WRITINGS OF VINCENT CHEUNG

by Vincent Cheung

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Vincent Cheung, compiled for study and devotional reading.

32 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01.00. Prayer and Revelation
2. 01.000. PREFACE
3. 01.01. PRAYING THROUGH THE SON
4. 01.02. PRAYING TO THE FATHER
5. 01.03. PRAYING BY THE SPIRIT
6. 01.04. PRAYER AND SOVEREIGNTY
7. 01.05. PRAYER AND OMNISCIENCE
8. 01.06. PRAYER AND TRANSCENDENCE
9. 01.07. PRAYER AND MOTIVATION
10. 01.08. PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE
11. 01.09. PRAYER AND PERSISTENCE
12. 01.10. PRAYER AND EXPERIENCE
13. 01.11. PRAYER AND REVELATION
14. 01.12. ENDNOTES
15. 02.00. Presuppositional Confrontations
16. 02.000. PREFACE
17. 02.01. THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL CHALLENGE
18. 02.02. THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONFRONTATION
19. 02.03. THE REVELATIONAL CONQUEST
20. 03.00. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
21. 03.000. PREFACE
22. 03.01. THEOLOGY
23. 03.02. SCRIPTURE
24. 03.03. GOD
25. 03.04. MAN
26. 03.05. CHRIST
27. 03.06. SALVATION
28. 04.00. Ultimate Questions
29. 04.000. PREFACE
30. 04.01. INESCAPABLE REVELATION
31. 04.02. ULTIMATE QUESTIONS
32. 04.03. CHOSEN FOR SALVATION

Chapter 1

01.00. Prayer and Revelation

Prayer and Revelation by Vincent Cheung Copyright © 2003 by Vincent Cheung disclaimer on webpage:

"Under our copyright policy, you are permitted to print, copy, and distribute unlimited copies of our publications for any ministry purpose, such as for your church, study group, or personal outreach."

01.000. PREFACE

PREFACE In his book, With Christ in the School of Prayer, Andrew Murray writes, "Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won't teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice."1 This is a most foolish thing to say. If reading, listening, and talking about prayer "won't teach you to pray," then how are these activities "very good"? If I get "nothing" without practice, then why should I read his book? His book is supposed to contain insights about prayer drawn from the instructions and examples of Jesus.2 But the statement quoted implies that "practice" or experience is a superior teacher than the very words and acts of Christ. The horror of the situation dawns on us when we realize that it seems most people share Murray's view about learning spiritual things.3 They say that you can read about it and talk about it, but experience is the best teacher. However, if experience is the best teacher, then Jesus is not the best teacher, and Scripture is not the best source of information. This is blasphemous. The truth is that experience is the worst teacher, especially when it comes to learning spiritual things.4 Our culture exalts learning by experience, and many Christians assume such a view even though it contradicts their professed allegiance to God and Scripture. Against this popular view, I urge that we must dethrone experience and exalt revelation, that is, the words of Scripture. This means that reading a book can really teach you a lot about prayer,5 and since I would like to show you some of the things that Scripture teaches about the subject, it makes sense that I have written this book.6

Chapter 3

01.01. PRAYING THROUGH THE SON

1. PRAYING THROUGH THE SON There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

One of the first things that you must know about prayer is that you do not have access to God unless you are a Christian. Prayer is not just about what you say, but an important aspect of it is where you stand in relation to God. The enemy of God clearly does not have the same privileges in prayer as the friend of God. Since the Bible teaches that the only way a person can have a right relationship with God is through Jesus Christ, only prayers offered by a Christian are acceptable to God. Relating prayer to the Trinitarian God portrayed in Scripture, this means that only prayers presented through God the Son, Jesus Christ, are acceptable to God the Father.

Some have proposed the absurd and unbiblical interpretation of the exclusivity of Christianity so as to say that Christ has made access to God possible for humanity in general so that even a non-Christian may pray to God through him in a certain sense. "Of course Jesus Christ is the only way to God," they may acknowledge, "but this means that if you are a sincere Muslim or Buddhist, you are saved through Christ." Not all of them would say it in these words, but this is what their theory amounts to. However, this is clearly a rejection of scriptural teaching on the subject, only that these people do not want to be explicit about it.

Thus by "Jesus Christ," I do not mean an abstract principle or spirit of "Christ" that is detached from the historical Jesus in the Bible or from his identity as the second person of the Trinity. What I mean is that short of a conscious and explicit affirmation of what the Scripture says about the historical person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, no one can have access to God. In other words, if you do not explicitly affirm the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and that these doctrines contradict all other religions, then you are not a Christian, and you do not have access to God. You are not acceptable to God, and you will suffer endless torment in hell after death. This is what Scripture teaches, and this is what I mean. Just as you cannot say that you are a Christian if you believe that there is more than one God, do not say that you are a Christian if you think that Muslims will go to heaven, or that Buddhists in some sense have access to God through Christ. The Bible says that God has chosen some people to be saved, and those whom he has chosen will approach him, but only through Jesus Christ. All others are excluded and condemned.8 That is, only true Christians are saved and have access to God, and all non-Christians are condemned to hell and do not have access to God. This is what the Bible teaches, and this is Christianity. If you disagree with it, then you have rejected Christianity, and I challenge you to refute it. If you claim that this is only my interpretation of Christianity, then at least you must refute me.9 It is dishonest and irrational to dismiss this view just because you do not like it - suppressing the truth is one of the major sins by which countless individuals will be condemned forever (Romans 1:18-19). Maybe you agree with what I have said, but you do not think that it should be stated so bluntly. If this is what you think, then you must also offer arguments to establish your claim.

There are those who insist that all religions are essentially the same. They do not say that all the beliefs of all the religions are identical, but they are saying that they are similar enough on the most important matters so that it is at least possible for different religions to unite, that one religion should not challenge another one as false, and that no religion should claim to be exclusively true so that all the others are false. I will mention only several problems with this view.

It is impossible to define religion in a way that includes all the thought systems that these people want to include, or exclude those that they want to exclude. For example, if I define religion as "the service or worship of God or the supernatural,"10 then this may exclude some forms of Buddhism. But those who say that all religions are essentially the same usually want to include Buddhism.

I may change my definition to, "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith,"11 which should be broad enough to include Buddhism, but then I cannot exclude communism. Another dictionary gives a similar possible definition: "any system of beliefs, practices, ethical values, etc.,"12 and with this gives humanism as an example. But if we include communism and humanism as religions, then we must also include totalitarianism and democracy. But are communism, totalitarianism, and democracy essentially the same? And are all these essentially the same with Buddhism and Christianity? For the sake of simplicity, I have given examples only from the dictionaries. Although texts on the philosophy of religion are more detailed in their attempts to define religion, their efforts fail to overcome the difficulties illustrated. The point is that no matter how our opponents define religion, the definition is either going to be too narrow or too broad for their purpose - they are going to include certain systems that they want to exclude, or they are going to exclude certain systems that they want to include. The difficulty exists because the various religions are not essentially the same; they contradict one another on many essential points. The implication is that not all of them can be correct, and thus it is impossible to unite them.13 A more productive project would be to identify and clarify the beliefs of each religion, and examine each one to see which ones are true and which ones are false.

Since Christianity claims to be the only true worldview,14 if it is indeed a true worldview, then its claim to be the only truth is also true, and all other worldviews are therefore false. On the other hand, if any non-Christian worldview is true, then Christianity is false. Therefore, any adherent to a non-Christian worldview must squarely face Christianity and defeat it, and any Christian must be prepared to demolish any non-Christian worldview. To make the worldviews appear to be in essential agreement when they are in essential disagreement is dishonest, ignorant, and irrational.15 When people say that all religions are essentially the same, they are usually only thinking of a non-foundational aspect of the religions, or an aspect that is foundational to some, but non-foundational to others. But then they are no longer comparing the essential points of the various religions. For example, if the claim is that all religions are essentially the same because they all teach people to strive toward goodness, then my objection would be that ethics is not the foundation of the biblical worldview, even if it is an important aspect. Christian ethics is founded on Christian metaphysics; that is, what the Bible teaches about morality depends on what the Bible teaches about reality. Without the biblical view of reality, there is no foundation for the biblical view of morality.

Therefore, the biblical view of reality is the more essential aspect of the Christian worldview. However, in the list of worldviews usually included by those who say that all religions are

essentially the same, we find various different and contradictory views of reality. Some affirm monotheism, others affirm polytheism and pantheism. Some even affirm naturalistic atheism.

Thus to say that both Buddhism and Christianity teach people to be good does not establish any essential similarity between the two systems, but merely hides the essential differences. Christianity affirms as its essential claims that God is a Trinity, that Christ is both God and man, and that Scripture is infallible. There are others, but these three beliefs are enough to exclude all non-Christian systems, and to establish that Christianity is essentially contradictory to all non-Christian worldviews, including Judaism.16

Many of those who say that all religions are essentially the same tend to emphasize what they perceive as similarities in the area of ethics. I disagree with this approach, because as I have shown above, different religions may construct their ethics upon different views of metaphysics (or reality), which to them is more foundational. One does not have the right to dictate to all the religions what is essential to them and what is not. Rather, we must allow each religion to specify its central claims. If I say that monotheism17 is foundational to my religion,18 then you have no right to say that it is not foundational to my religion. And you would be mistaken to say that my monotheistic religion is essentially the same with another person's polytheistic religion, even if our systems of ethics are identical.19

However, Christian ethics is not identical to non-Christian ethics. They are not even similar. You may say that all religions direct people to walk in love and goodness. First, this is not true. The ethical aims and directives of various religions are often very different. Second, how do you define love and goodness? The Bible says that love is the fulfillment of the biblical moral laws, so that if you walk in love, you will obey the commands in the Bible. But if your religion defines love differently, as all non-biblical religions must do, then whatever you call love is not what the Bible calls love. Therefore, it is impossible to say that all religions direct people to walk in love, since even though you attempt to use the same word to describe their moral directives, they are not similar at all, and there is no common concept of love. The very first of the Ten Commandments demands exclusive worship of the Christian God. Therefore, from a biblical viewpoint, it is immoral and sinful to be a non-Christian. Now, who are you to say that this is not an essential belief in Christianity? It is just as essential as the commandment against murder, and much more important and foundational, since even the commandment against murder is founded upon the exclusive authority of God. Now, do all religions have as their essential belief that they are to worship only the Christian God? If not, then how are they the same with Christianity?

It may be possible under both democracy and communism to affirm that there are such things as red roses, but that does not mean that democracy and communism are the same, or even similar to each other, because they differ on the essential points. Those who attempt to unite all religions arbitrarily choose certain points that they perceive to be common to all religions, and then make these points the essential points of all religions. But they have no right to dictate and specify the essential points of all religions, and even on those points that they think all religions agree, the various religions in fact do not agree. The truth is that the various religions are different, and they contradict one another on many essential and non-essential points. Therefore, not all religions can be true. Since Christianity says that all other religions are false, if we can show that Christianity is true, then even this pronouncement about all non-Christian religions is true, and thus we have also

shown that all non-Christian religions are false. My exclusive view is unpopular today, even among those who call themselves Christians. However, popularity does not indicate whether a particular belief is true or false. A common objection against exclusive religion is that it is arrogant to say that my own position is the only correct one, and that all who disagree with me are wrong.20 But what is your definition of arrogance? If Christianity itself asserts that I must accept it to be the only true religion and consider all non-Christian religions to be false, then under Christianity I am not arrogant to take such an exclusive position. You can only call me arrogant based on a non-Christian standard. If so, then you must establish the non-Christian worldview by which you call me arrogant to be true, and that Christianity is false. If you fail to do this, then you have no authority to call me arrogant. In addition, the claim that there is not one exclusively true religion is itself a universal judgment about all religions, thus you are imposing your own view on all religions, saying that not one of them may claim to be exclusively true. You are saying that only your view about the various religions is correct (that no one religion is exclusively true), and that all who believe otherwise are mistaken. This is arrogant according to your own standard.

I may give a similar response to the charge that it is narrow-minded to say that only my view is correct, and all who disagree with me are wrong. But why is it bad to be narrow- minded? By what standard do you determine that to be narrow-minded is bad, and then impose that label on me? If Christianity is indeed exclusively true, then it would be a good thing to be "narrow-minded." That is, if only Christianity is true, then it would be good to believe that only Christianity is true, whether you call that narrow-minded or not. But if Christianity is exclusively true, and you remain open-minded about the issue, then you are not affirming the truth, and you are the one who has a problem. The people who use the charges of arrogance, narrow-mindedness, bigotry, and the like, are in fact employing a name-calling tactic that, if successful, enables them to avoid facing the real questions. Is Christianity exclusively true or not? If not, you do not need to call me names - just refute me, and that will be the end of it. Since I perceive that name-callers are trying to avoid confrontation, I can also play the name-calling game and say that they are idiots and cowards, and we can go back and forth forever without facing the real questions. If you disagree with the claim that Christianity is the only true religion, and that all non-Christians will be condemned to endless torment in hell, all you have to do is to confront my arguments and refute the claim.

Even many professing Christians would consider me too harsh, but this is because they have been affected by non-Christian standards of right conduct. If the apostle Paul could tell the opposing Jews to castrate themselves (Galatians 5:12),21 then I am already being quite mild.22 Many of the Christian writers who affirm that only Christianity is true nevertheless sound reluctant to bluntly state this belief, and they are just as reluctant to clearly state its implication, that if only Christianity is true, then all non-Christian religions are false. They grudgingly affirm the exclusivity of Christianity, as if they resent the Bible for containing such a teaching. This attitude is sinful. Instead, they ought to embrace and defend the words of Scripture with force and with joy. Anything less indicates an unscriptural empathy to false religions and sinful humanity at the expense of faithfulness to Christ.

You will have to read some of my other books to see my arguments for Christianity,23 but what I have established here is that the various religions are essentially different and opposed to one another. Therefore, if you claim to be a Christian, then by necessary implication, you are also saying that all non-Christian religions are false, and that all non-Christians will be condemned to

endless torment in hell. If you have a problem with this, then you should examine to see if you have truly affirmed Christianity, for if you disagree with Christ and the apostles, then on what grounds do you claim to be a Christian? Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). If you are not a Christian, then you are not just non-Christian in your beliefs, but you are anti-Christian. This is the way it is, whether you like it or not. In the context of church government, one who affirms religious pluralism and the legitimacy of non-Christian religions or worldviews should have the implications of such a belief shown to him. The church should make clear to such a person what the Bible teaches on the subject. After that, if the person refuses to change his mind, then he should be excommunicated, or expelled from the church. We must begin to realize that believing false doctrine is much more sinful and destructive than something like murder or prostitution. False doctrine is a much greater evil than these other things, and we must protect the flock by removing those who insist on affirming unbiblical ideas: "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9). One reason why much of the church is so weak today is a lack of swift discipline.

Since I have established the exclusive truth of Christianity elsewhere, and since I have exposed the absurdity of asserting the essential unity of all religions, we may proceed with the assumption that Christianity is exclusively true, and that all non-Christian religions are false. Thus we may with greater appreciation return to the teaching stated earlier, that only Christians may offer prayers that are acceptable to God. Putting this another way, for one’s prayer to be acceptable, he must have a right relationship with God, but to have a right relationship with God, he must first have a right relationship with the designated mediator between God and humanity. The only mediator between God and humanity is Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. We are not talking about some general principle of Christ or the "spirit" of Christ, but the historical Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son who took upon himself human attributes, who died for his people and was raised from the dead. You cannot be a Muslim or Buddhist and say that you are somehow praying through Christ. You cannot say that you can be a Mormon or Hindu, but as long as you pray with a certain attitude or spirit, you are praying through Christ. You cannot say that Christ is somehow the mediator of all these religions. No, the Bible requires that you acknowledge by name the historical Jesus of Nazareth, who is both God and man, and who is the sole mediator between God and humanity. He is the only way to God; all other roads lead to endless torment in hell.

Some groups that claim to affirm the Christian faith suggest that saints and angels may act as mediators between God and humanity, so that they may appeal to, say, Mary the mother of Jesus for help and for intercession. This is a direct rejection of scriptural teaching. 1 Timothy 2:5 says that there is only one mediator, not two or three, or three hundred. There is only one. Outside of Jesus Christ, there is no access to God at all. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humanity, but he does not give to all humans proper access to God. Rather, through him only Christians have access to God the Father in prayer and worship.

01.02. PRAYING TO THE FATHER

2. PRAYING TO THE FATHER

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10)

If you are not a Christian, then you are not a child of God, but you are a child of the devil. All human beings are God's creatures, and this much is true. But when we are speaking of the relationship that we have with God, then humanity is divided into the children of God and the children of the devil. And ever since the beginning of human history, the two groups have been in conflict against each other (Genesis 3:15).

Those who think that all human beings are the children of God are ignorant of what the Bible says on the subject. Jesus says that the "father" of his opponents is the devil, and that they make their disciples twice as much the children of hell as they (John 8:44; Matthew 23:15). Paul writes:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ....For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:9; Romans 8:15-16) The passage refers to a specific "Spirit," that is, the Spirit of Christ. If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to Christ, and if you do not belong to Christ, you cannot call God your Father. The Bible contradicts the notion that humanity is "one big family," but insists that the family of God consists only of Christians. If you are not a Christian, you cannot call God your Father, because your father is the devil. It makes no difference whether you belong to a religion that you consider to be very proper, or if you think that you are a very good person - you are a child of the devil if you are not a Christian. When Jesus teaches his disciples to address God as their Father, he immediately excludes all non-Christians from having access to God. Rather, all who approach God the Father must do so through God the Son, Jesus Christ. Christians have the Spirit of Christ in their hearts by which they may legitimately call God their Father. Thus being a Christian is the prerequisite to having any positive relationship with God. This exclusive view is contrary to what many people want to believe. Even some who call themselves Christians hesitate to state the biblical position in such an explicit manner. However, since the above is what the Bible teaches, we must never do anything to obscure the message. If Christians have not been so afraid to offend people, we would not have so many false converts in our churches today. Is what I am saying hard and offensive to you? People complained against what Jesus teaches also: "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?'" (John 6:60-61). How does Jesus handle their discontent? Instead of trying to qualify his teaching so as to soften it, he bluntly applies the doctrine of election to their case: "He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him'" (John 6:65). His statement is not well received, for the next verse says, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66).24

If you are offended by the straightforward and no-nonsense presentation of the gospel, then God has not chosen you for salvation, and you have no ability to accept it. Or, it is possible that you are among the elect, but God has decided for you to accept the gospel later. In any case, what many Christians fail to realize is that the non-elect should be offended at the gospel message. We are not supposed to distort it so that it offends no one. The gospel offends people not because it is irrational, for it is rationally invincible. But the non-elect are offended at the true gospel precisely because they are both irrational and sinful, and God has not regenerated them so that they may react to the gospel in a positive way (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Maybe you are one of the many false converts in our churches, and no one has made clear to you the gospel message. Do you think that you are a Christian just because you muttered the "sinner's prayer"? Do you think that you are a Christian, even when you have not explicitly or implicitly renounced all non-Christian religions and philosophies as false? If you have affirmed a "gospel" that does not exclude other religions, then you have not affirmed the true gospel. My suggestion to you is the same one that Paul gives to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus teaches that we should pray to God the Father. Since the Father is a divine mind and not a non-rational object, we are to use intelligible language to express our thoughts, and this excludes all the religions that do not deal with a divine rational person. And since we must pray to the "Father," a definite person, not just any person will do; rather, we must only pray to the divine Father of the Bible. This "Father" is defined by many distinct attributes the sum of which restricts our conception of him to a very specific person, so as to make us realize that prayers made to any other person is misdirected. It also means that we must gain an accurate grasp of how the Bible defines this divine person, so that the conception of God in our minds will correspond to the conception of God as revealed in Scripture. The above leads us to reject the notion that it matters little what you believe about God as long as you are sincere. It is possible to sincerely believe something and be mistaken. To sincerely believe in the Buddha does not make you acceptable to God, since from a Christian perspective, you would just be sincerely sinful. What God requires is that we sincerely affirm the truth; although faith is important, the object of faith is also important. We must believe the right doctrines. We must define "God" - the object of our faith - according to the attributes ascribed to him in the Bible.

Before dealing with some of the central divine attributes in relation to our context, that we must direct our prayers to the Father brings up a point that is particularly relevant to our times, namely, much of feminist theology is contrary to biblical teaching, and thus must be rejected and opposed. For example, although God is without gender, since he reveals himself in the Bible in male roles and with male pronouns, we are to address him as "Father" and not "Mother," with "he" and not "she." I would like to deal with the threat of feminist theology more thoroughly and systematically elsewhere, and I realize that its subversive ideas relate to more than this one issue in our example. For now, we should at least recognize that the central agenda of feminist theology is anti-Christian;25 therefore, let us determine to challenge the unbiblical assertions from its proponents whenever they may come up, and excommunicate the unrepentant. We will now return to discuss the divine attributes.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:16) is frequently recited by people who wish to prove certain points about their conception of God, or of what God would do or would not do. These people make a number of inferences from the proposition, "God is love," that they think should be true if indeed God is love. But what is love? And what does it mean for God to be love? It certainly does not follow that a God who is love will not send anyone to hell, since the same Bible says that he sends many people to hell. It also does not follow that a God who is love will accept non-Christians, since the same Bible says that he rejects non- Christians.

Some people like to emphasize "God is love" because they falsely think that the divine attribute of love will spare them from the judgment promised to those who disobey God. For example, they may say that since "God is love," then he also loves the homosexual and will not judge him. But since this inference contradicts other propositions in the Bible, it is a false inference. The love of God does not contradict the other things that the Bible says about God. We must define love correctly. Further, the same Bible that says, "God is love," also says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). How come this verse, which is in the same letter by the apostle John, is so seldom mentioned? Perhaps it has something to do with the next verse, which explains what "God is light" implies: "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6). Walking with God requires adherence to his standard of right living, and if you do not do this, then you are not walking with God. Thus this very passage about the light of God shines upon those who hides under the darkness of a distorted interpretation of "God is love," and exposes the fact that they are not really walking with God. The same Bible that says, "God is love," also says that, "God is light." And the same Bible that says, "God is light," also says that, "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). All three propositions are true, and they are consistent with one another, but the invalid inferences that people make from "God is love" often contradict the other two propositions. That God is a consuming fire does not mean that he will give you a warm and welcome feeling. The writer of Hebrews states this proposition in the context of telling his readers to worship God "with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28). The image of God being a consuming fire is associated with his anger, judgment, and power to destroy.26 The modern man may disapprove of such a God, but what is wrong with such a God? If God comes at you as a consuming fire, it is you who are at fault. Paul tells his readers to recognize both the "kindness and severity" (Romans 11:22, NASB) of God. He says that he is severe against those who disobey him, but he is kind to you, that is, if you continue in his grace.

Many times I have heard preachers say, "God is not mad at anybody." This is false, and provides the non-Christians with false comfort. The Bible says that if you are a non-Christian, God is now very angry with you, and "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). Jesus says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Jesus declares that he who is not with him is against him (Matthew 12:30); there is no neutral ground. You need not deliberately align yourself against Christ to be counted as his enemy, since you were born his enemy. 1 John 5:12 says, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." You may suppress your knowledge of God and your rebellion against him (Romans 1:18), but God is very aware, and you will not get away with anything (Hebrews 4:13).

If you are not a Christian, the great force of divine wrath will be poured out against you, perhaps in a moment you do not expect, and it is as if you will hear God say, "You fool! This very night your

life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:20). Of course, as I have explained elsewhere, the wrath of God is not an emotion, since God is not a man and has no emotions.27 However, this should not give you any relief, because it remains that God's wrath is a policy of thought and action against his enemies that will stop at nothing short of effecting their utter destruction and endless suffering.

Today's preachers tend to obscure the wrath of God, and present him as a harmless and helpless clown. There are some "fire and brimstone" sermons, which the congregations detest, but even most of these sermons are not nearly terrifying enough to describe the horrors of hell, the helpless state of those without Christ, and the greatness of God's mercy toward his elect.

I urge you to read the sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" by Jonathan Edwards.28 It provides a much-needed biblical perspective about the sinner's condition. It is inappropriate to reproduce the sermon in full here, but here are several passages from it: The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the mean time is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw his hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it. The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone from being in the like circumstances with you, see that it was so with them; for destruction came suddenly upon most of them; when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, "Peace and safety." Now they see, that those things on which they depended for peace and safety, were nothing but thin air and empty shadows. The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more

than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night, that you was suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God’s hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. The terrors of hell is indeed frightening, but surely, you think I will tell you, God has sent Christ to make salvation possible for everyone, even you, so that in the end you will determine your own destiny, that you can save yourself from endless torment. But God has not left even this for the sinner to determine. Jesus says that no one can be saved except the Father has chosen him; unless God first shows you mercy, you will not and cannot choose him. Thus even in this aspect you are powerless, and you are completely at his mercy. As Edwards states in his sermon, "It will be as it was on the great out-pouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles’ days, the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded."

Therefore, cry out to God for mercy, and it may be that he has shown kindness toward you and has regenerated you, so that your plea for mercy will indeed come from a sincere heart instead of being done in pretense or in carnal fright, and thus you will obtain salvation through true faith in Jesus Christ. If you think that you are already a Christian, then believe and behave like a Christian. As Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, ’Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Why do you call him "Lord," but refuse to do what he says (Luke 6:46)? Can it be that your profession of faith is false? You cannot cheat your way into heaven. Test yourself! "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

01.03. PRAYING BY THE SPIRIT

3. PRAYING BY THE SPIRIT For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:18) The Bible teaches that we must pray through the Son, to the Father, by the Spirit. But not everyone has the Son (1 John 5:12), and not everyone has the Spirit (Romans 8:9); therefore, not everyone can pray to the Father. It is important to understand the relationship between prayer and the exclusivity of Christianity, because if not everyone has access to God, then one who prays better possess a correct sense of what and who he is before God. Is he still the enemy of God, or has God changed his heart and given him the gift of faith to embrace the gospel? The exclusivity of Christianity continues to be important and relevant for the Christian, since he ought to retain a sense of gratitude and awe that he has indeed been chosen to approach God: "Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts" (Psalms 65:4, NKJ). Rather than having the arrogant and foolish attitude that God should thank the human individual for believing in the gospel, the human individual should develop his new life "in fear and trembling" (Php 2:12-13), knowing that he is permitted in God’s presence solely because of God’s pleasure and discretion. The Christian had done nothing to deserve salvation, and in himself he was no better than the non-Christian, who would be condemned to endless suffering in hell. The Christian can thus say nothing to congratulate himself, whether of his good sense for choosing Christ, since Christ says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16), or for his moral superiority, since "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). So then, let him who boasts boast not about himself, but about what God has done for him in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:31). The Christian in himself was not intellectually and morally superior to the non-Christian. But make no mistake about it - once God changes and saves him, the Christian is indeed intellectually and morally superior. False humility and scriptural ignorance may cause many believers to deny this, but the Bible teaches that we have been enlightened and sanctified in Christ, and our spiritual growth involves increasing in knowledge and holiness. Also, the Bible calls unbelievers foolish and wicked in contrast to those who have been changed by God through Christ.

