal experience of a decision for Christ. For the conservative, this vindicated a style of transactional evangelism. For the moderate, it vindicated the personal quest for existential significance and the sanctity of individual conscience. For non-evangelicals and even people of other religions, it represented a nonintrusive, uncoercive, respectful attempt to offer a better life for everyone. Jesus will give you purpose, and Jesus will take you to heaven.

The funeral of Billy Graham (1918-2018) demonstrated the cohesive

power such a simply stated proposition placed within the autonomous voluntary capacity of people. The ninety-nine-year-old evangelist died on February 21, 2018, in his home in North Carolina. Christian blogger Adrian Warnock wrote, “It should be clear to any unbiased assessor that he was quite simply the most important and most influential Christian globally in the 20th Century.”[xcix] Americans and persons in scores of other countries paused and lamented that a great man had died and that with him was buried the phenomenon of non-divisive conviction. Timothy George, dean at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, pointed to five traits that gave such embracing impact to Graham’s ministry: single-mindedness, unity in the gospel, humility and prayer, identity and adaptability, and dominant emphasis on the love of God. The unprecedented and, at present, unmatched approval of Graham is symbolized in that Graham was the first religious leader and only the fourth private citizen to receive the honor of lying in state in the rotunda of the United States Capitol.[c]

The news of Graham’s death dominated news shows for hours, and his funeral was televised. All five of his children spoke of his humility, his self-effacing manner of living, his genuine manifestation of the love of God to them, his love for Ruth, his wife, and his utter sincerity in proclaiming Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. A Roman Catholic priest, serving as a guest commentator on one of the networks, expressed a deep emotional attachment to Graham, his message that emphasized the saving power of Christ, and his power as a unifying force. Graham’s youngest child, Franklin Graham, born in 1952, presented a message (giving the funeral the ambience of Billy Graham’s last crusade) that highlighted human sin, the exclusivity of Christ in his substitutionary death as the way of salvation, and that this transaction of salvation was immediately available through the sincere praying of a simple prayer of repentance and faith. Politicians, including the president of the United States, Donald Trump, and religious leaders from all denominations and a multitude of countries crowded into a revival-style tent to express sincere grief at Graham’s death and gratitude for his life and to hear the message once again. Graham did not condemn them; he invited them to experience the love of God here and in eternity through a

simple faith decision.

Writing in 1956, even the dominant twentieth-century liberal, Harry Emerson Fosdick, found the focus on the crisis of decision to be an affirmative and freeing element of the evangelical culture he had so decisively rejected. After slamming the ineptitude of the “reactionary orthodoxy” that drove Robert Ingersoll to infidelity, Fosdick described his personal conversion at seven years of age:

There is no use now trying to analyze the emotional basis of my decision, but it was clear and determined. There was no revival afoot to put pressure on me. . . . At any rate, I intended to be a Christian. That was my business, I told my family, and not theirs to decide. So on February 21, 1886, I was immersed. . . . I was so small that a stool was sunk in the baptistry for me to stand upon, and thus I made my confession of faith in an ancient ritual but with a genuine assertion of individual self-committal that had the root of the matter in it.[ci]

The ritual was ancient, and the faith it represented was outmoded, reactionary, and off-putting to the new intelligence of Fosdick’s eventual seminary years— but the “genuine assertion of individual self-committal” was an unchanging universal. Billy Graham fit the paradigm for that element of enduring religion and the power of a human expression of commitment.

A Catalyst for Cohesion

William Franklin Graham took twentieth-century American evangelical Protestantism by storm. He embodied tensions that could hardly have co-existed in any other person. With a tall, fit, striking appearance, an affable and engaging personality, a disarming transparency of purpose, and an embracing friendliness that could hardly be resisted by leaders of the diverse spheres of American (and world) culture, Graham spread his influence into a potpourri of Christian options for more than sixty years in the last half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Graham understood, and to some degree shared, the fundamentalist

reaction to modernism while fostering catholicity in denominational relations. He continued and brought to maturity the heritage of revivalistic evangelism, cleansing it of some of the more offensive protrusions. He did not ridicule but encouraged serious scholarship. He would not target local clergy as enemies but sought to make them friends, even beneficiaries, of the campaign. While professing the unchangeableness and the transtemporal absoluteness of the gospel message, he relished fellowship and counsel from those whose gifts and energies focused on cultural awareness. Through personal background, carefully sharpened gifts, and well-chosen camaraderie, he was able to give impetus to all of these while redefining and expanding evangelicalism throughout his long and ubiquitous ministry.

In small towns and cities, a sense of well-being accompanied his virtually omnipresent words and ministries. Daily newspapers carried “My Answer,” Billy Graham’s spiritual advice column. The regular appearance of *Decision* in the mailbox provided evangelical thought for millions. Families across the nation and even the world scheduled TV time to watch a splendid and seemingly world-transforming Billy Graham crusade presentation. Graham punctuated life as a virtual *regula fidei*.

Jason A. Poling, vicar of St. Hilda’s Episcopal Church, said at Billy Graham’s death, “He was the closest thing to a pope that evangelicals ever had, or will have.”[cii] The talk show phenomenon David Frost, who interviewed him periodically for over thirty years, wrote, “The fact that Billy Graham, once so roundly criticized as the apostle of an impossible certitude, could admit that there were questions to which he did not have an answer I found oddly reassuring: maybe the rest of us didn’t need to feel so threatened by our doubts either.”[ciii]

Of course, to mention a talk show host and Billy Graham in the same sentence reminds us that Graham seemed to come out unscathed in situations that for others would have appeared to be clumsy compromises. An appearance on *The Tonight Show* allowed a staccato gospel presentation beginning with the statement “You are a sinner.” Johnny Carson displayed a skillful combination of facial expressions and

body language that communicated both an embarrassed acceptance of the proclamation as well as a deflection of accusation to the audience and Ed McMahon. At the end of an appearance on *Laugh In*, Graham gave an approximate two-minute gospel presentation, after which a cigarette-smoking, squint-eyed, German soldier appeared, blowing a stream of smoke and uttering his classic “Veeerry interesting.” During his Las Vegas crusade in February 1978, Graham joined Mike Douglas and John Davidson for a tap dance to be aired on *The Mike Douglas Show* as a bit of publicity for the crusade. Pictures of the “unlikely threesome” made their way into papers across the country.[civ]

There was hardly any place in American culture that did not feel some obligation to let Billy Graham have his say. Likewise, there were few venues that Graham would not exploit to gain some foothold in the popular culture. He had long since left the separation ideal of fundamentalism and consistently tested the borders of relevance versus compromise.

In 1934, at age sixteen, Graham experienced conversion in a revival meeting under the preaching of Mordecai Ham in Charlotte, North Carolina. According to Ham’s own narrative of the event, “One night a man spoke to them during the invitation and said, ‘Come on; let’s go up front.’ Billy and Grady both went to the altar. Billy was saved, and Grady [Wilson] dedicated his life to Christian service.”[cv] The campaign lasted for eleven weeks. Graham, converted during the third week, spent the remainder of the time in the preachers’ section listening intensely and taking notes, absorbing not only an expository style but a method of closing the meeting. After a brief stint as a successful Fuller Brush salesman, he entered Bob Jones College in 1936 at eighteen years of age. When he transferred after one semester to Florida Bible Institute, Bob Jones Sr. warned him that future opportunities among the Fundamentalists would probably decrease, relegating himself to both poverty and irrelevance as a country Baptist preacher. For the sake of his personal judgment as to how he could best be used in gospel ministry, Graham showed his propensity to endure criticism, or even rejection, to open opportunities in the broader world of Christian profession.

Pursuant to that instinct, in 1943 he enrolled in Wheaton College, met Ruth Bell, the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to China, began serving as pastor of small Baptist churches, including the Village Church in Western Springs, and soon hosted a radio program called *Songs in the Night*. He convinced George Beverly Shea to join him on this program in 1944. Soon, under the influence of Torry Johnson, Graham began to speak at Saturday night Youth for Christ rallies. On May 27, 1944, at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Graham spoke to three thousand people. His closing invitation resulted in forty young people coming to "give their lives to Christ." The next year Graham spoke to sixty-five thousand at Soldier Field in Chicago. From 1946 to 1949, Graham, along with others that would become part of the evangelistic team, made several trips to England, Ireland, and France, where he preached to great crowds and generated massive amounts of publicity.

During those days, Graham made two pivotal decisions that had a disciplinal and salutary influence on his ministry. One, he avoided the temptation to intellectual pride pressed on him by one of his talented contemporaries. Sharing the podium with Graham with a display of perhaps even more natural talent than Graham was Charles Templeton. They often preached together until Templeton enrolled in Princeton as a special student to find an answer to uncertainties that had begun to arise in his perception of the Christian faith. He was staggered at the revelations of the gruesome action of the Nazi holocaust. Templeton challenged Graham to join him at seminary, for, so Templeton chided, he needed to understand the Christian faith in a more historically critical way. In 1957 Templeton announced that he had become agnostic, resigned from the Christian ministry, and engaged in a variety of activities until his death in 2001. In 1996 he published a spiritual autobiography entitled *Farewell to God.*

Graham did not emerge completely unscathed from his conversations with Templeton. Graham went through a crisis and decided to reject Templeton's invitation, dealing with any doubts that arose through his own study, and simply "preach the gospel" that had been the foundation of his commitment to Christ. He would accept the Bible by faith, sustain his pulpit propositions with "the Bible says," and not commit to any deeply

detailed defenses of every assertion of the Bible as long as he could maintain the most obvious purposes of Scripture with clarity.

While this resolution kept him from the agnosticism of Templeton, at times it allowed him to skip over some specific challenges to historical confessional orthodoxy. For example, when David Frost asked him about evolution, Graham answered, with some ambiguity:

> I personally believe that it's just as easy to accept the fact that God took some dust and blew on it and out came a man as it is to accept the fact that God breathed upon man and he became a living soul and it started with some protoplasm and went right on up through the evolutionary process. Either way is by faith and whichever way God did it makes no difference as to what man is and man's relationship to God. (*Conversations*, 82)

Second, in 1948 after a meeting in Augusta, Georgia, his team, perhaps sensing that the life of full-time evangelism was going to become ever more demanding and filled with some difficult temptations, decided to have a lengthy conversation when they got back to California. Having observed many of the objections that some Christian leaders had to full-time crusade evangelism, and with awareness of the history of revival practices, they developed some points upon which they would proceed. One, to avoid the power of avarice, their salaries would be fixed by the organization. Two, to avoid temptations to bitterness or a divisive spirit, they would never criticize local clergy. Three, to avoid false pride and superficiality, they would never provide estimates of crowd size. (Others obviously did this for them.) Four, to avoid the scandals into which so many had fallen, to provide the antithesis to the popular notion of the revivalist prompted in the popular mind by *Elmer Gantry,* and with full awareness of the deadly sin of lust, they would take extraordinary precaution against sexual temptation and even any appearance of sexual impropriety.

Shaping an Icon

The resolutions of Graham and his team for integrity and tenacity soon bore fruit both for evangelistic success and public notice. Mel Larson, in

commenting on the Los Angeles crusade of fall 1949, captured both elements when he observed, “Revival flowed through Billy Graham during that time until the entire world was conscious of it.”[cvi] Graham and his team had been in Grand Rapids, Des Moines, Charlotte, Augusta, Miami, and other places prior to Los Angeles. There, however, the impact was startling and etched the visage and name of Graham on the consciousness of American Christianity. Writing in 1950, Mel Larson continued his appraisal of Graham by saying, “Nothing perhaps has gripped the thinking of religious— and secular— American as did the revival campaign in Los Angeles in the autumn of 1949” (*Revival*, 12). At the end of that crusade official statistics reported that 3,000 people professed faith in Christ for the first time and another 3,000 made a renewal of commitment. There had been a total of 72 meetings in a large tent that had accommodated 350,000 during that time. One crowd was estimated at 15,000 with 6,000 of those standing on the outside. One of the most remarkable events of the crusade was the conversion of American entertainer Stuart Hamblen. And deeply moving and poignant stories attended the conversions of Harvey Fritz (a radio personality with an intensely embedded violent temper), Louis Zamperini (a World War II hero who endured the ravages of a Japanese prison camp), and Jim Vaus (an underworld figure).

Boston, on the other side of the country geographically and culturally, soon felt the presence and fascination of the personality and plain preaching of this new evangelistic sensation. Invited by the pastor of Park Street Church, Harold Ockenga, Graham and the team arrived on December 30 and immediately began the meetings, for there seemed to be “a warm moving of the Holy Spirit” (*Revival*, 28), even though the meetings were not scheduled to begin until the next night, New Year’s Eve.

Eighteen days later, on the last night of the crusade, Graham asked all that wanted to receive Christ as Savior to raise their hands and then come forward. So many flooded the podium area that they had to be sent immediately to the counseling room. It could not hold all the people, so others stood around the platform and received instruction from the evangelist himself. Decision cards and a Gospel of John were given to

all. That evening more than 1,500 decisions for Christ were recorded. Cumulatively, those eighteen days produced at least 3,000 professions of faith and more than 105,000 people attending. Just as many had professed faith in the eighteen days in Boston as had done so in eight weeks in Los Angeles (*Revival*, 33).

The evangelistic mantle seemed to have fallen on the thirty-one-year-old. Many testimonials immediately were given by leaders of a variety of evangelical organizations. Charles Fuller wrote, “God seems to have chosen Dr. William Graham, affectionately known as ‘Billy,’ to do an outstanding—even spectacular—work in starting revival fires, as attested in the recent campaigns in Los Angeles and Boston” (*Revival*, 5). He spoke of scores of people coming up the aisles in tears at the time of the invitation each night. Ockenga observed:

God has broken through the crust of conservative, cultured, and intellectual Boston through the preaching of Billy Graham. Not since the revival days of Billy Sunday has anything happened in Boston comparable to this. Thousands have been converted and tens of thousands have heard the gospel preached in power. (*Revival*, 6)

C. Wade Freeman of the Baptist General Convention of Texas attended the meetings and said:

> I saw 15,000 people present in the Boston Gardens the last night of the tremendous Billy Graham revival. . . . I heard the Spirit anointed preacher explain the plan of salvation to the great throng. I saw his compassionate heart revealed as he stood in the breach, giving the invitation, pleading with people to turn to God. I saw 1500 people make professions of faith in one single service. I saw the personal workers and the ministers, who had charge of the revival work, in the inquiry room with these hundreds. It was the mightiest demonstration of spiritual power which these eyes of mine have ever beheld. I found myself praying that Dr. Billy Graham might be the hot point to spearhead the great revival so sorely needed in America. (*Revival*, 7)

Comparisons to Charles Finney and Billy Sunday began to be common. An Associated Press article spoke of him as a “new rising

evangelist who tops Billy Sunday." The stately pastor/theologian Harold Ockenga said, "Not since the revival days of Billy Sunday has anything happened in Boston comparable to this." Robert C. Van Kampen was at the Boston meeting and chose some of the most elaborate comparisons in speaking of the impact of Graham: "We have often wondered what it was like when Peter spoke at Pentecost as Acts 2:41 tells us: 'then they gladly received his word and were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.' What a marvelous and thrilling experience!" he exclaimed, with the obvious number of three thousand providing the point of comparison. "Of course, that could only happen in early church history!" he announced with obvious irony. "We have read of the Finney, Moody and Sunday revivals and have said in our own hearts: 'It can't happen now— we are too sophisticated, too hard-boiled and too well educated,' but we did see it happen in Boston in January" (*Revival*, 30, 12, 30).

The final page of a book about the ministry in 1950, *America's Hour of Decision,* carried this prophetic evaluation:

> After the dearth of successful evangelistic meetings for the three decades following the God-blest ministry of Billy Sunday, skeptics, of whatever their degree, doubted that crowds would ever again throng to hear the evangelists' gospel. In the ministry of Billy Graham alone in the meetings of the year 1950, nearly two and one-half million persons came to hear the age-old message of sin, judgment and salvation. (*Hour*, 158)

Graham himself seemed to imply that he was heir to the spirit of Charles Finney. "The great stories coming from the life of Charles G. Finney astound ordinary believers today," Graham noted, "and nourish faith in our hearts" (*Hour*, 145-46). Graham seemed to have an intuition that he would follow in the stream of American evangelism as an heir of large crowds and hefty numbers of decisions. He preached: "When God gets ready to shake America, He may not take the Ph.D. and D.D. God may choose a country boy. God may choose a shoe salesman like He did D. L. Moody. He may choose a baseball player like He did Billy Sunday. God is not limited to the limitations we give Him. God may choose the man that no one knows, a little nobody, to shake America for Jesus Christ

in this day, and I pray that He would!" (*Revival*, 124).

Taking at face value Finney's description of the spiritual and doctrinal status of the churches when his controversial itinerancy was inaugurated, Graham reported that Finney's preaching "found the American churches divided into two opposing factions. The nerve of gospel ministry was cut and dull apathy prevailed." Undaunted, however, Finney, much like Graham himself, "preached the Word of God and God answered with power when over one hundred thousand were converted and joined the churches in one winter alone as revival fires spread in every direction" (*Hour*, 146).