If you do not have superior wisdom, as God defines wisdom, then you have not been enlightened; if you do not have superior character, as God defines character, then you have not been transformed. Therefore, if you are not intellectually and morally superior than the unbelievers, then God has not done any work in you, and you are not even a Christian. To deny that Christians are intellectually and morally superior to non-Christians is to contradict Scripture, and insult the work of God. The Holy Spirit gives Christians access to God, so as to make prayer possible. But he helps us in another way as well: In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. (Romans 8:26-27)

Some of the Greeks understood our limitations when it comes to prayer, and had reached corresponding conclusions about it: "Pythagoras forbade his disciples to pray for themselves,

because, he said, they could never in their ignorance know what was expedient for them. Xenophon tells us that Socrates taught his disciples simply to pray for good things, and not to attempt to specify them, but to leave God to decide what the good things were."29 The Christian is not in such an unhappy condition, since Scripture reveals a considerable amount of knowledge about the will of God, so that from it we can deduce much information to understand and interpret our particular situations. The Bible itself claims to be sufficient, meaning that if you have complete knowledge of its content, and if you fully follow what it teaches, you will never transgress the will of God. Of course, no one has complete knowledge of the Bible, and no one fully follows it, and thus we must often ask God for his forgiveness. The point is that the Bible itself contains sufficient information, so that when we fail to live a perfect life before God, we may never say that it is because the Bible contains insufficient information (2 Peter 1:3). That said, since we often do not know everything about a situation, even our own, and since we cannot know all the relationships between various events and options, we sometimes do not know what is the best thing to pray for in any situation. We may know what we want when it comes to our personal lives, but even then we may not know whether what we want is always best, or whether it conforms to the specific plan that God has for our lives. This is just to say that we are not omniscient, and not that Scripture provides insufficient information. Failing to know everything is not a sin, but there remains the practical problem of not knowing what to pray. That is, it is not an issue of lacking the necessary information to achieve holiness, since the Scripture is indeed sufficient, but it is an issue of practical helplessness because of our human limitations. The Spirit gives us access to God so that we may pray, but we do not always know for what we should pray. So, Paul says, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." What does this mean?

First, we need to clarify what "groans that words cannot express" may mean. If it is meant that these "groans" represent thoughts that are inexpressible by means of words, then this appears to be impossible. If words are only arbitrary signs that represent thoughts, then in principle words are capable of expressing any thought. For example, "X" can be a word representing any thought at all. No matter how profound a given thought is, if a mind can think it, then words can express it. In fact, "X" can designate an entire proposition or even all the propositions in an entire book; therefore, in themselves words are always adequate to express any thought. But if the "groans" are not thoughts, and if they are not meant to produce thoughts in another mind, then they are not meant as vehicles of expression at all, and thus the word "cannot" would appear to be inapplicable to verbal communication. That is, there would be a category mistake if the verse indeed says that some thoughts cannot be expressed in words, since all thoughts can be expressed in words. And anything that can be expressed must either be thoughts, or must generate thoughts in another mind. Otherwise, the transaction cannot be rightly called communication. The verse must be translated or understood differently. Or, maybe this verse is saying that we do not have the intellectual clarity or ability to put these groans into words, but it is not saying that words themselves, or language itself, is deficient in expressing thoughts. In any case, we must reject the popular notion that language is inherently incapable of expressing many things. This is nothing more than an anti-intellectual prejudice. The above shows that any limitation in expression must be in the mind, and not in language itself.

However, if Paul is indeed saying that the Spirit provides a solution to our limitation by "groans that words cannot express," so as to limit the ability of language itself to give expression to thoughts,

then my argument must be wrong and we should not explain away the passage, but we must accept that there is indeed an inherent limitation in language. But a careful examination of the passage shows that we need not come to such a conclusion. Douglas Moo points out that the term translated "that words cannot express" in the NIV appears only here in biblical Greek, and the meaning implied by its etymology is more properly denoted by, "unspoken" or "wordless."30 Likewise, Thomas Schreiner writes, "it much more likely means 'without speech,' the absence of any vocalization at all."31 Whatever the "groans" are, they are not thoughts that are meant to be spoken; therefore, the verse does not say that there are any inherent limitations in language itself in giving expression to thoughts. The groans are not literal audible sounds, but they are metaphorical. We find ample support for such an interpretation from the verses that precede our passage:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:18-23)

Paul describes the tension and the frustration that we experience by living in the imperfect present while expecting the perfect future. We long for the completion of our salvation, even "the redemption of our bodies." And thus our "groaning" is not an audible sort, but a metaphor for the tension and frustration that we now experience. That this "groaning" is metaphorical is even clearer when we see that, in a sense, the creation itself shares this tension and this frustration, and "has been groaning" along with us. But the creation itself is not a rational entity, and does not literally groan as a woman suffering "the pains of childbirth." Therefore, the "groaning" in these verses represent an intense anticipation for the fulfillment of the plan of God, rather than an audible sound.

Paul writes that, in some sense, the Spirit also groans for the will of God to be fulfilled. Romans 8:26 says, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Since we do not always know for what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with "groans" that are not audibly uttered. But what does this mean? What is the nature and mode of this intercession?

Schreiner writes the following:

These groanings are not audible. They are the inexpressible longings that arise in every believer's heart to do and know the will of God. That the groanings arise in the hearts of believers is suggested by Romans 8:27, which says that "God searches the hearts." This is most naturally understood to refer to the hearts of believers. God searches the hearts of believers and finds unutterable longings to conform their lives to the will of God. The Holy Spirit takes these groanings and presents them before God in an articulate form. Even though believers cannot specify these requests to God adequately since they do not know his will sufficiently, the Holy Spirit translates these groanings and conforms them to God's will.32 The passage indeed implies that believers

"do not know his will sufficiently,"33 and that the passage says that the Holy Spirit does something about it, and this "something" is related to the "groans" mentioned. However, I disagree with Schreiner when he says that these groans are "in the hearts of believers" in the sense that these are the groans of the believers, which the Spirit transforms into acceptable prayers to God.

According to Schreiner, Romans 8:27 suggests that the groans are in the hearts of the believers because it says that "God searches the hearts." Although I agree that the "hearts" are the hearts of the believers, I disagree that the verse supports his conclusion. We need to read the entire verse, which says, "And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." The words, "he who searches the hearts" merely identify which "he" we are talking about. The next words tell us what "he who searches the hearts" actually does - he "knows the mind of the Spirit." Now, verse 26 says that the Spirit "intercedes for us," and Romans 8:27 says that the Spirit "intercedes for the saints," so that it is the Spirit's prayer that God hears in this passage, and not that of the believers.

Assuming an understanding of the context of this passage, that is, at least Romans 8:18-28, we may paraphrase as follows: "We do not always know for what to pray, but the Spirit prays for us inaudibly. Now, he who knows our thoughts also knows the Spirit's thoughts; therefore, although the Spirit prays inaudibly, God hears the Spirit's prayers for us. And such prayers are effective, since the Spirit prays for us in accordance with the will of God." The reason Paul refers to God as the one "who searches our hearts" may be because the Spirit is one who indwells believers, so that Paul seems to say, in effect, "He who knows your thoughts also knows the thoughts of the Spirit who lives in you."

Douglas Moo arrives at a similar conclusion, and writes:

Moreover, it is likely that the groans are not the believer's but the Spirit's....it is preferable to understand these "groans" as the Spirit's own "language of prayer," a ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts in a manner imperceptible to us. This means, of course, that "groans" is used metaphorically....I take it that Paul is saying, then, that our failure to know God's will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God's Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God....

Romans 8:27 continues Paul's discussion of the intercession of the Spirit and focuses on the effectiveness of this intercession. The reason for this effectiveness is the perfect accord that exists between God, "the one who searches hearts," and "the mind of the Spirit." God, who sees into the inner being of people, where the indwelling Spirit's ministry of intercession takes place, "knows," "acknowledges," and responds to those "intentions" of the Spirit that are expressed in his prayers on our behalf.34

I have heard several preachers maintain that our passage does not teach that the Spirit prays for us, but that the Spirit helps us to pray. They say that the Spirit will not do something for you that you are supposed to do yourself, although he will help you do it. However, it begs the question to say that this passage does not teach that the Spirit prays for us because it cannot be true that the Spirit prays for us. Rather, since this passage teaches that the Spirit prays for us, it means that it is true that the Spirit prays for us.

Hebrews 7:25 indicates that Jesus Christ "always lives to intercede" for believers. Thus he has a ministry of intercession through which he prays for believers, and this ministry occurs independently of the believers themselves. In addition, it occurs in heaven, so that it is indeed "imperceptible to us." What our passage teaches is that the Holy Spirit also has a ministry of intercession. These preachers miss the point of the passage, whose very intent is to tell us that the Spirit has a ministry of intercession through which he prays for believers, and that this is an act that occurs independently of the believers themselves, so that it is also "imperceptible to us."

These same preachers that I have heard would teach that Christ is interceding for us, and they find no conflict between this ministry of intercession and our own responsibility to pray. If we can acknowledge that Christ prays for us, then it is irrational to insist that the Spirit cannot also pray for us, especially when our passage explicitly states this. Christ prays, the Spirit prays, and we pray - there is no conflict between these three.

Jesus refers to the Spirit as "another Counselor" (John 14:16, or "Advocate"). That the Spirit should have a ministry of intercession for the benefit of Christians fits very well with his ministry of being the second Advocate, paralleling the ministry of Christ as the first Advocate. Christ now serves as our Advocate in heaven, and the Spirit now serves as the indwelling Advocate on earth. Both of them pray for us.

Just as the fact that Jesus Christ has a ministry of intercession on our behalf does not prevent or discourage us from praying, the fact that the Spirit also has a ministry of intercession on our behalf should not prevent or discourage us from praying. It may very well be true that the Spirit helps us pray, but the passage under discussion is saying that he himself prays for us to God, and since his prayers are always in accordance with the will of God, they are always effective, and this is something that we will examine later in this chapter.

Another contrary interpretation of our passage is that the "groans that words cannot express" refer to speaking in tongues. Since we do not always know for what to pray, the Spirit grants us words to speak in a language that we do not understand so as to bypass the limitations of our minds. However, if our interpretation of this passage is correct, we have already eliminated the possibility that Paul is referring to tongues. Our interpretation says that it is the Spirit who prays in inaudible "groans" in a manner that is apart from and imperceptible to believers, but this description excludes tongues altogether. This is not to say that the Bible does not endorse speaking in tongues; whether it does or not, this passage does not seem to have tongues in mind. This brings me to a point related to speaking in tongues, although it is not directly relevant to our passage. Regardless of whether we think speaking in tongues is for today, and regardless of what we think it does, many people who speak in tongues use it in a way as to avoid having to struggle through the difficulties of praying in English (or their known languages). That is, whenever they find it hard to express themselves in English, or whenever they find it hard to extend the length of their prayers, they will simply begin speaking in tongues, and thus avoid having to exert further effort in prayer. As a result, some important aspects their spiritual growth are halted. This is one criticism that Neil Babcox offers against speaking in tongues. Although he thinks that speaking in tongues is not for today, even if he is wrong about this, what he says below is still applicable: At no time are we more aware of our weakness and inadequacy than when we kneel to pray....In the face of such spiritual helplessness, tongues can become a crutch. For example, when I found myself mute and

dumb in His presence, I could far too quickly remedy the situation by praying in tongues. Again, when I was oppressed with a sense of guilt and felt alienated from God, it was far more easy to pray in tongues than to search my heart for the cause of the guilt. But what was all of this if it was not an evasion? Whereas previously I could avoid the difficulties inherent in prayer by resorting to tongues, now I found myself praying, "Lord, teach me to pray."35

There are various reasons why you may have trouble praying in English, but almost all of them relate to deficiencies in the mind. Maybe your thoughts are unclear; maybe you are easily distracted; maybe you lack the ability to put your thoughts into words; or maybe your ignorance of scriptural teaching prevents you from properly relating to God. Whatever the reason may be, rather than giving up or resorting to tongues, you must struggle to attain fluency in prayer. And since most of the problems are in the mind, this is the area that you must work on. Peter Kreeft writes, "The first cause of a specifically human act is always internal, not external. By 'a specifically human act' I mean one like asking a question, creating a work of art, making a moral choice, affirming another person, or appreciating the beauty of nature or praying....That is why thought is where the action starts....Thought is the first battlefield."36

Although spiritual growth involves much effort and much struggle, if we have some sense of direction and purpose, and if we know what to work on, then the effort and the struggle will bear good fruit. The struggle in prayer should not consist mainly in forcing yourself to pray when you cannot pray well, but it should involve developing a spiritual mind by reading and thinking. If you wish to pray better, then you must make your thoughts clearer and richer. Thus the most important thing you can do to improve in prayer is theological study and reflection, which consists of much reading and thinking. For example, you will not be able to enrich your prayer and worship by engaging the divine attributes if you do not know about them. Meaningful prayer and worship depends on theological knowledge. Therefore, reading a book on systematic theology does much more to improve your prayer life than reading one that is specifically about prayer, but whose content is mainly pragmatic, anecdotal, or otherwise theologically shallow.

Jesus would sometimes spend an entire night praying, from evening to morning (Luke 6:12). The content of his mind was very rich and his knowledge was very broad. We cannot attain to his level, but we can strive to become better. And the Spirit is involved in all of this it is he who grants us knowledge and understanding, who causes us to recall and obey the words of God, and who transforms our thinking and our character through Scripture. Although our passage does not specifically refer to the Spirit's role in helping us pray, but rather indicates that the Spirit prays for us, other biblical passages assure us that he is here to help us in every aspect of our spiritual life, including our struggle to pray better by establishing a foundation of greater knowledge and deeper reflection regarding the things of God.

Paul has been telling us about the Spirit's ministry of intercession. Because the Spirit always prays "in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:27), his prayers are always effective. Romans 8:28 then describes the result of such an effective ministry: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."37 The HCSB is better: "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose."38

Although Peter Masters is addressing another topic, the following warning against what he calls "pietistic speaking" also applies to how believers often misuse Romans 8:28 :

Many Christians have picked up a manner of thinking and speaking which is highly destructive to genuine guidance. We may call it pietistic speaking. These friends constantly ascribe all kinds of everyday events to the special and direct intervention of the Lord, as though their lives were filled with minor miracles. They believe this kind of thinking and speaking is what the Lord wants from His people. They think that it reflects gratitude and a spiritual attitude. However, this trend often leads to a form of spiritual "superstition"...

It is significant that when believers pick up the habit of pietistic thinking and speaking, they tend to focus on...earthly rather than spiritual matters. And most significantly, they are usually good events, and not hard or painful ones. We have heard friends say: "The Lord sent a bus for me this morning," and, "The Lord enabled me to pass my exam, because actually I did very badly." Other comments about the Lord's direct interventions concern everyday affairs like the weather, or the Lord preventing the cakes from burning....

We must not drift into the idea that only small, earthly and good things are examples of His providence. Why should we single out life's happy surprises and coincidences as instances of God's work in our lives? Why not talk about the days when nothing remarkable happened? Why not talk about illnesses and times of failure? After all, God superintends all that happens to His children.39 The relevance of the above to a correct understanding of Romans 8:28 is in the fact that we must define "good" the way God defines it, and not the way we would like to define it. In our passage, Paul is trying to give us a proper perspective from which to interpret the things that we suffer in this life. He says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." So when Romans 8:28 says that "all things work together for the good," the "all things" should really include "all things." In fact, Romans 9:1-33 indicates that even the creation and destruction of the reprobates serve to glorify God and edify Christians. But the main emphasis on Romans 8:28 appears to be on suffering. Most people assumes this to be so even without noting the context of the passage, but they may still misunderstand the verse if they assume a false definition of "good." For example, the verse cannot mean, "All things, whether good or bad, work together for your good - that is, to make you rich." The "good" in our verse cannot mean material riches because that is not how God defines "good." Jesus says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Nor can the verse mean, "All things, whether good or bad, work together for your good that is, to make you popular," because God does not define "good" as popularity. Our answer is in Romans 8:29, which says that God has predestined us to be "conformed to the likeness of his Son." Thus God defines the "good" in Romans 8:28 as that which functions to further our sanctification. To the extent that we fail to focus on spiritual things, this may not be the top item on our agenda, but God is greatly concerned with it, and he works all things - even the lives of others and the destinies of nations - to effect our sanctification. "It is God's will that you should be sanctified...For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7).

However, this is not to say that God does not give us pleasant things. In the context of admonishing wealthy people, Paul writes that God "richly provides us with everything for our

enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). The point is not that God only gives us pleasant or unpleasant things, or that only certain things further our sanctification, but that all things work together by the providence and wisdom of God to further the great purpose of our sanctification, which refers to our increase in knowledge and in holiness (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24). But then we return again to the exclusivity of Christianity, for all things work together for good, not for everyone, but only for "those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Paul writes, "If anyone does not love the Lord a curse be on him" (1 Corinthians 16:22). We have already seen from other verses that the wrath of God remains on non-Christians, and there is no escape from judgment except through Jesus Christ. Who then are "those who love God"? Are they those who have chosen Christ by their own "free will"? Are they those who have the good sense and moral propensity to accept the gospel? Scripture states that no one can choose God unless God has first chosen him. Thus the verse says that those who love God are those "who are called according to His purpose." It does not say that they are those who love God because they have chosen to love him according to their own reasons, but that they love God because they have been chosen by him according to his own purpose. Those who loved God are those who have been "summoned by preference."40 The rest of humanity will be "thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). In the plan of God, they serve to produce an environment in which the chosen ones may increase in sanctification, and to promote the glory of God by their destruction and damnation. Their lives have no positive meaning for themselves. Many are appalled and outraged at such a God who is sovereign, and who dares to exercise his sovereignty, but "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:21).

PRAYER AND THE DIVINE NATURE In the introduction to the previous section, I mentioned that God is defined by the sum of his attributes. Some of these attributes are his sovereignty, knowledge, and transcendence or, we may say that God is all-powerful, God is all-knowing, and God is spirit. Stephen Charnock is credited as having said, "It is impossible to honor God as we ought, unless we know him as he is."41 Accordingly, there is an intimate relationship between prayer and the divine attributes; the former is impossible without knowledge of the latter.

Let us suppose that you are responsible for making a speech at a banquet honoring a distinguished professor. Now, if you think that the professor is a man when she is a woman, if you think that her field is physics when it is history, and if you think that she comes from Texas when she is from India, then your speech is not going to make much sense, and both the professor and the audience would think that your speech is referring to someone else.

Likewise, many people pray to "God," but if they were to describe him, what we hear may not correspond at all to the biblical God. If this person’s "God" is completely irreconcilable with the Bible, can we say that he is praying to God, and can we say that this person is a Christian? The Israelites pointed to the golden calf that they had made and declared, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). But God himself disagreed.

If your "God" is a "golden calf," then you are not a Christian. From the biblical perspective, you are an idol worshiper. Of course, you can say that you are a Christian anyone can say that - but you are not one by biblical definition. And if your definition of "Jesus" is too far off, then you are not a Christian even if you define "God" in terms of the biblical divine attributes.

Therefore, let no one say that theology is unimportant or impractical - it is the most important factor in the Christian life and the necessary foundation for the "practical" issues to be intelligible. Besides its inherent value, theology is the prerequisite for all spiritual activities, including prayer. People say that if you want to know God, then you should pray. No! If you do not know something about God first, then you cannot pray. If you do not have at least a minimal but biblical conception of God,42 then you may just be praying to an entity produced by your own imagination instead of the true God, which is idolatry. Thus if you want to know God, study the Scripture, then pray to this God that it teaches you about. As Christians, we may know something about the divine attributes, but we do not always pray as if these attributes are true of God. Christians who dare not explicitly deny the attributes of God nevertheless often implicitly deny them when they pray. We must correct this, or our prayers will not please God and glorify him as much as they should. For example, God's omniscience has a number of implications for prayer, and we must pray "as if" God is omniscient, because he really is. Imagine a prayer whose content assumes or implies that God is powerless, ignorant, and local. Such a prayer insults God rather than glorifies him.

We will be discussing three divine attributes and their implications for prayer, but you must make the effort to learn more about God. As you learn more about him, you should consider the implications that this new knowledge has on your prayers, and thus make your prayers increasingly consistent with the way God is as revealed in Scripture.

01.04. PRAYER AND SOVEREIGNTY

4. PRAYER AND SOVEREIGNTY

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

Some Christian ministers are fond of affirming the proposition, "God needs you," in one form or another. The immediate context may be an exhortation to greater dedication in prayer, evangelism, helping the needy, giving money to the church, or some other activity that would advance the kingdom of God. Although some of these ministers mean what they say literally, perhaps not all of them do, and certainly not all of them intend all that is implied when we say that God needs us. Nevertheless, the proposition is so unbiblical, and the implications so blasphemous, that we should stop saying that God needs us in all settings and contexts, and in whatever form the proposition may take.

Confronting the philosophers of Athens, Paul states, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:24-25). For a minister to say, "God needs you," or anything to that effect, is therefore a direct contradiction of Scripture. God is self-sufficient and all-sufficient. We need him for everything, but he does not need us for anything.

It is often to motivate their congregations that ministers say God needs them. The assumption is that the commands of God appear to be more meaningful if God actually needs these people to help him. But when we think this way, we are thinking of God as if he is a finite being, and so we are no longer thinking about the Christian God, nor are we thinking as Christians. Of course we should obey the commands of God, but we should not sustain our motivation for doing so with the idea that he needs us to obey them or his plans would somehow fail.

Since God commands us to pray, negligence in prayer is sinful. However, it does not mean that our failure to pray will hinder the plan of God. He does not need our prayers. Neither has he bound himself to a certain way of interacting with his creation, so that he will or can only act when certain conditions are met on the human side. Some have gone as far as to say that God has given dominion to man, so that God will or can only intervene if man grants "permission" for God to do so. This is plainly false. The Bible testifies that God controls all things, including the thinking and behavior of demons and humans. He sends even evil spirits to do his bidding, and he gives to or takes from his creatures whatever he pleases, whenever and however he pleases.

God possesses absolute sovereignty. This means that he determines all things, and he carries out what he has determined by his omnipotence. But he chooses to use means to accomplish his ends, and his means often involve human beings and their prayers. Nevertheless, he has not bound himself to use these means or any means at all in accomplishing his plans. In addition, the means by which he accomplishes his ends do not work autonomously, but they are themselves

determined by his sovereignty, so that nothing in creation escapes his attention and control.

It follows that the proposition, "Prayer changes things," is false. Prayer does not change anything. It is God as a person who exercises his omnipotence to change things, and not the human act of prayer that changes them. Also, prayer does not change God, since he is immutable in all his attributes and decrees, and he has determined in eternity all that he will do.

Some passages appear to say that our prayers can change God's mind until we examine them more carefully. For example, after the people of Israel had sinned by making and worshiping the golden calf, God says to Moses, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation" (Exodus 32:10). But after hearing the intercession of Moses (Exodus 32:11-13), Exodus 32:14 says, "Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened." Therefore, on the surface it appears that God changed his mind in response to the prayer of Moses.

However, the above interpretation contradicts the following two verses on the subject: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19); "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." (1 Samuel 15:29). Since these two verses explicitly state that God does not change his mind, we must conclude that the above interpretation saying that God does change his mind must be false, even without further argument.

Nevertheless, for the sake of confirmation, we may directly deal with the passage from Exodus, and show we can arrive at the same conclusion, that God does not change his mind after all. Now, Jacob says in Genesis 49:10, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." This is understood as predicting the lineage of the Messiah, finding its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Exodus 32:10 has God saying that he would destroy the Israelites and raise up a new nation through Moses. But Moses was a Levi, which means that God had never planned to raise up a new nation through Moses, and only several verses later, it turned out that he did not have to.43 W. Bingham Hunter is thus correct when he says, "My conviction is that references to God's 'repenting,' 'relenting' or 'changing his mind' in Scripture are figures of speech; technically speaking, they are anthropopathisms expressions which explain God in terms usually used to describe human emotions."44

God is sovereign, meaning that he determines and controls everything. Since this is true, it follows that everything about a person's prayer has also been determined by God. If it appears that God is responding to a prayer, it is because God has decided that he would act in history by means of this prayer, and this prayer has also been determined and caused by him to occur in precisely the way that it occurs. Therefore, prayer does not change things, and prayer does not change God. From God's perspective, prayer is an effect caused by God, which may lead to other effects that are also caused by God. Prayer itself is not a cause that causes God to act; rather, the person who prays does so because God is acting on him and causing him to pray.

Many people’s idea of prayer amounts to thinking that, "In prayer a human being seeks to assert self-will over the will of God."45 Stanley Grenz observes, "Some Christians fail to see this conflict as in any way problematic. They readily admit adhering to exactly this understanding of prayer. Certain evangelical and charismatic circles describe prayer as a technique for bending the divine will."46 To the extent that one’s idea of prayer resembles this description, he has altogether misunderstood the nature of God, Christianity, and prayer. We must completely abandon and clear away from our minds the idea that prayer is "for bending the divine will." The divine will cannot be bent, and it cannot be changed; our idea of prayer must correspond to this reality. Prayer is meaningful because "God has decided to include humans in the divine program for the world,"47 and not because he needs our permission or request to act.

Therefore, we must define prayer not as changing the will of God, but we must think about it from another perspective. A more biblical view of prayer is to think of it as one possible means in the process by which God gives us what he wants, or achieves some other purpose of his. This may include his plan to grant us some material goods, or it is part of the process that effects our sanctification.

Such a view of prayer is correct because it is what the Bible teaches, and it is consistent with other biblical doctrines. A view of prayer may appear to be derived from several isolated biblical passages, but if it contradicts the attributes of God or other biblical doctrines, then it must not be a biblical view of prayer, and those biblical passages must have been mishandled.

Failing to observe this, some have derived principles and definitions on prayer that they find meaningful, but by the time they are done, there is no room left for the Christian God in their theology of prayer, so that they have the "prayer" that they like, but no God. Such is the case with a view of prayer affirming that God changes his mind in response to our petitions, which fails to note the figurative intent of some passages, and the explicit scriptural statements that contradict their position.

Forming a proper conception of prayer brings us to note the implications of biblical prayer and its relation to divine sovereignty, namely, we must think, speak, and pray "as if" God is sovereign, because he really is sovereign. Divine sovereignty does not threaten the meaningfulness of prayer as long as we do not insist that meaningfulness depends on some weakness or deficiency in God, so that he needs us to pray in order to intervene or accomplish his plans. Rather, prayer is meaningful because it is a chosen means that plays a role in accomplishing the plans of God. Divine sovereignty also implies that there is never a need to assume that all is lost due to a failure to pray, although such failure is a moral problem that we must correct. We should realize that the fate of the universe does not depend on us. For this reason, referring to "the power of prayer" is misleading, since there is no power in prayer itself, but the power is only in God. If we insist on using this phrase because of habit, at least we should be aware of the truth, that the power is in God alone, and that we say such things as "the power of prayer" only as a manner of speaking.

01.05. PRAYER AND OMNISCIENCE

5. PRAYER AND OMNISCIENCE And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:7-8)

God has exhaustive knowledge of all things. He knows all bout our past, present, and future. He knows all of our thoughts and actions. He is omniscient. Scripture repeatedly reminds us of this attribute of God, and we must take care not to forget it, or act in a way that is inconsistent with it. That is, if God is omniscient, then we should think and act in a way that reflects our acknowledgment of this divine attribute. In our context, divine omniscience has several implications for how we should pray.

Some people think that God will hear them because their prayers are long and repetitious. In some religions, prayer often consists of monotonous chants or prescribed prayers that are recited again and again without thought. On the basis of God's omniscience, Jesus condemns such prayers. He tells us not to be like these pagans because God already knows what we need before we ask him.

Once I was on a telephone conference call with several women who regularly called in to pray and to discuss spiritual things. After several needs were mentioned, one of them hijacked the conference and began to pray...and pray...and pray. Much of it was repetitious, unbiblical, and pious-sounding mystical nonsense. So I lost interest and put down the phone to make myself a cup of coffee. Then, I went to my desk and tidied it up a little. When I picked up the phone, she was still praying, and it sounded just the same.

I am not sure how long she prayed, but I think it must have been twenty minutes. In a setting where the primary function of the conference is discussion, the prayers should be brief, perhaps limited to one minute or so. In this case, her prayer could have been said in ten to thirty seconds. No public prayer should last twenty minutes unless there is some sort of a prior agreement, and even then I hesitate to give my approval to it, since given the way people pray nowadays, it would just be twenty minutes of wasted time. But if we are assured that the entire prayer will consist of meaningful content without needless repetition or other stupid behavior, then perhaps an even longer prayer is justified at times.

If I were to think better of the woman than what her behavior suggested, I would say that she had formed some poor prayer habits. But in this case, it was evident that she wanted to dominate the conference, and to get the attention and approval of other participants. She wanted to show the rest of us her spirituality and passion for the things of God, which her lengthy prayer in fact suggested to be false. She succeeded in annoying me and nothing more. But if she had gained the admiration of the other women that night, according to Jesus, that is all the reward she was going to get. She did not impress God at all.

I was not the leader or moderator of the conference call, but if I had been responsible for it, I would have spoken to her after the first instance of such violation and point out to her from the Bible that

her behavior was wrong. If she had continued, I would have to embarrass her by addressing it on the conference call itself. If she had insisted on continuing such behavior, I would have to forbid her from participating again. This treatment follows the general pattern for church discipline outlined in the Bible.

Maybe you also pray like this woman. If so, stop it! You are not spiritual, and you do not know God. You are praying as the pagans do. You are treating God as the pagans treat their deities, who are not gods at all. All the reward you are going to get is the admiration of unknowledgeable people who would be fooled by your false piety. The more spiritual and mature believers would be disgusted by the shameful display that you call prayer. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Of course, God welcomes his people, and you may pray as long as you wish if you continue to have something meaningful to say. But leave out the nonsense.48

Christians should pray "as if" God is omniscient because God is indeed omniscient. This is the principle that we must keep in mind, that we must reflect our belief in the divine attributes in all that we think and do. God already knows our thoughts, desires, and circumstances; therefore, when we pray, we do not need to repeat ourselves in chant-like fashion or make the prayer as long as possible and keep on going even if we have already finished presenting our petition. There is no need to provide a very detailed description of the circumstances surrounding the situation, or give elaborate arguments on why God should grant a particular request. He already knows the situation thoroughly.

There is a popular teaching that we should always be specific in our prayers. Instead of asking God for wisdom, we should ask him to enlighten us on the subject that we wish to understand. Instead of asking him to provide, we should ask him to give us a certain amount of money. Instead of asking for a spouse in general, we should specify the exact characteristics that we wish him or her to have.

However, this teaching appears to be unbiblical, especially when one insists that all prayers must be specific, and that the level of specificity must be very high. Some of the prayers in the Bible are specific, but many are very general, even when they are directed toward clear and specific needs. In any case, the number of highly specific prayers in the Bible does not justify the teaching that we should make most or all of our petitions highly specific. This is not to say that most or all of our prayers should be general. I merely want to point out that it is unbiblical to insist that most or all prayers should be specific, since the Bible does not provide justification for this teaching. In fact, given the omniscience of God, our starting assumption should be that most prayers do not need to be highly specific or contain many details. Although I do recommend that one be specific when confessing his sins, I can think of at least several biblical passages in which even prayers of such a nature are not very specific.

Some people argue that making our requests specific has the positive effect of focusing our minds when we pray. This may be true, but we are not praying to ourselves. In prayer, we are not trying to achieve mystical breakthroughs or reach an altered state of consciousness. Rather, we are addressing an intelligent person who simultaneously perceives our words, thoughts, and circumstances. If God is omniscient, then we should not act as if he is not omniscient.

It is also said that if we will make our petitions specific, then we will more easily recognize our answers when they come. However, this is true only if God answers our prayers in the way that we prescribe, but there is nothing in Scripture promising that God will give us what we ask in the exact manner and form that we expect. It may be that he decides to answer our prayers in ways that will further our sanctification, whereas when we prayed we were only concerned with our apparent need and not thinking about our spiritual growth at all. That said, at times, God may move a person to pray a very specific petition so that when the answer comes, the person would be more convinced that the prayer has something to do with it. But again, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that this is the rule rather than the exception.49

There is another issue that may pressure a person to make his petitions highly specific. I am not sure how many people have thought of it, but it receives little attention from books on prayer. Moreover, since discussing it will involve a partial but instructive exposition of two relevant passages, the point is indeed worthy of mention. Here are the passages:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11) So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:9-13) The context of these parallel passages is prayer, and in them, Jesus gives his hearers three examples illustrating how earthly parents respond to the petitions of their children. On this basis, he makes a "from lesser to greater" argument50 to establish the superior benevolence of the heavenly Father. The three examples Jesus gives about earthly parents tell us the point that he intends to establish about the heavenly Father. We may represent these examples by the following propositions:

1. If your son asks for bread, you will not give him a stone.

2. If your son asks for a fish, you will not give him a snake.

3. If your son asks for an egg, you will not give him a scorpion. The "stone" probably refers to one of the limestone pebbles of the Palestine seashore that looked like small loaves of bread. The "snake" in the second example may be an eel, which the Jews could not eat because it was considered unclean. As for the scorpion, its claws and tail are folded in when it is at rest, and thus may resemble an egg.51 In effect Jesus is saying to his hearers, "You will not give your son something that makes it look like you have granted his request, but in fact it is the means by which you will make his situation worse." From this premise, Jesus argues that God is not like the pagan gods that we read about in mythology, who would use the request of a petitioner as an opportunity to mock and torment him. These mythological deities may make the petitioner’s situation worse in the process of granting the request, or by granting the request, they would make his situation worse through the consequences produced by the granted petition. For example, if a man were to

ask for a large sum of money with the intention to cure his wife of a fatal disease, these mythological deities may kill his wife in a car accident so that the man may receive the money he wants from her life insurance. But then, the man would no longer need the money. Stanley Grenz gives the following example: The goddess of the dawn, Aurora, fell in love with a human youth, Tithonus. When offered by Zeus any gift she might choose for her lover, she requested that Tithonus live forever. Unfortunately, Aurora failed to specify that Tithonus remain forever young. Her request was granted, but in an unfortunate way. Poor Tithonus grew ever older and could never die. The gift of Zeus became a curse.52 In my example, the man would need to specify that his request must be fulfilled in a way that will not bring any harm to his wife. But then the deities may decide that the man himself or his son should die in the process of granting the petition. The man may specify that no harm should come to anyone in order for the request to be granted or as the result of the request being granted. But then he fails to specify how long it should take before the money comes, so that he may not get it in time. In Grenz's example, Aurora could have specified that Tithonus were to remain forever young besides living forever. But then she may have failed to specify that Tithonus should also be immune to sickness, so that the result may be that he could be immortal and young, but forever ill and in torment. As one who often deals with theology and philosophy, I try to be specific and precise when communicating my views, and I try to anticipate objections or misunderstandings so that I may address them in my presentation. However, even if I were to anticipate all the ways in which my words can be distorted and misunderstood, and even if I were to anticipate all the potential objections to my views, it would be impossible to address all of them in any given presentation. But the fact is that I may indeed fail to anticipate certain objections and distortions, so that I can only address them if they were directed at me after my presentation.

However, the difficulty is nothing compared to the problems that may arise when speaking to God. If God were to behave like the pagan deities, it would be impossible to outwit him by formulating a perfect petition that cannot be distorted or answered in a way that makes things worse. But Jesus assures us that this is not something we need to worry about - God is not like the pagan deities. He is not trying to trick us or mock us. Thus I need not try to cover myself from every possible angle when I bring my request before him. God already knows about my needs, and I can trust him when I speak to him. He will not use my petition as an opportunity to make my situation worse. When I ask for an egg, I do not need to specify that I want a chicken egg of a particular size, of a particular color, from a particular farm, and that I do not want a poisoned or spoiled one.

Therefore, when we pray, we may wish to include some details, and be specific enough to constitute clear communication. But we must also assume the omniscience and benevolence of God, so that we do not need to worry that a prayer that is not highly specific will be unanswered. In fact, the Bible shows that God will often do greater things than we request and expect.

Abraham asked God to spare the cities if there were only five righteous men there, and it was likely that his main concern was saving Lot from destruction. Since there were not even five righteous man in the cities, God was technically justified in destroying them, which he did, but he removed Lot from cities before he destroyed them. Assuming that Abraham's main concern was really Lot's safety, his prayer technically failed, but God knew Abraham's thoughts and granted what he was really after. In the same way, although it is irreverent to be careless with our words when we pray, we do not need to be perfectly precise and extremely specific. This is not an

excuse to be lazy. The biblical prayers are specific enough so that we know a prayer that simply says, "Bless me," is likely to be too general in most contexts. Nevertheless, God always knows what you are going through, so that at times even "Help me!" is sufficient. The point is that it is wrong to pray as if God knows nothing, or as if he is looking for loopholes in our petitions so that he may answer them in ways that will ultimately harm us. If God wants to harm us, he can do so without the opportunity generated by an imperfectly formulated petition.

We should pray in a way that implies our acknowledgment of the divine attributes of God, and here we are emphasizing his omniscience. That God knows everything, even our thoughts, implies that we do not even need to pray aloud, but that he can hear us even when we pray to him in our minds without speaking out our prayers. There are several examples in the Bible where prayers to God were made only in the mind, and they were answered (Genesis 24:45; 1 Samuel 1:13).

Nevertheless, there are advantages to praying aloud. Although I have argued above that our prayers do not need to be extremely specific, they should not be so general that even we have no idea what we are saying to God. Speaking out our prayers forces us to put our thoughts into words, and therefore helps to focus our minds when addressing God. For this reason, you should usually pray using clear and distinct words even when you are praying only in your mind. That is, you may "speak" those words to God in your mind without saying them aloud with your mouth, and he will hear you.

Another reason for praying aloud is so that others may be edified. We are not saying that we should pray aloud so that others may hear us in order to impress them. Jesus condemns such a motive for prayer. What I am pointing out is that our prayers, although addressed to God, may also be a source of comfort and instruction for other people (John 11:41-42). When others hear how expectant and reverent we are when we pray, it may encourage them to pray likewise. And since any prayer presupposes a theology, our prayers will have the effect of informing and encouraging others if they are rich in theological content, as with the prayers of Paul in his letters. Praying aloud is also necessary when we are in public gatherings and when we are praying in agreement with other people.

Whatever we do, the principle remains that we are to avoid being hypocritical and self- serving in our motives and in our prayers. And we are to keep in mind that God is omniscient when we pray.

You may already be wondering, if God is omniscient and already knows what we need, then why do we pray to him at all? That God knows everything does not only mean that we do not need to be highly specific in our prayers, but it seems to imply that we do not need to pray at all. If he already knows all of our thoughts, desires, and needs, and if he knows our circumstances even better than we do, then why does he not just decide whether to grant us whatever we need regardless of whether we pray or not? Thus the omniscience of God appears to destroy the relevance of prayer. The above fails to grasp the purpose of prayer. If the purpose of prayer is to inform God of our needs, desires, and circumstances, then it is indeed unnecessary and irrelevant, since God already knows all these things. But the purpose of prayer is not to give him information that he does not already have.

First, we must pray because God commands us to pray. If we do not get any additional explanation, this is sufficient reason to pray.

Second, prayer is meaningful because it is a means by which God executes his plans. W. Bingham Hunter says, "I passionately disagree with the notion that prayer is a way to get from God what we want."53 Instead, he offers the following definition: "Prayer is a means God uses to give us what he wants."54 Prayer is one step in the process by which God executes his plans for his creation, and even our prayers are sovereignly caused by him. Therefore, prayer accords with both his comprehensive sovereignty and knowledge.

Third, we should pray because prayer is not only about getting things from God, but it is a means by which we grow in our sanctification. The Bible tells us that the will of God is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). The things that God commands us to do and the things that God causes to occur in our lives all contribute to the purpose of our sanctification in Christ. In prayer we struggle against temptations, distractions, lusts, and unbelief. We struggle to find words to express our needs and desires. We study diligently to refine our prayers so that they may be more pleasing to God. But if we see prayer only as the means by which we attain what we need for self-preservation or self-gratification, then we will fail to see all the activities and benefits related to prayer that contribute to our spiritual growth. When we learn to see prayer from the broader perspective, that it is a means to meet our needs as well as one that contributes to our sanctification, we will understand that although God knows and determines all things, there is no conflict between his attributes and our need to remain in the habit of prayer and worship.

01.06. PRAYER AND TRANSCENDENCE

6. PRAYER AND TRANSCENDENCE

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24)

God is a transcendent spirit. He exists in a higher form than his creation. Although this is true, he is not aloof from his people, since by his omnipotence he is able to govern his creation and communicate with his creatures. Nevertheless, his transcendence means that he is not local. In fact, the Bible teaches that he is omnipresent: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Psalms 139:7-8). That God is omnipresent does not mean that he occupies all of physical space, at least not in the sense that we occupy physical space. Since "God is spirit" and not matter, he occupies none of physical space at all. God says in Jeremiah 23:24, "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Now, if he fills his creation in terms of its physical space, then nothing else can exist as physical matter or occupy physical space, since we would not be able to occupy the same physical space as God. Omnipresence means, not that God fills all of physical space, but that he knows and controls all of his creation, including all of physical space, so that the same verse from Jeremiah emphasizes, "Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" In this very real sense, God is everywhere, and there is nowhere that you can go in creation where there is no God, or where his knowledge and power does not extend. This chapter explores some of the tremendous implications that this divine attribute has on prayer.

Leading up to our text on the spiritual nature of God and the nature of true worship is a point brought up by a Samaritan woman: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20). By "this mountain," the woman means Mount Gerizim, and she is referring to the debate between the Jews and the Samaritans about the proper place of worship. Jesus answers that true worship is not to be identified with location, but with whether the person is worshiping "in spirit and in truth." Jesus appeals to the spiritual nature of God as the basis of this reply.

Failing to understand the spiritual and transcendent nature of God, the enemies of Israel says in 1 Kings 20:23, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they." They thought God was local. Those who understood the true nature of God knew better, so that even as Solomon dedicates the Jewish temple, he exclaims, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). He knew that a transcendent God does not "live" in a physical temple. Although the form of worship that the people of God assumed during this period of redemptive history included the use of a physical temple, those who had understanding knew that God was not local. The coming of Christ signified that what the Old Covenant anticipated was about to be fulfilled. Kenneth Wuest’s comments on

Romans 12:1 are very applicable at this point: "This is in contrast to the worship of the priests which consisted of outward forms, symbolic in themselves of spiritual truth, and yet not rational in the sense that this worship was not devoid of a material connection....Israel preached the gospel through the use of object lessons, the tabernacle, priesthood, and offerings. The Church preaches the same gospel in abstract terms."55

Old Covenant worship was indeed founded upon intellectual truth, but much was associated with and implied by outward expressions and rituals. Christ's fulfillment of the Old Covenant and inauguration of the New Covenant signaled the dawn of a new era in which the people of God are free to worship him as spirit to spirit, mind to mind, intellect to intellect. True and acceptable worship is now independent of our location, and much less associated with physical expressions and rituals;56 rather, the emphasis rightly returns to sincerity and truth, to motive and doctrine.

Daniel was a pious man. Most Christians today cannot claim to approach his spiritual devotion, extraordinary character, and intellectual prowess. How many of us can claim to be "ten times" greater than the intellectual elite of our day "in every matter of wisdom and understanding" (Daniel 1:20)? More than a few theologians of our day insist that the Hebrews favor "practical" wisdom over theoretical or academic wisdom. This is not true. At least with Daniel and his friends, there is no doubt that the emphasis is placed on their "book smarts,"57 since Daniel 1:17 says, "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning."58 Of course, this does not contradict or undermine any supernatural endowment God chose to give them: "And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Daniel 1:17). For our purpose, the point is that Daniel was an all-around superior specimen of a believer.

Nevertheless, when Daniel prayed, he went to a room where "the windows opened toward Jerusalem" (Daniel 6:10). Now, those who had understanding knew that this was unnecessary, and Daniel probably did not always prayed this way. Daniel was not wrong in doing this under the Old Covenant, but under the New Covenant, it would be meaningless to do what he did. In fact, the only meaning conveyed by praying toward Jerusalem today would be a denial of the work of Christ. God is not bound to any point in space, or even especially associated with any point in space. Jerusalem is not an especially holy place today, and there is no such thing as a "holy land" from the Christian perspective.

Pilgrimage to a certain geographical area is unnecessary, and betrays not only a lack of understanding, but also a shirking of real spiritual duty, which pertains more to things like doctrine, prayer, and good works. So what if you travel to the empty tomb where Jesus occupied? Why would you feel "closer" to him? Jesus is no longer there; he left that place two thousand years ago. Now, perhaps visiting some of the biblical sites may excite you about the biblical narratives you have already read, and because of this you feel closer to God. But feeling is deceptive, and any real intimacy comes from thinking about the words that you have already read from Scripture, and you can do that at home. The Bible says that only those who believe the truth and obey his commands are close to God.

Any real benefit that you may receive from visiting these sites occurs only because they remind you of what you have already read from the Bible, which brings us back to the point that true spirituality depends on the intellect and its relationship with revealed truth; it has nothing to do with your location. But since these benefits occur only in the mind, you can receive them by reading

your Bible wherever you are, only that the benefits will be greater, since you are spending more time reading and thinking, rather than sight-seeing, and trying to convince yourself that you are getting closer to God by doing so. My point is that you must not treat God as if he is local; God is spirit, and you must treat him as such by worshiping him in spirit and in truth, and not by going to Jerusalem. You are also spirit, created in his image, and therefore you can associate with him by interacting with the words of the Bible, which is his revelation to you.

One of my classmates in high school was a Muslim. He had a prayer carpet with a compass sewn into it so that he could face the direction of Mecca when he prayed. Muslims are very concerned with Mecca; their faith is entwined with this place. Thus Robert Morey wisely suggests that the United States should threaten to destroy Mecca in order to deter the Muslim terrorists.59

I saw a five-ton statue of Buddha in Thailand that was made out of fine gold. The monks covered it up with mud during wartime to protect it. The statue could not protect itself; it could not talk, hear, or do anything. When the Christian God commanded the use of physical objects in worship, he still made it clear that he himself transcended those objects, and had no direct relationship with them. So when Uzzah reached out to steady the ark of the covenant during transportation, God struck him dead (1 Chronicles 13:9-10). He will not be treated like a Buddhist statue. The Catholics take care to secure the "bread and wine" of communion, lest they spill the body and blood of Christ! Even some who call themselves Christians act as if the Bible itself that is, the physical object consisting of paper and ink - is especially holy, and some act as if the crucifix has special powers. But the power of God is not tied to these physical objects, and the power of the Bible is in its words, not the physical book itself. We appropriate the power of the "Bible," not by physically wielding it, but by reading it and believing its doctrines. The Christian must repudiate the sort of practices and superstitions found in Islam, Buddhism, and Catholicism. We worship God "in spirit and in truth," and not by facing a certain direction or by kissing a book.

You approach God by knowledge and by faith, not by physical technique or posture. Prayer is not better when you do it in a church, or when you are in Jerusalem, but you must pray "in spirit and in truth." If you are in ignorance or in unbelief when it comes to biblical doctrines, or if you praise God with your lips while your heart is far from him, then you will not be heard, and you are not close to God even if you are face to face with Christ.

It follows from God’s transcendence that we can pray anywhere and at anytime. You can even pray with your mind and God will hear you, for even before Psalms 139:1-24 mentions his omnipresence, it says, "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD" (Psalms 139:1-4). The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre could not stand the idea of Someone constantly "staring" at him, and who is aware of all that he thinks and does, and thus he needed to be an atheist. Now, although the divine attributes may produce in Christians a holy fear, they also bring invincible peace and comfort, and we would have it no other way.

PRAYER AND THE MORAL LIFE

W. Bingham Hunter writes, "From a biblical point of view, prayer is related to everything that we are and everything that God is. God does not respond to our prayers. God responds to us: to our

whole life....Our all-knowing God responds to our entire lives, of which our prayers are merely a small part. This means that how you and I live when we are not praying and worshiping is as significant perhaps more so than when we do."60 This being the case, in thinking about prayer, it would be a mistake to place the emphasis on the very act of prayer, or any technique associated with it. A discussion on the believer's moral life will prove to be pertinent and helpful to his prayer life even if we do not directly relate the two. Nevertheless, since this is a book about prayer, we will examine several points about the moral life, and relate it to the prayer life.

01.07. PRAYER AND MOTIVATION

7. PRAYER AND MOTIVATION And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6) The effect of sin in man is so strong that he can often make the most sacred activities into expressions of his wickedness. He can do something that appears to be very spiritual from a very unspiritual motive. For example, a person who prayer long and often may appear to us as very spiritual and devoted, but this is not necessarily true, since he may be praying precisely to make us think this about him. Sin has made the heart of man so vile that he may even give his life to make himself look good to others, and thus Paul writes that he is possible for a person to suffer martyrdom without any love in his heart. Surely some people willingly endure persecution just for the glory of it.

Many people display strong emotions when they pray or sing at church. Although some of them are probably sincere, many of them are not. Their emotions do not result from an intense gratitude toward the grace of God, but from their self-pity or the desire to cause others to think that they are spiritual. For similarly illegitimate reasons, other people dance and scream at church, perhaps to demonstrate to any observers their spiritual freedom and love for God. They are trying to show that they love God so much that they do not care what other people think about them; however, they do what they do precisely because they care very much about what other people think.

Preaching the true gospel includes a declaration of the sovereignty of God and the cost of discipleship. For the most part, the church today preaches a false gospel that hides or even denies these two crucial elements. Because of this, many false converts have been introduced to the church community so that I would go as far as to say that most people who call themselves Christians today are not true Christians. Since people who are not true Christians cannot worship God in spirit and in truth, there is very little true worship in our public gatherings today. It is easy to throw a rock concert and call it a worship service, and it is easy to think that if we feel good about something, then it must be acceptable to God. Some churches think that true worship includes rolling on the floor and foaming at the mouth. But only the Bible can show us what is true worship.

If God has truly regenerated you, then your faith is real and at the root of your personality is the desire to offer true worship. But since your sanctification is incomplete, you still continue to commit sins, and therefore you must consider the possibility that you do not always worship God with complete purity and sincerity. That is, although at the root of your personality you indeed love God, and you indeed offer him true worship to some extent, you do not always love or worship him in complete purity and sincerity. Rather, you continue to love and worship him imperfectly, and with ulterior motives.

Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is for us to love God with our all, and there are people who really think that this is what they are doing. However, they fail to realize what this

commandment really means. You may feel very loving toward God, but that is not at all an indication of how much you love him. Jesus says that if you love him, you would obey his commandments. Thus if you love him perfectly, would you not obey his commandments perfectly? If you indeed love God with all of your heart, then you would be perfect, and you would never sin. But the apostle John tells us that if we say that we have no sin, then the truth is not in us. If we admit that we continue to sin, then we have also admitted that we do not love God perfectly.