In 1950, Graham's organization was incorporated as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, raising the organizational and business aspect of revival to a new level. It also, however, gave a professional accountability to the team that would be enduring and with which people could identify. He also agreed to undertake the radio broadcast *The Hour of Decision*, which made its debut in November. In a sermon entitled "Whither Bound," Graham commented about the success of the ministry in 1950: "In our own campaigns during the past year we have seen nearly seventy-five thousand souls coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and we have had the privilege of preaching to well over two million, by the miracle of radio" (*Hour*, 142).

A television program, also named *The Hour of Decision*, ran from 1951-54. Increasing his aggressive use of media, he not only arranged for televising selected crusades but, under the name of World Wide Pictures, made commercial-grade movies with an evangelistic purpose. The first, *Mr. Texas*, appeared in 1951. In 1952, he began a column in the newspaper called "My Answer." The Greater London Crusade of 1954 sealed his worldwide fame. Graham recalled, "Not only did we not have empty seats, but we had two and three services a night on some nights to take care of the people and ended up at Wembley Stadium, with the press all for us and the archbishop of Canterbury sitting by my side" (*Conversations*, 10). The final meeting at Wembley Stadium brought an assembly of one hundred twenty thousand people for the world's largest evangelistic meeting. In 1956 he served as the guiding light for founding the magazine *Christianity Today*, which by its ninth issue had surpassed

the circulation of the liberal periodical *The Christian Century.*

Within half a dozen years, Billy Graham's impact had been truly phenomenal. Secular media, Hollywood, political figures, and religious leaders across a wide spectrum found his unadorned sincerity highly engaging. Billy Graham had become a major icon of American identity. Moral earnestness, deep patriotism, an affable spirit that created bridges and not barriers, a striking physical presence that pictured discipline and chastened confidence, and an air of utter transparency in his concern for souls made him paradigmatic as an ideal American. In addition, he had become oracular for evangelistic method. The promise embedded in Finney, Moody, and Sunday had come to fulfillment in Graham.

The Bible Says

In the Billy Graham Museum at Wheaton, the last three figures highlighted before Graham are Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Sunday. In many ways, he saw himself as the heir and steward of their tradition. Though like them in some broadly recognizable ways, Graham forged his own way forward and developed his own way of relating to the public that he hoped would hear his presentation of the gospel.

Billy Graham did not press theological exposition in his preaching to the extent Charles Finney did. Finney lived in an age of metaphysical musings on doctrine and brought his personal reflections to the pulpit. To overcome the lingering power of Jonathan Edwards's grand vision of absolute human dependence on the divine, Finney had to try to match the metaphysical cogency of the missionary to the Indians of Stockbridge. Graham, on the other hand, did not engage in the construction of a philosophical theology from the pulpit but gave staccato-like assertion of those things he knew to be true. Thankfully, he was more confessionally evangelical than Finney, though he might not have discerned the importance of that distinct difference. Graham did inherit, however, one of the practical outworkings of Finney's reflective stance, an issue to which we will return.

At the same time, Graham was far more theological than Dwight L.

Moody, another of Graham's admired predecessors. Whereas Moody mastered the lengthy story as the support and oratorical defense of his slim body of doctrine, Graham filled the space between his doctrinal propositions with quotations of Scripture and examples, both from the Bible and from his observations about life and contemporary issues, that illustrated the truth of, and the effects of, the doctrinal point.

Billy Sunday knew how to draw great crowds, identifying himself with the mass of American commoners while defying the elaborate lifestyles of the socially elite as much as he did the grotesque wastefulness of wretched drunks who abused their wives and children. His pugilistic and histrionic demeanor made the point of his earnestness but also turned the evangelistic podium and pulpit into a sphere of theater having an attraction independent of its religious fervor.

Graham's earnestness took another form; without compromise of his doctrinal canon, he never sought to make personal judgments of either the low or the high. Whether high or low, rich or poor, black or white, drunk or sober, he focused on the "allness" of sin. The Bible's verdict against sin with its consequent judgment omitted none. Equally so, the promise of forgiveness through faith with the consequent assurance of heaven omitted none. His attraction was never from personal swagger or theatrical pyrotechnics but from an unbroken sense of gravitas concerning the issues of heaven and hell.

In pursuit of this, his clarity and consistency in doctrine was quite remarkable. Graham's source of authority for his message unremittingly was the Bible. Innumerable are the times laced throughout his sermons when each point is given all the demonstration it needed with the words "The Bible says." He would not make his solemn declaration a matter of his personal opinion or any subtle extrapolations but rested on the plain assertion of Scripture. A sermon on humility pointed to the sin of pride throughout and that grace could not co-exist with pride. At the close of this message he called on those "outside of Jesus Christ" to remember that before they can come to the "salvation of God, you are going to have to humble yourself and confess that you are a sinner before God. . . . You must realize that you have broken the moral law of God. You must recognize that you are a sinner." Then, in his inimitable manner, he

concluded, “The Bible says,” and quoted six passages that emphasize the sinfulness of every human being, punctuated with another reminder: “Again the Bible says” (*Hour*, 132).

So serious was the reality of sin, and its proclamation so wrought with the possibility of appearing to stand in a position of superiority over the congregation, that he made sure they knew he only spoke in accord with an authority outside of himself. Preaching on the certainty of coming judgment, Graham surmised a possible dialogue between him and the one that did not like his proclamation that “each sinner who rejected Christ will be given his assigned place in the lake of fire and brimstone.” His interlocutor responded, “I don’t like that.” Graham answered, “I’m telling you what God says; if you don’t like it, you don’t like what He says, not what I say. I’m giving it to you straight from God’s Word” (*Revival*, 163). A sermon on the resurrection of Christ again pointed to the Bible as the only source from which one could understand such a world-changing truth. Printed in his book *Revival in Our Time*, Graham preached

But we need no other proof than the Word of Almighty God. That’s all the proof we need. I don't care what the scientists has to say. I’m not dependent on what the scientists tells me to believe about this Book. Every time some big shot scientist comes along and makes a statement complimentary to the Word of God we rush out and say, “Boy, look what so and so said— Look what Dr. so and so, a Ph. D. from Oxford, had to say.” I don’t care what any scientist says. The Word of God is enough. We don't need to depend on the world to tell us whether this is God’s Word or not! God said so and we accept it by faith and believe it from cover to cover as God’s inspired, holy Word and when God says that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead, bless the Lord, I believe it— every bit of it. But it can be proved from history. (*Revival,* 144)

Not only did that claim of divine origin guarantee truthfulness, it established permanent relevancy. “I believe it is the message of the hour, the message that needs to be proclaimed from the housetops, in the streets, down on the avenue, in the church, or wherever one might find professing Christians— ‘Thus saith the Lord.’” His conviction of the divine origin of the message pressed him to relentless insistence— “Night after night in this campaign I have been trying, to the best of my ability, to tell

you what God says instead of what man says" (*Revival*, 136-37).

Because of this confidence that the Bible rightly revealed man's spiritual condition of sin and sinfulness, and because salvation made no sense if that doctrine were not true, Graham regularly emphasized human sin in virtually, if not absolutely, every sermon. In a 1951 pamphlet *Christianism vs. Communism*, Graham warned against the atheistic and hateful philosophy and political system of communism. Communism sought to initiate a new world order of peace and prosperity and promised a new kind of man. For Graham, however, only the new birth could produce a new kind of man. Human sin makes it so. After citing the universality of sin from Romans 3:23, he tied this fact to humanity's descent from Adam:

> So every man is dead in trespasses and in sins and thereby alienated from the life of God. By his sin Adam had become a sinner and possessed a sinful nature. Then he had sons like him; they inherited his sinful nature and so has his posterity on down through the whole human family. Through Adam's one sin of disobedience all men have been constituted sinners in the sight of God.

Graham looked at sin in its particular manifestations as arising from fundamental corruption in the heart. In a series for his radio program, *The Hour of Decision*, Graham preached seven consecutive weeks on the seven deadly sins: pride, anger, envy, impurity, gluttony, slothfulness, and avarice. Each of these words represents a fundamental corruption in the heart. Pride stands before all of them and feeds the others with a numberless array of existential manifestations. "Pride," Graham taught, is "the mental and moral condition that precedes almost all other sins." It consists of "undue self-esteem out of all proportion to our actual worth." Though it is expressed in many forms, "it all emanates from the haughty human heart" and "is the sin that God seemingly hates most."[cvii]

With each successive message, Graham pointed out how these "deadly sins" were the fountain from which flowed a terrifying list of actions and interactions that destroyed relationships, personal health, families, and life. Again, showing the relation between individual sins and

the problem of a corrupt heart, Graham spoke about anger as “one of man’s most devastating sins,” and proposed that “no one is by nature immune to this dispositional disease of human nature.” He dealt with envy as “the murderer of souls,” as a “devastating symptom of this thing called ‘original sin,’” and as “one of the symptoms of the basic sins that separates you and your God.” Nevertheless, though these sins are dispositional in nature, Graham asserted the moral power resident in the unregenerate heart when he proposed the remedy, “You must repent of sin and receive Christ as Saviour before you can receive a new nature and victory over envy. . . . Open your heart to the regenerating grace of Christ” (*Deadly Sins*, 27, 41, 47, 49, 51).

Graham stated clearly his biblical conviction concerning the eternal consequences of sin. Sin fitted one for the company of hell and the consummate experience of dwelling eternally under the righteous anger of God in that day when “the holy wrath and anger of God will be exploded against the sinner who has not received His Son, Jesus Christ, as Savior” (*Deadly Sins*, 37).

As clearly as he set forth the certainty of divine wrath as the penalty for sin, Graham set forth the atoning work of Christ as the saving provision for sin. That Christ had substituted himself in the stead of the sinner, in order that God might be just and justify those that placed their faith in Christ was never in doubt either in the mind or the message of the earnest evangelist. Clearly propounding a substitutionary atonement, he emphasized that it is ubiquitously personal: “I know that I’m a sinner,” he said, not failing to apply his doctrine to himself, “and that I deserve the lake of fire and brimstone,” owning the final state of unbelieving sinners as that which was his due, “but because Christ was judged in my stead, He took my sin, I know that my name is in His Book of Life” (*Revival,* 164-65).

Even as he found Christ’s death singularly effective for the forgiveness of his sins and for the removal of his deserved wrath, so every person could consider this saving remedy his by faith. Graham would point with unfettered range to his audience and proclaim: “You deserve hell. You deserve the stripes and the punishment of a holy, worshipful sovereign, because of your sins.” Then, with just as free a

universal appointment, he continued, “But Jesus was there in your place. Jesus was judged . . . because of you, . . . and God took *your* sins, and *your* sins, and *my* sins and *your* sins and placed them on Christ and spared him not, . . . and Jesus Christ died, and reverently speaking, went to hell, separated from God” (*Hour,* 125).

From Graham’s many sermonic references to the dying love of Christ, one naturally infers that a universal atonement is the assumption of universal obligation to repent. Also, he would argue that it is the only sure foundation for the universal offer of the gospel. His understanding of repentance and faith pointed to a remaining power, and even autonomy, in the human will that operated prior to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

In the next chapter, we will consider how Graham’s view of scriptural authority, defended through the confirming power of experience and the autonomy of the will, created a hybrid of fellowship and thought.

10. Billy Graham's Formula for Dilution

Graham's focus on human experience vis-à-vis biblical authority and as an apologetic for the Christian faith provided the bands of attachment to him and his ministry from two directions—both moderates and conservatives found resonance in his emphases. Similar effects of affirmation arose from a third area of emphasis— the autonomy of the human will. The entire work of God for salvation finally was suspended on the capacity-to-decide resident within the human will. In a sermon on slothfulness, Graham closed, "Eternal life is within reach of everyone. The savior is as near as your yielded will, or He is as far away as you want Him to be. Your own stubborn, slothful spirit is your greatest hindrance to letting Him come into your heart" (*Deadly Sins*, 40).

I Am the Captain of My Soul

Anger also finds its cure in the power of the will: "The first step then in finding victory over unjustified anger is to want to get rid of it," Graham rightly advised. The solution, therefore, already resides within. "The will comes to the fore and says, 'I will do something about this unruly temper of mine'" (*Deadly Sins*, 33). In Graham's anthropology, like Finney and those that followed in his wake, the human will had been unaffected by the fall. Both the "stubborn, slothful spirit" and the "unruly temper" were in the control of the human will and would yield to the force of a person's decision to throw them off.

Graham summarized his preaching as focused on the "*kerygma*, which is the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the fact that people need to repent and come to Christ by faith" (*Conversations*, 176). His understanding and proclamation, therefore, of the objective actions of God for salvation— the incarnation, substitutionary atonement, and resurrection— were sound and prominent in his crusade ministry. All persons, fallen through their connection with Adam and because of their own actual transgressions, are under condemnation, and Christ's redeeming death has created the path to forgiveness. He also recognized that apart from the Holy Spirit's convicting power none could be brought

to a desire to know Christ. In expressing a disagreement with the bishop of Woolwich who claimed that Christianity must develop a new “jargon” for this generation, Graham noted, “We don’t at all. We need the old jargon, the biblical jargon, preached in the power and urgency of the Holy Spirit” (*Conversations*, 69).

These doctrinal affirmations made Graham’s theology and preaching more purposefully evangelical than Finney’s, more consistently doctrinal than Moody’s, and more persistent in its gospel orientation than Sunday’s. He did not manifest the analytical powers of Finney, did not engage in the sentimentality of Moody, and always maintained perfect possession of the dignity of the pulpit above that of the free-wheeling histrionics of Sunday. His grasp of the character of repentance far transcended the perceptions of Sam Jones.

Graham’s persuasion, however, about human corruption and its effect on the human will seems to be built by default on the pragmatic concerns that had become dominant in crusade evangelism. What was developed as a tenaciously constructed theology of the will by Finney, leading to a number of decision-oriented practices known in the nineteenth-century as “New Measures,” had become the received understanding of the collaterality of divine command and human ability.

According to this viewpoint, no command exists in Scripture for which there is no corresponding moral power in fallen humanity. Graham’s position is not nearly as severe as that of Pelagius, who unabashedly held to the possibility of saving merit through human goodness. Nevertheless, he continued the view of Finney who always rested the turning point of salvation on the will’s power to engender faith. “Who of you have this heart faith?” Finney asked; “Which of you will now commit yourself to Christ?” It is not a matter of mental assent to intellectually demonstrated propositions, “but heart-faith must be reached by simple effort— by voluntary purpose to *trust.* Ye who say, I cannot do this, bow your knees before God and commit yourself to his will; say ‘O my Saviour! I take thee at thy word.’ This is a simple act of will.” Graham found no reason to dissent from this but coincided with Finney that “the will comes to the fore and says, ‘I will.’” [cviii]

If the Bible commands repentance, then every person can respond without any special enabling outside his own will. Each person hearing the command has no moral impediments that make the command absolutely alien to his moral power, that is, his intrinsic disposition of enmity to God and all his holy attributes. Regeneration no longer is seen as a sovereign and effectual operation of the Holy Spirit but as the Spirit's response to the autonomous decision of the sinner to believe. The fall, so the prevailing theology implied, has brought the children of Adam into condemnation but has left the operation of the will intact. God provided salvation in Christ to be offered to all; the practical effect of it, however, arises from inside the sinner. The presence of mental, moral, and dispositional corruption has been minimized, setting aside the idea that the moral disposition that permeates the affections is intrinsically hostile to God's holiness. We do not need a salvation that transforms the heart, the affections, the mind, and thus, the will; we need only the removal of condemnation, not the reversal of corruption. No longer, in Graham's invitational directives, is any consent given to the implications of the Bible's verdict: "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

In a 1951 pamphlet entitled *Christianism vs. Communism*, Graham contrasted the new man of communism to the new man of Christianity. He gave a brief definition of the new birth that would satisfy Reformed as well as non-Reformed evangelicals: "To be born again means that you are born from above. It carries with it the idea of the infusion of divine life into the human soul, the implantation or impartation of divine nature in the human soul whereby we become sons of God."[cix]

He added, however, a method to receive the new birth that assumes the presence of what only the new birth can bestow. Graham listed several mistakes made in perceptions of the new birth but proceeded to describe how one may receive the new birth: "God gives a new nature to those that receive by faith His Son, Jesus Christ." One must grasp the non-negotiable condition of faith— not reformation, not respectability, not civilization, not church membership. After further emphasis on the necessity of the new birth, Graham noted, "There are just two conditions

to the new birth: repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. You must acknowledge that you are a sinner, you must show sorrow for your sins and transgression of the law of God, you must forsake your sin, and then turn by faith and receive Christ as our Lord and Savior."

These instructions find expansive expression in Graham's book *How to Be Born Again.* The book is divided into three sections, dealing with man's problem, God's solution, and man's response. Large in anecdotal description and Scripture quotation, it builds a doctrine of sin, sets forth Christ's person and work in clear terms, and then discusses the necessities of repentance and faith, giving component parts of each. While "God took the initiative and did everything that was needed to make the offer of salvation possible,"[cx] the most pivotal aspect of the transforming experience Graham described as the act of the human will:

Faith in Christ is also voluntary. A person cannot be coerced, bribed or tricked into trusting Jesus. God will not force His way into your life. The Holy Spirit will do everything possible to disturb you, draw you, love you — but finally it is your personal decision. God not only gave His Son on the cross where the plan of redemption was finished: He gave the law as expressed in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount to show you your need of forgiveness; He gave the Holy Spirit to convict you of your need. He gives the Holy Spirit to draw you to the cross, but even after all of this, it is your decision whether to accept God's free pardon or to continue in your lost condition.[cxi]

He did not advocate a non-transforming mental assent to certain propositions as faith but saw repentance as a moral concomitant of true faith, as he stated in *Christianism vs. Communism*: "To receive Christ means far more than just believing on Him," Graham emphasized; "It carries with it the idea of following Christ, giving him lordship over your body, mind and soul." Where does regeneration fit in this encounter of salvation? "The process of regeneration is done by the Spirit of God. You may not be aware of the moment when you step over the line, but there comes a moment in the life of every man who has been born again, a

moment of decision, when he says, ‘yes’ to Christ.”