Also, it is impossible for most people to love God very much at all, not to say perfectly, because of their ignorance of theology. If you know next to nothing about God, then you cannot love him, since your love is either directed toward nothing, or to a false conception of God. Whether you have no conception of God or a false conception of God, the object of your love is not God, and whatever you think you love so intensely is not God, but a product of your imagination and false theology. In fact, unless you are among the elect, the more you find out about God, the more you may hate him. Only the elect can love a God who has absolute sovereignty and exhaustive knowledge, who does whatever he pleases, justifies the elect, and condemns the reprobates.

There is a common misunderstanding that if God gives you a command, then you are surely able to obey it. However, a command of God serves only to define sin, that it would be sinful for you to disobey it, but it says nothing about whether you will be able to obey it. Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is for us to love God with our all, but no one is able to obey it. No one loves God perfectly, and anyone who claims to be doing it has only succeeded in showing us his very low definition of what perfection means.

Now, that we are unable to obey God perfectly when God demands perfection means that, if we were to be acceptable to God, we will need a foreign righteousness imputed to us - we will need God’s own perfect righteousness credited to our account. This is what Christ has done for his own people. If God has chosen you to be saved, it means that Christ came to die for you, and that he has paid your debt incurred by sin, and that when you believed in Christ, his righteousness was imputed to you. God then pronounced you as legally justified in his sight, although in yourself you are still a sinner. It is on this imputed righteousness that you depend both at your justification, and your continual acceptance before God in your Christian life. That said, this does not mean that you may give up on fighting against sin. The believer is not in the same position as the unbeliever, in that God has given the believer the Holy Spirit, who assists the believer in sanctification. The Holy Spirit causes the Christian to remember and obey the commands of God. Therefore, once you realize that your motives in prayer and worship are not always pure, you may proceed to actively fight against the sin that lingers. You must struggle to remove the remnants of sinfulness and wickedness in your heart. You must stifle and frustrate the desire for praise and approval from people.

I am trying to show you that your motives in public worship may not be entirely pure, and this applies not only to worship, but also to any context in which you have the opportunity to demonstrate your spirituality in public. Although you have a genuine love toward God if you are truly regenerated, it remains that your love toward him has not yet been perfected.

How should you proceed?

You should practice private prayer and worship. If you are excited about praying when other people are around, but if your enthusiasm becomes almost nonexistent when nobody is watching or praising you, then this is evidence that you have the type of spiritual problem we are talking about above. Your love for God alone should be able to sustain your habit of prayer and study. Jesus says that if you perform spiritual activities in order to gain the approval of other people, then that is all the reward you are going to get. But if you are willing to sincerely offer prayer and worship to God in private, then he will hear you and reward you.

Even when you are in church gatherings and other public settings, there are a number of things that you can do to stifle and frustrate your sinful desire to gain the attention and approval of other people. In general, you should keep a low profile when possible, and avoid drawing attention to yourself by your outward appearance and behavior. This includes dressing, praying, singing, and doing other things in ways that would not make you stand out. If you have been having problems in this area, this might be painful at first. But it is a wicked thing to use a church gathering as a contest to see who appears to be the most spiritual and in love with the Lord. You may even ask a friend to point out ways through which you attract unnecessary attention to yourself. Of course, at times you may have to do things that may attract some attention to yourself, but are necessary to edify the church. For example, the preacher has to stand up and speak, and the ushers have to walk around the meeting place. These functional activities are approved by Scripture, acknowledged by the church, and performed by appointed individuals, so do not use this as an excuse and think that whatever you do to attract attention to yourself is necessary for the edification to others.

Some people claim that we should allow the Holy Spirit the "freedom" to control how we behave at church. If the Spirit moves them to sing and dance and to roll on the floor, who are they to resist? But the apostle Paul insists that we retain control over our faculties in church: "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). Those who disagree oppose apostolic authority (v. 37) and are subject to church discipline.

Stifling and frustrating the desire for human approval instead of divine approval is not only the responsibility of the individual, but it is also the responsibility of the church community. Too often we do things that encourage sinful motives and hypocritical behavior. For example, we may tend to admire and praise superficial displays of excitement rather than true character and devotion. One reason for this is because genuine virtue is more difficult to detect, since we cannot see into the hearts of men. But we can certainly withhold compliments toward people’s outward behavior when we are uncertain that their thoughts and motives correspond. Expressing our appreciation for a truly spiritual person is one thing, flattery is another.

Ignorant and irresponsible ministers make the mistake of encouraging outward "freedom" and unrestrained expression in prayer and worship without reprimanding the false motives of the people in their congregations. Ministers must preach against superficial spirituality and expose the pretenders. They must urge believers to seek only God’s approval and to pursue private prayer and worship. In cases of severe abuse and blatant disobedience, the leaders must exercise church discipline to discourage future disorderly behavior.

We must not underestimate human sinfulness, whether in ourselves or in others. Even in private prayer and worship there is room for hypocrisy and false motives. Self-approval and

self-congratulation is a common sin. Thus we must learn the habit of self-examination and self-confrontation. We must confront sin in our own hearts with constant vigilance and ruthlessness. Jesus talks about a Pharisee who congratulated himself for not being a tax collector, while the tax collector repents to God for his sinfulness. The one who repents is the one who leaves the place of prayer justified (Luke 18:9-14).

01.08. PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE

8. PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable. (Proverbs 28:9) The prevailing theological tendency of our day is against the continual relevance and application of God’s law. There is an aversion to measuring and guiding the thoughts and actions of people by the clear and unbending precepts of the Bible. This school of thought is called "antinomianism."61 This theological error, and indeed major heresy, may be founded on mistaken ideas about legalism, justification by faith, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

It is easy for antinomianism to gain a following because humanity is born antinomian; people are born rebellious and hostile to the law of God. As Paul writes, "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:6-7). The sinful mind rebels against God’s law, but the spiritual mind submits to it. Since only the regenerate are "controlled by the Spirit," only believers can submit to the law of God. This means that to the extent we can know one’s relationship with God’s law, we can also draw some conclusions about his spiritual condition. The law of God divides humanity into two groups the righteous and the wicked. Since the fall of Adam, all of humanity is wicked by birth. By their inherited guilt, they are in legal violation against the law of God, and by their subsequent sins, they are in personal violation against the law of God. But having determined that all of humanity would become wicked through Adam, God by his grace chose some out of humanity to become righteous through Christ. Human history subsequently exhibits the continual conflict between the seed of God and the seed of Satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This conflict reached a high point in the work of Christ, who decisively crushed the kingdom of Satan. Thus it is naïve and unbiblical to think that religion is about the unity of mankind, since biblical revelation shows that it is about the dichotomy of these two groups, and unity is desirable only among believers.62 This point is crucial to a biblical philosophy of history, and runs counter to the interpretation of human events preferred by many people. Thus God makes a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked, the light and the darkness, the Christians and the non-Christians: Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

Accordingly, God distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked when it comes to prayer. Proverbs 15:8 says, "The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him." People pray in earnestness when a special need arises or when a tragedy happens; yet, some of these same people would deny being religious at all, let alone being Christians. Thus

of course they have no interest in consciously learning and obeying the commands of God in their daily lives. In light of what we have established above, the prayers of these individuals are unacceptable to God, and more than that, they are detestable to him.

Jesus says in John 15:7, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." This seems to be a big "if." Who are those who remain in Christ and have his words remain in them? Only Christians - not all those who call themselves Christians, but real Christians, that is, those who have been changed by the power of God, who have received the Holy Spirit, enabling them to obey the commands of God. This narrows down those who fit the description of this verse to very few people. Perhaps we should do what I suggest so often, that we should emphasize theology more than activities like prayer, since without the first, the second is meaningless. Many times, preachers who emphasize prayer first is just giving unbelievers the false assurance that their prayers are acceptable to God, when they are not even saved.

So, what does it mean to "remain" or "abide" in Christ?63

I have heard several fanciful theories about this, including ones that take a rather romantic view toward Christianity. False interpretations and inferences from our relationship to Christ as "branches" are to the "vine" (John 15:1-6) encourage the tendency to see our life and abidance in Christ in mystical terms. They tend to portray the unity implied as an ontological oneness, and fail to notice the emphasis on the intellect and obedience by the mention of "words" (John 15:3, John 15:7, John 15:10-11). Accordingly, these false interpretations result in promoting prayer, singing, and other activities as means to abide in Christ. But John 15:7 states that answered prayer is the result of abiding in Christ. The writings of John explicitly define what it means to abide in Christ. John 15:10 says, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love." In his first general letter, John writes, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him....Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them" (1 John 3:21-22; 1 John 3:24).

We abide in Christ by obeying his commands. John himself insists that we may occasionally stumble, and says, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 1:10; 1 John 2:1). So he is not speaking of perfection, but a lifestyle that clearly exhibits obedience toward God’s commands. Many people think that they are abiding in Christ just because they continue to say that they believe in Christ. But Christ’s response is, "Why do you call me, ’Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46); therefore, "Not everyone who says to me, ’Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

You may have heard that, "Christianity is not about following a set of rules." This is true in a sense, but only in a sense, and those who say this often have an unbiblical antinomian outlook. Doubtless Christianity does not consist of a set of rules that says, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" (Colossians 2:21), as far as these are "human commands and teachings" (Colossians 2:22). But how about these: "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil....Do not take revenge, my

friends...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:16-21)? Surely the Christian life makes the demand, "Love your neighbor as yourself," but that is only a summary for, "'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be" (Romans 13:9), because "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). That is, to walk in love is to do whatever the law commands.

"Christianity is not about following a set of rules" is therefore a very misleading statement. We are not justified by obeying the commands of God, since we cannot obey them before we become Christians. But when God saves us, he gives us the Holy Spirit to cause us to obey his laws: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Therefore, if by saying, "Christianity is not about following a set of rules," we mean that we are not justified by obeying the laws of God, then this is true. But if we mean that there are no divine laws to follow in the Christian life, then this is false. In fact, believers are regenerated and justified so that they may obey the laws and commands of God, so much so that if a person does not exhibit a definite lifestyle of obedience toward biblical commands, he is not a Christian no matter what he says. He can say with great conviction, "Jesus Christ died for my sins and I trust him as my Savior. Jesus is Lord!" This person is not telling the truth; he is not a Christian. Again, a person is not saved by obedience, but he has not been saved unless he exhibits obedience. Salvation comes only by grace apart from works, but if a person fails to exhibit good works, it means that God has never changed his heart by grace.

You may say, "I thought this is a book about prayer! Aren't you really talking about something else, and just loosely associating it with prayer?" As mentioned in the introduction of this section of the book, it is a mistake to focus on the very act of prayer when discussing the subject. If you understand what I have been trying to convey so far in this chapter, then you should also understand why this is so. You see, according to Jesus, for your prayers to be acceptable, you must first be a Christian a real Christian who exhibits a lifestyle of obedience and then, you may "ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (John 15:7).

Acceptable prayer depends on who you are, and not just saying the right things when you pray. Therefore, it is best to look at prayer from a broader perspective, relating it to our lifestyle and sanctification. Perhaps now you can better appreciate the words of W. Bingham Hunter, quoted earlier: "From a biblical point of view, prayer is related to everything that we are and everything that God is. God does not respond to our prayers. God responds to us: to our whole life....Our all-knowing God responds to our entire lives, of which our prayers are merely a small part. This means that how you and I live when we are not praying and worshiping is as significant perhaps more so than when we do."64

We cannot earn answers to our prayers by our good conduct, since even if we fully obey God, we would not have earned anything: "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10). God does not owe us anything even when we have perfectly obeyed him, since we owe him perfect obedience in the first place. So I am not saying that we must earn answers to our prayers, but I am saying that we must be Christians when we pray, and if you are really a Christian, then you will

think and behave like one. Then, you will know that God hears you, having the biblical assurance that "the Father himself loves you" (John 16:27), because he has given you true love for Christ and sincere faith in him.

01.09. PRAYER AND PERSISTENCE

9. PRAYER AND PERSISTENCE Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (Luke 18:1)

Once you have prayed to God for or about something, should you pray for it again? The prevailing opinion in some circles is that to repeatedly pray for something is indicative of a lack of faith. Proponents of this position say that if you truly believe that God has heard you or even granted your request when you prayed the first time, then you would not be praying for it again, at least not in the same way. Perhaps you may mention the topic again, but instead of speaking as you did the first time, you should at least change your speech from a form of petition to that of thanksgiving. Instead of asking God for the same thing again, you should thank him that he has already granted your request. At least on the surface, we may commend these people for their intention. They wish to pray in a way that demonstrate faith in God, and to take care not to insult him by speaking or behaving in a way that suggests doubt. However, although this approach to prayer appears to exhibit faith, is it a result of careful thinking and accurate exegesis, or is it the conclusion of false analogies and faulty interpretation? And if the process of formulation of this doctrine is very inferior, it casts doubt on the purity of their motives as well. I will not direct our attention to the issue of motive in this chapter, but I will show that the Bible does not teach that praying in faith prevents one from asking for the same things more than once, and in fact, the Bible teaches that if we were to pray in faith, we must persist in prayer by repeatedly asking for the same things. An analogy is sometimes used to illustrate why we should not pray for something more than once. Imagine a child asking his father for something again and again, when the father has already promised to give it to him after the first request. We would judge the child to be untrusting, and his behavior annoying. By repeatedly asking for the same thing when it has already been promised to him, the child insults his father’s integrity. Variations of this analogy may replace the father and son relationship with one that is between two friends, but the point remains the same; that is, it is an insult to repeat a petition when the item asked for has already been promised. The analogy appears to be reasonable as far as human relationships go, but it falls apart when we apply it to God. The analogy does not even fully support the position of those who use it. For example, those who say that we should not pray for something more than once nevertheless say that we may repeatedly thank God for granting us our request after the initial petition. But if the child in the analogy thanks his father over and over again after the initial petition, but before the item materializes, it would have the same irritating and insulting effect as if he repeatedly asks for the same thing. It would appear as if the child distrusts the father’s integrity or memory, and thus repeatedly reminds him of his promise. To be consistent, those who say that we should pray for something only once should also say that we should not thank God for granting what we have asked until the item materializes. The analogy fails because God is not a human father, and although there are similarities between the fatherhood of God and the fatherhood of man, the two are not similar at every point, and we must look to Scripture to determine at which points the two are similar, and at which points they are different. Analogies can be very misleading. Only if an

analogy comes from Scripture is it authoritative, and illustrates a true similarity between the two. Even then, we must take care to use the analogy to illustrate only the point that it intends to get across, and not some other point that we wish to justify.

We must be careful when constructing analogies to illustrate our relationship with God, lest we forget that God is not human but divine, and therefore he is not like us in many ways. Some mistakenly think that since we call God our "Father," we may treat him almost exactly like how we would treat an ideal human father. But this is a false and dangerous inference. No matter how good an earthly father is, we do not worship him; a person who sings songs of praise to his earthly father to extol his greatness is probably insane. God is not a human being, so we should not treat him like one. Therefore, the analogy about the child making requests to his father fails to establish that we should not repeat our petitions to God.

However, the position that we are considering is not solely based on analogies. Its proponents do try to find biblical support, and here we will examine two representative passages:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24) This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us whatever we ask we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15) The argument is that these verses tell us that after we have prayed for something, we are to believe that we have already received what we prayed for, and then we are to talk and act in a way that is consistent with this belief. To talk and act like we have already received implies that we should not pray for what we have asked again. Therefore, we should not repeat our petitions to God; otherwise, it would indicate that we do not really believe that we have already received, which is a lack of faith. For the sake of argument, let us assume that the interpretation of these verses is correct, that is, they teach us that once we have prayed for something, we are supposed to believe that we have already received it. However, the verses do not explicitly tell us how we are supposed to act once we believe that we have received. It may be true that once I believe that my request toward another human being is granted, I should not mention the request to him again, but we have shown that analogies based on human relationships do not necessarily apply to our relationship with God, since God is not a human being. God is to be treated the way he demands to be treated. Therefore, even if their interpretation of some of these biblical passages is correct, those who say that we must not repeat our petitions to God make a jump in logic at this point, saying that if we are to believe that we have already received, then we should not repeat our petitions.

James writes, "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (James 5:17-18). He says this in the context of talking about the "prayer of faith" (James 5:15, KJV) and "the prayer of a righteous man" (James 5:16). Elijah was on a mission from God. "He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain." This came as judgment against the idolatrous nation. After a time, he challenged the false prophets to a supernatural duel, and won a decisive victory. The nation showed signs of turning back to God, and it was time for him to pray that it may rain again.

Since Elijah was doing all these things at God’s command (1 Kings 18:36), he was praying according to God’s will. Now, 1 John 5:14-15 says that when we pray according to God’s will, we

can "know that we have what we asked of him." Therefore, at least according to those who say that we should not repeat our prayers, Elijah should have believed that God had granted his request upon his first prayer for rain. Indeed, we see something that indicates this in 1 Kings 18:41, where Elijah tells King Ahab, "There is the sound of a heavy rain," even before he made his first prayer. But then, why does Elijah even pray the first prayer, if he already "hears" the sound of rain? According to the assumptions of those who say that we should not repeat our prayers, Elijah should not have prayed the first prayer, since he already believed the promise of God to be as good as done even before he prayed. And certainly after the first prayer, he should not have prayed again. However, it turns out that Elijah not only prayed, but he prayed several times for the same thing:

Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:42-45) This suggests that believing the promises of God so strongly that we perceive it to be as good as done can accommodate not only the first prayer, but repeated prayers as well. That is, even when one believes that his request is already granted (1 Kings 18:41), even when he believes that he has already received, he may still pray - not once, twice, or five times, but until the answer materializes. But according to those who say that we should not repeat our prayers, if we really believe that we have received, then we should not repeat our requests. In the light of this example from Elijah, this position is clearly unbiblical, but it is an unwarranted inference about our relationship with God from how human relationships usually work.

Whatever Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, he says, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me" (2 Corinthians 12:8), and it appears that he could have continued to repeat his petition if the answer had not come. But since God gave him a reply (2 Corinthians 12:9), he could stop praying. Then, in Luke 11:5-8, Jesus gives the following illustration:

Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him"; and from inside he shall answer and say, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (NASB)65

Again, we must be careful to apply only the point intended by this illustration to our relationship with God, and not every possible aspect of the human relationship described. It would be absurd, for example, to take from this illustration that God is like a friend who sleeps, whom we must awaken to hear our petitions. This is not the point of the illustration. God is not a human being, and he never sleeps (Psalms 121:4). Rather, the purpose of the illustration is to encourage persistence if a human friend will give you what you ask because of your persistence, how much more will God answer you if you have persistence! The crucial question is what it means to have faith when we pray. Indeed, James writes, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he

who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6-7). So it is agreed that we must have faith, but those who say that we should not repeat our prayers jump without warrant from this premise, that we must have faith, to the conclusion that we must not repeat our prayers after the first petition.

We should let the Bible define faith, instead of letting extra-biblical analogies from human relationships or unwarranted inferences from biblical passages to define it. In Luke 18:1-43, Jesus gives a parable that will help us define faith in its relation to our current discussion on persistence:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" (Luke 18:1-5)

It seems that the widow in this parable repeats her petition many times - the judge says that she "keeps bothering" him. Again, we must be careful what conclusion we draw from this, so that we will not falsely infer something from this parable about a human relationship and apply it to our relationship with God. Luke 18:1 gives us the purpose of the passage, that Jesus tells this parable to his disciples "to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

Therefore, the fact that the judge in this parable is reluctant to help the widow does not mean that God is likewise reluctant to grant our petitions. Jesus intends the judge to be a contrast against what God is like: "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (Luke 18:6-8). That is, if even a reluctant judge will grant a persistent widow her request, how much more will a willing Father grant a persistent believer his petition! The behavior of the widow is to illustrate the main point, that we should "always pray and not give up," that we should "cry out to him day and night." That the judge thinks that the widow "keeps bothering" him means that the type of behavior portrayed here includes constant repetition of the same request, over and over again. Thus Luke 18:1 ("pray and not give up"), Luke 18:5 ("keeps bothering"), and Luke 18:7 ("day and night") all indicate that we should repeat our prayers to God.

Jesus finishes the parable by saying, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). What kind of faith is he looking for in people? Precisely the kind of "faith" that the widow demonstrates in the parable! It is the faith that prays and does not give up; it is the faith that cries out to God day and night; it is the faith that persists in prayer to God. Contrary to those who say that faith excludes repeating our petitions to God, Jesus indicates that to have faith means that we repeat our petitions to God over and over again. This is how the Bible defines faith, and we are not to argue, or to subvert this biblical teaching using false analogies from human relationships or unwarranted inferences from biblical passages. To present our requests to God over and over again means that we continue to believe that he hears us and that it is meaningful to pray, no matter what our circumstances may look like. It is not unbelief to repeat our petitions, but it is unbelief to give up and stop praying.

God arranges our lives so that we must persist in prayer in order to further our spiritual growth and sanctification. This may involve a number of things, such as increasing in knowledge, understanding, and patience. One of the most valuable things that we must do is to affirm a more biblical set of priorities. The following passages show that patience, endurance, character, and such qualities are things that we must value and not despise: But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. (Job 23:10) Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:3-4)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything....Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 1:2-4; James 5:10-11)

We tend to cringe from hardships, since they rob us of our bodily comfort. However, the true believer must place his spiritual development above his natural convenience. Peter writes, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6-7). I may desire natural comfort, but my desire for knowing that my faith is genuine is much greater, since my faith is "of greater worth than gold." Genuine faith cannot be destroyed by testing, but is rather purified and refined.

What is disappointing is that many believers miss the purpose of the above passages by using them as nothing more than excuses for their failures, and for not struggling against their problems. But we are not trying to find excuses - a true Christian really must consider the development of his character and maturity more important than the natural things that he desires.

Another misunderstanding about hardship and endurance is that the very experience of suffering, in and of itself, will further our sanctification. This is not true. Just as sensation and experience themselves cannot provide any intelligible information to the mind, but can only provide the occasions upon which God directly acts on the intellect and conveys to it intelligible information,66 neither can suffering in itself teach us anything or help our spiritual growth.

Rather, our experiences of suffering can at most provide the occasions upon which we recall, organize, assimilate, accept, and learn to obey the information already revealed to us from Scripture. Since no experience comes with its own interpretation, a proper reaction to experience - that is, one that results in spiritual growth can only come because we have an understanding of biblical revelation and the ability to relate it to our experience. Knowledge of the relevant biblical propositions can come either before or after the experience, but until one has such knowledge, the experience remains unintelligible, so that nothing can be learned from it.

Failing to understand this very important point, many people consider experience or suffering as inherently valuable as the means to teach us spiritual things, and verses such as Hebrews 5:8 may appear to support this: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."

But they forget that Jesus had thorough knowledge of Scripture, so that he knew about the progress of God's redemptive plan, his place in this plan, and thus how to interpret his suffering. Experience itself does not bring its own interpretation, and another person could have just as easily developed spiritual rebellion instead of obedience as a result of suffering. In fact, many people do. Even Hebrews 5:8 itself comes to us as a biblical verse and not an experience. The idea that one can learn, in some sense, from his suffering or experience itself has no infallible foundation apart from propositional revelation. At most, experience stimulates us to think with and about the information that we have already learned through verbal communication, such as from the Bible. Perhaps we will even come to better resolutions about some topics than we have before, but not by any information conveyed by the experience itself, since none is conveyed, but by thinking with and about the biblical propositions that we already know or will learn. With that in mind, Douglas Kelly's use of Jacob's experience as an explanation on the necessity of persistence in prayer is helpful: The name Jacob, prophetically given at birth, means the Supplanter, and refers to the fact that he would cheat his older brother out of his birthright. But this same man won the name Israel, Prince with God, after wrestling successfully with the Lord. He was a completely changed man after that night.... But it was still a battle and it cost him something. It took him the whole night he lost a night's sleep. But more than that, in the struggle, the stranger touched his thigh (which was the way of making a personal binding covenant in the ancient world) so that Jacob was partially lame for the rest of his life.

It was indeed costly for Jacob, but he won the eternal gain. His name was changed that night from Jacob, a constant reminder of his somewhat dishonest character, to Israel, Prince with God....Though we experience real pain, we can take courage as we become aware that it is in His love and mercy that He is determined to turn us from a Jacob into an Israel....Not only in Jacob's experience, but also in ours, it takes hard wrestling with ourselves and with the Lord to be turned from self-centered manipulators into princes with God.67

If you have the wrong priorities - if you do not think that faith tested and refined is "of greater worth than gold" - then you will not understand what God is doing. You may think that he is reluctant, and that he is not answering your prayers. But if you are a Christian, your true desire is for your faith to be tested and refined, so that it may be approved and vindicated. A better understanding of what Scripture says on the subject and the continual work of sanctification that God is effecting in us will bring this true desire to the surface, allowing it to direct and control our behavior and response to circumstances.

Experience itself will not teach you any of this - two people going through the same situation often have opposite interpretations of what is happening, and only the Bible can tell us the truth. In fact, God can use the same incident to punish the wicked and edify the righteous, so that there is no inherent meaning in any experience. This very chapter about persistence you are reading is a theological exposition, and not a non-verbal experience. To say it again, only theology - a systematic understanding of biblical revelation can make sense of prayer and experience, or any aspect of the Christian life. For our suffering and our experience to have any meaning at all, we must be Christians who study and obey the Scripture.

PRAYER AND THE INNER LIFE The inner life, or the life of the mind, is foundational to the whole of human existence. Even the moral life must be recognized as first a part of the inner life before

we can consider the actions that flow out of it. Jesus says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). One first sins in his mind - in his immoral plans, intentions, desires, habits, and reasonings - before he exhibits his sinful determinations and dispositions through the body.

Just as sinfulness begins in one's thoughts, righteousness also has its foundation in the mind. Paul says that the believer's "new self" is "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24), but the parallel verse in Colossians 3:10 says that it is "in knowledge" that this "new self" is being "renewed...in the image of its Creator." Accordingly, Romans 12:2 says that it is by the "renewing of your mind" that you will be "transformed," and gain the ability to discern the will of God, which is good, pleasing, and perfect.68 This means that if you want to improve your moral life, you must first work on your mind by restructuring it according to biblical precepts. This is the plain teaching of Scripture, but once I put it in such intellectualistic terms, many people may find it strange and unacceptable. However, this is not because there is anything false in what I say, but it is because what I am saying - that is, what the Scripture teaches - is contrary to the anti-intellectualistic tendency of our culture, and our church culture as well. Indeed, it is not I who chooses to put the teaching of Scripture in such terms, but it is the Scripture itself that does this, and I am merely yielding to it in my exposition.

Once you are able to abandon the anti-intellectual attitude imposed upon you by the culture and accept the way things are as Scripture describes it, then you will find that the Scripture provides clear guidance for directing your spiritual life; it gives you explicit instructions on what to do. Indeed, many believers place great emphasis on the "spiritual life," but the way they use the term either conveys no definite meaning, or even when it does, it appears that they mean a mystical life that removes the proper Christian emphasis on the actual content of Scripture. Then, even those who appear to emphasize the actual content of Scripture denies that it is grasped by the intellect, but rather some non-rational (and really non-existent) part of man that they falsely call the "spirit." The truth is that the spirit of man is his rational soul or mind, made in the image of God, and by it we grasp and assimilate the content of Scripture.69 The same principle that we have just applied to the believer's moral development also applies to all other aspects of the Christian life, including the prayer life. Just as a strong and meaningful moral life is founded upon an accurate understanding of Scripture, a prayer life that is acceptable in practice and rich in content must have theological understanding as its foundation. Just as moral improvement begins with scriptural instructions, any enhancement of the prayer life begins with an enrichment of the inner life.

We find in Scripture examples of the prayer lives of great men. Jesus could meaningfully pray to his Father all night, and in the letters of Paul are prayers that are rich in inspired theological thinking. If your prayer life is weak, and your prayers are shallow in content, it would help very little to try to remedy the situation by praying even more. In fact, you will probably produce and reinforce bad habits and false theology with such an approach to prayer. Rather, we must improve the prayer life by constructing a better foundation, that is, by building an inner life structured according to biblical precepts. The first chapter in this section urges you to dethrone experience as a source of information for constructing your spiritual life in general, and your prayer life in particular, since experience can teach us nothing. Then, the next chapter proceeds to outline some elementary directions for building the inner life on the infallible foundation of biblical revelation.

01.10. PRAYER AND EXPERIENCE

10. PRAYER AND EXPERIENCE

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1)

Many of the books written on the subject of prayer suggest that the best way to learn about prayer is by actually praying. They say that the best way to learn about prayer (or most other things) is not by talking about it or reading about it, but by doing it. "Learning by doing" is a very popular theory of education, and these books are applying it to the question of how a person should learn to pray. If this theory of learning is correct, then there is limited value in spending hour after hour in trying to construct a biblical theology of prayer; rather, our time is better spent by actually praying. Prayer is best learned by experience.

I disagree. In general, I oppose the theory of learning by doing. In particular, I oppose the idea that anything at all about prayer can be learned by experience.70

It is impossible to learn about prayer by experience because it is impossible to even begin without any previous instructions or assumptions not derivable from experience. What is prayer? Do I pray to someone or something? Who is this someone or something? What are the attributes of this someone or something? What is my relationship with this someone or something? Do I have immediate and direct access to this someone or something, or do I need a mediator to contact this someone or something? Who or what is this mediator, and what are the attributes of this mediator? What is my relationship with this mediator? Does it matter what physical posture or position I assume during prayer? For what or whom should I pray? How often, how long, and how intense should I pray? Should I persist in my requests, or should I present any petition only once? Experience can answer none of these questions, but we need answers to all of them and many others to pray properly. In fact, even to ask the above questions presupposes some knowledge and reflection on the subject.

People tell us that we learn how to pray by experience, and that we can learn more about prayer by doing it than by talking about it or reading about it. But where is the biblical justification for such a claim? They want to give the impression that they are giving this advice because they take prayer seriously, and that they want other people to take it seriously as well. But I would say that their advice is sacrilegious they are treating the presence of God as a place for experimentation rather than a place of worship. If the Bible already gives us many explicit instructions on prayer, then we better do them instead of learn them during prayer. We abuse God’s patience and mercy if we approach him without first learning how to approach him, especially when he has already given us instructions on the matter.

Although God does not always immediately exact judgment upon those who approach him improperly, there are examples in the Old Testament when he struck dead those who failed to follow his instructions for worship. By the principle of trial and error, one could easily become a

dead priest before he became an experienced one. Besides insisting that it is impossible to learn anything by experience in the first place, my point is that you should not try to learn from experience what God has already told you by verbal instructions. At the minimum, if you try to learn about prayer by experience, you may end up forming many bad habits and false ideas that may never receive correction. Therefore, we conclude that learning by experience when it comes to prayer is an irreverent and impossible approach. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, Jesus did not tell them to learn how to pray by doing it, but he taught them how to pray by giving them verbal instructions. The disciples also mentioned that John the Baptist taught his own disciples how to pray, so we know that those disciples also learned about pray by verbal instructions, and not by experience. Thus we understand that prayer can be taught, and that the way to learn how to pray is not by experience, but by words. That is, the biblical way to learn about prayer is indeed by talking about it and reading about it, not by doing it. Since our topic is prayer, I will not take time to explain, but this principle is also true about other aspects of the spiritual life.

We learn by reading, listening, and thinking, and not by doing. To learn by reading, listening, and thinking makes it at least possible that a person would do something correctly at the first try. But learning by doing, experience, or trial and error inserts the necessity of failure in the very principle of education itself. I have shown somewhere else that even if the sensation one receives really corresponds to the object that produces such a sensation, one must make inferences from such a sensation to produce knowledge, and inferences from sensations are always fallacious.71 Therefore, any "knowledge" produced from sensation is always false. Thus learning by experience guarantees failure (indeed it depends on it), and it only produces false "knowledge." For the sake of argument, even if we assume that it is possible to learn from our mistakes,72 how do you know when you have made a mistake in prayer? Again for the sake of argument, even if we assume that you can catch some of these mistakes by experience, can you by experience catch all or even most of them? But you cannot even answer this question by experience, since by experience you cannot know how many mistakes you are making in prayer since, again, you need to learn what is right and what is wrong in the first place, by experience, which is impossible and therefore you cannot tell me if you can catch all or most of your mistakes in prayer by experience. The problem gets worse and worse when we continue to think about it. In fact, it is very likely that you have been making a number of mistakes when you pray but you do not recognize them as mistakes. Rather than being corrected by experience, the more experience you have in prayer in making those mistakes, the more they are reinforced as habits. By experience, can you even know that it is wrong to pray to the angel Gabriel or to the Buddha rather than to God the Father? Many people have been praying to the Buddha for years, and after so much experience, they still have not recognized their error. In addition, what is our justification for forcing God to endure our mistakes in prayer when we can avoid them simply by reading the Bible? If we learn it from the Bible in the first place, we would know not to make those mistakes at all.

If you insist on learning by experience when God has already given you the necessary information by revelation - that is, by the words of the Bible - in effect are you not shaking your fist toward heaven and saying, "I refuse to use your way to learn how to serve you! I will use my own way!"? Just as it is sinful to serve God one way when he has prescribed another way, it is also sinful to try to learn how to serve him when he has prescribed another way. We must submit to God not only in what we think, but also in how we come to think it. The best way to learn about prayer or anything

else is by talking about it, reading about it, and thinking about it. Most believers would learn about prayer through this method by reading and listening to instructions delivered by Christian ministers, who are supposed to have studied the Scripture on the subject. However, although the Scripture itself is infallible, human ministers are not. But what at first appears to be a problem only serves to accentuate the advantages of learning through reading and listening. That is, verbal presentations are subject to precise and public scrutiny; they can be the basis for prolonged debate and careful reflection. Through diligent and rigorous discussions on the subject that is, by talking about it, reading about it, and thinking about it, rather than by doing it we may arrive at principles concerning prayer and be confident that they are in accordance with the revealed will of God.

01.11. PRAYER AND REVELATION

11. PRAYER AND REVELATION

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalms 42:11)

Portions of the Psalms and the Prophets are often used to support the teaching that we should freely express our thoughts and our emotions during prayer, even if they consist of intense frustration, or even anger and bitterness against God. It appears that the assumption is that since the prophets were righteous men, and since these righteous men vented their frustrations to God, therefore we may, or even should, likewise vent our frustrations to God when we pray. But this is a false inference. From the fact that the prophets sometimes vented their frustrations to God, we cannot immediately infer that we should also do the same. Rather, we must first examine the contexts of the relevant biblical passages, and note the Scripture's own infallible interpretations of and comments on such instances of venting one's frustrations. In other words, the Bible records what the prophets did, but what does the same Bible say about what they did? The biblical characters sometimes bitterly complained to God, but it would be irresponsible to immediately say that we should imitate them without first noting how God responded.

Job, of course, is the classic case. He has been suffering great pains and tragedies, and says:

I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked? (Job 10:1-3)

If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say. (Job 23:3-5) Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature; let the Almighty answer me! (Job 31:35, NASB) Does God praise Job for his forthrightness, or does he rebuke Job for his words and for his lack of understanding? God says to Job, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!...Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:2; Job 40:7-8). God does not take pleasure at those who demand of him, "Answer me!" Rather, he will say to these people, "No, you answer me!"

Habakkuk says to God, "How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds" (Habakkuk 1:2-3). In Habakkuk 1:4 he states his concern: "Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted." This is the state of his own nation.

Then, God answers that he is using the Babylonians to punish the Jews: "Look at the nations and watch - and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own" (Habakkuk 1:5-6). In other words, God says he is indeed doing something about the situation. But Habakkuk disapproves of the divine strategy: "O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Habakkuk 1:12-13). It appears shocking to the prophet that God would use heathens to judge his own people.

What most people fail to note when they try to use the Bible to support an almost unrestrained expression of one's anger and frustration against God is that these instances in the Bible are very different from those that they have in mind, and that the prophets' motivations are often much more noble than their own. The above example from Habakkuk involves a serious historical and political context, and Habakkuk himself was no ignoramus when it comes to theology. The few verses that we have cited already exhibit his recognition of divine eternity and sovereignty, but what he wants to better understand is God's dealing with the nations.

Without examining the answer God gives, since it is not our topic, we should note Habakkuk's words after he has expressed his complaint: "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (Habakkuk 2:1). Or, as the NASB has it, "I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved."73 Although his address to God is already much more reverent and informed than many believers in our day, Habakkuk himself expects that God's answer to his complaint will be in the form of a rebuke.

Jeremiah brings before God a plain question: "You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jeremiah 12:1). Does God then encourage Jeremiah to vent his emotions, as some Christian writers teach that we should vent our anger toward God just as a frustrated child beats on his father's chest? Or is the Heavenly Father still a God to us? God responds, "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5). In other words, "If you cannot handle what you have been through so far, how can you handle the greater difficulties that are coming?"

Again, Jeremiah complains, "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?" (Jeremiah 15:18). Does God apologize to Jeremiah? No, but he gives the prophet first a rebuke and then a promise:

"If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them. I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD. I will save you from the hands

of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel. (Jeremiah 18:19-21)

God calls Jeremiah to repent for what he said and stop uttering "worthless words"! Doubtless many professing Christians, influenced by secular psychology and an unbiblical understanding of love, would accuse God of being insensitive. Even the promise God gives to Jeremiah is a repetition and reminder, at most an extension, of what was already given at the beginning of the prophet's ministry:

Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you. (Jeremiah 1:17-19)

Although the Bible records instances in which the prophets vented their emotions toward and against God, the same Bible gives no encouragement for its readers to imitate such behavior. This does not oppose honesty and reverent forthrightness toward God, but the question is whether we should resolve our frustration through venting and complaining in prayer. What we can say for certain is that it is especially irreverent to demand answers from God that he has already given in the Bible. God already said to Habakkuk, "The righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). In other words, if you claim to be a believer, then believe! Trust God! This is what God will tell you if he responds to your complaint, and if he already said it to the prophets, why does he need to say it again to you?

If we challenge God in the same way as some of the biblical characters did, even though God has already given and recorded his answers, are we not therefore testing his patience? Does it not show that we have little respect for the Bible, and act as if it does not exist? Or do we somehow expect that God will give us different answers to the same questions than those already recorded in the Bible? What justification, then, can we give to vent our emotions and frustrations if God has already responded to them by the words of Scripture? Job had learned his lesson: "I am unworthy - how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer - twice, but I will say no more....I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 40:4-5; Job 42:2). We learn the same lessons as the biblical characters did by reading about them in the Bible, and not by repeating the same behavior that occasioned the answers and rebukes given to the prophets.

Honesty toward God does not translate into unrestrained expression of every negative thought and emotion in prayer. Besides honesty, Scripture also maintains the believer's responsibility to uphold knowledge and self-control. So in Psalms 42:1-11, the psalmist says in agony, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalms 42:9-10). But he immediately confronts his own attitude and says, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalms 42:11). John MacArthur observes, "In this active introspection the psalmist rebukes himself for his despondency."74

One of the premises of this book is that in thinking about prayer, we must not focus on the technique of prayer, although that has its place, but to look at the subject from a broader perspective. This is because God responds not only to what we say during prayer, but he responds to the entirety of our lives, including our thoughts and actions while we are not praying. Also, in the introduction to this section and in the previous chapter, I have established that we must not attempt to build our spiritual life with experience as its foundation. The conclusion is that to construct a better spiritual life in general, and a better prayer life in particular, one must enrich his inner life, and this inner life must have biblical revelation as its foundation. In what follows I will elaborate on this principle, and give some suggestions for implementation. To enhance our spiritual life by constructing our inner life upon biblical revelation, we must practice what MacArthur calls, "active introspection." We may also call it Christian contemplation or meditation. Now, by contemplation or meditation I do not include any mystical element, and I intend a meaning very different from non-Christian or New Age meditation. Christian contemplation does not aim to empty the mind and suspend logic; instead, it aims to fill the mind and apply logic. It does not repudiate rationality to achieve mystical union with the divine; rather, it embraces rationality to think after the thoughts of God. It does not wait for spontaneous insights or personal revelations, but it achieves understanding through deliberate thought and discursive reasoning founded on the infallible revelation of Scripture.

There is a great difference between Christian contemplation and non-Christian meditation. Christian contemplation or meditation is nothing other than active thinking controlled by the words of Scripture. Such meditation is deliberate, conscious, intellectual, rational, and full of content. But not just any content will do - Christian thinking begins from the Reformation principle of "Scripture alone," and proceeds from this starting point to construct a coherent worldview that is applicable to and authoritative in every area of life and thought. By Christian meditation I mean an activity that involves intense thinking and reasoning, but thinking and reasoning that is grounded upon biblical revelation as its sole foundation. Edmund Clowney writes, "For man to receive God’s wisdom, it is not enough for God to display his wisdom in his works. He must also set forth his wisdom in his words....Divine and heavenly mysteries are revealed to us in God-given words. Meditation centers on God’s revelation, his Word."75 If you wish to grow in your spiritual life, then you must enrich your inner life, and such contemplation or meditation is what you must do.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Some people interpret this as telling us to almost not think at all, or at least not to reason about our situation. However, Proverbs 22:19-21 teaches that if you trust in God, you must think, but the difference is in what you think: "So that your trust may be in the LORD, I teach you today, even you. Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, teaching you true and reliable words, so that you can give sound answers to him who sent you?" Therefore, to "lean not on your own understanding" does not mean to stop thinking, but it means to stop relying on what you can come up with and to begin relying on the information that God has given to you in the Bible. To trust in God is to believe what the Bible says. In the context of this chapter, we may say that it means to ground your reasoning upon Scripture, and let it supply the content of your thinking, and thus also your praying. To the extent that your mind has not been renewed by Scripture, it may be as if there are two voices in your mind one reflects the assumptions and

dispositions that were central before your conversion, and the other reflects the voice of knowledge and reason, founded on the words of Scripture. In our text from Psalms 42:1-11, the writer challenges his own mind, saying, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalms 42:1-11). He is not satisfied in allowing his mind to wander in just any direction, but he confronts himself with scriptural knowledge. His present state of mind has experience or feeling as its foundation, but he confronts himself with an authoritative voice that has biblical revelation as its foundation. Instead of encouraging his emotions, he questions and challenges them. Our culture favors the free expression of emotions, but the Bible teaches self-control. Yet this is not to encourage what is called "repression," in which case the thoughts are merely suppressed so as not to appear before one's consciousness, and doing this will supposedly cause problems later. Rather, in biblical contemplation and meditation we confront these thoughts and we resolve them: The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself....And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do.... The essence of this matter is to understand that this self of ours, this other man within us, had got to be handled. Do not listen to him; turn on him; speak to him; condemn him; upbraid him; exhort him; encourage him; remind him of what you know, instead of listening placidly to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you.76

Psalms 119:59 says, "I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies" (NKJ). It is by thinking, not praying, that anyone will turn to God, for even praying presupposes thinking:

Before you can speak a single word of prayer, you have to think. You have to use your mind. You need to know who you're praying to. You need to know what you're praying for. You need to know the basis on which you are offering these prayers. So if your prayers are real, and not just some ritual of thoughtless words, they will involve you in a vigorous use of your understanding....When you actually speak with [the Lord], you will spend all the riches of your intelligence in thoughtfully adoring, praising, petitioning and thanking him.77

It follows that if "all the riches of your intelligence" is nil, then you cannot pray at all. It also follows that to increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness of your prayer life, you must first work on the intellect. And even when you pray, you must give priority to asking God for wisdom and understanding, as the apostles are prone to practice and recommend:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (Ephesians 1:17) For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5) So by contemplation or meditation, I mean the active and deliberate interaction of your mind with biblical revelation, that is, the words of the Bible, and to relate and apply the spiritual wisdom grasped by your intellect to your own life. Christian contemplation refers to intense theological thinking, but such thinking must have revelation as its foundation. Therefore, the crucial element in Christian contemplation is the careful construction of such a foundation. In other words, thinking is never without content, and the believer receives the

content for his thinking from the Bible. This means that we have several definite options in implementing Christian contemplation. One main source of biblical content to fuel our contemplation comes from reading. Nowadays, to say that you have learned something from a book means to some people that you do not really know it; that is, you can read about something all you want, but you do not know it until you have done it or experienced it. But the Bible itself is a book, and no professing believer should dare say that he does not know or believe that there is a heaven until he experiences it. Jesus tells us, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). If you consider your experience more reliable than the words of Christ, then by what definition and by what authority are you a Christian?

Richard de Bury says, "A library of wisdom is more precious than all wealth, and all things that are desirable cannot be compared to it. Whoever therefore claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness, of wisdom or knowledge, aye even of the faith, must needs become a lover of books."78 The Bible is a book, and it is the only infallible standard of truth by which all knowledge is founded, and by which all things are measured. To be effective in spirituality and in learning, we must have more respect for books surely not the contents of all books, but the very method of learning from books itself.

Although our ultimate and infallible authority is the Scripture alone, to interact with the full range of biblical materials, we ought to consult the insights of other people who have diligently researched and studied the Scripture. Therefore, we are justified in reading books written by believers who have faithfully worked out the meanings and implications of biblical passages, and also to hear sermons and lectures given by them. Nevertheless, we cannot overemphasize the importance of holding only to Scripture as our ultimate and infallible standard. The process does not end with reading and listening, which supply the content for our thinking, and indeed are parts of contemplation itself, since one cannot read or listen without thinking at the same time. Indeed, even as you have been reading this book, you have been practicing biblical contemplation - thinking about the teaching of Scripture and its implications. However, we must continue to practice contemplation even when we are not reading a book or hearing a sermon. Paul says to Timothy, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this" (2 Timothy 2:7). Spiritual insight usually does not come without rational and deliberate thinking; rather, it is by means of reasoning from the foundation of scriptural revelation that God will grant us wisdom and knowledge. Thus God indeed governs what each of us knows and understands, but usually not without means such as reading and thinking, which are also the two things that Timothy has to do as indicated in the verse above. This again distinguishes Christian contemplation from the meditation of the mystics. The writer of Psalms 119:1-176 says that he thinks on God's law "all day long" (Psalms 119:97), and because of this, he is wiser than his enemies and his teachers. Of course, some of you will complain that there is no time to think about theology all day along, but I am unsympathetic. W. Bingham Hunter writes: "In contrast to Jesus, most of us are too busy coping with existence to see prayer as vital or essential. But life could be more simple. An older car, a less trendy wardrobe, reupholstered rather than replaced furniture, a little less meat on the table changes like this could reduce the need for so much income and perhaps provide more time for prayer."79

Many people wish to better their spiritual and prayer lives precisely to gain these things that he suggests we should let go in order to better our spiritual and prayer lives. But Jesus says, "Watch

out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). If you think that life does consist in the abundance of possessions, then you have already fallen into the trap of greed. Alas, once we reduce the importance of material things, there remains no motivation for many people to pray.

Maybe there are things that you can do without threatening your standard of living. If you will stop socializing with unproductive and unspiritual people other than those to whom you are preaching the gospel, if you will stop watching so much television or reading newspapers and magazines, then perhaps you will already be adding hours of free time to your week. Then again, maybe it is necessary for you to make the kind of changes Hunter mentions. However, if you are unwilling to discipline yourself or make any sort of changes, then you are not serious about the Christian faith, and maybe you are not even a Christian, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

God says to his people, "Give careful thought to your ways" (Haggai 1:5). Think about your life. But by what standard do we think about anything? Christian conversion itself means that, by the sovereign grace of God, you have abandoned your former way of thinking, and now you have adopted biblical revelation as the foundation - the first principle and the starting point - of all your thought and conduct. Then, Christian sanctification involves making all of your life increasingly consistent with this infallible foundation. You begin to do this by gaining a systematic understanding of biblical revelation, which means that you must immerse yourself in theological reading and reflection. As you continue to think about the words of God, he will grant you understanding, and then you will know that experience counts for nothing, that biblical revelation alone is reliable, and that the answers you seek are already written in the Book that God has given to us.

01.12. ENDNOTES

Endnotes:

1. Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer; Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1999.

2. We can learn from the "examples" of Jesus only in the sense that the words of Scripture tell us about the prayer life of Christ, so that we are still learning through reading, listening, and thinking, and not experience or observation. The Bible does teach that we should be examples of what it teaches, but this is very different from saying that we should teach by examples. Since we are not perfect, how can a person know what to imitate and what not to imitate from us, unless he already knows what is right and what is wrong by reading, listening, and thinking about the words of Scripture? But if he already knows, then our examples at best serve as encouragement to contemplate and follow the words of Scripture, so that the examples do not themselves convey information about how a Christian should live. The information taught comes only from Scripture, not from experience or examples. There are no infallible examples for us to learn from today except those described and interpreted by the words of Scripture. Although Jesus was sinless, so that all he did was righteous, when he set an example in John 13:15, the disciples still did not understand it until he taught them in words. Thus the lesson was in the words, not in the act itself. The example itself at best served to illustrate the words. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 10:6 refers to the Israelites under Moses as examples, but the lesson was in Paul’s interpretation of their lives.

3. For example, Whitney states, "There are many good resources for learning how to pray, but the best way to learn how to pray is to pray"; Donald S. Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life; Navpress, 2002; p. 69.

4. Please see the chapter, "Prayer and Experience," for more about this.

5. But many books on prayer are destructive because they exalt experience at the expense of theological depth and accuracy.

6. Reading about prayer is not the same as praying, so I am not saying that you should read about prayer instead of praying. But when it comes to learning about prayer, we should read about it, talk about it, and think about it. That said, perhaps most people should indeed pray less, but spend more time reading, talking, and thinking about it. Reverence demands that we learn how to approach God in the manner prescribed by him, and we learn that from Scripture, not from experience or observation.

7. Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

8. See Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology, for an exposition on the doctrines of election and reprobation.

9. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology and Ultimate Questions.

10. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition; "religion."

11. Ibid.

12. Webster’s New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition; "religion."

13. Someone said to me that she thought religion was about unity, and she meant the unity of the human race. But this is precisely what the Tower of Babel was about. No, religion is not about unity, at least this is not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about revealed truth, and if enough people affirm the truth to unite around it, then all the better.

14. It claims to be the only true system of thought, whether religious or secular.

15. Vincent Cheung, The Light of Our Minds.

16. I do not say that Christianity contradicts the Old Testament, but it contradicts Judaism. Although we can find the doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, Judaism denies both. Those who were saved under the Old Covenant were not saved apart from Christ (see John 8:56; Hebrews 11:26). Thus our contention is that Judaism does not follow the Old Testament. Rather, the whole Bible Old and New Testaments - is a Christian book, and only a Christian book. It endorses no other worldview or religion.

17. Not just any conception of a monotheistic God, but the one with all the attributes specified in the Bible, including his triune nature.

18. Elsewhere I state that the infallibility of Scripture is my first principle of reasoning, but within the system revealed by Scripture, metaphysics indeed precedes ethics.

19. Christians and Buddhists may both believe "1 + 1 = 2," but that does not mean that Christianity and Buddhism are essentially the same. Two worldview are essentially the same only when they are the same on the essential points.

20. The charge of arrogance is often just an attempt to avoid having to confront the rational arguments that have been offered.

21. "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"

22. I have seen very few arguments supporting the assumption that we should be somewhat charitable when dealing with non-Christian views. I demand a deductive argument from an infallible premise from my opposition on this issue, and the only way to satisfy this is an exegetical and theological argument from Scripture. But this can only support my way of dealing with non-Christian ideas; that is, with ruthless honesty. People often say that we should "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), but this cannot mean, "speak the truth softly and in an effeminate style, so as not to offend anyone," for if the verse in fact teaches this, then were not Christ, the prophets, and the apostles in violation? They were blunt and very fierce when they spoke against error.

23. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology and Ultimate Questions. If you disagree with my defense of the Christian faith as the only true worldview, then you must refute me. Too many people simply dismiss sound arguments that they do not wish to believe. This is dishonest and irrational.

24. If you have wondered whether we should include the doctrine of election when preaching the gospel, here is your answer. Jesus tells them to their face that they could not believe unless the Father enables them. However, we may not always need to mention this doctrine in evangelism; I only mean that we should not deliberately avoid mentioning it.

25. See Susan T. Foh, Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992; John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism; Crossway Books, 1991.

26. Deuteronomy 4:21-27; Deuteronomy 9:3; Psalms 50:3; Psalms 97:3; Isaiah 66:15; Hebrews 10:27.

27. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology.

28. The Words of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2; Hendrickson Publishers, 2000 reprint from 1834 edition; p. 7-12.