Graham did not mean that the “moment of decision” *arises from* the new birth, but that without such a “moment of decision” one never will receive the new birth. He continued, “Right now, at this moment, where you sit, can be your moment of decision. You can be born again by the Spirit of God just now. You can enter into the Kingdom of God.” This technique of closing a message with both the urgency of the eternal and the sinner’s power of immediate transformation was what Tony Blair called, with utter sincerity and admiration, “the well-honed harvesting of converts that was the hallmark of his Evangelistic Association.”[cxii]

The moment at which this happens depends absolutely on the will of the sinner. After a sermon on the attributes of God in which Graham emphasized holiness, wrath, judgment, and the atonement of Christ— a powerful sermon in many ways— he closed:

> You say, “Well, Billy, what do I have to do?” All you have to do is let Jesus in. You say, “Is it as simple as that?” It’s as simple as snapping one’s fingers. You say, “How long does it take?” Only a second, the twinkling of an eye. Right now, where you sit, you can settle it and say ‘yes’ to Christ for eternity, and I guarantee on the authority of God’s Word that you can know before you leave here tonight that you’re going to heaven. Utterly sure! You can be certain that you’ll escape the judgment of Almighty God (*Hour*, 126).

The last page of his pamphlets issued by the *Hour of Decision* was entitled “My Decision for Christ.” The text read, “Believing that the Lord, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for me and is now living, I want this to be my Hour of Decision. Having confessed my sins, I believe in my heart, and do now receive Him as my Savior.” Then there was a place for name, address, and date of decision. Graham’s apparent success, sincerity, and transparency in his invitation made it seem incontrovertible and a divinely revealed method. One admirer wrote, “I do altar calls very regularly, and they don’t change. The essence of them hasn’t changed in 2,000 years, and seeing Billy Graham be faithful to that same simple message has been an encouragement to me to stay focused as well.”[cxiii] Another

wrote that after he adopted Graham's method of using the invitation, he found that "everything went so much better" in seeing people respond. "I pretty much took Billy Graham's playbook," he continued, "and I still use it for the way that he invites people to come to faith and to accept Christ into their lives."[cxiv]

We see the same emphasis on immediacy and the dependence of the entire saving event on human autonomy in the sermon "Hate vs. Love." Graham closed, "In order to become a Christian, to be saved from your sins and to have the assurance that if you died you would go to Heaven, all you have to do is right now, wherever you are, say an eternal 'Yes' to Christ." He then reinforced both the urgency and the simplicity of the transaction: "Right now you can settle it— you can say 'Yes' to Christ! You can make this hour your 'Hour of Decision.'"[cxv]

Another example of this very consistent cant of Graham proceeds:

> But you say, "Billy, what do I have to do?" All you have to do is at this instant submit your will to Christ and accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. You must acknowledge that you are a sinner and then by faith let Christ come into your heart. You can do it this moment. I guarantee this will be a solution to your fears. (*Hour*, 138)

A Formula to Fail

Despite the absolute guarantees that he made to his hearers, Graham estimated that about 75 percent of those that responded to his invitation would not seal the transaction with truly sincere and persevering faith. When asked about his view of how many of those coming forward were saved, he referred to the parable of the sowing of seed on different kinds of soil and said, in 1993, "And I've always thought that in any group that comes forward to make a commitment, if I've preached the gospel faithfully, a fourth of them will be there five years from now or ten years from now" (*Conversations*, 72).

Whatever else the parable indicates about the relation of the word to the human mind, it would seem self-evident that it does not justify

developing a method of evangelism that admittedly produces false professions in 75 percent of those who respond positively to the instruction and promises given in a call to decision. The method of Jesus was far more cautious and filled with warnings about the deceitfulness of sin and the spirit of self-glory and self-preservation that pervades the human soul and the consequent need for internal transforming grace (Matt. 10:26-39; 11:25-30; John 6:60-71).

Although by his own observation many who respond to Graham's invitation are not truly saved, so responsive was the will of man to promptings of truth, he also maintained, that some who never hear the gospel are saved. By the promptings of conscience and other aspects of general revelation as well as their natural desire to know the true God, they come to Christ virtually, though they may never hear of him actually: "I think there is that hunger for God and people are living as best they know how according to the light that they have. Well," he continued in response to a question by David Frost, "I think they're in a separate category than people like Hitler and people who have just defied God, and shaken their fists at God" (*Conversations*, 166). One might legitimately query if Hitler were not "sincere" in pursuing what he believed the light of nature taught him. Clearly, the autonomy of the human will emerges as the single most determinative factor in the salvation of any person.

This was not just a one-off misspoken sentiment. In an interview with Robert Schuller on May 31, 1997, Graham affirmed the same idea of salvation through sincere yearning. When asked by Schuller, "What is the future of Christianity?" he pictured a future that the body of Christ would include those who had never heard of Christ, who lived in devoted connection to other religions but sought sincerely to find an answer to their yearnings. These are people who "know Christ and love Christ whether they are conscious of it or not."[cxvi] This represents the final triumph of the human will over truth itself.

Though doctrinal conservatism permeated many aspects of Graham's thought and zeal for conversion dominated his public ministry and private desires, those traits, combined with certain constructions in his theology

— experience, biblical accommodation, and human autonomy— created loyalties from widely divergent expressions along the theological spectrum. The most persuasive theological impact of Graham was the centrality of human decision. This idea he inherited from a century of development, and his artful use of it gave him his sticking power across the doctrinal and spiritual spectrum.

The Anatomy of a Hybrid Constituency

Billy Graham's strong affirmation of biblical authority, his clear proclamation of the objective truths of the gospel, and his perseverance in the calling of evangelism gave him comprehensive credibility among evangelicals. Accompanying these strong traits, however, were a few convictions that gave some of the mainstream, more liberal-leaning Protestants and the more moderate wing of Southern Baptists room to approve of Graham and thus find a point of positive contact with their conservative detractors. Two of these religious persuasions that proved to be a bridge to uncomfortable unity were the priority of religious experience and, concomitantly, an affirmation of biblical truthfulness that transcended any critical engagement with supposed difficulties in the biblical text.

It could be suggested that Graham's experiential persuasion of Christianity's truthfulness is simply a rock-solid engagement with the Reformed doctrine of the internal witness of the Spirit— or as Jonathan Edwards expressed it as "sensible" knowledge of sin and of the excellence of Christ. By the same token, one could look upon Graham's unswerving commitment to the message of the Bible as another application of the same principle, as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "Our full persuasion, and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority therefore, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." Doubtless, such a witness of the Spirit graced the conscience of Graham so that he could say with no hesitation, "Since my earliest days, from about 1950 on up, I've never doubted one time that the Gospel is true, the Bible is true, and that what I'm preaching is true" (*Conversations*, 20).

This conviction sometimes found expression in words that implied

divine truthfulness in Scripture— or revelatory conviction through Scripture— that rose above any objectionable phenomena presented by the text. In interviews with David Frost, these tensions surfaced. On two separate occasions, Graham testified strongly about his unwavering confidence in the Bible. He shared with Frost an experience in which he went before God and said:

Lord, I don't understand all the things in this book, but I accept it as Your Word by faith. I can't prove it. There are things I don't understand. There are apparent contradictions here that I can't reconcile. There are things here, especially in the Old Testament, that I can't accept from my ethical and moral point of view today, but I accept it as Your revelation to us. (*Conversations*, 19, 20)

This description probably reflected his dark night of the soul during discussions with Charles Templeton. Since that experience of submission, Graham went on to say, he never had a doubt that the Bible is the word of God (*Conversations*, 20).

Another question on another occasion provoked by Graham's magnetic demeanor of confidence and certainty probed the fundamental issue as to whether Graham had doubts. The unperturbed man responded, "No, I really don't, David. You may be surprised at that, but there was a time that I did. But I really don't have doubts, and if I did, I would tell you. These doubts have gone." In expanding his statement, he interlaced the issues of secure confidence of an experience that focused on Christ with the continuing difficulties in understanding and interpreting the statements of the Bible. "I'm absolutely convinced if someone would come and give me a great deal of proof that the Bible was not true and Christ never lived," so Graham stated the hypothetical case, "as some people say He didn't and so forth, this wouldn't disturb my faith at all because my faith is grounded in a personal encounter with Christ and a daily experience with Him." Then in the true spirit of the popular evangelical gospel hymn "He Lives," Graham sealed his doubtless faith: "I know He lives. I know that He's the purpose and meaning of life. I know that He's the embodiment of truth. And to me, it's a tremendous sense of security that I have every day that I would like to pass on to every person I could" (*Conversations*, 20, 21).

If pressed on some of those statements, Graham would argue that such assertions of errors, contradictions, ethical primitivism, or doubtfulness of the historical existence of Christ are erroneous and built on false premises. Supposed errors and contradictions can be shown as mere appearances and explained and harmonized with careful, honest labor with the text. Any doubts about the real existence of Christ, his words, his works, and his resurrection can be set aside by applying the canons of historical investigation to the documentary evidence combined with the phenomena of history since the time of Christ. He would affirm, as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 15, that faith without historical reality of substitutionary atonement, a true death, a historical resurrection replete with all the elements of visual and tactile observation, and a true bodily ascension into the presence of the Father's glory would be "vain," a meaningless, empty irrelevant assertion. None of this garnering of evidence, however, in a highly successful method of demonstrating the compelling credibility of the Bible and the central Christian doctrines in any way diminishes the necessity of the work of the Spirit in bringing a person to an indestructible experience of faith. Christian faith involves both Word and Spirit. Graham did not, however, take the time or the opportunity to answer in that way, but found the appeal to personal experience more satisfactory, and perhaps compelling, in the situation.

Grant Wacker has written in his biography of Graham that this "faith-based approach to the Bible proved baffling to many partisans of the mainline Protestant— not to mention the academic— establishment." [cxvii] That is certainly true in many cases, but it might be that this approach also provided a gateway for them to continue their affirmation of, and participation in, his ministry without surrendering their ultimate agnosticism about the inspiration of Scripture and historical confessional Christianity. Historically, varieties of liberalism functioned experientially as did Graham— theology rests in personal experience, and faith is a matter of the assertion of the human will.

Answers of this sort resonate both with a wide range of emotional conservatives and traditional liberals. Those that saw the promotion of personal encounter and experience as most basic to Christianity could

rally to Graham's answer and identify with the nature of his confidence. Among those that felt safe in affirming his ministry were many who had concluded that any commitment to the reality of propositional revelation and the inerrancy of Scripture constituted a distracting superfluity.

In addition, his conscious attempt to create as full a sphere of acceptability as possible is demonstrated in two of his public positions. He showed his commitment to social and racial justice and equality in his crusade policy. He took an early stance against racism even in the Deep South. Graham developed in this matter from early misapprehension of the depth of the problem and an implicit gradualism in his statements to a clear stance against the "sin of racism." By 1953 he had virtually eliminated segregated seating in his crusades. By 1956 he was publicly listing racism as among the sins from which men needed to repent. In 1957, he had Martin Luther King Jr. join him on a crusade platform in New York at Madison Square Garden, making a commitment to social ethics as a necessary concomitant to doctrinal orthodoxy.

Two, he showed a pliability in his stance on some doctrinal issues, indicating a wide range of *adiaphora*. For example, in discussing the issue of women in ministry, after affirming the teaching gift of his daughter Anne, he gave his perspective on the ordination of women: "It would be according to the circle I was in," he began. "I feel that I belong to all the churches," he reasoned. "I am equally at home in an Anglican or Baptist church or a Brethren assembly or a Roman Catholic church, and I would have to say that I would identify with the customs and the culture and the theology of that particular church" (*Conversations*, 74).

Graham's rhetoric, though not his core conviction, is very similar to the Baptist liberal William Newton Clarke, as Clarke described the position on Scripture to which he arrived by the beginning of the twentieth century:

> The ground of my confidence is this. By this time in the history of the world the quality of the Bible as the book of divine religion is so established that we may think of it with serene confidence. It is certain that the Bible gives us knowledge of Jesus, and that Jesus gives us knowledge of God, and that God as Jesus reveals him is the true light of life. Our sacred book is thus our guide to Jesus, to God, and to life

> divine. This fact has been established in long human experience, and can be trusted. We are not to be deprived of it: it will stand. For some minds it may be obscured, but it is a steadfast certainty, on which we are entitled to rest in peace.[cxviii]

One wing of Protestant liberalism found Christian continuity in the "social gospel." Its proponents remembered the revivalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that seemed "calculated to produce skin-deep changes." Walter Rauschen-busch remembered the mantra of "signing a card, shaking hands, or being introduced to the evangelist." He wanted an overhaul in "the kind of change we hope to produce by personal conversion and regeneration." Even with his minimization of the idea of "going to heaven" and maximizing energetic involvement in changing social structures, he still pointed to the power of human will: "Salvation is the voluntary socializing of the soul." "It is faith," Rauschenbusch affirmed, "to assert the feasibility of a fairly righteous and fraternal social order [and] to see God at work in the world and to claim a share in his job." Well said; and prophetically consistent with the theological direction of the following century, the human will comes alongside God "to claim a share in his job." As with all sincere practitioners of religion in every age, theology is "based on their personal experiences," and leads to a faith that "is an energetic act of the will, affirming our fellowship with God and man, declaring our solidarity with the Kingdom of God, and repudiating selfish isolation."[cxix]

Doctrinal Preaching

The powerful effect and universal approval of Billy Graham's ministry led to the sealing of perhaps his most characteristic assertion as evangelical orthodoxy— the inviolable uprightness and autonomy of the human will. His crusade appeals consummated the direction of evangelistic engagement and brought about a deep-seated suspicion that the historic Reformed view of the relation of the fallen human will to the Spirit and truth provided no support for evangelistic proclamation.

The doctrines that constituted the power of preaching from colonial Puritanism, from Edwards to Nettleton, had been cut in half. The

objective affirmations of the person of Christ, the necessity of the cross and resurrection, and the call to repentance and faith though suffering through various nuances of explanation had remained clear. Yet the subjective doctrines of the character of the human will and consequent discussions of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and conversion and the nature of repentance, faith, and assurance all had been redefined.

Evangelistic numbers were more expansive, but it is difficult to discern, especially considering Graham's own observations, if evangelism was more productive in its long-term effects. Christian experience in general seemed shallower, for the evidences of an effectual work of the Spirit of God had come to a point of irrelevance. Those marks of a genuine work of the Spirit of God had to be shoved aside because the human will required no effectual spiritual power for union with Christ in his saving work. In other words, "have you decided" is enough.

While earlier views that highlighted evidences of a changed life sometimes produced an absorption with introspection, modern views produced an untested confidence in the power of the human transaction of decision. Volitional power oversaw the euthanasia of introspection. The Christian conscience must no longer have to tolerate that pest, that drag on its confidence. For assurance, one need look no further than the moment of decision. Church discipline accompanied it to the grave, and room on church rolls had to be made for carnal Christians.

Soon, not only were the blessings of divine grace subject to the human will, but the blessings themselves would be viewed in terms of increasing earthly comfort, an absence of suffering, and a spirituality that transcended the content and finality of biblical truth.

11. Ungrounded Spirituality

Steve McQueen died at age fifty during a surgical procedure in Mexico, in a desperation effort to overcome the fatal effects of mesothelioma. Before he went to Mexico, he had a long conversation with Billy Graham. He told Graham that he had "found Christ," and the conversation with Graham had given McQueen serenity. The actor had had a relationship of four years with Barbara Minty and had been married to her for one year at the time of this surgery. Immediately after she heard that her husband had died during surgery, Barbara called Billy Graham, talked with him, and "somehow he made everything okay." He had interpreted Steve's death as a loss in some sense "but a gain for Steve." Barbara did not consider herself "a traditionally religious person," but took comfort from her persuasion, "I am very spiritual."[cxx]

Spiritual but Not Religious

Before the trip to Mexico, Graham gave McQueen a Bible that he had used in travel for some years. It had Graham's name on the front, coffee stains on the side of the pages, notes to Nixon, some outlines of "big speeches," and notes for foreign political officials. "It's spectacular," Barbara noted, with an expression of appreciation for their allowing her to keep the Bible. She reported, "When the clinic where Steve passed made it possible for us to see him, Grady [Wilson] found the Bible on Steve's chest. He graciously gave it to me, and I still treasure it to this day."[cxxi]

A treasured Bible and deep spirituality— of such stuff fervent Christianity is built. Something entirely different is just as possible, however, from that combination. Given the historical prominence of the Bible in western thought for two thousand years, it is possible for one to treasure the Bible for a number of reasons. It may serve as a talisman, a power to align the stars, a prophylactic from disaster. It may exude a sense of religious security while its soteriological seriousness is ignored. It may serve the interests of sentiment concerning who owned it or how long it has been in the family or might be admired for its ancient pedigree

— but never entice commitment to or acquaintance with the depth and scope of its content. Some analyze its historical impact on literature, musical repertoire, political theory, and philosophical ethics but remain void of any personal concern for its doctrines of sin and salvation.

One may embrace spirituality with a fervor equally destitute of true relevance. If one's spirituality is not formed under the authority of the content of biblical truth, then we must heed the warning "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). A person may consider spirituality as an intuitive fondness for looking beyond the crass materiality of things and events, a mystical persuasion favoring some transcendent sphere of purpose and meaning. Spiritual people may believe that personality transcends the body, continues to thrive in some immaterial sphere, and may even have the ability to encourage loved ones left on the earth in this life. Some materialists may give a nod to spirituality as the intrinsic, but mysterious, resident power of matter to produce intelligence and personality. Spirituality is a mind-set that must not be placed in the fetters of doctrinal propositions. Spirituality means that one is free to roam the spheres of transcendent hope undefined by any external source of authority.

Ungrounded Spirituality

But surely we must see that this is not so. Intelligence and personality cannot arise from impersonal matter, nor can spirituality acquire meaning in the absence of truth. In fact, spirituality normally is present in direct proportion to the purity and magnitude of the truth presented and believed. Our Lord prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). According to 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6, the Spirit's work moves along the path of bold proclamation of the unadulterated word of God, a clear manifestation of the truth. To this we will return.

Roger Olson has personified the clear danger of promoting spirituality detoxified of doctrine. Seeking, ostensibly as a neutral observer, a medium between what he calls the *traditionalist* and the *reformist* evangelical viewpoints, Olson foresees a future in which a "Spirit-energized evangelical theology will be less obsessed with theological

correctness and uniformity and more focused on spiritual transformation."[cxxii] This gives an impression that spirituality somehow is crushed under the weight of correctness and receives new vitality when concern for correctness (read "truth") dissipates. Do you hear the voice of the Spirit now? He reveals a new truth concerning his operations. "I can get along just fine, thank you, without truth; and, furthermore, you would be much more balanced and attractive to people, more sanctified and all that, and more susceptible to my power if you were not so shackled with concerns about correctness."

Olson's solution would be death to evangelicals and the world. His position is impossible to argue biblically. Were he to present an exegetical and doctrinal defense of his call for minimizing the importance of truth, then he must contradict his purported conclusion. He would seek to argue that doctrinal correctness contradicts true spirituality while wanting to establish it on an unassailable doctrinal foundation. Thus, he can have no coherent scriptural support for his assertion. He has cut himself off from even trying.

Seemingly, he would be forced into asserting Christian spirituality without consulting a text at all. But if he consulted a text, could he claim it as authoritative? Further, what text could he possibly use for such a self-contradictory endeavor? The Spirit's work is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment based on truth-based propositions (John 16:8-11). The Spirit is the source of revelation about the person and work of Christ, the nature and need of men, and the operations of grace by which God brings sinners into a saving relationship with him. "Now we have received," Paul instructed the Corinthians, "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). The work of establishing understanding of God's gracious condescension to sinners is then complemented by an impartation in "words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:11-13).

When Jesus promised the Spirit to the apostles, he was introduced to them as the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). In that context, Jesus indicated that the mark of love for him was to keep his words. Again, the Spirit's

work would be to teach them “all things, and to bring to [their] remembrance all that [Jesus] said to [them]” (v. 26). In 15:26, he is called the “Spirit of truth” whom Jesus would send to them “from the Father.” And in 16:13, Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.” Truth, and our need to be guided into it, flows to us from the infinitely perfect purpose and knowledge of the triune God through the revelatory ministry of the Holy Spirit.

When outlining tests of a work of God’s Spirit, John established a heartfelt and attentive (“listens to”) belief in the apostolic witness as an unassailable mark:

> They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:5–6)

The connection between truth and the Spirit is indissoluble. Likewise, the connection between Scripture and Spirit is indissoluble. Even so, the connection between carefully delineated doctrine and spirituality is indissoluble. To speak of “Spirit energized evangelical theology” that is “less obsessed with theological correctness” is like speaking of full-bodied health that is less obsessed with physical wellness.

We play the same kind of game, however, if we think that we are Christian preachers while less obsessed with doctrinal content in our sermons. Such a delusion has captured some of the most fabulously famous preachers in America, indeed, across the world. The evangelical wreckage that arises from a loss of God-centered doctrine and the resultant minimization of doctrinal importance at all may be seen in the ministry of Joel Osteen.

Jesus Is the Answer: A Tattered Vestige of a Formerly Robust Faith

This well-known American pulpiteer is the incarnation of the kind of preacher Jonathan Edwards described in his sermon “Ministers Who

Gratify Men's Lusts Better Received." In a series of theoretical scenarios, Edwards described much of what actually is found in the sermonic corpus of Osteen: "If ministers were sent to direct people how they might gratify their covetousness, and to tell them of means by which they might grow rich, and get abundance in the world, they would be a great deal better received and hearkened to than they are now." In another nuance of the preference sinners have for fulfilling their lusts, Edwards proposed, "If ministers were sent from God to tell men how they might probably get great estates, though the means were not at all more probable than the means that they now direct to for obtaining heaven, yet many would be a great deal more ready to put the directions in practice."[cxxiii] One more will suffice to make the point of Edwards's insight on this distinction between the eternal and the temporal, God-centeredness and man-centeredness in preaching:

> If some persons could learn by ministers how to get fine clothes, so as to make a finer show than their fellows, they would hear with greater pleasure and a greater disposition to practice than when the minister tells them how they may be clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and may have the ornaments of the graces of God's Spirit, and may hereafter come to shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of God. [cxxiv]

In an uncanny reification of Edwards's theoretical projection, Osteen demonstrates how much of an afterthought and how diminished the doctrinal content is in his recommendation of faith in Christ. Always, according to his nomenclature, Osteen wants to "provide the audience an opportunity to make Jesus the Lord of their lives" and, as in his spoken medium, suggests the need of his reader and a prayer as a fitting response to his message: "Are you at peace with God? A void exists in every person's heart that only God can fill. I'm not talking about joining a church or finding religion. I'm talking about finding life and peace and happiness." Having established the need, this would hopefully spark a desire for a corresponding solution. He continues, "Would you pray with me today? Just say, 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. I ask you to come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Savior." Very similarly, on the last

page of another book, the writer-preacher states, “I believe there is a void in every person that only a relationship with God can fill,” and after similar explanatory language, encourages his readers to pray, “Jesus, I believe You died for me and rose from the dead, so now I want to live for You. I am turning away from my sins and placing my trust in You. I acknowledge You as my Savior and Lord, and I’m asking You to guide my life from now on.”

Perhaps with a nuance here and there, this kind of appeal rests right at the center of the standard perceptions of what is involved in repentance and faith. Repentance consists of taking the words “I repent,” faith consists of an invitation to Jesus to come into one’s heart, and sincerity in the process is sealed by the supplicant making Jesus “my Lord and Savior.” So confident is the preacher of the saving efficacy of such a decisional transaction that he continues, “Friend, if you prayed that simple prayer, I believe you have been ‘born again.’ I encourage you to attend a good, Bible-based church and keep God in first place in your life.” The new birth constitutes God’s response to this statement of repentance and faith.

All the elements that reflect the revivalist evangelism of the twentieth century are present, with the doctrinal assumptions that support this self-generated act of union with Christ. What is remarkable in this is the rampant confidence in a verbal formula devoid of commensurate corresponding substance. These appeals are on the last page respectively of Osteen’s books entitled *You Can, You Will: 8 Undeniable Qualities of a Winner* and *Break Out: 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life*.[cxxv] Osteen’s connection with the flow of evangelicalism resides in his confidence that his ministry has the full approval of Billy Graham. When Osteen visited Graham a few months before the death of Ruth Graham, he asked him for advice. Graham responded, “I don’t know of anything I would tell you, Joel, except keep doing what you’re doing.” Graham, according to Osteen’s recollection of the event, continued, “Don’t let people change you; stay true to what God has called you to do.”[cxxvi]

Osteen's evangelistic prayer formula could pass for that of Graham's, but his doctrinal content is far from Graham's. I do not fear exaggeration when I write these words: Absolutely nothing in either book gives warrant for such a designated prayer— even as unburdened by theological direction such proposed language may be— and nothing in the content of Osteen's preaching has anything at all to do with sin, repentance, or the lordship of Christ. I summarize its most relevant elements of appeal in *You Can, You Will* (page numbers cited in parentheses).

Savior is mentioned once in a hazily oblique context. In reminding his readers to avoid parasitic, dependent people, he says, "God did not call you to be unhappy. He does not want you to waste your life to keep someone else happy" (40), and advises, "You are not the savior of the world. We already have a Savior" (32). It is little short of blasphemy to commandeer the saviorhood of Jesus as a foundation for saying that it is a waste of life to work to make someone else happy.

Otherwise, he presents Jesus as an exemplar of true service to others —he bolsters our confidence when we need to look on the bright side of things. When his disciples seemed puzzled that Jesus was not hungry as he sat at the well in Samaria, having talked with a woman whom he told "about her future and gave her a new beginning," Jesus explained, "I get fed by doing what God wants me to do. I get nourished when I help people. My food, strength, peace, joy, and satisfaction come when I serve others" (136). Those are the most Christ-centered words in the book.

Further to illustrate the joy of service, Osteen assures his readers that those who serve unapplauded here will receive applause in heaven. "The Scripture says," so Osteen reports, "when Peter went to heaven, Jesus stood up to welcome him." Well, let's cut some slack for the encourager and suppose he meant to write "Stephen." His point, however, is that when unsung heroes arrive in heaven, sometimes Jesus says, "You know what? This one deserves a standing ovation" (145).

Christ also makes his appearance when Osteen needs some mantra of encouragement to evoke positive feelings. Three times he quotes, "I can do all things through Christ" (40, 83, 87). It is used almost as a throw-away line in a *Saturday Night Live* spoof. "All through the day you should

be focused on the positive: ‘Something good is going to happen to me. I’m strong, healthy, talented, disciplined. I’m fun to be around. My children will be mighty in the land. I can do all things through Christ. I will pass this chemistry test. I will meet the right person. I will overcome this challenge. My best days are still out in front of me” (83). Osteen ends most chapters with a declaration, something like a prophetic prediction with effectual power to bring it to pass, that God will give his readers success if they pursue each respective trait of a winner.

In speaking of keeping a vision, he says, “Every time you see your vision, you’re moving toward it. Thank God that it’s on the way. If you’ll do this God will supersize what you’re dreaming about. . . . I believe and declare that every dream, every promise, every goal God puts in your heart, He will bring to pass” (17, 18). Discernment concerning the biblical doctrine of the subtle and corrosive nature of the desires of a fallen heart, the deceitful residual forces of indwelling sin, and the power of worldliness are not a part of the instruction.

He gives himself no pause by thinking that he might be appealing to the values of the world rather than the will of God: “All that is in the world —the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life— is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16-17).

In the chapter “Run Your Race,” having given the advice “Understand this: Your first priority is to keep yourself happy,” he encourages another mantra, “This is going to be a great day. I’m strong in the Lord. I’ve got the favor of God. I can do all things through Christ. Something good is going to happen to me” (40). Calling for winners to “Expect Great Things,” (William Carey would not recognize this list of expectations) Osteen advises, “Draw a line in the sand and say, ‘That’s it. I’m done with low expectations, I’m not settling for mediocrity. I expect favor, increase, and promotions. I expect blessings to chase me down. I expect this year to be my best year so far” (64).

A positive mind-set is of great value, writes Osteen, to the person that expects God to bless him with health and real breakthroughs in career.

“Start off your day in faith,” Osteen urges; “If you develop this positive mind-set you’ll not only be happier, healthier, and stronger, but also, I believe and declare, you will accomplish more than you ever imagined. You will overcome obstacles that looked impossible, and you will become everything God has created you to be. You can, you will!” (89). Evidently, faith is a positive mind-set that one will be amazingly successful in his or her career. Visions of getting jet planes as a gift, buying an opulent hotel chain, purchasing a massive sports complex in Houston, and becoming a billionaire illustrate the power of faith.

Real winners also pursue excellence. With many examples of how to achieve excellence, spiced with personal anecdotes and the example of Daniel, Osteen assures his reader, “If you’ll have this spirit of excellence, God will breathe in your direction and cause you to stand out. You’ll look up and be more creative, more skilled, more talented, and wise with more ideas. I believe and declare that like Daniel, you will outperform, you will outclass, and you will outshine, and God will promote you and set you in a place of honor. You can, you will” (108).

To the sixth admonition to keep growing, Osteen adds this declaration: “I believe and declare God is about to thrust you into the fullness of your destiny. He will open doors that no man can shut. You will go further than you could imagine and become the winner He’s created you to be” (127). What greater example could we find of what it means to take the Lord’s name in vain?

The chapter on “Serve Others” has an admonition that runs counter to the entire thrust of all the other chapters. Many people are unhappy, he observes, “because they are focused only on themselves. It’s all about ‘my dreams, my goals, and my problems.’ That self-centered focus will limit you” (131). Probably so, but every other point of motivation has been caressing and embracing self-focus. In the chapter preceding he had said, “It’s fine to help people in need, but don’t spend all your time with them. You need talented and smart people in your life; winners who are farther along than you and can inspire you and challenge you to rise higher” (126). He ends the chapter on service with the declaration “I believe and declare because you’re a giver, you will come in to your reward. You will come in to health, strength, opportunity, promotion, and

breakthroughs. You will come into new levels of God's goodness" (146).

In *Break Out!*, Osteen gives a typical display of his exegetical prowess in using the stories of Joshua's prayer and Elisha's request of Elijah to commend God-sized, uncommon faith. In each application he emphasizes his contention that each person can say to God with confidence of divine approval and performance, "Let me have twice the influence, twice the wisdom, twice the favor, twice the income" of those that preceded me.[cxxvii]

The eighth mark of a winner is the ability to stay passionate. Lose the blahs, regain your enthusiasm; know that the image of God in you is intended to give you zeal for success, for promotion, for health, for successful relationships. Like the Ephesian church in Revelation, you may have left your first love, but you have not lost it. You can regain that original passion for success:

> Get back your passion. . . .You can set new levels for your family. . . . You have the seeds of greatness on the inside. . . . Winning is in your DNA. The most high God breathed His life into you. You've got what it takes. This is your time. This is your moment. Shake off doubts, shake off fear and insecurity, and get ready for favor, get ready for increase, get ready for the fullness of your destiny. You can, you will! (168-69)

The page of text following this triumph of confident assertion, innocent of any hint of original sin or final dependence on God, gives the evangelistic invitation. The call to repentance and the assertion of a need for a Savior is hollow and completely unrelated to the full thrust of each book. Osteen exhibits no doctrine of sin or of the work of the Spirit in bringing about conviction of sin, no doctrine of justification, nothing about substitutionary atonement, no soteriological discussion of Christ in his offices or of the successive stages of his redemptive labors for sinners, nothing about holiness as a test of true faith, no serious attempt at careful biblical exposition. Instead he gives plenty of silliness in his rare handling of the biblical text and endless provocations to veil rampant worldliness as confident spirituality. All this leads with no seeming inconsistency or

equivocation into a prayer to “make” Jesus “my Lord and Savior.”

This is the fruit of the confessional amnesia that justified the elevation of human will and, consequently, resident positive spiritual potential in the human soul. With the loss of both guilt and corruption as constituent elements of original sin, an “autosoteric” system is established. Osteen’s version is simply the most blatant example of the perversion that arises from the loss of fully confessional doctrinal preaching. Deeply impoverished by its minimization of Christ’s redeeming work, it is not qualitatively different in its anthropology from confident assertions that elevate human goodness and independence by denials of both the condemning and corrupting impact of original sin.

12. Polluting the Prophetic Word

Equally unfounded spirituality increasingly characterizes congregations that formerly relied solely on the inerrant word of God as interpreted within the historic confessional grid of Reformed Christianity. Prophetic ministries assuming the continuing phenomenon of spontaneous revelation to persons supposedly having a prophetic gift constitute part of the worship. In Sam Storms's book *Practicing the Power*, detailed instructions are provided as to how the prophetic gift should be practiced in the local church, and this discussion will be put in that context.[cxxviii]

Two major assumptions govern the discussion. Obviously, the first is that the instruction given about the gift of prophecy in the New Testament (especially 1 Cor. 12 and 14) means that the gift is active today. Paul's admonition in 14:1, "earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy," supports this conviction and all the instructions given as to how to discern its appropriate use.

Second, the argument is made that one must be trained carefully in how to use the gift, for a person with a real gift might utter things under the impression that it is of the Lord and be in error. A principle of honing the gift successfully rests in the conviction that one must "be willing to be wrong." Accuracy in prophetic pronouncement is not really the most important aspect of the gift, but courage and obedience are. If a person "steps out in faith" and gives a prophecy or word of knowledge that she believes God has given her, and it turns out to be "completely wrong," she nevertheless is to be applauded ("raucously") for her courage (Storms, 101).

God is not offended by our failure when we speak in his name and speak falsely; he is not more interested in prophetic accuracy than he is in our "always practicing obedience," our perseverance that results in not giving up trying (Storms, 29-31). (This sounds very similar to Roger Olson's new spirituality without correct doctrine.)