29. William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans (The Daily Study Bible Series); Westminster John Knox Press, 1975; p. 112.

30. Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (The New International Commentary on the New Testament); William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996; p. 524.

31. Thomas R. Schreiner, Romans (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament); Baker Books, 1998; p. 445.

32. Schreiner, p. 446.

33. Again, what the believers know insufficiently does not correspond to what the Scripture reveals sufficiently. That is, our lack of knowledge does not contradict the Scripture's claim to sufficient information, since the Scripture does not claim to supply what this passage says that we lack. Even so, I would maintain that if our knowledge of Scripture were to be complete, it is doubtful that much, or any, of the lack of knowledge referred to by this passage will remain.

34. Moo, p. 526-527.

35. Neil Babock, My Search for Charismatic Reality; The Wakeman Trust, 1985; p. 65-66.

36. Peter Kreeft, Prayer for Beginners; Ignatius Press, 2000; p. 38-41.

37. Thomas Watson, All Things for Good; The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001 (original: 1663).

38. Holman Christian Standard Bible; Holman Bible Publishers, 2000.

39. Peter Masters, Steps for Guidance; The Wakeman Trust, 1995; p. 119-122.

40. Richmond Lattimore, The New Testament; North Point Press, 1996; p. 343.

41. Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God; Baker Books, 2000 (original: 1853).

42. One should at least know enough about God so as to able to distinguish the Christian God from all other gods and religions. If one is able to reconcile the Christian God (or Christianity as a

whole) with that of any other religion or worldview, then he does not know enough about God. Of course, one will never know enough about God in the sense that he may stop learning.

43. However, it does not follow that God lied to Moses in Exodus 32:10, since if Moses had not interceded, God could have indeed carried out his pronouncement against the Israelites and destroyed them all. But that Jacob had already said what he said in Genesis 49:10 meant that there was no possibility that God would have carried out Exodus 32:10; therefore, unless God had chosen some other way to prevent carrying out Exodus 32:10, he had already determined that Moses would intercede, and there was no possibility that Moses would not have done it.

44. W. Bingham Hunter, The God Who Hears; InterVarsity Press, 1986; p. 52.

45. Stanley J. Grenz, Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom; Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1988; p. 32.

46. Ibid., p. 32.

47. Ibid., p. 44.

48. Jesus commands us to be persistent in prayer, but the woman in our example does not demonstrate persistence, but false piety.

49. It has been suggested that when we pray for the sick, we should specify what should happen to the body from the perspective of medical science in order for the condition to be healed. The use of some medical terms is at times recommended. Although proponents of this view do not say that medical knowledge is necessary, they claim that medical knowledge will help one to pray for effectively for the sick. This is unbiblical. God knows what he should do to heal any disease or injury; he does not need us to specify all the details. In addition, the medical explanations of people’s conditions are often wrong.

50. That is, the a fortiori argument, which takes an established premise and argues that the conclusion is true since it is even more certain than the premise. For example: "If a high school student can solve this algebra problem, how much more can a college graduate!" This sort of argument is called qal vahomer by the Jews. See Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament; InterVarsity Press, 1993; p. 65, 219-220.

51. William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew; G. R. Welch Co., 1975; p. 274-275; Grenz, Prayer; p. 83.

52. Grenz, Prayer; p. 84.

53. Hunter, God Who Hears; p. 12.

54. Ibid., p. 12 and 199. This definition may be too narrow when applied to prayer in general, but it is correct insofar as it intends to describe the meaning and relevance of petitions to God.

55. Kenneth S. Wuest, Romans in the Greek New Testament; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955.

56. Worship is not completely independent of the physical. For example, our bodies form the "temple" of God (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we still have the rituals of baptism and communion. Nevertheless, the significance of all three hinges upon the relationship of our intellect to revelation,

that is, the relationship of our mind to Scripture.

57. Any so-called "practical" wisdom must have as its foundation an intellectual understanding of Scripture. What many Christians consider practical wisdom is nothing more than convenient but worldly and unbiblical ways of doing things that are without biblical foundation. But I reject the distinction between the theoretical and the practical in the first place. "Practical" wisdom is only theoretical wisdom about what we consider "practical" things. Otherwise, it is not "wisdom" at all, but just an unexamined habit or instinct. If it is "wisdom," then it is intellectual, academic, and theoretical.

58. Their abilities were tested against the "scribes" (v. 20) of the day. "Magicians" is perhaps a misleading translation. See Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible, by Robert Young.

59. Robert Morey, Winning the War Against Radical Islam; Christian Scholars Press, 2002.

60. Hunter, God Who Hears; p. 13, 40.

61. Greek: anti = against; nomos = law. As with many heresies, there are various versions of and foundations for antinomianism.

62. Thus the division and enmity between these two groups is a result of an act of grace; all of humanity would be "united" in wickedness if God had not chosen some for salvation.

63. Other translations have "abide" instead of "remain" (see KJV, NASB).

64. Hunter, God Who Hears; p. 13, 40.

65. Alternate translations to "persistence" may be "boldness" or "shamelessness," but these do not affect our point here, since the intent of the passage as an encouragement to persistent prayer remains. Indeed, the kind of persistence we are speaking of here is not easily stifled by embarrassment.

66. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology and Ultimate Questions.

67. Douglas F. Kelly, If God Already Knows Why Pray?; Christian Focus Publications, 2001 (original: 1989); p. 172-173.

68. Contrary to the emphasis given to the term in some circles, biblical usage of the term, "the will of God," does not only or mainly refer to things like where we should live or which job we should take, but it has a broader meaning that emphasizes the doctrinal and ethical content of Scripture, and its application to our lives.

69. Man does not have a non-rational "spirit." What is called "spirit" in Scripture is the same part of man as his rational mind. Thus man is body (physical) and soul (rational), and not body (physical), soul (rational), and spirit (non-rational).

70. For an explanation on why I oppose learning by doing, please read my book, Preach the Word.

71. If you put an inference into the form of an argument, you would have a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. If the conclusion says more than what the premises necessarily imply, then it is an inductive inference, which is always invalid. But to produce knowledge from

experience or sensation, you must make numerous inductive inferences. Therefore, learning by experience is always logically fallacious and cannot arrive at truth.

72. I maintain that it is logically impossible to learn - that is, to form propositions that constitute knowledge - from either successes or failures, since the inferences from such instances will always be fallacious.

73. "What answer I am to make to the reproof which I anticipate from God on account of the liberty of my expostulation with Him." Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary; Zondervan, 1961; p. 829.

74. John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible; Thomas Nelson Bibles, 1997; p. 780.

75. Edmund P. Clowney, Christian Meditation; Regent College Publishing, 2002 (original: 1979); p. 21-22.

76. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001 (original: 1965); p. 21.

77. What Happens When I Pray?; Grace Publications Trust, 1997; p. 38.

78. Richard de Bury, Philobiblon; IndyPublish, 2002 (original: 1473).

79. Hunter, God Who Hears; p. 189-190.

Chapter 15

02.00. Presuppositional Confrontations

Presuppositional Confrontations by Vincent Cheung Copyright © 2003 by Vincent Cheung disclaimer on webpage:

"Under our copyright policy, you are permitted to print, copy, and distribute unlimited copies of our publications for any ministry purpose, such as for your church, study group, or personal outreach."

02.000. PREFACE

PREFACE

We will begin with a short discussion on the determinative role of presuppositions in our thinking, particularly in the construction of our worldviews, religions, and philosophies. All arguments are ultimately settled only by appealing to the soundness of our first principles.

Following that comes an exposition of Paul's confrontation with the philosophers and the population of Athens in Acts 17:1-34, and how we should mirror his approach when doing apologetics and evangelism today. However, the principles that we will learn there do not apply only to apologetics and evangelism, but to all spheres of Christian thought, including the construction of theological formulations and preaching ministries that are faithful to biblical revelation. The book concludes with some additional points in the third chapter, including exhortations to do biblical apologetics, evangelism, and other related tasks with greater aggressiveness. To understand the biblical approach to theology, philosophy, apologetics, evangelism, and other related tasks, one should also read my Systematic Theology and Ultimate Questions, where some of the points mentioned here are discussed in greater detail or from different perspectives.

02.01. THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL CHALLENGE

Presuppositional Confrontations 1. The Presuppositional Challenge

Imagine that you are watching a game of tennis with me on television, although for our purpose it can be just about any kind of game - golf, basketball, football, or even chess. Now suppose that I know the rules of the game we are watching, which in this case is tennis, but you do not know the rules at all. Suppose further that we have muted the television, so that no verbal communication can be heard from the commentator of the game. Finally, suppose that no verbal communication is coming visually from the screen, so that not even the scores are shown. Now, my question is whether the game will be intelligible to you at all.

If I pay close attention, I should still be able to follow the game even without being presented with any visual or auditory verbal communication, because I already know the rules of the game. Likewise, the players themselves should be able to follow the game they are playing without constant assistance from the announcer or the scoreboard. On the other hand, although you are watching exactly the same game as I am, you will not be able to make sense out of what you are seeing, since you do not know the rules that correspond to the game.

What I have shown here is that when you are watching a game, what you see does not provide its own intelligibility and interpretation. Rather, for a game to be intelligible to you and for you to have the correct interpretation of what is happening, you must bring a considerable amount of knowledge to the act of watching the game, and this knowledge does not come from watching the game itself. If I had systematically explained the rules to you, or if I explain the rules to you as we are watching the game, then what you are watching will become intelligible, and you will be able to correctly interpret what you are seeing.

You may argue that it is possible to derive some of the rules of the game by observation. Even if this is possible, it would be much more difficult than most people think. For example, suppose you observe that after each instance of what we who know the rules of chess would call a "checkmate," the two players would walk away from the chessboard. What can you infer from this? You cannot infer that one of them had won unless you know the rules of the game. You need to know that it is a game in the first place, that it can be won or lost, and how it is won or lost. Even if I allow you to infer that one of them had won without all of this information, where do you obtain the categories of "winning" and "losing"? You cannot get them from observing the game itself; rather, you must bring these ideas to the act of observation.

How about the categories of time and causation? You cannot derive the very concepts of time and causation from watching the game, but you must bring them to the act of observation. You must also have some presuppositions about ethics. That is, you must assume that the players would not usually cheat, and that the players cannot get away with cheating, or else the game would not have sufficient regularity for you to derive any rules from it. But if a person cheats and gets away with it, how will you know that he is cheating, or if his action is just an exception allowed by the

rules? If we take the time to enumerate, we can make explicit dozens, or more probably hundreds or even thousands, of presuppositions that you need to have in your mind for observation of the game to be intelligible when at the same time these presuppositions cannot come from the act of observation itself. To make matters more difficult, there are hundreds or thousands of arbitrary elements to every game that are not essential to the rules, and yet they are objects of observation. For example, if the particular chess game that you are watching is being played by two men who are wearing formal attire, what can you infer from this? Are you to infer that this is an essential rule of chess? And if so, must women also wear men's suits, or are they allowed to wear formal dresses? Of course, you can say that people wear regular clothes when they are playing chess in other settings. But how do you know that they are not in violation of the rules, and that they are just getting away with it? Or do you assume without warrant that if they were indeed in violation, the proper rules would be always enforced against them? You may think that it is ridiculous to question all of these things that we usually assume, but what will you say when I demand justification for these presuppositions?

Without knowledge that comes apart from observation, observation itself can make no sense or communicate any information. The intelligibility and interpretation of observation presuppose knowledge about what you are observing, and such knowledge cannot come from the act of observation itself. That is, the intelligibility and interpretation of an experience is made possible by knowledge that comes apart from the experience. This knowledge may be something that you are born with, or it may be something taught to you by verbal communication.

If your mind is totally blank, so that you do not even have mental categories such as time, space, and causation, nothing that you observe will be intelligible, and there will be no way to interpret what you observe. In fact, if your mind is a total blank, without any knowledge that comes apart from observation, your world will be to you as a whirlwind of sensations with no way to organize them or interpret them. But if a prior non-observational knowledge of reality is required in order to properly interpret observation about reality, this means that the order and meaning you observe is imposed on what you observe, and never derived from what you see. This is another way of saying that the meaning of what you observe is governed by your presuppositions.

Returning to our initial illustration, what happens if you presuppose the rules of basketball or chess when you are watching the tennis game? Even if it appears that you are able to make sense of some of the things that you observe, because the wrong rules are presupposed, your interpretation of what is observed will be false. Therefore, it is not enough to recognize that non-observational presuppositions precede intelligible and meaningful observation, but we must realize that not all presuppositions are equal, and that they can be true or false. So far, I have established several possibilities regarding presuppositions when watching a tennis game:

1. The mind is totally blank, in which case nothing is intelligible, and interpretation is impossible.

2. The mind contains only basic categories with no knowledge of the rules of the game, so that it acknowledges concepts such as time, causation, ethics, and winning. Interpretation is still impossible.

3. The mind applies false presuppositions to the game, so that it may apply basketball rules to tennis. Interpretation is either impossible, or yields false results when attempted.

4. The mind contains the right presuppositions about the universe in general (the basic categories such as time and causation) and about tennis in particular. Correct interpretation is possible. The result is that two people can be observing exactly the same thing, but they will come up with contradictory interpretations. However, this does not need to result in relativism, since one person may indeed be correct and the other may indeed be wrong. It depends on which one has the correct presuppositions about the universe in general, and the thing that is under observation in particular.

Let me give you two biblical examples that illustrate what I have been saying. The first shows that observation is unreliable, and the second shows that our presuppositions determine the meaning or interpretation of what we observe, so that the wrong presuppositions will lead to a false interpretation. The first example comes from John 12:28-29. As Jesus exclaims, "Father, glorify your name!" the Scripture says, "Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him." The infallible testimony of Scripture says that the voice uttered a complete sentence: "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." Yet some of those who were present, who observed the very same event, "said it had thundered." Therefore, observation is unreliable, and the truth cannot be conclusively settled by observation. The second example comes from Matthew 12:22-28, and concerns the authority of Christ to expel demons: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons'" (Matthew 12:22-24). Based on their observation of the event, the general audience is prepared to consider at least the possibility that Jesus is the Christ, but the Pharisees, who had observed the same event, say that he expels demons by the power of Satan.

However, this does not lead to an impasse, nor does it reduce truth to relativism. Christ's reply indicates that not all interpretations are correct:

Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12:25-28)

He first reduces their assertion to absurdity, and then he gives the right interpretation of the event, and concludes with an implication about the gospel.

Now, if the Pharisees had truly believed the Scripture, they should have arrived at the same interpretation about Christ as what Christ himself asserted about himself. But although they claimed to believe the Scripture, in reality they suppressed the truth about it. Although they had access to the right presuppositions or knowledge by which they could rightly interpret reality, because of their sinfulness they refused to accept these presuppositions and their implications, and thus they rejected the truth by suppressing and distorting it.

Paul says that this is what humankind has done with their knowledge about God. He states that some knowledge about God is innate, that is, every human being is born with some knowledge

about God, but because man is sinful, he refuses to acknowledge and worship this true God, and thus suppresses and distorts this innate knowledge: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:18-21, NASB)

People often complain that there is insufficient evidence about God and Christianity, but the Bible says that they already know about this true God, only that they are suppressing this knowledge because they refuse to acknowledge or worship him. Knowledge about God is "evident within them," because he "made it evident to them." The problem is not a lack of evidence, but an artificially manufactured set of presuppositions that suppresses the evidence about God.

Some argue that this passage provides justification for saying that we can derive knowledge about God by observation and empirical arguments. However, we have already illustrated from the example about watching tennis, and confirmed it by biblical examples, that observation in itself can provide no intelligible meaning or information. Therefore, the passage cannot mean that observation, at least in itself, can provide knowledge about God; rather, there must be certain innate ideas that are already in the mind before any experience or observation. By our example about watching tennis, we have also shown that even having the basic categories necessary to intelligibility is insufficient, but there must be some actual content to our innate ideas. However, if the innate ideas or presuppositions already contain actual content about God, then the actual knowledge about God does not come from observation at all, but such knowledge is already in the mind prior to and apart from experience and observation.

If you already know the rules of tennis, watching tennis cannot give you additional information about the rules of tennis, but it can only stimulate you to recall and apply particular rules of tennis as you observe particular events within the game. Likewise, experience or observation at best can only stimulate you to recall and apply the innate knowledge that you have about God.

More than a few commentators seem to agree with this view. Here I will only cite Charles Hodge: "It is not a mere external revelation of which the apostle is speaking, but of that evidence of the being and perfections of God which every man has in the constitution of his own nature, and in virtue of which he is competent to apprehend the manifestation of God in his works."1 Accordingly, the NLT translates, or rather paraphrases, as follows: "For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts." A later passage confirms our understanding that God has placed some knowledge about himself into the mind of man directly, that is, apart from experience or observation: For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:14-16, NASB). Do not misunderstand this to mean that some Gentiles are innocent. Rather, Romans 2:12 says, "All who

sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." Paul is trying to show that both those who have the verbal revelation from God and those who do not are guilty of sin and subject to judgment. In addition, Paul is not saying that all men are saved because they already know God, nor is he saying that the innate knowledge about God carries enough content for salvation, if one will only acknowledge it. Rather, the point of the passage is that men are without excuse for denying the true God because they suppress the truth about God. Therefore, this passage cannot be used to justify world religions, as some morons have tried to do, but its point is precisely to condemn all non-Christian worldviews, especially non-Christian religions.

Although all of this is relevant, our particular interest at this point is in the innate knowledge about God present in the mind of man apart from experience or observation. The NASB has "instinctively" in Romans 12:14, which is good, and the NJB uses the term, "innate sense." But the phrase "a law to themselves" may be misleading. It does not mean that the Gentiles, since they do not have the Scripture, determine for themselves right and wrong; rather, it means what is already implied by "innate sense," so that J. B. Phillips translates, "they have a law in themselves." This confirms our contention that there are innate ideas in the mind of man, and that the contents of which consist not only in thought categories, but actual knowledge about God, rendering those who deny him without excuse.

I am not saying that people should not "see" God in nature - they should.2 But I am trying to explain why they do not, or at least why they say that they do not. Paul is saying that you have to suppress and distort the knowledge that is already in your mind in order to reject Christianity and to affirm a non-Christian religion, philosophy, or worldview. Only Christianity corresponds to what you already know in your mind, so that you will have to suppress and distort what you already know, and indeed deceive yourself, to accept something else other than a complete and distinctive Christian worldview or religion.

Some Christian apologists attempt to defend the faith by mainly using scientific arguments, such as those based on physics, biology, and archaeology. In other words, along with the unbelievers they assume the reliability of science and attempt to "do science" better than the unbelievers can. If what I am saying is correct - that is, if what Paul is saying is correct - then of course we are able to do science better than the unbelievers, since we have a set of presuppositions that corresponds to objective reality and morality. That said, I have argued elsewhere that the scientific method itself precludes the knowledge of truth,3 so that even with the correct presuppositions, science is completely incompetent as a way to discover the nature of reality. Ronald W. Clark comments, "Contemplation of first principles progressively occupied Einstein’s attention," and in such a context, he quotes Einstein as saying, "We know nothing about it at all. All our knowledge is but the knowledge of schoolchildren….the real nature of things, that we shall never know, never."4 Of course, he could only speak as a representative of science and not revelation.

Karl Popper, who had written a number of works on the philosophy of science, wrote as follows:

Although in science we do our best to find the truth, we are conscious of the fact that we can never be sure whether we have got it….In science there is no "knowledge," in the sense in which Plato and Aristotle understood the word, in the sense which implies finality; in science, we never have sufficient reason for the belief that we have attained the truth.…Einstein declared that his theory

was false - he said that it would be a better approximation to the truth than Newton’s, but he gave reasons why he would not, even if all predictions came out right, regard it as a true theory.5

Scientists conduct multiple experiments to test a hypothesis. If observation is reliable, then why do they need more than one experiment? If observation is less than reliable, then how many experiments are enough? Who decides? Ignoring this problem for now, W. Gary Crampton explains the difficulty in formulating a scientific law by the method of experimentation: In the laboratory the scientist seeks to determine the boiling point of water. Since water hardly boils at the same temperature, the scientist conducts a number of tests and the slightly differing results are noted. He then must average them. But what kind of average does he use: mean, mode, or median? He must choose; and whatever kind of average he selects, it is his own choice; it is not dictated by the data. Then too, the average he chooses is just that, that is, it is an average, not the actual datum yielded by the experiment. Once the test results have been averaged, the scientist will calculate the variable error in his readings. He will likely plot the data points or areas on a graph. Then he will draw a curve through the resultant data points or areas on the graph. But how many curves, each one of which describes a different equation, are possible? An infinite number of curves is possible. But the scientist draws only one.6 The probability of drawing the correct curve is one over infinity, which equals zero. Therefore, there is a zero probability that any scientific law can be true. It is impossible for science to ever accurately describe anything about reality. Thus Popper writes, "It can even be shown that all theories, including the best, have the same probability, namely zero."7

If what is said above about scientific experiments is difficult for some people to understand, the problem of "affirming the consequent" may be more easily grasped. Consider the following form of argument:

1. If X, then Y

2. Y

3. Therefore, X This form of reasoning, called "affirming the consequent," is always a formal fallacy in logic; that is, we know that the argument is invalid just by noting its structure. Just because Y is true does not mean that X is true, since there can be an infinite number of things that may substitute for X so that we will still have Y. Correlation is not the same as causation - but can science even discover correlation? Thus if the hypothesis is, "If X, then Y," the fact that Y turns up does nothing whatever to confirm the hypothesis.

Scientists, of course, attempt to get around this problem by having "controlled" experiments, but they are faced again with an infinite number of things that may affect the experiment. How do they know what variables must be controlled? By other experiments that affirm the consequent, or by observation, which we have already shown to be unreliable?

Bertrand Russell was a celebrated mathematician, logician, philosopher, and wrote much against the Christian religion. So he was not attempting to endorse Christianity when he wrote the following:

All inductive arguments in the last resort reduce themselves to the following form: "If this is true, that is true: now that is true, therefore this is true." This argument is, of course, formally fallacious.

Suppose I were to say: "If bread is a stone and stones are nourishing, then this bread will nourish me; now this bread does nourish me; therefore it is a stone, and stones are nourishing." If I were to advance such an argument, I should certainly be thought foolish, yet it would not be fundamentally different from the argument upon which all scientific laws are based.8

Yet many who speak this way refuse to draw the logical conclusion that all science is ultimately irrational and without justification. Most people feel compelled to respect science because of the practical success that it appears to achieve; however, we have noted that affirming the consequent may yield results but not truths. Remember what Popper said about Einstein: "He would not, even if all predictions came out right, regard it as a true theory." The typical college student would disagree, but the typical college student is not Einstein. Accordingly, although science is useful as a way to achieve practical ends, it has no authority to make any pronouncements concerning the nature of reality. If the scientist does not know his place, an informed believer should not hesitate to put him back in his place. Theology is the ruling intellectual discipline, not science.

Many people will think that this skepticism toward sensation and this low view of science are too extreme, but anyone who disagrees must first justify how knowledge comes from sensation and how the scientific method can function to discover truth. If you trust in science but cannot provide a rational justification for it, then how dare you call Christians irrational and gullible? You may attempt to advance your selective and arbitrary skepticism against Christianity on the basis of science, but if I can successfully apply a stronger and comprehensive skepticism to refute secular science and all world religions, but defend biblical revelation, then you better not dare call Christians irrational and gullible anymore.

It is only because you have been made in the image of God and thus have an innate knowledge about him that you can even speak of rationality in the first place, for without Christ - the Reason of God (John 1:1)9 - you have no foundation for even logic itself. On the other hand, from the Christian perspective, rationality characterizes the very structure of God’s mind, and the laws of logic describe the way he thinks. Since he has made us in his image, we are also able to use logic, and since the same God who created us also created the universe, logic corresponds to reality. If you reject Christian presuppositions, then on what basis do you use logic, and on what basis do you say that logic corresponds to reality? You attempt to use reason, but you deny Reason itself. You claim to think logically, but you deny the very person who has structured your rational mind in the likeness of his own rational mind. Thus in exalting reason without exalting God, you contradict yourself and incriminate yourself, and show that you have suppressed the truth about God.

Although, due to the nature of its method, science itself is incompetent and unreliable no matter what foundation you build it on, if we are correct about the reality of innate ideas and the unbeliever’s suppression of truth, then Christians can still do better science than non-Christians, since we explicitly affirm the correct presuppositions, including those in Scripture that are not part of the innate ideas present at birth. But at the same time, if we are correct about the innate ideas and presuppositions, then science is in fact a surface issue when it comes to the conflicts between opposing worldviews. Our presuppositions determine our interpretation of what we observe, so that we can observe exactly the same things and come up with different conclusions. Although I would say that non-Christian presuppositions cannot even support non-Christian conclusions,

neither can they be used to provide conclusive support for Christianity, for the reason that non-Christian presuppositions really cannot support anything.10 Thus we come to the realization that ultimately, we must deal with the non-Christians on the presuppositional level.11 Do not underestimate this insight, which shows that unless the non-Christian can provide a foundation for knowledge without using Christian presuppositions, all his arguments are just so much noise. He is just trying to rationalize his way out of his innate knowledge that Christianity is true, and that only Christianity is true. Yet he cannot even rationalize without using Christian presuppositions. He chooses a non-Christian starting point for his philosophy and tries to convince himself that it is adequate, but he knows better, although he may not admit this even to himself. This knowledge haunts him, and so he suppresses his conscience and turns against the believers. But even suicide will not rescue him from his unhappy condition, since that will only finalize his doom, and he knows this deep inside (Romans 1:32). Paul writes in Romans 1:22, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools." Or, more plainly, "They think they are smart, but they are stupid." This is true of every non-Christian.

If you are a Christian, then God has chosen you and changed you, and he has enlisted you to issue this presuppositional challenge to the world. Paul commands us to hold out the straight standard of "the word of life" in this "crooked and depraved generation" (Php 2:15-16). Indeed, unbelievers are "crooked" in their thought and conduct, and they suppress and distort the truth about reality and morality. Nevertheless, God will show mercy to his elect and will convert them, and set straight their crooked paths. But the reprobates will resist, and be crushed by the Rock that is the foundation of Christianity (Luke 20:17-18).