This representation of prophetic utterance is hardly consistent with the admonition of Peter concerning the exercise of the gift of prophecy in the congregation: “Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God . . . in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11). The person speaking does not begin a prophetic word with “It seems that God might be saying,” or “I have a strong inner impression that I believe is from the Lord” (Storms, 129).

Nor does it match how Paul encouraged prophetic utterances to be observed: “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:19-22). Storms cites this passage to encourage people to hold fast to a tested prophetic utterance that is demonstrated to be good and to evaluate “the biblical validity of its content” (Storms, 128, 135).

At the same time, however, the passage does not say that a supposed prophecy that is shown to be wrong can at the same time be harmless, benign, and celebrated; it is to be regarded as evil. It is not to be followed, and the person uttering it should be regarded as having brought into the place of inspired instruction— whether small group or entire congregation— a positive evil. Their pretension to utter prophecy has proved erroneous, the result is evil, and they should not be seen as having the gift. Seeking to be pastorally sensitive, this requirement seems to be sidestepped, and the advice is given to say something like “Our brother (or sister) obviously acted and spoke in a way they thought was what God desired, and I want to honor them for their sincerity. However, I don’t believe that what was said is altogether accurate” (Storms, 135). As I will seek to demonstrate later, this way of handling pretensions to prophecy that are in fact erroneous is without precedent in the biblical record.

One defense of erroneous prophecy rests in the fallibility of teachers of the text of Scripture: “What the teacher says is occasionally wrong or tainted with error” even though their “ministry is rooted in a divine revelation (the Bible).” Only the Bible has intrinsic authority, not its teachers. As with the Bible, “we know that this revelation is true” (that is received spontaneously by a prophet), but the prophet may “perceive the revelation imperfectly and consequently he may deliver it

imperfectly."[cxxix]

This comparison has a major difficulty. If a teacher misinterprets Scripture, the words, syntax, and context remain before the eyes of all who may read it. The revelation is still there and may be revisited by the teacher and any number of Christians— young, inexperienced, mature, scholarly— until it yields the proper meaning. If a prophet bungles the revelation, it is lost; none can retrieve it. We may well conclude it was a false prophecy for all we heard was the falsehood; no way to verify its truthfulness remains. This kind of comparison is an insult to the wisdom and power of God and seeks to justify error by putting the Bible on the same plane as a botched prophecy.

Another defense of this possibility of being wrong in a prophetic utterance lies in the closely reasoned conviction that Agabus in Acts 21:10-11 had several "minor" errors in his prediction (Storms, 104-122). Storms explains the possible confusion between the actual revelation and a prophet's interpretation and application of the revelation. Storms goes on to define "the nature of prophecy" as "generally a mixture of infallible divine revelation and fallible human interpretation and application" (Storms, 115).

Storms points to the narrative about Agabus to demonstrate this: "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Storms concludes that in the two elements of Agabus's prophecy, "in both cases, *Agabus was wrong"* (Storms, 116, italics original). Though Paul was indeed bound, the Jews did not bind him but wanted to kill him (Acts 21:30-31). Not only did they not bind him, they did not deliver him but had to surrender him to the Roman authorities when they arrived. "The tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains" (21:33).

Storms looks on these as positive errors in Agabus's delivery, perhaps involving an erroneous interpretation mixed with the actual revelation. "I'm inclined," Storms explains, "to believe that Agabus himself collapsed his own interpretation into the divine revelation, failed to differentiate

between the two, and then spoke as if God had revealed both to him" (Storms, 117). In another place, Storms called these words of Agabus a "mixture of truth and error" and concluded that "New Testament prophecy is occasionally fallible and therefore has to be carefully judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-22)."[cxxx] On that basis, Storms asserts, "Christians who on occasion (or even often) prophesy falsely should not be labeled false prophets" if they are regenerate persons and do not personally deny a cardinal doctrine of the faith (Storms, 120).

This explanation is one possible way of viewing the language. I find the extrapolation from it unwarranted, both doctrinally and exegetically. It makes the reader conclude, unnecessarily, that a prophecy from one accepted as a true prophet (Acts 11:27-30) has errors mingled with it. The apostles already had acted on the earlier prophecy of Agabus concerning the famine by taking action for the "relief of the brethren living in Judea" (Acts 11:29). Since this prophecy concerned a future event, they could compare it to nothing that was written but nevertheless acted on the basis of their belief in what Agabus said. In this second instance of Agabus, we are called on to accept the idea that he mingled the prophecy with errors arising from his own misled perceptions about what the Holy Spirit actually said. That interpretation is an important aspect of Storms's justification of his view of the possibility of errors in New Testament prophecy. There is another way to view this event that takes full account of the language employed, the full context of Paul's conviction that he must go to Rome, and the fearful imploring of his friends.

The words of Luke, however, do not indicate any such mixture in the delivery of Agabus, though we do see it in the response of Paul's friends encouraging him not to go to Jerusalem. Luke reports in a way that shows us Agabus spoke without any reservation that what he said was what the Holy Spirit said. If it is otherwise, Luke did not know any better, and Agabus lied or was self-deceived to such a degree that he could never pass muster according to prevailing standards of prophetic utterance.

What in fact happened was exactly according to what Agabus said.

Though the Jews did not take hold of Paul and bind him to deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles, the effect was the same. Their violent reaction to Paul set in motion the entire chain of events by which Paul was bound and delivered into the hands of the Roman commander. When the Jews saw him, “they stopped beating Paul,” and this issued immediately in his delivery, or their yielding him, into the hands of the Romans and his being bound. Both the delivery and the binding were the immediate results of the actions of the Jews. Circumstances they caused naturally brought all these things to effect.

Though Storms uses the evidence of Wayne Grudem that the word *deliver* always denotes an action that is “conscious and intentional and willing” (Storms, 116-17), Arndt and Gingrich set forth a meaning of “allow, permit,” and also “yield,”[cxxxi] like a fruit tree yielding fruit that is the necessary and natural consequence of its being a fruit tree and in its season (used so in Hab. 3:17). Even so the Jews, considering the circumstances, yielded Paul to the Romans, allowed them to take him, and permitted the subsequent actions in light of the natural consequences of their riot and the intervention of the Roman commander.

In the same way, Jesus was delivered into wicked hands. Using a form, with a different prefix, of the same word for *deliver*, Peter said, “[Jesus of Nazareth], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23 NASB). On the one hand, the “predetermined plan” did not actively deliver Jesus over but determined that such a thing would happen. In fact, the necessary consequence of the providential circumstances into which the divine decree brought Jesus led ineluctably to his being “delivered over” and to his death. The natural consequence of those circumstances yielded those results. On the other hand, the Jews did not “nail him to a cross,” but their actions led to this result by “the hands of godless men.” This statement of historical fact, a past event, by Peter has the same literary quality of the prophecy by Agabus; neither can be accused of error or of superimposing an unwarranted opinion into the stated proposition.

Giving support to the concept of erroneous prophecy, Storms points to Acts 21:4, concerning words delivered by some disciples at Tyre: “through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” Paul did not follow their counsel. Storms surmises that they had a true revelation but conflated their application with the revelation and delivered it to Paul as if the application were the revelation. This serves as evidence that sometimes prophecy in the New Testament is delivered in a way that includes errors (Storms, 114). Given the larger context of Acts 20:22–23 and 19:21, Paul weighed what they said and decided that their deliverance “through the Spirit” became mingled in their head with an unwarranted application.

I believe that Storms is accurate in seeking to isolate the revelation from its interpretation and its application. We see the necessity of that distinction in this passage. The location of the passage makes it unlikely that they delivered their interpretation as if it were the revelation. Their specific exhortation did not come to him “through the Spirit.” The entire context lets us know, from Paul’s own impressions (Acts 20:23), from theirs, and from the prophecy of Agabus, that “persecution awaited him.” They were engaged with Paul in discussion about this for seven days and were continually urging him not to go to Jerusalem. It seems that they would say, “In light of the revealed truth that persecution awaits you in Jerusalem, we earnestly implore that you not go there; for your own sake and for the sake of the church at large don’t submit yourself to the hostility of the Jews and perhaps interrupt an expansion of your ministry.” We find the same response from the disciples in Philip’s house in verse 12, giving an exhortation in light of the information. Given the context and the discussion time of seven days, we have a tidily concentrated expression in an elliptical sentence, which if expanded, would read, “They kept telling Paul, on the basis of the Spirit’s revelation of what awaited him in Jerusalem, not to set foot in Jerusalem.”

These exhortations were misapplications of a revelation, but the text does not require the conclusion that any of them indicated that their advice also was a message from the Spirit. It involved an extended discussion based on a clearly received, unambiguous revelation (Acts 20:23), a revelation they shared, that “bonds and afflictions await [Paul].”

This highly condensed report of seven days of discussion does not require us to conclude that they conflated their advice as an element of the revelation.

A second major problem with this, beyond the very tenuous biblical support for the possibly error-prone New Testament prophet, is that it calls for a radical change in the entire canonical orientation to the prophetic without any preparation for such a change or any pattern of examples for it. The character of the Old Testament prophet is plain:

- "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die." (Deut. 18:20)

- "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely." (Jer. 5:30-31)

- "Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the Lord' . . . and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness." (Jer. 23:31-32)

- "Hananiah's false prophecy led to his personal doom as prophesied truly by Jeremiah." (Jer. 28)

- "God told Ezekiel as he spoke according to the formula, repeated over and over, "The word of the Lord came to me saying," that the exiles found him fascinating but did not embrace the moral and spiritual gravity of what he said: "Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass—surely it will come— then they will know that a prophet has been among them" (Ezek. 33:32–33 NKJV).

No error, personal judgment, misjudgment, guesswork, or uncertainty concerning the revelation is a part of the function of the prophets. When the prophet speaks, "Surely it will come."

The same is true with the concept of the prophet in the New Testament. Nothing in the canon prepares us for a change in this expectation. The revelation they received is parallel to that received by the apostles. The apostles received divine revelation of an inerrant character, and they did not mix any erroneous opinions or misinterpretations with it. That which could not be known otherwise was received by revelation and opened the knowledge of the operations of the grace of God to the minds of those who received it and to those who heard, or read, its communication:

- "We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. . . . These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." (1 Cor. 2: 7, 10)

- None can doubt the intensity of Paul's claim to revelation in Galatians 1:11-12: "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Nor did Paul misapply the revelation in his practical sanctifying instructions to the Galatians.

- Peter identified the word preached by the apostles as the "word of our God [which] will stand forever" (Isa. 40:8), when he cited the Isaiah passage and stated, "And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25).

- John tied the spirit of error to those who did not listen to the apostles and the spirit of truth to those who did (1 John 4:1-4).

The prophets of the New Testament received revelation that was of the same quality and truthfulness as that received by the apostles. They did not have the same historical qualifications as apostles and were under the authority of the apostles. Nevertheless, their messages to and in the churches were accepted as revelatory. Since they must respond to direct apostolic authority, their function and their viability ceased with the end of the apostolic stewardship (1 Cor. 4:1; 14:37-40; 2 Cor. 3:6). In Ephesians,

Paul stated that God's household was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (2:20). That he referred to the prophets of the New Testament church is verified just a few verses down when he reminded the Ephesian Christians that both his speaking and writing arose from a single stream of revelation and that the prophets who functioned in their churches received revelation also:

Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. (Eph. 3:2-5)

With the completion of the "insight into the mystery of Christ" that came by revelation, so the work of the prophets would cease.

This position receives reinforcement from the fact that Paul took Silas with him on his second missionary journey. Silas was a prominently gifted man from the Jerusalem church who accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver the decision of the Jerusalem council. He was a prophet and had preached a lengthy message there (Acts 15:32). Prophets in the New Testament received special revelation from the Holy Spirit to teach with authority in the churches. All churches needed to have revealed truth as the full implications of the person, work, and words of Christ were being brought to maturity. The prophets fulfilled that need, since apostles could not be in all the churches on all occasions.

New covenant communities needed a constant inflow of revealed truth; on that account, God gave prophets to receive that revelation until the apostolic message reached its final maturity and so ceased. With the completion of the message, the need for the revelatory gifts was also complete. (See Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; 14:1, 3, 6, 22, 24, 25, 29-32). Silas had been confirmed in the Spirit and in the eyes of the church as a prophet and was commissioned by the church at Antioch to go on this second missionary tour with Paul. He functioned as an equal partner in labor, teaching, suffering, and preaching. Read Acts 16:22-34

for the record of Silas's participation with Paul in the full task of apostolic missions and teaching the gospel even in its virgin voyage into Europe.

The ministry of the prophets bore the marks of seriousness, gravity, and truthfulness, as did that of the apostles. Their reception of revelation was of the same errorless quality as that of the apostles. To argue for the continuation of this ministry is to say that the message of the mystery of Christ was not completed in the apostolic age and we stand in need of existential manifestations of the revelation beyond the written text of Scripture. If, at the same time, we argue for errors in the prophetic message, we must make room for errors in the apostolic message. If we question the revelation of the one, we question the revelation of the other. We question, therefore, the full veracity of what is written and the completely trustworthy stewardship of the apostles in handing down to subsequent generations that which was delivered to them. Since their revelation is the same, how do we know that the deposit, now written as Scripture, is not compromised in some way by a misinterpretation of revelation?

Peter wrote, "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20 NASB). The word *prophecy* is used to characterize both the Old Testament prophets and the apostolic message. The denial of "one's own interpretation" means that in prophecy the idea of opinion or unwarranted surmising is rejected. Prophecy is either true or false, and prophets are either true or false.

Peter was insistent on the reality of his position as a witness— his calling in light of his having seen the Lord during his earthly ministry, having seen him after his resurrection, and having seen him taken up in glory. The witness of the apostles was not a fabrication, a matter of creatively constructed stories, or an expression of opinion. Their reports came from sober observation— both eyewitness and ear witness (2 Peter 1:16-18). The event and the subsequent revelatory work of the Holy Spirit to the apostles moved forward, both by providence and inspiration, the authoritative inscripturation of divine revelation.

In this event, Peter wrote, "We have the prophetic word made more sure" (2 Peter 1:19 NASB), or "confirmed" (NKJV). One no longer has to

wonder as the prophets did, according to 1 Peter 1:10-11, about the person or the time of the Christ. He was now before them with the glory around him and the voice of the Father from heaven. This is a similar idea to that voiced by John when he wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). Peter knew that the prophetic word received its clear and certain fulfillment in the person of Christ. His present testimony clearly fulfilled previous prophecy. As Christ was the person to whom all the types, promises, and prophecies of the old covenant point, so the apostolic word is the culmination of the divine revelation.

In 1 Peter 1:24-25, Peter cited Isaiah 40:6-8, the “word of the Lord [that] remains forever,” as identical with “the good news that was preached to you.” Even so now, when he writes, “to which you will do well to pay attention” (2 Peter 1:19), he means “Pay attention to what I am writing to you now, even as you pay attention to the already written prophets.” His testimony is the fulfillment of prophecy in Christ as reported by the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To that culminating word they must pay attention.

To confirm this, Peter invoked the well-established doctrine concerning the origin of Scripture. Scripture does not arise from human investigation and interpretation of events (v. 20) nor one’s misapplication of a revelatory word. Earlier Peter had reminded his readers of this very truth regarding his writing (“we did not follow cleverly devised myths” [v. 16]). In the past, the prophets spoke the word of the Lord when it came to them and then recorded their speaking as the Holy Spirit carried them along. In that process, their speaking the audible word became *graphe*, the written word— that is, Scripture. Even so, the preaching of Peter and the other apostles became Scripture.

Peter continued the parallel between the inspired truthfulness of the prophets and the same of the apostles in 2:1: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you.” Paul’s argument in 2 Timothy 3:10-17 sets forth the same parallel. He reminded Timothy of “my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith,” etc. (v. 10) as something that marked him off from the false

teachers (v. 13) and demonstrated that he had “kept the faith” (4:7). Timothy, therefore, was to continue in what he had learned because he had learned it from Paul himself (v. 14) as well as from the “sacred writings” (v. 15). Inspired Scripture includes the witness of Paul, as Peter himself testified (2 Peter 3:15-16). Peter’s confidence that his written witness held the status of Scripture (2 Peter 3:1-2; 15) warranted his admonition that they do well to take heed. Scripture, including this apostolic message about Christ, is a “lamp shining in a dark place” (v. 19). We are to give heed to Scripture until the “day dawns” (v. 19), until Christ himself returns (Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12). “The day” is the day of Christ. That will be the time when “the morning star rises in your hearts” (v. 19)— our complete conformity to Christ (1 John 3:2). Scripture— the complete canon of the Old and New Testaments— will show us Christ and conform us to Christ until that day when the brightness of his glory completes that process of “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18).

That Peter puts this discussion in the context of “prophecy”— “the prophetic word” (v. 19), “prophecy” (v. 20), “prophecy” (v. 21), “false prophets” who “exploit you with false words” (2:1, 3)— makes it difficult, if not impossible, that a change in the concept of prophecy had taken place. He believed that prophecy occurred, both in its spoken and written forms, as “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The revealed/inspired word of the apostles and the revealed/inspired word of the prophets had no qualitative distinction. The “prophecy of Scripture” (v. 20) will be our sole authority in faith, virtue, worship, and worldview until the “day dawns” (v. 19). It alone will prepare us thoroughly for that time when the “morning star [Jesus himself] rises in our hearts” (v. 19).