Endnotes:

1. Charles Hodge, Romans; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 (original: 1835); p. 36.

2. The precise way of saying this is that they should be reminded of God when they observe nature.

3. Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

4. Ronald W. Clark, Einstein: The Life and Times; Avon Books, 1971; p. 504.

5. Popper Selections, edited by David Miller; Princeton University Press, 1985; p. 90, 91, 121.

6. W. Gary Crampton, "The Biblical View of Science," January 1997, The Trinity Review.

7. Karl Popper, Conjectures and Refutations; Harper and Row, 1968; p. 192.

8. Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy; Oxford University Press, 1998.

9. The logos, or Word, in John 1:1 can be just as accurately translated as Wisdom, Reason, or even Logic.

10. The strategic uses of scientific arguments are sometimes desirable, but never necessary, within the context of debates, but their only function is to show that even if science can discover truth, the unbeliever would still be wrong. It remains that Christians should not build their confidence on something as feeble as science. Christians should have higher intellectual standards than the non-Christians.

11. It is often urged that we must "look at the facts objectively." If this means that we should have no presuppositions, then we have shown that to be impossible, and it in fact makes the "facts" unintelligible. But if being "objective" means that we should look at the world as it truly is, then this is the very point at issue, and we are arguing that only when you begin with Christian presuppositions will you be able to look at the world as it truly is. "Facts" do not come with their own interpretations, and any interpretation requires presuppositions. However, not all presuppositions are equal, and thus we return to the point that arguments must ultimately be settled on the presuppositional level.

02.02. THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONFRONTATION

Presuppositional Confrontations 2. The Philosophical Confrontation

Acts 17:16-34

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Acts 17:16-17

According to one account, over a third of the twenty Christian speeches in Acts qualify as defenses, and half of the ten speeches by Paul are of this kind.1 This chapter studies Paul's Areopagus address in which the apostle speaks to the philosophers and population of Athens

about the Christian faith (Acts 17:16-34). We will try to notice some significant points about this speech as seen from its historical setting, and to consider how the apostolic example should inform and dictate our approach to contemporary apologetics. The Jews in Thessalonica had caused much trouble for Paul, and the believers there had to send him away to Berea (Acts 17:5, Acts 17:10). The Bereans were more receptive to the gospel message (Acts 17:11-12), but the Jews of Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and incited the crowds against him (Acts 17:13), so that the believers there had to send him away again while Silas and Timothy stayed a little longer (Acts 17:14). This time, Paul went to Athens, and those who were with Paul returned to Thessalonica with instructions that Silas and Timothy were to join him there as soon as possible (Acts 17:15).

Athens was a city given to idolatry. More than a few writers had marveled at the sheer number of religious statues there. Pausanias wrote that Athens had more images than the rest of Greece combined. Accordingly, Petronius remarked that it was easier to find a god than to find a man in Athens. As Paul walked through Athens, he would have seen altars to and statues of various gods, including Ares, Bacchus, Eumenides, Neptune, and of course, the mother goddess of the city, Athena, after which the city was named. On one street there stood in front of every house a pillar with a bust of Hermes. Pliny testified that there were over thirty thousand public statues in Athens, and many more private ones in the homes.

Paul was surrounded by expressions of pagan worship; the streets were lined up with idols. Although Athens was admired for its rich artistic culture, so that "it was also the repository of some of the finest treasures of art and architecture,"2 the apostle did not show any respect for the aesthetic qualities of the buildings and sculptures. He was not positively impressed with the people’s culture and crafts; rather, he was "greatly distressed" (Acts 17:16) by their rampant idolatry as he was waiting for his companions to arrive.

Some tourists today who call themselves Christians do not hesitate to visit pagan temples and even bow to their statues. They contend that this is not to worship pagan deities, but merely to show respect for the beliefs of other cultures. Also, they claim to admire the temples and sculptures as works of art and historical artifacts, and not as representations of pagan gods. But these professing Christians are liars. In the first place, the Christian has no right to respect or admire non-Christian beliefs and cultures. Paul was thoroughly disgusted by them. Do these so-called Christians believe that God himself approves of these "works of art," and their preservation and exhibition?

Even if some statues are void of religious implications for the contemporary person, they are still remnants of idolatry and traces of sinful rebellion against the true God. Thus we are not to admire them as works of art, but condemn them as works of the devil. Surely the apostle was much more accustomed to seeing expressions of pagan worship, but he was not desensitized to them as many of us are today; rather, he continued to see them as expressions of sinful rebellion, and accordingly he reacted with disgust and distress. To the extent that we are not distressed and indignant about non-Christian beliefs, we probably do not have a corresponding love toward the true God.

Domestic paganism is just as blatant and sinful, and many who call themselves Christians, who would strongly react against traditional idol worship, nevertheless tolerate and even respect

contemporary non-Christian thought and conduct. They are horrified by accounts of serial murder and child molestation, but relatively nonchalant when it comes to non-Christian religions and philosophies. They are greatly distressed over acts of racism and fraud, and some even weep over deaths caused by diseases and accidents as reported by the news, but they display no such reaction when someone introduces himself as a Mormon, when someone announces that she will marry a Muslim, or when someone uses the name of God with irreverence. Their morality is man-centered instead of God-centered, but biblical morality is of the latter kind, with right worship toward God as the foundation and prerequisite for right treatment toward man. Of course, many people care for neither God nor man.

How do you react toward non-Christian religions and philosophies? Do you respond as you should with complete revulsion and unqualified condemnation, or are you so molded by unbiblical influences so that you actually show admiration and respect toward them? If the latter, on what basis do you call yourself a Christian? Are you more horrified by murder and rape, or do not consider it even worse to use the name of Christ as a swearword? Alas, you probably use the divine name as a swearword yourself. Of course, you would never commit the external acts of murder and adultery, or at least that is what you think, but you harbor no special antagonism against a person who denounces Christianity, or one who abuses the name of Christ, or one who affirms heretical doctrines.3 Your primary concern is not God’s honor but man’s welfare. If this describes you, then your fundamental commitment is not biblical but humanistic. The biblical reaction to non-Christian religions and philosophies, thought and conduct, beliefs and cultures, is not indifference or appreciation, but extreme indignation. Here I am not opposing merely non-western beliefs and cultures, but non-Christian or anti-biblical cultures, which can and do exist within western society. Sometimes people neglect to recognize this distinction. I am saying that Christians should strongly react

There are different ways that one can express his indignation against anti-biblical beliefs, but not all of them are legitimate. For example, it is possible to silence the opposition by violence, but it is in such a context that Jesus says, "All who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).4 Some people have misconstrued these words to endorse pacifism or to forbid all uses of physical force. However, Romans 13:4 says that the civil servant "does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." This indicates that some uses of physical force are legitimate. It appears that what Jesus says is a proverb that simply restates Genesis 9:6, which says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." In no way does the statement denounce the military or other uses of physical force where sanctioned by Scripture.

Although I maintain that Christianity forbids the use of violence in promoting its ideas, it is irrational to reject a religion simply because it advocates the use of violence, whether or not for the purpose of promoting the religion. One who says that a religion is wrong because it promotes violence presupposes a standard of ethics by which he judges this religion, and it is the truth of this presupposed standard that we need to argue about in the first place. Whether the use of violence is acceptable depends on whether its basis is correct. If a given religion is true, and it allows or commands the use of violence for a given purpose, then its endorsement of violence is acceptable. For example, we should not argue that Islam is false because it allows or commands the use of violence in promoting its ideas; rather, we should argue that it is wrong to promote one’s

religion through the use of violence because Islam is wrong and some other standard is correct that happens to forbid violence for such a purpose. Thus the matter of whether violence is acceptable (for the promotion of religion or some other purpose) must be settled on the presuppositional level.

One may, of course, take as his first principle that all uses of violence or some designated uses of violence are wrong, and then evaluate different worldviews and religions by such a standard. However, what is the justification for such a standard? The principle may be arbitrary, self-authenticating, or it must ultimately be based on some principle that is self-authenticating. If it is arbitrary, then it is irrational and cannot be imposed on everyone. If it is self-authenticating, then one must show that it is self-authenticating. Even if it is self-authenticating, and I do not believe it is, it is too narrow to answer necessary questions in the areas of knowledge, reality, and others. In fact, it cannot even provide guidance to many questions within its own category of ethics. If one claims that it is based on something that is self-authenticating, then we return to my point that we must first argue about this ultimate principle, rather than the subsidiary principle of whether violence is acceptable in various contexts.

Likewise, many people denounce Christianity because it is an exclusive religion; that is, they believe that if a religion claims to be the only truth, then it must be wrong or unacceptable. But what is the justification for such an assumption, and by what ultimate standard do they make this judgment? In contrast, we may maintain that if Christianity is true, and it claims to be the only truth, then its claim to being the only truth must also be true. We must first settle whether Christianity is true before judging its claim to be the exclusive truth. Of course, in presuppositional argumentation, the premise that Christianity is the exclusive truth is inherent in its first principle.

One may take as his first principle - or, if there are more than one, one of his axioms by which he deduces subsidiary theorems - that there is no exclusive truth, and then uses it to evaluate every religion. But such a principle is self-refuting, since it claims to be exclusively true that there is no exclusive truth. "There is no exclusive truth" is a proposition that precludes all exclusive claims, but it is in itself an exclusive claim about the very nature of truth, so that it excludes the proposition, "There is exclusive truth." Thus the rejection of exclusive truth cannot be self-authenticating, since it is self-refuting. It cannot be legitimately based on something that is self-authenticating, since the process of deduction merely draws out the necessary implications of a premise, so that it is impossible to derive a self-refuting conclusion from a self-authenticating premise. We must conclude that the rejection of exclusive truth is arbitrary and irrational. It cannot function as the first principle of a coherent worldview, nor can it be used to make any rational judgment about a religion. When it comes to defending and advancing the Christian religion, Paul writes, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Our relationship with this world should indeed be characterized by one of warfare, but since the war is spiritual in nature, it is not a contest of physical or military might. Rather, God has given us weapons appropriate for the nature of this conflict, having "divine power to demolish strongholds." What are these "strongholds" that we are to "demolish" with our divine weapons? 2 Corinthians 10:5 says that we are to "demolish arguments," and instead of physically subduing our enemies, we "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Accordingly, Paul reacted to non-Christian beliefs in general, and the rampant idolatry of Athens in particular, by engaging their adherents in rational argumentation: "So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17).

I. Howard Marshall alleges that the word translated "reasoned" means to "preach" rather than to "argue" or "debate."5 He references Acts 20:7; Acts 20:9, in which the same word is translated "spoke" ("preached" in KJV) and "talked on and on" ("was long preaching" in KJV). It is unclear whether Marshall intends to eliminate the idea that Paul employed argumentation in promoting the gospel, or whether he intends to eliminate only the idea of interaction between Paul and his audience as implied by the words "reasoned," "argue," or "debate."

If it is the former, that is, if Marshall intends to say that Paul did not employ argumentation in promoting the gospel, or that Paul avoided an intellectually combative stance, then he is mistaken. The word in question can explicitly denote the meaning of argumentation. For example, Acts 17:2 says, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures." Does this mean that Paul preached to them or argued with them? Was it a presentation or a debate? Whatever the case may be, scriptural preaching involves rigorous arguments. The next verse tells us that when Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures," he was "explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." Therefore, whether or not he interacted with them, he was both presenting the gospel and arguing for it. Then in Acts 18:4, Luke writes that Paul "reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." The attempt to persuade necessarily implies the element of argumentation. Paul "spoke boldly" for the gospel at Ephesus, and that means he was "reasoning and persuading" (Acts 19:8, NASB) people about the kingdom of God.

However, there is an indication that Marshall means the latter, because he contrasts what Paul does against the approach of Socrates: "The description is reminiscent of the activity of Socrates who argued with anybody who would listen to him, although for Luke ’argue’ means ’preach’ rather than ’debate.’"6 That is, it appears as if he is saying that to translate the word as "argue" or "debate" falsely suggests that Paul sometimes assumed an interactive format when introducing the gospel to his audience. If this is what Marshall means, then he is still mistaken, since both in Acts 17:1-34 and other passages, Paul appears to engage his opponents at times in dialogical fashion, arguing and debating with them. Nevertheless, the most important element of the present point is to show that Paul reacted against non-Christian beliefs by rational argumentation, whether in the form of presentation ("preaching") or interaction ("debate").

Thayer indicates that although the word in question can mean to "ponder," "argue," "discourse," or "discuss," when it is used in Acts 17:17, which is the verse we are examining, it is used "with the idea of disputing prominent."7 In addition, A. T. Robertson writes that whether the word is used to denote the act of pondering, conversing, discoursing, or teaching by the dialectical method, it always carries "the idea of intellectual stimulus."8

Therefore, whatever is Marshall’s exact meaning, he is wrong when he writes, "For Luke ’argue’ means ’preach’ rather than ’debate.’"9 That is, if Marshall means, "For Luke ’argue’ means ’to present an argument’ rather than ’to engage in argument,’" he is still mistaken, but at least he would escape the charge of anti-intellectualism. However, if he means, "For Luke ’argue’ means

’to assert without argument’ rather than ’to engage in argument,’" then he is not only wrong, but since the error is too obvious, we may also suspect him of having an anti-intellectual bias. But he does not seem to mean the latter.10 In any case, the word does not mean to preach rather than debate. The word can mean to preach (a monologue), to debate (a dialogue), or both, and we discern which meaning is intended from the context. But since there is a particular word for preaching that Luke freely uses throughout the Book of Acts, it appears that the word we are presently examining more often than not means an argumentative exchange or dialogue rather than preaching in the sense of a monologue. The word always signifies the use of rational argumentation. For example, although the two verses may be describing a presentation or discussion among friendly believers, even Acts 20:7; Acts 20:9 give no indication that the situation excludes the use of arguments. The apostles arrived at their conclusions through rational deductions from scriptural and special revelation even in their presentations to believers, as seen from their sermons and letters. The conclusion is that the word can signify either a presentation or a debate, with the emphasis determined by the context of the passage, and even when mere presentation is in view, rational argumentation is a necessary element of what is conveyed. Our verse, Acts 17:17, appears to describe or include a debate.

We cannot be sure if Marshall’s exegetical error results at least partly from an anti-intellectual bias, but this is a possibility. "Preaching," at least as defined and practiced by many people, sounds pious and harmless, but to "argue" and "debate" sound intellectual and offensive. Many Christians have been indoctrinated by the world on how Christians should behave in a non-Christian world, and assume that we are not supposed to argue with anyone. But Christ and the apostles often argued with people in defense of biblical truth, and they left instructions for us to do the same.

Perhaps some people imagine that every argument involves members of the opposing parties boisterously screaming at one another, but that does not need to be the case. Winning an argument should largely depend on the superiority of what we affirm rather than a domineering personality, so that we may be gentle and polite throughout the entire process; however, scriptural instructions and examples dictate that sometimes regular standards of social etiquette are put aside. In any case, because the biblical strategies for the evangelism of unbelievers and the edification of believers are heavily intellectual, an anti-intellectual attitude runs counter to the spirit of Scripture and renders one an unfaithful and ineffective Christian worker. Now, if someone disagrees with all this, he must give me an argument.

Acts 17:18, Acts 17:21

Although Athens had lost its earlier political eminence by the time of Paul’s visit, it remained the intellectual center of the ancient world. Four major philosophical schools had flourished there. They were the Academy of Plato (287 B.C.), the Lyceum of Aristotle (335 B.C.), the Garden of Epicurus (306 B.C.), and the Porch of Zeno (300 B.C.). Although we may assume that various philosophical viewpoints were represented, Luke explicitly mentions the "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (Acts 17:18), who disputed with Paul. I will take time to summarize Epicurean and Stoic philosophies because they are mentioned here in Acts 17:1-34. Lamentably, we cannot also devote the space to explain the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, as well as other philosophical traditions such as Skepticism.

Epicurus (340-270 B.C.) had adopted the atomic theory of the earlier Democritus (460-360 B.C.). The theory asserts that reality consists of indivisible material entities called atoms, moving through infinite empty space. Although the atoms themselves have no inherent properties, they combine in various ways to form objects that have differing properties.

One major motivation for Epicurus' philosophy is to deliver man from his fear of death and of gods. Although the Epicureans formally affirm the traditional Greek deities, they are seen as part of the materialistic and atomic universe, and irrelevant to human affairs. Because the gods were not interested in human affairs, belief in divine providence is considered superstitious, and religious rituals are worthless. We may call them deists; the Stoics considered them atheists, and indeed they were such in the practical sense.

Democritus had taught that the atoms move in all directions through empty space, and it is easy to conceive of how they may collide with and cling to one another to form different combinations of atoms. However, Epicurus introduced the property of weight to the atoms, and asserted that they are constantly falling downward through empty space. But this generated the problem of how the atoms will ever collide with one another. Epicurus answered that while falling, the atoms would at times swerve out of their straight downward path and collide with other atoms. He considered this theory successful in maintaining the metaphysical indeterminism, and thus the human freedom, that he desired in his philosophy.

Since everything consists of atoms, even the mind consists of atoms, and there is no soul that transcends physical reality. The atoms that formed the person are dispersed at death, and this committed Epicurus to a denial of immortality, so that he wrote in his Letter to Menoeceus, "When death is, we are not, and when we are, death is not." Since there is no immortality, neither can there be a resurrection or judgment; therefore, it is irrational for man to fear death. Although the gods themselves were made up of atoms, because they "live in less turbulent regions,"11 they are not subject to dissolution.

Since there is no afterlife, man should desire only the things of this life. For the Epicureans, pleasure is the highest good, and thus we may categorize their ethical theory as a form of hedonism. Nevertheless, Epicurus himself opposed the crude sensual hedonism of Aristippus (435-356 B.C.), who led a movement called Cyrenaicism and advocated the pursuit of bodily pleasures, living by the motto, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die."

Although Epicurus agreed that pleasure is man's highest good, he made distinctions between various kinds of pleasures. Pleasurable experiences may be of differing intensity and duration. Although bodily pleasures may carry greater intensity, they often bring a measure of pain. For example, the pleasure that one obtains from gorging food is canceled out by the negative short-term and long-term effects that may result. The same may be said of the pleasure that one may derive from sexual promiscuity.

Therefore, Epicurus promoted the less intense but the safe and long-lived pleasures of the mind, such as having a conversation with a friend or admiring great art and literature. The general aim is to live a tranquil life. However, since the mind is not distinguished from the body, we are merely referring to different types of sensations, and not mental pleasures as distinct from physical ones. In any case, scholars suggest that by the time Paul visited Athens, the followers of Epicurus had

adopted the crude sensual hedonism that the founder of their philosophy had taken great pains to avoid.

Contrary to Democritus, Epicurus affirmed the reliability of sensations. According to him, the bodies of the objects being observed throw off films of atoms that exactly conform to the shapes of the objects and make contact with the atoms of the soul of the observer. Since the films of atoms coming from the observed objects exactly correspond to the objects, sensations never convey false information, although he allowed that one might make false judgments on the basis of such sensations. To summarize the philosophy of the Epicureans, in epistemology they were empiricists, in metaphysics they were deists, atomists, and indeterminists, in ethics they were hedonists, and they denied immortality, resurrection, and judgment.

Since Epicureanism is not our main topic, I will not take the space to offer a detailed refutation of this philosophy in particular, but we may mention several points. In epistemology, I have presented numerous arguments and examples against empiricism elsewhere; in metaphysics, the Epicurean atomic theory and indeterminism is thoroughly arbitrary, and also unsustainable by their epistemology; in ethics, their theory cannot be formulated on the basis of their epistemology, and there is no authoritative reason to think that pleasure is the highest good. And if the Epicureans failed to establish their view of metaphysics, then their rejection of immortality, resurrection, and judgment are also arbitrary and without foundation.

Other arguments against the details of Epicureanism are more involved, and therefore must be passed over at this time. In any case, it is especially relevant to this study to note that, as with other non-Christian worldviews, Epicureanism is ultimately founded on pure human speculation. Also, it is relevant to note that many points in Epicureanism are strikingly similar in principle to some of the widely held beliefs of contemporary secularists, who are still unable to justify these beliefs. The philosophical tradition of Zeno (340-265 B.C.) was named Stoicism because he had taught in the Porch, or the Stoa. Reading a book about Socrates had ignited Zeno’s passion for philosophy, and this led him to move to Athens. On his first arrival, he came under the tutelage of the Cynic Crates. His own philosophy would evidence the influence of Cynicism through his emphasis on self-sufficiency. Early successors of Zeno included Cleanthes and Chrysippus. Panaetius of Rhodes (180-110 B.C.) and Posidonius (130-50 B.C.; Cicero’s instructor) contributed to the establishment of Stoicism in Rome, and Roman Stoicism were given expression by Seneca (4 B.C. - A.D. 65), Epictetus (50-130), and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180). To adequately summarize Stoic philosophy in several paragraphs is unrealistic, but we must make such an attempt without claiming to be exhaustive.

Probably inspired by Heraclitus (about 530-470 B.C.), the Stoics taught that at first there was nothing but eternal fire, from which emerged the elements that made up the universe. The world would eventually be consumed in an universal conflagration and return to fire, and the cycle of history will repeat over and over again. The Stoic view of history appears to preclude individual immortality, even if there seemed to be slightly different views on this issue: "They denied the universal and perpetual immortality of the soul; some supposing that it was swallowed up in deity; others, that it survived only till the final conflagration; others, that immortality was restricted to the wise and good."12 The divine fire that permeates the whole world is a rational fire, and the logos or Reason that determines the course of the universe. Some people have the misconception that

because Stoicism affirms that every event is determined by Fate, it therefore denies that there is purpose in history. However, since its logos is an intelligent fire, Stoicism can indeed affirm a teleological view of the universe. But then people confuse such a view with the biblical teaching on divine sovereignty. This is unfortunate and unnecessary. The Stoics were pantheists, so that their logos is not transcendent but immanent. In fact, "man's reason [is] seen as being of a piece with the ever-living fire which permeates the world order,"13 leading Epictetus to assert that there is a "spark of divinity" within every man. The universe, men, and even animals are all parts of God, and thus the Stoics were pantheists. God is the universe, and the universe is God. This is completely opposed to the biblical position.14

Since man is subject to the immanent forces of the world, he ought to live in harmony with nature. Since Reason permeates and governs the world, to live in harmony with nature is to live in conformity to rationality, and rationality is superior to the emotions. Everything outside of reason should be viewed with indifference, be it pleasure, suffering, or even death. Epictetus wrote that although man cannot control events, he can control his attitude toward events:

Since our bodies are not under our control, pleasure is not a good and pain is not an evil. There is the famous story about Epictetus, the slave. As his master was torturing his leg, he said with great composure, "You will certainly break my leg." When the bone broke, he continued in the same tone of voice, "Did I not tell you that you would break it?" The good life, therefore, does not consist of externalities, but it is an inward state, a strength of will, and self-control.15

"Stoicism gave rise to a serious attitude, resignation in suffering, stern individualism, and social self-sufficiency."16 We are to demonstrate self-control, self-sufficiency, and emotional indifference amidst life's situations. But if life gets too rough, Stoicism permits suicide.

Critics sometimes attempt to undermine the uniqueness of Christianity by pointing out its apparent similarities with Stoicism. For example, both worldviews emphasize "indifference" and control over the emotions. The typical reply against this is often that Christianity does not share such an emphasis at all, not even on the surface, so that some would deny that Christianity teaches emotional indifference and control. However, such attacks and replies are both misguided, and often betray a lack of understanding of both Stoicism and Christianity.

One example comes from Php 4:12, where Paul writes, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." On the surface, the Stoics may have agreed with this statement, and the word "content" is indeed the Stoic word for indifference. Scripture does not allow the emotionalism encouraged by many contemporary believers, whose opinions on this issue are formed more by modern psychology than by biblical theology, so that they advocate the free expression of one's emotions without consideration of the biblical teaching on self-control and inner transformation.

However, Php 4:13 makes all the difference: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Christianity indeed teaches spiritual, emotional, and social self-sufficiency, without rejecting the legitimacy of community; however, this self-sufficiency is only relative to other human beings, but not to God, so that we are always in need of him. This verse indicates that the Christian's inner power is directly linked to a conscious affirmation of Christianity and dependence

on God. This God is not a pantheistic immanent rational fire that is part of the universe, but a transcendent rational mind that is distinct from and the creator of the universe. God is not in the universe; God made the universe. He is immanent in the sense that he chooses to exercise his power in human and natural affairs, but he is not part of this creation, nor is he bound to it. And contrary to Stoic philosophy, no matter how difficult our lives get, there is no justification to commit suicide. This difference is not superficial but fundamental and essential, since it is based on a view of metaphysics that contradicts the Stoic view of metaphysics. Christianity teaches a God who is both transcendent and immanent - metaphysically aloof but makes himself near by what he does - who makes distinctions between individuals, who regenerates some and not others, who makes decisions and effects communications, and who strengthens his people so that they may overcome the world. The Christian's inner resources come from God, who is distinct from the Christian himself, while the Stoic sought to achieve absolute self-sufficiency, and not the relative self-sufficiency of the Christian. We overcome the world and fulfill our purpose not by ourselves, but by the power of God, which so powerfully works in us (Colossians 1:29). Therefore, although they may be superficial similarities between Stoicism and Christianity, in reality these similarities have behind them fundamental and irreconcilable differences between the two worldviews.

Besides what has been stated above concerning their metaphysics and ethics, the Stoics had developed detailed theories on epistemology, logic, linguistics, and other subjects. Concerning epistemology, I will say nothing more than that the Stoics held to a form of empiricism, but nevertheless not the Epicureans' naïve acceptance of sensation. In any case, both Epicureanism and Stoicism failed to provide a constructive epistemology that makes knowledge possible, yet skepticism is not an option because of its own self-referential incoherence.

Despite superficial and apparent similarities that may confuse the uninformed, Stoicism and Christianity are irreconcilably opposed to each other concerning every ultimate question on a fundamental level. In epistemology the Stoics were empiricists, in metaphysics they were pantheists, in ethics they held to a view of reason and virtue very different from Christianity, and they denied immortality, resurrection, and judgment.