We find that John pursues the same parallel between the apostolic revelation and New Testament “prophecy.” In the vision given to John in Revelation 10:11, he is told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” He would not leave Patmos and do this in person but would do it through his faithful recording of the continued conflict between the truth of God and the people of God with the anti-Christian forces of this world until Christ

himself would rule and reign in glory, might, and splendor. The angel uses the word *prophesy*, therefore, to indicate the inerrant inscripturation of John's visions. In Revelation 22:7 the angel refers to John's faithful writing when he says, "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." John is not operating with a changed definition of the concept of prophecy.

When John mistakenly bowed before an angel who had revealed heavenly truth to him (note that John's action was wrong, but that the revelation was still unmixed and pure), the angel said, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book" (22:9). There is a perfect flow of continuity of truth from the angel to John, to his "brothers the prophets," and to those who "keep the words of this book." In the final verse, John testifies to "everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book" not to add to them, and then gives sober warning to anyone that would take "away from the words of the book of this prophecy" (vv. 18-19). Again, we find that the concept of prophecy is identified with infallible revelation, the words received and inscripturated by the apostle. For the idea of prophecy to have a different status in Paul's writings and in Corinth has no biblical warrant.

It is surprising how transparently Storms challenges the sufficiency of Scripture. He rightly points out that the purpose of each gift is to build up the body of Christ. All the revelatory gifts functioned in such a way in the New Testament church. Also, as Storms reminds us, we have not progressed beyond the need for edification. He then imposes a *non sequitur* into the argument— therefore, according to Storms, we have not progressed "beyond the need for the contribution of the *charismata."* If spiritual gifts were essential for the birth of the church, "why should they be any less important or needful for its continued growth and maturation?"[cxxxii]

To me the answer seems clear. The complete revelation of the apostolic era has produced a written revelation of all the truth we need for life and godliness, a written revelation that will serve to give spiritual maturity to Christians until Christ returns. Through Scripture, Christians

may be completely furnished unto all good works, all edification, and all revealed knowledge of the things that God has prepared for those who love him. Scripture is sufficient. Storms, however, contends that though ostensibly Scripture is sufficient, some ongoing revelation is needed to supplement its purpose of conviction of sin, edification, comfort, and instruction in the knowledge of Christ. We need a revelation that gives admonition to “step out in faith and take those risks, apart from which people may well go without the blessings that prophecy can bring” (Storms, 146).

What blessing will be omitted in our total reliance on Scripture? We are called to rest our faith on what is not written. Apart from the kind of prophecy that has the aura of error always hovering around it, we “may well go without blessings.” What has become of Scripture in this urging! Are we now devoid of understanding all the “spiritual blessings in the heavenly places” that are ours in Christ Jesus if we are left to Scripture alone?

Storms presses for just that kind of spiritual insufficiency in those who affirm the completeness of revelation and the cessation of the miraculous that characterized the age of the apostles. According to Storms, “Cessationists quench the Spirit, and, in their rejection of the gift of continuing prophetic, are sinning” (Storms, 184). The prayers of a cessationist, unaided by the continuing revelatory operation of the Spirit, will be less imbued with faith than they would be otherwise. Storms warns, “If you are a cessationist of some degree or if you question the presence of the miraculous in the present church age, it is unlikely you will pray with much expectancy or anticipation of God saying yes to your request” (Storms, 71).

Without minimizing the joy of physical healing in this life, I fervently contend that written revelation gives us abundant promises connected with prayer far beyond any event, by miracle or medicine, of physical healing.

God “upholds all things by the word of his power,” and is in a constant state of manifesting the absolute dependence of all things on him. In light of that, we should find perfect consolation in the promises that he will

hear our prayers through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:1-2; Rom. 8:26-28) and will grant all that we ask according to his will (1 John 5:13-15). These unchanging realities provide a sufficient source of pleasing expectation and anticipation for any Christian.

To believe in the good sovereignty of God and that he “works all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11) provides a constant influx of hope and encouragement to the Christian without gravitating to the position that those gifts of revelation and healing given to the apostles and the prophets must also operate now.

No expectation can possibly transcend the written revelation validating the prayer that God would

> grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you being rooted and grounded in love [Eph. 1:4, 5; 2:4], may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:16–19 NASB)

And then, as if the unending glory and anticipation of such a written promise in prayer were not enough, Paul added, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (vv. 20–21).

Do we wait for another revelation, possibly erroneous, to expand what already has been set before us— the riches of knowing God now and in an ever-increasing, inexhaustible way and throughout eternity; the depths of meditation on electing, redeeming, regenerating, and resurrection love; the powerful internal operation of the Spirit in sanctification; the assurance that though the outer man is wasting away yet the inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16); the revealed truth that “if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1); the

acknowledgment that “while we are in this tent we groan, being burdened,” yet we look forward to being with the Lord in an incorruptible state, for God has “prepared us for this very thing” and “has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (5:4-5)?

We have the revealed prayer about realities of expectation and joy that our “love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so 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).

Christians, even cessationists, may be fully occupied with deeply moving, exuberant, transcending anticipation about the things that are promised, about the immeasurably glorious realities that should occupy our desires and our prayers with revealed expectations that they will not fall short.

If our spirituality depends on confidence in more revelation and in the continuation of signs and wonders, under the assumption that the depths and heights and certainty of what is written does not meet our needs, then we too have embraced a view of God unfounded in Scripture. We have proposed an unfounded spirituality.

A Concluding Plea for Doctrinally Sound Spirituality

True prophetic proclamation, and consequently true spirituality, must be based on the truth of written revelation. Less concern about doctrinal correctness will surely impede, if not destroy, Christian spirituality. Defining God’s concerns for us in terms of ever-increasing material opulence, self-congratulatory importance, and confidence in the power of our visionary expectations, while ignoring any biblical exposition or presentation of Christian doctrine, is not just an inferior species of Christian preaching, it is positively anti-Christian. To find fullness in an expression of Christian worship, confidence, and discipleship dependent on continuing revelation that is not secured from mixture of error and mistaken judgments has the necessary effect of compromising the full truthfulness, the sole authority, and the absolute sufficiency of Scripture.

Ephesians 4:11-13 is mentioned as a reason for the continuation of revelatory spiritual gifts (Storms, 254). The text affirms that in his ascension Jesus gave gifts to men. The gifts mentioned here are not designated as spiritual gifts but as persons who function for the benefit of the church. These gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. The benefit of these gifts is to extend until “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Storms concludes, “Since the latter most assuredly has not yet been attained by the church, we can confidently anticipate the presence and power of such gifts until that day arrives” (Storms, 254).

I will make three brief comments on this. First, the church does still enjoy the benefits of all these gifts, for we have the full revelation of the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:7-10; Col. 1:24-29), all of it that God intended in this age, in the ministry and writings of the apostles and those who were firsthand participants in their ministries (e.g. Luke, Mark, the writer of Hebrews). What I have argued regarding prophets fits perfectly here. The church’s initial stability in doctrinal matters was ascertained by the presence of prophets, parallel in truthfulness to the apostles while regulated by their authority, in local congregations. Evangelists such as Philip (Acts 21:8) and Epaphras (Col. 1:5-7) were given extraordinary success with supernatural leadership in their movement and message (Acts 8:4-8, 26-40) to establish strong and sizable congregations throughout the Mediterranean basin. Acts records the activities of Philip as an indication of what other evangelists did also. The pastor-teacher is to take the words of revelation as delivered by the apostles and prophets and preach them in season and out of season to bring to spiritual maturity the congregation and to protect his flock from false doctrine (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:10-17; Titus 1:5, 9). He also is to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). This ongoing work of the pastor-teacher embodies the advantages already given to the church in apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Second, the way he will do this work is in his faithful proclamation, through expository preaching, of the doctrines of the Bible and their implications for social, ethical, and spiritual life (Titus 2:1; Jude 3). This is the work that will bring the church to unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. Third, if something more than

the preached words under the effectual operation of the Spirit is needed, then Scripture is not sufficient; something beyond the revelation of Scripture is needed to achieve unity in the faith. Something more is needed for a knowledge of the Son of God.

Before the close of the apostolic period but in anticipation of its end, the apostle Paul pointed the Romans to the Scriptures as their source of all comfort, so that when special revelation ended, they would have a settled, unchanging, complete source of all that was needed for knowledge of God and knowledge of themselves: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4 NKJV). He then thrust them forward to the time when the Scriptures would be complete. Even his own message, the things that Christ accomplished through him in “word and deed” accompanied by “mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” so that he “fully preached the gospel of Christ” (vv. 18–19) would themselves be part of the Scriptures. He looked to the time when his gospel, his preaching, would be elemental to the “prophetic Scriptures” that would be made known to all nations as the foundation for faith:

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27 NKJV)

What more can we wish, what more can we look for, than the manifestation by revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began?

If we stay with “what is written,” looking to its exposition in its doctrinal outcome as the foundation for knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves, our discipleship and our worship will arise from a constant abiding source of renewed challenge and purification. We will discover with no regret that the “sufferings of this present time are not worth

comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" and that "light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17).

When we preach doctrine, we look with absolute confidence to the reality that the original revelatory speaking of the prophets, whether the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, or the New Testament prophets, was preserved in its authoritative form in writing— the Scriptures. Though we recognize that there is yet more light to break forth from his word, we never will have to examine, reject, or correct nor hesitate concerning the absolute truthfulness of the source of what is spoken. Olson wants minimalist doctrine for increased spirituality. Osteen wants material prosperity and not real Christian doctrine at all. Storms writes that we should not expect within the continuing gift of revelation rock-solid, absolute truthfulness, for "revelatory gifts are inescapably subjective, and the people through whom they operate are unavoidably prone to error" (Storms, 122). That sounds nothing like the confidence that the prophets and apostles had in the word of revelation they received, the result of which was the written outbreathing of God.

If we faithfully proclaim the doctrine of what is written, we will never have to substitute something unwritten for the proper place of Scripture alone for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16 NJKV). We will close with a look at the apostle Paul's understanding of his call as a preacher of truth to the conscience.

13. Confidence, Conscience, & Content

Paul rested his genuineness as a preacher of the gospel not on commendations from others but on 1) the unchanging *content* of his message, 2) the cleansed *conscience* of those who believed his gospel, and 3) his unswerving *confidence* in the purpose and power of God in salvation. Each reflects a part of his overall doctrinal orientation to preaching, and they feed off each other in reaching their maturest expression. All three find expression in 2 Corinthians 4:

> Since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (vv. 1-2 NASB)

Doctrinal preaching gives the preacher and the church the right kind of confidence in Christian ministry. Doctrinal preaching ascertains that the pulpit ministry will challenge the conscience with truthful issues and establish consciences devoid of offense. Doctrinal preaching makes an expository ministry resonate with the fullness of truth affecting every passage.

Confidence

Paul expresses his confidence in three statements: 1) "We have this ministry"; 2) "we received mercy"; and 3) "we do not lose heart." He wrote again in 4:16, upon contemplating the swelling tide of saving power in gospel proclamation, "So we do not lose heart." He already had expressed in 3:4 "such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God." The combination of the character of his ministry combined with the reality of his personal experience of sovereign mercy gave him abiding confidence that his preaching of the gospel would always accomplish its end.

In his ministry, Paul declared himself a servant of the new covenant (2

Cor. 3:6). In that context, his ministry was one of life, of the Spirit, of righteousness, of glory, and of hope (2:14-3:18). Every Old Testament believer had all these blessings. True believers were, however, scattered throughout Israel, were not identified as a distinct body, and possessed fragmentary and diminished understanding of these covenantal blessings that left them wondering how God would bring to full fruition the promises (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Now in the new covenant (as developed in chapter 1), this fragmentation and every promise of God is “Yes” in Christ and sealed to every believer by the Spirit of God (2 Cor. 1:20-22). Paul’s ministry, and the ministry of every preacher under the clarity, power, and purpose of the new covenant, is one of spreading the fulfilled sacrifice of Christ—that is, the fragrance of Christ to God— everywhere. For the unbelievers this fragrance serves to remind them of the certainty of the final death of eternal condemnation for those who remain dead in trespasses and sins apart from repentance and faith; for the believers it speaks of the assurance of eternal life for all those raised by regeneration to spiritual life in Christ (from death to death, from life to life) (2:15-17).

The awesomeness of the outcome of spreading this fragrance through preaching could and should strike fear and a deep sense of utter incompetence to set forth such an ultimate message with our mouths —“Who is sufficient for these things?” (2:16). Paul gives several affirmations that show the reason for his confidence. He knew that the “surpassing greatness of the power” came not from any talent, skill, genius, rhetoric, manipulative language, or resistless energy and personality of his; no, it was solely “of God and not from ourselves” (4:7 NASB). Had his encouragement in ministry depended either on his personal skills or on hopes that sinners, contrary to appearance, really were yearning for the opportunity to know the thrice-holy God, then he could never have affirmed that “we do not lose heart.”

His confidence arose from the revelation of God’s own initiative in accomplishing the end he intended in the gospel. This is the point at which confidence merges with content. Confidence arises from the objective side of gospel truth. Christ, the Son of God, is the one in whom the veil is lifted from the old covenant (3:14). Paul built his ministry on this

reality, proving from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Christ Jesus, as the man from Nazareth, embraced our nature and has fulfilled all promises and prophecies of Scripture, has made all provisions for forgiveness, justification, and holiness, and now awaits to receive us to himself in heaven in the very presence of God. As felonious violators of the holy law of God, we never could have done any of this, but in Christ, all is done:

> One has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. . . . God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. . . . He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (5:14-21)

We have confidence because we announce the certainty of the objective work done by Christ. Though the fragrance does speak certainty of death to unbelievers, the message is the “word of reconciliation,” not the word of condemnation. We announce that everywhere throughout the entire world, in every generation, as long as the world stands, there are persons to whom God will not count their trespasses, for Christ died and rose again on their behalf; he was made sin for them, and they will attain the righteousness of God in him. It is not dependent on their powers but on the objective certainty of his reconciling work— “We do not lose heart.”

Confidence also arises from the subjective side of God’s work, that is, what he does in us to bring us to submit to and trust in what he has done outside of us. The work of the Spirit makes us a letter of Christ written by the Holy Spirit on the heart. When we see the promise of death that comes to us from the law, and the glory of God is comprehended in that holy operation of the law, with even greater glory the Spirit gives life by his witness of Christ. We may use “great boldness in our speech” (3:12) with such a confidence of the Spirit’s determination to make the new covenant, in all its implications, glorious.

When the glorious manifestation of the law brings condemnation, the ministry committed to us brings righteousness, counteracting every aspect of the condemnation under which we live. When the law makes our future infinitely forlorn, the gospel exchanges that for unfailing hope. Even as the mind of Israel was veiled to Christ as the fulfillment of the old covenant, so the minds of unbelievers are veiled to the gospel (4:3) by hard hearts submissive to the deceits of Satan. But our ministry is one that engages the creative power of God. Even as he spoke light into existence, so he opens the heart with the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). Or, as Paul said in another place, “the immeasurable greatness of his power . . . according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19-20).

Paul knew this doctrine from revelation; he also knew that such a power had shone in his heart, forgiven his trespasses, cleansed his conscience, and given him bold utterance. All the confidence that arose from such a powerful internal operation of the Spirit multiplied Paul’s knowledge that trouble, wasting away, affliction, burden, groaning, the reality of mortality, and the threat of dissolution simply heightened the reality of sanctification, the renewal of the inner man, the hope of eternal life, and the eternal weight of glory. Since he knew that in every aspect of the finality of Christ’s external work and the certain success of the Spirit’s internal work, leading all the way to resurrection and eternal life, the “surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (4:7 NASB), he could say, “We are of good courage” (5:8).

Conscience

Paul developed an intricate argument commending his apostleship to the Corinthians, not by means of letters of recommendation but by means of the saving and cleansing power of the gospel, the witness of conscience to its truthfulness. At one level, when Paul appealed to commendation from their conscience, he could be saying, “You know deep down that I was sincere and tried to take advantage of no one.” He means much more than that, however, for he is appealing to their consciences in a way that goes beyond an affirmation of his character,

and witnesses to the efficacy of his gospel. In his preaching ministry, knowing the character of the doctrine he preached in both its external accomplishments and its internal operations, Paul aimed at the conscience. The gospel would have its immediate impact in the experience of the believer at the level of conscience.

Scripture appeals to the godly operation of conscience in several pivotal areas. In the deepest recesses of his own soul and as an expression of an affection molded into his very being, Paul said, “I am speaking the truth in Christ— I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:1-2). He said this in an expression of the deepest desire for the salvation of Israel based on their place in the history of salvation. Paul gives a detailed presentation of the unspeakable favors poured out on Israel and how through their race God himself took on human flesh as the Christ. How could he not desire from deep within both natural and spiritual affections formed, considering these aspects of divine mercy, to see the people saved whose very existence had been shaped by God’s purpose to save? His conscience, therefore, could well bear witness to a conscious willingness to be excluded if it would mean a larger salvation among the Israelites.

Deacons should “hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9), again seeing the connection with the mind’s grasp of revealed truth so that the affections find it a delightful source of joyful action.

Baptism is the “appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21). The person whose conscience has been cleansed by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ pledges himself to God for a life of service by uniting symbolically and visibly in the cross event, to rise with a newly informed conscience based on a submission to the full range of gospel truth.

We should obey the authorities that God has ordained in a society, not just for fear of punishment if the law is broken but “also for the sake of conscience” (Rom. 13:5), an internal conviction of the affections that it is a good thing to do what is right for the glory of God.

The writer of Hebrews argued that the old system of sacrifices “cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,” while the “blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, [will] purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:9, 14).

This is why Paul pointed to the effect brought about in the Corinthians by God’s blessing Paul’s preaching of the gospel. It produced the change in their consciences, so he is able to commend himself and his workers to their consciences in proof of the honesty, transparency, and effectiveness of the ministry he has just described. His appeal to their conscience (“commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” [2 Cor. 4:2]) is made possible by his confidence in the effectuality of his doctrine.

The preacher must know the nature of conscience. It is the witness of the image of God, the law written on the heart in every man. It serves as a witness to either accuse or excuse our actions in light of our knowledge of right and wrong (Rom. 2:12-16). Conscience is human affection operating in conformity to received information. A conscience may be either good or bad depending on the doctrine, or worldview, that informs the affections, including the moral power by which the worldview is applied. The transforming power of the Spirit of God applying the revealed truth of the gospel to the affections establishes a good conscience. An unregenerate heart, in league with the world (1 John 2:15-17), perverts even the purity of gospel truth, or embraces another worldview more congenial to worldly assumptions, and informs the conscience in that light, or rather, that darkness: “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16:13).

Even so, those who fall from the revealed faith of Scripture and adopt other doctrines Paul characterized as being “seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Tim. 4:2 NASB). In the same vein, Paul wrote to Titus of some who had departed from the truth and to whom “nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” (Titus 1:15). Since faith and conscience are so inextricably tied,

Paul noted to Timothy that some who had rejected a good conscience "have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). They did this by perverting both law and gospel in their attempts at teaching (1 Tim. 1:5-11). Everything commanded and forbidden by the law is consistent with the sound doctrine of the gospel and with a cleansed and healthy conscience.

Paul looked upon the function of ministry as the development of a good conscience. As he charged Timothy not to allow the teaching of a different doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3), that is, a doctrine different from that which Timothy received from Paul, he explained that the purpose of this charge was "love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1:5). Timothy was set aside to gospel ministry by specific revelations given to the church concerning him ("in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you" [1:18; 4:14]), with the assumption that he would wage a good warfare, "holding faith and a good conscience" (1:19). The good warfare meant that, in accordance with the faith of the gospel taught by Paul ("holding faith"), he would continually, with a conscious sense of love for the truth ("good conscience"), give his devotion and energy to bring gospel truth to bear on his own soul and those around him (4:16).

Again, conscience is human affection operating in conformity to received information. According to 1 Timothy 1:5 mentioned above, a good conscience is a vital element of a phalanx of inter-related spiritual realities— love, pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith. Love is the goal, for love is the unmixed embracing of the goodness of the law: Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That conviction is foundational to genuine repentance from sin and heartfelt faith in Jesus Christ. We have not loved, so we must repent; but Jesus alone never failed to love, so by his righteousness alone can we be justified.

When Jesus pointed to the distinction between the Pharisees' justification of themselves in relation to God's knowledge of their hearts, he isolated their fatal substitution of external appearance in conduct for the purity and heart-holiness required by the law for perfect righteousness. At the same time, those who are now pressed to be

citizens of the kingdom of God, without a true grasp of the character of its righteousness, will find themselves to be no less hypocritical. The kingdom of God does not suspend the righteous demands of the law but highlights the absolute requirement of their fulfillment; “But it easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” (Luke 16:14-17). Those who seek personal legal righteousness without a holy heart are no more hypocritical than those who think the gospel of the kingdom has dropped the necessity of the orientation of the heart toward love and holiness. According to Jesus, a person “cannot see the kingdom of God” apart from the new birth (John 3:3).

To come to a self-conscious realization of this, the heart, the central station of human affections, must be purified by a holy power. The Holy Spirit, among the many other truthful propositions which could be said concerning him, is an eternally proceeding torrent of holy love proceeding from the Father and the Son. He perfectly engages both Father and Son and communicates this holy love, not as a contradiction or addition to their own infinite blessedness but in perfect harmony with it and of its essence. Even so, in regeneration, he makes a personal engagement with our hearts establishing a moral transformation perfectly consistent with the moral personhood of creatures made in the divine image. This is no disruptive violation, no contradictory coercion that violates the freedom of personality, but a manifestation of holy personality transforming the moral fountain and consequent outflow of the heart. In accord with his eternal double-procession and consistent with our being created in the image of God, the Spirit produces in the elect a pure heart.

Such a change of moral disposition comes to consciousness as a principle of action in the conscience. Conscience serves as that element of personality by which one raises to the level of consciousness the interrelated system that drives the moral life. The pure heart finds expression in the unrestrained approval of God’s verdict of condemnation against sin—the conscious operation of a good conscience— producing repentance. At the same time and in accord with the same moral reality, the pure heart gives loving and joyful approval— the conscious operation of a good conscience— to the unblemished righteousness of Christ.

Sincere faith, literally “unhypocritical faith,” completes this

concatenation of internal moral changes involved in the saving process. It means that we embrace without reservation the pronouncement that justification, salvation, our being saved has no element of any works of righteousness that we have done:

> Not as a result of works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:9)
>
> Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. (Titus 3:5)
>
> Called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace. (2 Tim. 1:9)
>
> Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Phil. 3:9)
>
> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; . . . the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:10, 24)

This unhypocritical faith looks to find righteousness solely in the perfected obedience of Christ. That tested and perfected obedience qualifies him, and him alone, to be the righteousness by which we may stand in the merit of eternal life: “And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). The one who grasps this is skilled “in the word of righteousness” (5:13). This kind of faith arises from the engagement of the conscience with the completed work of Christ: “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). These dispositions related to conscience lead us to the source that informs and defines each of these.

Content

At this point we again engage the necessity of doctrinal preaching as a determinative factor in true expositional preaching. Paul could appeal to

conscience because he grasped the necessary connection between revealed truth and true spirituality. He knew that only the gospel in its fullness could, and certainly would, cleanse the conscience.

Conscience is not employed appropriately when the preacher creates false issues for it. John W. Nevin examined the anxious bench as employed in the nineteenth century and demonstrated that it asserted the necessity of a falsehood in its relation to repentance and faith. It detracted the sinner from the real issue of heart and placed a physical movement or posture or location in the stead of a good conscience. The anxious bench and all similar contrivances of external manipulation established a system of salvation not qualitatively distinct from the medieval system of penance. Conformity to them created a false sense of satisfaction with having met gospel requirements, when in reality they only have been proselytized by a Pharisee and are two-fold the child of hell they were before. A facade of human contrivance has been erected in front of the glory of Christ and the true content of the gospel.

How did Paul commend himself, that is, the legitimacy of his apostolic ministry, to the conscience of the Corinthians? He had “renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways” and “refused to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word” (2 Cor. 4:2). Likewise, he asked the Christians in Colossae to pray that he would have an open door to declare the mystery of Christ and “to make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3, 4). No manipulation to impress the conscience with anything other than or short of the revealed truth of God would do. Not only was his content pure, but his manner of delivery was pure and commensurate with the gravity and importance of the subject. He asked for their conscience to witness to the fact that he had made “an open statement of the truth” (2 Cor. 4:2).

Here Paul refers to the preaching characteristic of the completed revelation in Christ. He is speaking of truth as a whole, not the isolation of individual truths apart from the whole. To isolate an expositional idea faithfully derived from an exegesis of a text and then to fail to preach and apply it in light of the whole is the same as failing to preach the truth. Paul points to truth in the light of the ministry of the new covenant that he has just summarized.

This is a preaching ministry in which the person of Christ and the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified (Heb. 10:29; 13:20) has full display. The veil from the old covenant is removed in Christ. (3:14). Here Paul is not talking about the Spirit's opening of the heart in regeneration to see the glory of God in the face of Christ, although that is involved. He speaks to that immediately after this. Here he is referring to the hermeneutical reality that the old covenant cannot be understood without the key of Christology. The veil over the understanding of the old covenant is a lack of knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. Paul had experienced that in virtually every city and synagogue, and he began his ministry in each synagogue by seeking to remove the veil.

His method was to demonstrate that, according to a proper synthesis of all the prophecies, the figures, the types, the nature of sin, the character of God, the actual blessings of salvation, and other things, that the Christ as promised in the old covenant must be a single figure. Not only would this figure eventually assume the throne of David as a conquering king but would suffer to obtain the forgiveness of sin and rise from the dead. In other words, Paul would deduce from the Old Testament Scriptures what Peter described as the message of the prophets: "the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10, 11).

Then he would introduce them to the life, ministry, claims, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, showing that he was the Christ (Acts 13:16-39; 17:2-4). The long-expected Messiah had come and was even at that time reigning in heaven until the redemption of the purchased possession (Eph. 1:14). The full redemption provided by God was fulfilled by Christ, and the full revelation of the meaning of this redemption was revealed to the apostles. Matthew Henry said, "All the lines of Christian doctrine centre in Christ; and in preaching Christ we preach all we should preach."[cxxxiii]

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul gave a summary of the "gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are saved, if you hold fast the word I preached to you— unless you believed

in vain” (vv. 1-2). Paul had perfect confidence that the gospel he preached came from God and had salvation for its end. The vanity to which he referred here means that all of it is empty, and belief does no good at all, if the crowning point of the gospel— the resurrection— is not true. He emphasized this in verse 14: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is in vain.”

There is no such thing as Christian faith that has no support in the full truthfulness of the propositions set forth by revelation. Accordingly, Paul affirmed “as of first importance” that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (vv. 3–4). These affirmations show the fully canonical conclusions to which Paul had come in his examination of the Old Testament and his understanding of the full Jesus event. That he received it all by revelation does not diminish in any sense the perfect conformity of canonical authority with the history of the life of Jesus.

Paul went on to give the accumulation of evidence that the claim for the resurrection is true: to show that both preaching and faith are vain and unworthy of God if it is not true, to show that the resurrection reverses the effects of Adam’s fall, to discuss the mystery of the resurrection body, and to proclaim the complete vanquishing of death in all its effects for those who believe. Paul’s message would not tolerate any detachment of faith from historical and revealed fact. Nothing less than the gospel of God should occupy the energy of proclamation or steal any moments from the time when such proclamation is to be done. He concluded the discussion with the all-consuming challenge and assertion of confidence both in the content and in the effects of gospel preaching: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (v. 58).

Another problem remains, however, of which the Christian minister must be fully aware. Paul also would point to this in his preaching. He included warnings about the hardness of heart that would keep them from believing (Acts 13:40-41). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote about those who “refused to love the truth,” and, thus, “did not believe the truth

but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2: 10, 12). He recognized that “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

The conspiracy of the devil and depraved human affections shut off any avenue for believing the truth even under the clearest and most forceful presentation of the gospel and the urgency of believing it. Something beyond that is needed. In Paul’s case, and by implication in the experience of the Corinthians, the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” exhibited that word of omnipotence and “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

For the Thessalonians, Paul tied the power that accompanied the preaching to the eternal purpose of God: “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess. 1:4-5). He reiterated this in his second letter to them, again addressing them as “brothers beloved by the Lord,” by saying, “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel” (2:13-14). This experience, described historically in Acts 17:1-9, Paul summarized by writing, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13). In the way that Jesus of Nazareth removes the veil from the old covenant, so the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, penetrating both mind and heart with a fully truthful word of sin and salvation, removes the veil from the gospel.

Paul described his preaching, both in content and style, in many places, emphasizing the full display of truth in a way that would allow for the greatest clarity of his content, avoiding any adornment that would detract from the word and point to him. While Paul contended, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest

in the wisdom of men but in the power of God," he also expressed convictional urgency: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade [men]" (1 Cor. 2:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:11). His stewardship of persuasion focused on the sober reality of the truth he proclaimed, not on the worldly challenge of rhetorical victory. "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you . . . was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes" (2 Cor. 1:19).

He expressed no indetermination about the absoluteness of Christ's person and work in fulfilling all prophecies, promises, and covenantal conditions. "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17). He was laid bare before God by the Spirit and the truth, he had internalized the eternal significance of this doctrine, Christ was the delight of his soul as well as the eternal delight of the Father, and he dare do nothing that would injure, diminish, or detract from the fullness of truth that resided in Christ and his work.

"Since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (2 Cor. 3:12). His hope, objectively realized already in Christ and now patiently anticipated by him and all Christians, issuing in eternal life, did not call for any half-hearted "perhaps" but rock-solid certainty and insistence:

> We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth. . . . For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2 Cor. 4:2, 5)

No trick, no deceitful devices, no chicanery is needed, nor is it consistent with the purity of the gospel. The fullness of truth as contained in the summarizing proclamation of "Christ Jesus as Lord" will do all that is needed and puts us in our proper state of servanthood. "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). If his conscience and mind submit to the truth, so he must seek that same result in others: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled

to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Since God has taken the initiative in appealing both in the reconciling work and in its proclamation, nothing can be of more transcendent importance than laying out the case that the sinner must run to God seeking a removal of all offenses that he has committed with every breath and thought of his life.

To the Thessalonians also he reviewed his ministry both in content and manner. Despite harsh treatment in Philippi, he had "boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict" (1 Thess. 2:2). In his "exhortation" he embraced neither error nor uncleanness nor deceit. He had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel and spoke consistently with that stewardship, "not to please man, but to please God who tests our heart" (2:4). He did not use flattering words or manipulate religious truth as a cloak for covetousness. He did not seek glory from men, nor did he seek their wealth, but with a deep longing for their eternal well-being, he was "ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (2:8). As he lived conscientiously— devoutly, justly, blamelessly— among them he also exhorted, comforted, and charged them to "walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (2:12).

Gospel doctrine not only cleanses the conscience of those who receive it but of those who announce it. Richard Furman (1755-1825), pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, from 1787-1825, makes it a point to say that the pastor should be "truly acquainted with experimental religion, and deeply affected with its reality and importance: That his preaching may be the effect of faith; of a knowledge of the worth of souls; of the terrors of the Lord; and the constraining love of Christ."[cxxxiv]

Conclusion

The Christian minister's calling is bound up in the necessity of doctrinal preaching laid upon him. It determines the content of his proclamation with all its implications for his personal deportment and even style in the pulpit. From it arises all the confidence he has in the effects of his ministry. The hearer must be brought to God by nothing but

Christ-centered, canonically coherent gospel truth, which will alone serve as the context for Spirit-wrought regeneration. Because of God's eternal decree, his purposeful existential operation, and the glorious tapestry of saving truth committed to us for proclamation, we do not lose heart but hopefully anticipate God to call his elect through preaching. From doctrinal preaching, therefore, comes the cleansing of the conscience from dead works, a cleansing that drives the redeemed to serve the living and true God.

Furman had in mind the comprehensive nature of this task of preaching truth when he described the minister's duty of taking heed to his doctrine. He described preaching as the great work of the minister in which "he must, as it were, send forth all his soul":

> To his doctrine he must take heed, that it be the truth of God; not the fancies of his own mind, nor the traditions, or commandments of men; but the word of God: "For what is the chaff to the wheat? Saith the Lord." Here again he must distinguish between the law and Gospel; and between the characters of men, as saints or sinners: Must point out the ruined and guilty state of all, by nature, under the curse of a broken law; sound, as it were, Mount Sinai's thunder in the sinners ear; present the flaming mountain to his eye; and thus produce the awful evidence, to that momentous truth, "that by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh living be justified." To the humbled sinner, and believing soul, he must describe Jesus, as "the lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world:" As the only, the almighty, and willing savior. He must describe him, in his person, his offices, his works of love and grace, his bleeding passion, and triumphant state. He must open as it were Immanuel's heart, in the description of divine compassion and publish the gracious invitation of the Gospel, to perishing and heavy laden souls; must shew the abundant grace contained in the promises, and the foundation on which faith may rest, in the faithfulness, infinite goodness, sovereign mercy, and unchangeable purpose of the promiser. To him, belongs the important work of drawing aside the veil of time, and opening the awful scenes of eternity, on his hearers minds; of describing the joys of paradise; and the terrors of the infernal world. To present man with the humbling scenes of his mortality; and

erect the throne of decisive judgment in his mental view.[cxxxv]

In the infinite glory and importance of these truths, we find the exalted privilege and the surpassing power of doctrinal preaching. Its glorious promise is as sure as the Spirit's determination to bless the truth to the exaltation of Christ and the glory of God. At the same time, their character determines the destructive peril of omitting or altering them or preaching different, strange, or other doctrine.

Meditate on these things;
Give yourself entirely to them,
That your progress may be evident to all.
Take heed to yourself
And to the doctrine.
Continue in them,
For in doing this
You will save both yourself
And those who hear you.
(The Apostle Paul to Timothy, son of Eunice)

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Endnotes

Chapter 1 Endnotes

[i] This is argued well in Jim Scott Orrick, Brian Payne, and Ryan Fullerton, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B & H, 2017), especially chapters 3, 4, 12.

[ii] R. L. Dabney, “The Gospel Idea of Preaching,” in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 600, 601.

[iii] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 284. He goes on to suggest that doctrinal preaching may bore the hypocrites, but “it is only doctrinal preaching that will save Christ’s sheep.”

Chapter 2 Endnotes

[iv] David Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995), 21–22.

[v] Larsen, 65.

[vi] Larsen, 155.

[vii] John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. ed. (1898; repr., New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), 78.

[viii] Broadus, 76, 77.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

[ix] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:791 (hereafter cited in text as *Works*).

[x] Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, eds. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xxxviii (hereafter cited in text as *Reader*).

[xi] Perry Miller, foreword to *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959).

[xii] Miller, foreword.

[xiii] Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards: 1703–1758* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 14, 15.

[xiv] Andrew Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845), 1:720.

[xv] In the very first section of his “Observations on the facts and evidences of Christianity, and the objections of infidels” he says, “It is easily proved that the highest end and happiness of man is to view God’s excellency, to love him, and receive expressions of his love. This love, including all those other affections which depend upon, and are necessarily connected with it, are expressed in worship” (*Works*, 2:460).

[xvi] I use the word *affect* purposefully and will use it strategically throughout this chapter. An *effect* is the natural result of the total number of interconnected precedents that act as causes. An *affect* is the predominant aspect of a response in the affections.

[xvii] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses 1723–1729*, ed. Kenneth Minkema (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 201, 206.

[xviii] Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College at New Jersey* (Boston, 1765), 48.

[xix] Kimnach indulges in some creative surmising concerning Edward's self-consciousness about the effectiveness of his written compared to his oral style. He writes:

> Unlike Whitefield, Edwards had always lived with a pen in hand, and he was more apt to be at his best when he had a paper, rather than a room, to fill with words. Perhaps it occurred to Edwards that if Whitefield had been called to lead the battle in the field, he himself was best suited to carrying it on in the closet….Edwards set about the composition of the ideal revival sermon, one so immediate and powerful as to be a model for the present and future….Certainly, the sermon was not delivered as it stands in print.… Rather Edwards attempted a literary coup that utilized techniques and rested upon precedents already established in preparing [other sermons] for the press….The product of his efforts is undoubtedly the most "literary" performance of his career. (Wilson H. Kimnach, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses*, *1720-1723*, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992], 115.)

[xx] Kimnach, 107.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

[xxi] Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 9:523.

[xxii] Warfield, *Works*, 9:523.

[xxiii] Warfield, 2:46–48.

[xxiv] Edwards, *Works*, 2:243-46. The sermon “The Christian Pilgrim” is based on Hebrews 11:13, 14.

[xxv] Solomon Stoddard, preface to *A Guide to Christ. or, The Way of Directing Souls that are under the work of Conversion* [. . .] (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993).

[xxvi] In “The Manner in which the Salvation of the Soul is to be Sought.” The sermon is built on Genesis 6:22: “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” It is another prime model of allowing the entire theological corpus of Scripture to give unction of the interpretation and application of a passage.

[xxvii] This was stated in a lecture John Gerstner gave in my class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Chapter 5 Endnotes

[xxviii] Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), 76.

[xxix] Robert L. Dabney, “The Gospel Idea of Preaching,” in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 600.

[xxx] Lyman Beecher, *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher,* ed. Barbara Myers Cross (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 241.

[xxxi] Bennet Tyler, in foreword to *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Asahel Nettleton* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852).

[xxxii] Rev. R. Smith, *Recollection of Nettleton, and the Great Revival of 1820* (Albany: E. H. Pease & Co. 1848), 44.

[xxxiii] Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *The Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 148–49n*.

[xxxiv] Tyler and Bonar, 165.

[xxxv] Asahel Nettleton, “Genuine Repentance Does Not Precede Regeneration,” in *Asahel Nettleton: Sermons from the Second Great Awakening* (Ames, IA: International Outreach, 1995), 70-71 (hereafter cited in text as *Repentance*).

[xxxvi] Smith, *Recollections*, 20, 21.

[xxxvii] Tyler and Bonar, *Life and Labours*, 376–77 (italics in original).

Chapter 6 Endnotes

[xxxviii] Charles Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles Finney,* eds. Garth Rosell and A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 9 (hereafter cited in text as *Memoirs*).

[xxxix] He repeated this in J. H. Fairchild, ed., *Finney's Systematic Theology,* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), ix (hereafter cited in text as *ST*).

[xl] Charles Finney, *The Way of Salvation* (London: R. D. Dickinson, 1896), 267 (hereafter cited in text as *Way*).

[xli] These accusations included "neglect to discriminate between true religion and false; . . . Calling men hard names; . . . Making too much of favourable appearances; . . . Ostentation and noise; . . . Giving heed to impulses, impressions, or supposed revelations; . . . Wrong means of exciting fear; . . . Taking the success of any measure, as an evidence that those measures are right, and approved of God; . . . Disorderly and disorganizing measures."

[xlii] Finney maintained, "So much was said & written about new measures that it seems to have been taken for granted that there was very much to deplore in the means used to promote that blessed work of the Holy Spirit. This is an entire mistake. As I have since labored extensively in this country & in Europe & no exceptions have been taken to my measures it has been assumed & asserted that since the opposition made by Mr. Nettleton & Dr. Beecher I have been reformed & have given up the measures they complained of. This again is an entire mistake. I have always & everywhere used all the measures I used in these revivals, & have often added other measures such as the anxious seat whenever I have deemed it expedient. I have never seen the necessity of reformation in this respect. . . . It was no wisdom of mine that directed me. I was made to feel my ignorance & dependence & led to

look to God continually for His guidance. I had no doubt then nor have I ever had that God led me by his Spirit to take the course I did. So clearly did he lead me from day to day that I never did nor could doubt that I was Divinely directed" (*Memoirs*, 227). With such a strong conviction of the divine ordination of his measures it is no wonder that Finney felt that all questions concerning his measures were prompted by prejudice and misappre-hension.

[xliii] Charles G. Finney, *Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 19 (hereafter cited in text as *Sermons*).

[xliv] John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; 37th ed. (1870; repr., New York: Hodder and Stoughton, George H. Doran Company, 1898), 77.

Chapter 7 Endnotes

[xlv] Dwight L. Moody, *Moody's Latest Sermons* (Chicago: The Bible Colportage Association, 1900), 15.

[xlvi] Stan Gundry, *Love Them In: The Proclamation Theology of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 71. Gundry has given a full discussion of Moody's theology, taking into account a great number of secondary discussions of Moody, and a full investigation of the primary source corpus of Moody's sermons. It provides a helpful synthesis of Moody's thought, critically and sympathetically examined, with an awareness of how Moody fits into the development of critical theological issues in the history of Christian theology.

[xlvii] Gundry, 86.

[xlviii] Justin D. Fulton, *Charles H. Spurgeon: Our Ally,* (Brooklyn, NY: P. Propaganda, 1892), 360.

[xlix] See Gundry, *Love Them In*, 161–74.

[l] Gundry, 88.

[li] This was a short pamphlet written by Moody and published by F. H. Revell to be given to young converts at the end of a campaign. He distributed thousands of them.

[lii] Dwight L. Moody, *The Way to God and How to Find It* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1884), 45 (hereafter cited in text as *WtG*).

[liii] Moody, *Moody's Latest Sermons*, 120–21. This is in a sermon entitled "Revivals," in which Moody presents an impassioned defense of

itinerant revivalism, claims that perhaps four out of five persons who are Christians in America were converted in revival meetings, and expresses a deep revulsion at the controversy over revivals and their supposed extravagances and sensationalism.

[liv] Moody, 121.

[lv] This anecdote clearly is in itself reductionistic. It is used only to give a real-life illustration of the downgrade in doctrinal content in the last part of the nineteenth century and as a prelude to the twentieth. For an excellent discussion of the overall impact of Moody as an evangelist, educator, and conference organizer, see Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997).

[lvi] Sam Jones, *Sam Jones' Anecdotes and Illustrations, related by Him in His Revival Work* (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure Publishing, 1905), 106, 5, 6.

[lvii] Jones, 90.

[lviii] Sam Jones, *Sam Jones' Own Book* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1887), 17.

[lix] Jones, *Sam Jones' Own Book*, 28, 29.

[lx] Sam Jones, *Sam Jones' Revival Sermons,* comp. Annie Jones Pyron (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), 19, 20.

[lxi] Jones, 20.

[lxii] Jones, *Sam Jones' Own Book,* 29–30.

[lxiii] Jones, *Anecdotes and Illustrations,* 91–92.

[lxiv] Sam P. Jones, *Quit Your Meanness* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1890), 30-48. This is sermon 2 in the book and gives many illustrations concerning the brutal treatment of children and wives by men who are gamblers or drunkards and makes the plea, “Control your tongue and be kind to your children.” He also emphasized intensity in religion and living what one professed. “You have never known much about religion if you never felt in your soul as if you wanted to be somebody—something—so big that you feel as if you could fly up, and up, and up; then you can know something about what religion is” (34).

[lxv] Sam Jones, *Gospel Sermons* (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure Pub. Co., 1910), 267.

Chapter 8 Endnotes

[lxvi] The troubles of the final three years of Sunday's life are narrated in a poignant way in Roger A. Bruns, *Preacher: Billy Sunday and Big-Time Evangelism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 292-99. The nomenclature of "Sawdust Trail" is related in William A. "Billy" Sunday, foreword to *The Sawdust Trail* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), (hereafter cited in text as *Sawdust*). The anecdote supplied by "Ma" Sunday explains how the term "the sawdust trail" came to be associated with moving forward in a meeting to "accept the Lord Jesus as their Savior." It was a reference to lumbermen in virgin forestland making their way home by means of a trail of sawdust they had laid down so that they could safely find their way out of the forest.

[lxvii] Many substantial books about Sunday have been written: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1914); Roger Bruns, *Preacher: Billy Sunday and Big Time American Evangelism* (New York: Norton, 1992); Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); William McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). The books represent a variety of views of Sunday from honest appreciation to critical dismissal.

[lxviii] Michael McClymond, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 422 (s.v. Sunday, William Ashley).

[lxix] Robert F. Martin, foreword to *The Sawdust Trail: Billy Sunday in His Own Words*, by William A. Sunday (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

[lxx] William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1914), 150 (hereafter cited in

text as *Ellis*).

[lxxi] Theodore Thomas Frankenberg, *Spectacular Career of Rev. Billy Sunday, Famous Baseball Evangelist* (Columbus, OH: McLelland and Company Publishers, 1913), 66.

[lxxii] See the story told by Sunday himself in Ellis, 37.

[lxxiii] This is from Sunday's sermon, "The Unpardonable Sin."

[lxxiv] Karen Gullen, ed., *Billy Sunday Speaks* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1970), 33 (from Sunday's sermon "The Need of Revivals").

[lxxv] Gullen, *Billy Sunday Speaks*, 33–34.

[lxxvi] Gullen, 36.

[lxxvii] Carl Sandburg, *Billy Sunday and Other Poems,* edited and with introduction by George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick (Orlando: Harcourt and Brace, 1993), 3–4.

[lxxviii] Bruns, *Preacher,* 187–201.

[lxxix] Gullen, *Billy Sunday Speaks*, 90.

[lxxx] Bruns, *Preacher*, 201.

[lxxxi] "Gethsemane," by Billy Sunday, Bible Believers, accessed April 25, 2018, http://www.biblebelievers.com/billy_sunday/sun16.html.

[lxxxii] Billy Sunday, foreword to *Great Love Stories of the Bible and*

Their Lessons for Today (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917).

[lxxxiii] Gullen, *Billy Sunday Speaks*, 51 (from Sunday's famous sermon, "Booze").

[lxxxiv] Gullen, 69, 77.

[lxxxv] "What Shall I Do Then with Jesus," by Billy Sunday, Baptist City, accessed March 30, 2018, https://www.baptist-city.com/sermons/what_do_with_jesus. htm.

[lxxxvi] Sunday, "Gethsemane."

[lxxxvii] "Why Delay Your Real Conversion?" by Billy Sunday, Bible Believers.com, accessed March 30, 2018, https://www.biblebelievers.com/billy_sunday/ sun6.htm.

[lxxxviii] Gullen, *Billy Sunday Speaks*, 54.

[lxxxix] In his sermon "Atonement," Sunday noted, "I have read a great deal that has been written against the atonement from the infidel standpoint—Voltaire, Huxley, Spencer, Diderot, Bradlaugh, Paine, on down to Bob Ingersoll—and I have never found an argument that would stand the test of common sense and common reasoning. . . . Until he can show me something that is better I'll nail my hopes to the cross" (Ellis, 427, 430).

[xc] "What Shall I Do Then with Jesus," by Billy Sunday, Fundamental Baptist Sermons, accessed April 2, 2018, https://fundamentalbaptistsermons.net/BILLYSUNDAY/SundayBillyWhatS

[xci] Gullen, *Billy Sunday Speaks,* 134.

[xcii] This was in a sermon by Sunday, “Heaven.”

[xciii] Sunday, “What Shall I Do Then with Jesus.”

[xciv] Sunday, “Gethsemane.”

[xcv] Sunday, “Gethsemane.”

[xcvi] “Show Thyself a Man,” by Billy Sunday, Bible Believers, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.biblebelievers.com/billy_sunday/sun15.html

[xcvii] Charles Spurgeon, “Sovereignty and Salvation,” in *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, 20 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, n.d.), 1:22.

[xcviii] Sunday, “Show Thyself a Man.”

Chapter 9 Endnotes

[xcix] "Billy Graham dies at 99, the most influential Christian of the 20th Century," Adrian Warnock on Patheos.com, accessed April 2, 2018, http://www.patheos. com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2018/02/billy-graham-dies-99-influential-christian-20th-century.

[c] Preceding Billy Graham were Rosa Parks (1913–2005), the humble seamstress but disarmingly courageous leader of the Civil Rights movement, and two law enforcement officers, Jacob J. Chestnut Jr. (1940–98) and Detective John M. Gibson (1956–98), killed while protecting the Capitol from an armed assailant.

[ci] Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days* (New York: Harper & Bros.: 1956), 22.

[cii] "Billy Graham mourned by religious leaders as 'the closest thing to a pope that evangelicals ever had,'" The Baltimore Sun, accessed April 24, 2018, http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/obituaries/bs-md-billy-graham-notes-20180221-story.html.

[ciii] David Frost, *Billy Graham: Candid Conversations with a Public Man* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2014), 93 (hereafter cited in text as *Conversations*).

[civ] e.g. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 4, 1978.

[cv] The Day Billy Graham Found Christ," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, accessed April 24, 2018, https://billygraham.org/story/the-day-billy-graham-found-christ. See also, *America's Hour of Decision* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1951), 8 (hereafter cited in text as *Hour*). The man who spoke to them was J. D. Preavatte, a local clothing merchant.

[cvi] Mel Larson, “Tasting Revival–In Los Angeles,” in *Revival in Our Time* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1950), 11 (hereafter cited in text as *Revival*).

[cvii] Billy Graham, *The 7 Deadly Sins* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955), 15, 16, 24 (hereafter cited in text as *Deadly Sins*).

Chapter 10 Endnotes

[cviii] Charles Finney, “On Believing with the Heart,” in *The Way of Salvation* (London: R. D. Dickinson, 1896), 330-31.

[cix] Charlotte: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1951.

[cx] Billy Graham, *How to Be Born Again* (Waco: Words Books, 1977), 161.

[cxi] Graham, 162.

[cxii] Steve Posner and Amy Newmark, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Billy Graham & Me* (Cos Cob, CT: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, 2013), 40.

[cxiii] Posner and Newmark, *Billy Graham and Me*, 247.

[cxiv] Posner and Newmark, 365.

[cxv] Minneapolis: The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1951.

[cxvi] “Billy Graham Believes Catholic Doctrine of Salvation Without Bible, Gospel, or Name of Christ,” Bible Bulletin Board, accessed April 24, 2018, http://www.biblebb.com/files/tonyqa/tc00-105.htm.

[cxvii] Grant Wacker, *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 12.

[cxviii] William Newton Clarke, *Sixty Years with the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909) 253.

[cxix] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 95–109.

Chapter 11 Endnotes

[cxx] Steve Posner and Amy Newmark, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Billy Graham & Me* (Cos Cob, CT: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, 2013), 250-52.

[cxxi] Posner and Newmark, 250–52.

[cxxii] Roger Olson, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” in *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998, 48.

[cxxiii] William C. Nichols, ed. *Knowing the Heart: Jonathan Edwards on True and False Conversion*, (Ames, IA: International Outreach, Inc. 2003), 172.

[cxxiv] Nichols, 173.

[cxxv] Joel Osteen, You Can, You Will: 8 Undeniable Qualities of a Winner (New York: Faith Words, 2014), 171; Break Out: 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life (New York: Faith Words, 2013), 245.

[cxxvi] Posner and Newmark, *Billy Graham & Me,* 268.

[cxxvii] Osteen, *Break Out,* 136, 139.

Chapter 12 Endnotes

[cxxviii] Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 123-47 (hereafter cited in text as *Storms*).

[cxxix] C. Samuel Storms, “A Third Wave View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Wayne Grudem, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 209.

[cxxx] Storms, *Miraculous Gifts*, 208-09.

[cxxxi] William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. paradídōmi (παραδίδωμι).

[cxxxii] Storms, *Miraculous Gifts*, 205.

Chapter 13 Endnotes

[cxxxiii] Matthew Henry, “An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians,” in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, in Six Volumes* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 616, comments on 4:1-7.

[cxxxiv] Richard Furman, *The Constitution and Order of the Christian Church* (Charleston: Markland & McIver, 1791), 23, 24.

[cxxxv] Furman, 26-27.