Like the Epicureans, their philosophy is arbitrary, inconsistent, and ultimately founded on pure human speculation. One writer thinks that the Stoics have their counterparts in contemporary New Age followers and pantheists.17 Although I can understand why it may appear to be so, and it may be true in some sense, I would not venture to push this assertion too far. Present-day adherents of New Age philosophy and pantheism often do not have developed theories of logic and ethics from which we may make comparisons with Stoicism. Nevertheless, there are philosophers today who claim to have inherited from the Stoic tradition.18

Bringing our attention back to Acts 17:1-34, it is important to keep in mind that Paul's audience consists not only of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, although these two groups are referred to by name (Acts 17:18), but the crowd also includes other people, probably of various philosophical persuasions. Acts 17:17 says that Paul speaks about the gospel "in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there," and Acts 17:21 indicates that the audience includes "the Athenians and the foreigners."

Judging from the intellectual background of Athens, it would not be surprising to find representatives of Platonism, Aristotelianism, Skepticism, and other perspectives in the audience.

Even among the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, we may be certain that there are differences of opinion between them. Adherents to the various philosophical schools have often made major modifications to the philosophies of their founders, so that Frederic Howe is justified in saying that there is a "rather broad spectrum of vantage points on hand."19

Because the audience consists of people representing different philosophical traditions, not every point in Paul's speech will equally apply to each hearer. For example, although Paul appeals to the Athenians' rampant idolatry and an altar to an unknown god as a point of departure for his speech, the Epicurean philosophers themselves had wanted to remove from human thinking what they perceived to be superstitious devotion to the gods. Accordingly, Lucretius rejected the Athenians' appeal to the "unknown gods." Nevertheless, Paul's choice of this point of departure for his speech is appropriate. As Howe writes, "Doubtless the predominant group of hearers included bystanders and those who enjoyed hearing the exchange of ideas often presented there."20

Therefore, we must keep in mind that Paul is addressing a diverse group of people with diverse philosophies and perspectives. It follows that we should not expect every detail of his speech to equally apply to every person in the audience. However, a major point of this study, and with it comes a major insight for apologetics, is that before he is done, Paul would have offended and contradicted every non-Christian present - not with merely superficial disagreements, but on the most fundamental level and on every major philosophical subject.

Acts 17:28 says that the philosophers disputed with Paul. Contrary to what this implies, some scholars interpret the Areopagus episode as illustrating Paul's use of a philosophical "common ground" that his Christian faith had with the philosophers. John Sanders writes as follows:

Interestingly, Paul does not refer to the Old Testament in his speech. He quotes only from pagan poets and uses the ideas and vocabulary of Greek philosophy in his attempt to reach these people. Yet all of Paul's points can be found in the Old Testament, because there are affinities between general and special Revelation 21:1-27 This comment by Sanders betrays his dismal grasp of both Greek philosophy and Christian theology, a misunderstanding of Luke's intention in this passage, and astonishingly inferior reasoning skills.

Although it is true that Paul quotes from Greek poets in his speech (v. 28), this does not mean that he necessarily agrees with what they say. Right now I am quoting from Sanders, but I am doing so only to declare his error, making him an example of inferior scholarship. Likewise, Paul quotes the poets not to express his agreement, but for another purpose. We will have more to say about this when we discuss Acts 17:28, where he quotes the Greek poets. Neither does using the "vocabulary of Greek philosophy" demonstrate agreement with Greek philosophy, just as I can use the vocabulary of evolutionary science to illustrate how Christian theology opposes evolution. Or, I can address the thought categories that interest the secular psychologist, only to illustrate the biblical opposition against non-Christian psychology by filling them with Christian content. As for using the "ideas…of Greek philosophy," I agree that Paul addresses the thought categories and ultimate questions that interested the philosophers, but he fills them with Christian content in opposition to their philosophies. The Bible itself directly discusses these ultimate questions, so that when Paul uses philosophical terms and fills them with biblical content, he is doing the opposite of what Sanders alleges. Who says that those ideas and categories originated with and belong to the Greek philosophers in the first place? My position is that non-Christian scholarship hijacks and

distorts ideas and categories that originated from and belong to God, revealed to us through our innate knowledge and biblical revelation. That non-Christians share some of these ideas and categories illustrate only their culpability, that they have distorted and suppressed the true knowledge of God, so that all of them are without excuse and come under divine condemnation.

Sanders writes, "Paul does not refer to the Old Testament in his speech….Yet all of Paul's points can be found in the Old Testament." His thinking appears to be that instead of quoting from the Old Testament, Paul quotes from the Greek poets (which reflect Greek philosophy), yet his points are found in the Old Testament; therefore, Greek philosophy agrees with the Old Testament (at least on some essential points). However, reasoning this way begs the question. From reading the same speech, I would say the following instead: All of Paul's points are found in the Old Testament, therefore he is speaking from the Old Testament even without directly quoting it, showing that he confronts human speculation with biblical revelation. All of Paul's points are found in the Old Testament because all of his points are taken from the Old Testament. As for the Greek poets, he quotes them to show how they could not suppress the innate knowledge of the true God, even though they have distorted his general revelation to the point that such knowledge only serves to condemn them without leading them closer to God. Further, this inescapable knowledge of God contradicts their explicit philosophies in every major thought category, thus illustrating that conversion will demand a thorough repentance from them, so that they must turn from their futile thinking and speculation. Another possibility is that the quotations do not agree with the Old Testament at all, but Paul is citing them only to expose how Greek philosophy contradicts itself. In this particular speech, we will see exactly for what reason he quotes the Greek poets when we come to Acts 17:28. This general understanding of Paul's speech is in agreement with what the apostle himself writes in Romans 1:18-32; therefore, we have a biblical basis for such an interpretation. On the other hand, on what basis does Sanders assert his interpretation? Lacking a biblical justification, it seems that his basis consists of little more than his desire to make Christian and non-Christian thought appear less disagreeable. But according to the Scripture, this is an ignoble and sinful desire. In fact, some scholars are so biased that they claim Acts 17:1-34 contradicts Romans 1:1-32! This is sufficient ground for their excommunication. For those who affirm biblical infallibility, that these scholars believe that Acts 17:1-34 can contradict Romans 1:1-32, or any other part of the Bible, is in itself a refutation of their position. The two passages only appear to contradict once we force Acts 17:1-34 to say what it does not say, and of course, if you do this you can make any two passages contradict each other. On the other hand, the correct interpretation recognizes that Acts 17:1-34 illustrates Romans 1:1-32. Of course it is true that, in the words of Sanders, "there are affinities between general and special revelation," but Sanders draws a different conclusion from this than the apostle Paul. Sanders thinks that because "there are affinities between general and special revelation," therefore Christian and non-Christian thought contain substantial agreement. However, this is the opposite point that Paul makes in Romans 1:1-32, where the apostle states that since God has made himself plain to everyone through general revelation (Romans 1:19), therefore those who suppress the inescapable truth about God does so in wickedness (Romans 1:18), and are left without excuse (Romans 1:20). That is, pagan philosophies do not agree with general revelation, and that is one reason why God condemns them.

It is because non-Christian philosophies disagree with special revelation, while they ought to agree with special revelation if they were to accurately reflect general revelation, that God charges them with culpable "ignorance." In other words, God has presented enough information about himself through man's innate knowledge and the created world so that non-Christians ought to agree with special revelation (the Scripture), but non-Christians in fact do not agree with special revelation, and therefore none of them can escape condemnation. Sanders affirms a position that subverts the intent of Romans 1:1-32 and Acts 17:1-34; that is, if he is right about Acts 17:1-34, he would have made nonsense of Romans 1:1-32. On the other hand, we can affirm that Romans 1:1-32 helps us make sense of Acts 17:1-34.

Another important issue is to find out whose interpretation Luke himself favors. Throughout the passage we find an emphasis on the disagreements between Paul and the Athenians instead of a merely incomplete agreement between them. Luke and Paul nowhere give any indication that the philosophers are "on the right track."22 Instead, Luke introduces the philosophers by having them "dispute with [Paul]," and emphasizing how they misunderstand and insult the apostle. Frederic Howe correctly observes that Paul's speech stressed the ignorance of the Athenians rather than what Paul thinks they were doing right.23

We will be pointing out additional disagreements between Paul and the philosophers as we continue this study, but the above is sufficient to discredit the interpretation of the Areopagus speech as an illustration of how there is substantial "common ground" between Christian and non-Christian thinking. The sermons and letters of the apostles in general, and this passage in particular, do not support this "common ground" perspective. The philosophers themselves disputed with Paul, and Paul in turn stressed their ignorance. It appears that it is the interpreters themselves who want to discover and emphasize this non-existent common ground with unbelievers, and neglecting proper scholarship, they have imposed such a view upon this and other relevant biblical passages.24

Misunderstanding and disparagement characterized the philosophers' reaction to Paul's initial presentation of the gospel. Although it is likely that they made other comments, Luke specifically recorded two. One statement implies that they had misunderstood key elements in the apostle's presentation, and the other statement is meant as an insult against his intellectual competence (Acts 17:28).

Some of the philosophers remark that Paul appears to be "advocating foreign gods" - that is, more than one. Luke explains, "They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection." They may have understood "Jesus" as the personified power of Healing, since the name means something like this in the Greek, and "resurrection" (anastasis) as the goddess of Restoration. The Greeks had raised altars to abstract principles such as Modesty and Piety, and so it is not surprising that they could have misunderstood the apostle in this manner. Since "Jesus" is in the masculine and "resurrection" is in the feminine, they could have also misconstrued Paul as introducing a new divine couple.

Right away we can see how the presuppositions of non-Christians distort how they interpret information about the true God when it is presented to them. According to the Bible, unregenerate men adopt non-Christian presuppositions as an act of sinful rebellion against God, and these presuppositions in turn reinforce their habitual denial of God in their thoughts by distorting and

suppressing the information about God presented to them through general revelation (created world and innate ideas) and special revelation (Scripture). The Athenians' non-Christian presuppositions, and the resulting misunderstanding toward the gospel message, afforded the hearers a temporary delay in having to confront the truth about God, even when directly presented to them. The same problem exists when preaching to non-Christians today. Their unbelieving intellectual backgrounds have conditioned their minds to distort and reject the Christian message, so that even in societies where biblical information appears to be relatively pervasive, there remains widespread misconceptions about what Scripture really teaches and what Christianity really affirms.

We must not allow the non-Christians to get away with hearing or assuming a false representation of the Christian faith, and then consider themselves justified in rejecting Christianity by finding fault with this false representation. Therefore, we must strive to present the faith with accuracy, and continue to correct misconceptions in others regarding what we believe. Although misconceptions can be formed very quickly, they are often stubborn and hard to change. As an apostle, Paul no doubt presented the gospel clearly and accurately, but it remains that the philosophers' initial reaction betrays their failure to grasp some basic points in his message. How much more, then, are we to share the desire of the apostle, who writes to the Colossians, "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (Colossians 4:4).

While some philosophers fail to understand Paul's message, other philosophers make an insulting remark about him, asking, "What is this babbler trying to say?" The word "babbler" comes from spermologos in the Greek. Since sperma means seed and lego- means to collect, the word literally means "seed-picker" or "gutter-sparrow." It had been used to describe loafers who picked up scraps of food in the market, and then became an Athenian slang referring to those "who had acquired mere scraps of learning."25 It is in this last sense that the philosophers use this word to speak about Paul - an insult that conveys "supreme ridicule."26 There is a parallel from Shakespeare: This fellow picks up wit as pigeons peas, And utters it again when Jove doth please.

He is wit's peddler, and retails his wares At wakes, and wassails, meetings, markets, fairs.27 No matter what the critics say, it is not really Paul's learning that is at issue, but the content of his message. Although on this occasion the philosophers belittle Paul's learning on account of what he says, on another occasion Festus blames the apostle's great learning to account for what he says! Festus says, "Your great learning is driving you insane" (Acts 26:24). So which is it? Paul indeed had an extensive education, but unbelievers will find things to criticize no matter what credentials we have. The root of their hostility is sinful rebellion against God.

They call the apostle a collector of scraps of learning, but Luke observes, "All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21). Paul's beliefs come from God, who reveals himself through the prophets and the apostles. On the basis of revelation, Paul speaks from a position of knowledge, and he is not looking to hear something new. On the other hand, with all of their speculation, the philosophers could not settle upon the truth, and it is they who ended up being collectors of scraps of learning. As with the unbelievers of today, the Athenians were "open-minded" because they were ignorant of the truth, but of course, many of them very quickly became close-minded when confronted with the exclusive truth of Christianity.

A. T. Robertson writes, "[Paul] was the real master philosopher and these Epicureans and Stoics were quacks. Paul had the only true philosophy of the universe and life with Jesus Christ as the centre (Colossians 1:21-20), the greatest of all philosophers as Ramsay justly terms him."28 I am very glad that Robertson includes this remark, since many Christians today would not even consider Paul an intellectual, let alone a "master philosopher." But Paul was a different kind of philosopher, because his philosophy was not founded on human speculation but divine revelation, so that Christ was the center or foundation of his philosophy. This is an excellent perspective on Paul, although it is very unusual, and many Christians today are resistant to it. Anti-intellectual Christians would insist that Paul was not a philosopher, nor was he interested in philosophical debate. They would rather make Paul a mystic than an intellectual.

Christians today are too quickly embarrassed by the intellectual challenges thrown at them by the unbelievers. Although we are not divinely inspired like the prophets and the apostles, if we will wholly depend on the revelation of Scripture, we will indeed be the master philosophers of this world. Because we have revelation as the foundation of our philosophy, unbelievers are not in fact competing against our own wisdom, but the very wisdom of God. Thus if we will only learn to apply divine revelation with skill when answering their challenges, there can be no real contest, but we will be able to destroy every unbelieving argument, and embarrass the gainsayers.

Non-Christians prize the idea that they are wise, and they find security in the idea that Christians are irrational. The biblical apologist shatters their illusion, and shows them their true condition, that they are sinful and ignorant, and that they are the intellectual quacks of this world. Their only hope is in Christ, but since their alleged autonomy is non-existent, even their having faith in Christ is ultimately not up to them, but rests on the sovereign mercy of God alone.

Acts 17:19-20

Acts 17:19-20 say that Paul is then taken to the Areopagus, where he is asked to elaborate on his beliefs: "Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.'" The Areopagus, or the Hill of Mars, received its name from the mythological account of the trial of Mars for the murder of Neptune's son. The Court of Areopagus (or "the Areopagus") was a council consisting of probably around thirty aristocratic Athenians, and exercised jurisdiction over matters of religion and education. By the time of Paul, the Areopagus probably met on the hill itself only to hear cases of homicides. Ordinary meetings were held in the Royal Portico (stoa basileios), located in the northwest corner of the Agora, the marketplace in Athens.

Socrates (470-399 B.C.) was arraigned and condemned by this council several hundred years before. Although by the time of Roman dominance, the authority of the council had been greatly reduced, it was still the chief judicial institution, and had the power either to censor and silence new speakers, or to grant them freedom to teach. Cicero once induced the Areopagus to invite a philosopher to lecture in Athens. So the council exercised some control over the circulation of ideas within the city, and had authority to grant or withhold teaching licenses.

One important theme Luke pursues in the Book of Acts is that Paul was often brought before a court, but that this had never resulted in a guilty verdict against him. Here Paul is once again

brought before a court to come under examination, and it is likely that Luke intends for the Areopagus episode to be another example of Paul appearing before a court without resulting in a guilty verdict. Although for Luke the word translated "they took him" (Acts 17:19) is more often than not meant in the sense of seizing and arresting someone (Acts 16:19; Acts 18:17; Acts 21:30), it is not always used this way (Acts 9:27; Acts 23:19). The context seems to show that Paul was not under arrest in Athens, but he was asked to appear before the Areopagus either to give him an opportunity to expound on his philosophy, or it was for the purpose of determining whether he would be permitted to propagate his ideas in the city: "'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.' All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:19-21). Formal charges probably could have been brought against Paul, but in the end the council took no legal action against him (Acts 17:33).

Acts 17:22-23

Paul does not begin his speech by establishing what many consider to be "common ground" with the unbelievers; rather, he begins by underscoring their ignorance. He says, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23). It is important to correctly understand Paul's intention here, since it will affect how we will interpret the rest of the speech. Nevertheless, the rest of the verses in this speech have their necessary meanings, so that the usual false understanding of these two verses will prove to be inconsistent with some crucial points in the subsequent verses. The word translated "religious" can be meant either in a good sense, as in "pious," or in a bad sense, as in "superstitious." One commentary says, "Some suggest that Paul's statement was derogatory rather than complimentary, but the latter is most likely the case."29 Then it continues, "He chose a starting point, a place where they could agree, rather than starting with their differences." If this is given as a reason why we should believe that the word "religious" is used in a positive sense here, then it begs the question, since if the word is used in a negative sense, then Paul is in fact beginning his speech by emphasizing their differences. The same commentary then contradicts itself by saying, "The term translated 'very religious,' however, is a combination of Greek words deido (to fear or revere) and daimon (evil spirits), which may contain a subtle rebuke concerning the spiritual realities behind their religion." But if it is a rebuke (subtle or not) directed against the very "realities behind their religion," then Paul is not choosing "a place where they could agree" as his starting point. So is Paul starting with his agreement with them (if he agrees with them on anything at all), or is he starting with a rebuke about their religion? Which one is it? The commentary contradicts itself when it says that Paul begins his speech from a place of agreement with his hearers, and then turns around and says that Paul begins with a rebuke about the very realities of their religion. But it commits a factual error on the latter point, since although daimon is the word from which we derived the English demons, it does not necessarily mean the evil spirits referred to often in the Gospels. Rather, Robertson is correct when he says that deisidaimon itself can be "a neutral word," with daimon signifying the idea of "deity."30 But then Robertson commits his own error, and says, "It seems unlikely that Paul should give this audience a slap in the face at the very start."31 This again begs

the question. If the word is used in a negative sense, then this is evidence that Paul would indeed "give this audience a slap in the face at the very start." Why could he not begin with an insult, or by emphasizing the differences? Marvin Vincent writes, "Paul would have been unlikely to begin his address with a charge which would have awakened the anger of his audience."32 "Unlikely" according to whom? They are saying that this statement cannot be an insult because Paul could not have started with an insult. But why not?

If this statement is an insult, then we know that Paul indeed could have started with an insult. But the commentaries rule out this possibility without deriving their interpretation from this statement or other verses. It is very disappointing and frustrating to read such an arbitrary assertion in the commentaries without anyone giving a reason as to why Paul could not begin with an insult. Unless these scholars give us a reason for this assertion, they are imposing on the verse their arbitrary view of what Paul could or could not have done.

I. Howard Marshall likewise asserts, "Paul begins by commending the Athenians for being very religious….It is most likely that Paul meant it in a good sense, to provide a way in to his address that would engage the attention of the audience."33 Nonsense! Does he mean to say that Paul would have lost the audience's attention if he had started with an insult? If the apostle had started with an unambiguous insult or rebuke, the audience probably would have paid much closer attention to what he was saying. Either way, we have no right to simply assume. Then, Marshall undermines his own case with the following admission: "Nevertheless, Luke also uses the corresponding noun in what is perhaps a slightly derogatory sense in Acts 25:19, and it is likely that he intended his readers to perceive the irony of the situation (cf. Acts 25:16). For all their religiosity, the Athenians were in reality thoroughly superstitious and lacking in knowledge of the true God." So is Paul's statement still a compliment? When Marshall says that Paul is "commending the Athenians," he gives a non-biblical reason, one that is based on Marshall's own assumption about the best rhetorical strategy for the situation. But when he says that Paul's statement may in fact be saying that the Athenians are "thoroughly superstitious and lacking in knowledge," he uses a biblical argument. Marshall is suppressing biblical evidence that he knows to give way to his own prejudice about what Paul should do in this situation.

David J. Williams, on the other hand, may be closer to the truth than the above commentators: "Perhaps Paul deliberately chose the word with kindly ambiguity so as not to offend his hearers while, at the same time, expressing to his own satisfaction what he thought of their religion. They would learn soon enough what his opinion really was."34 To assert without good reason that Paul is trying not to offend his hearers would again be begging the question, since if Paul intends for the word to express an insult, then he also intends to offend his hearers. However, Williams is wise to add "perhaps" before his comment. Even if Paul intends to preserve the ambiguity inherent in the term, if Paul is at least truthful and competent, so that he uses the right words to express his thoughts, we can be sure that the word in question is at least effective in "expressing to his own satisfaction what he thought of their religion."

Since Paul would soon contradict his hearers' religions and philosophies at every major point, or as Williams states, "They would learn soon enough what his opinion really was," this suggests that Paul uses the term in a negative sense, so that it truly expresses his opinion, although he is aware that it would be sufficiently ambiguous, so that his hearers could not be sure that it is intended as

an insult or rebuke. Conrad Gempf agrees: "Paul used very guarded and ambiguous phrases, and on reflection even his introduction becomes a veiled attack."35 It is possible that Paul is saying that his hearers are very involved in religious matters, without stating whether this is good or bad. Of course, whether it is good or bad depends on whether their religious beliefs are true or false, and we will see that Paul thinks they are false. In any case, an exposition of Acts 17:23 will illustrate that Paul does not intend for "very religious" to be a compliment, even if he does not mean something as clearly negative as "very superstitious." To illustrate what he has just said, Paul continues, "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Right away Paul contrasts their ignorance with his knowledge. In philosophical terms, he begins his speech by claiming a superior epistemology. Since what is recorded in Acts 17:1-34 is likely to be a condensed version of what Paul delivered in Athens, as is the case with other speeches in the Bible, we may look to what Paul has written elsewhere to inform our understanding of his speech to the Areopagus. As mentioned earlier, there were many statues and altars in Athens, but Paul finds one altar especially appropriate to use as his point of departure for his speech. That is, there was an altar dedicated to "an unknown god." The Jerusalem Bible translates Paul's statement as follows: "Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it." But it is a grave error to understand what Paul says in this manner and to translate the verse this way. The Athenians had erected altars to "unknown gods" to ensure that no deities were left out in their worship. They did not have any definite idea as to who or what these deities may be, nor did they have any definite information about them. Now, if one were to say, "I am a worshiper of Zeus, but just in case there are any other gods, I will acknowledge them too," the true God of Christianity would not accept that as worship. Thus neither can Paul be conceding that the Athenians were worshiping the God of Christianity, and that they merely needed to know more about him.

Rather, the point is that they did not know the true God at all. They may realize that there may be a divine existence beyond and other than what they were worshiping, and so constructed altars to these "unknown gods" just as a safety measure. One cannot conclude from this that they were already worshiping the God of Christianity. In fact, the point is that they were not worshiping the God of Christianity. Their altars to "unknown gods" merely constitute a confession of ignorance, and Paul's statement intends to exploit this confession without conceding anything positive about their present way of worship. This understanding agrees with what Paul says in Romans 1:1-32, where he teaches that although pagan worshipers already possess an innate knowledge of the true God, they suppress and distort the truth about him in their explicit philosophy, resulting in all kinds of idol worship and sinful practices. An altar to an "unknown god" is just one more example. Sin has blinded the spiritual eyes of every human being, so that unless God reveals himself through special revelation, man cannot rightly know him.

We obtain additional confirmation from 1 Corinthians 1:21, which says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." Paul says, "the world through its wisdom did not know him." The true God is as the Scripture reveals him, but the non-Christians fail to obtain explicit knowledge about this true God by their non-Christian epistemology.

Gordon Fee puts it this way: "As he will elaborate in Romans 1:18-31, left to themselves mere creatures cannot find out the living God. The best they can do is to create gods in the likeness of created things, or, as so often happens, in their own distorted likeness."36 Since both 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 and Romans 1:1-32 begin by stressing the failure of non-Christian philosophy to arrive at the truth about God, the most natural interpretation of the beginning of Paul's Areopagus speech is that there he is also stressing the intellectual impotence of non-Christian philosophy. To say that Paul acknowledges that the Athenians were already worshiping the true God without knowing it would make the apostle contradict his own stated position in 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 and Romans 1:1-32.

Therefore, we may agree with the following comments about the beginning of the Areopagus speech: Of course there was no connection between this god and the God whom he would proclaim. He was not suggesting for one moment that they were unconscious worshipers of the true God, but was simply looking for a way of raising with them the basic question of theology: Who is God? (David J. Williams)37

Under these circumstances an allusion to one of these altars by the apostle would be equivalent to his saying to the Athenians thus: "You are correct in acknowledging a divine existence beyond which the ordinary rites of your worship recognize; there is such an existence. You are correct in confessing that this Being is unknown to you; you have no just conceptions of his nature and perfections." (Marvin R. Vincent)38

It appears to some readers he was saying that these pagans were doing well - that, in their ignorance, they were worshiping the right God all along and didn't know it. This is, however, far from the intent…Secondly, the translation is misleading. The emphasis in the sentence is not on the identity of the "unknown god" but on the ignorance of the worship. Paul, in the city of "the lovers of wisdom," focused on the ignorance they admitted about the identity of God. (Conrad Gempf)39 The vital principle here is that the point of contact for Paul's statement of clarification was not a common knowledge of the true God of Scripture that these hearers were encouraged to discover, as if to say that they all along had really worshiped the true God. Far from it! Paul's real principle is that their acknowledged ignorance is to be met with accurate information! Their ignorance rather than their worship is stressed. (Frederic R. Howe)40 In other words, about the only thing that Paul concedes to the Athenians is their admitted ignorance. An altar to an "unknown god" is not evidence that they are already worshiping the true God without knowing it, but it is a confession of ignorance. Paul accepts this confession of ignorance as true, and claims that he is able to supply the information about God that they lacked.

However, if non-Christian philosophy has failed to reach God, on what epistemological foundation does Paul so confidently proclaim this God to them? In other words, if man cannot know God by his own unaided wisdom, how did Paul obtain his knowledge about God? We may return to 1 Corinthians 1:21 for the answer: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Although the KJV has, "the foolishness of preaching," the word ke-rygma here refers to the content of preaching rather than the act of preaching. It is by means of the content of apostolic preaching, the content of the Christian faith, that God saves "those who believe." Since faith is a gift from God

(Ephesians 2:8), we may say that God saves those whom he has chosen by generating faith in them by the content of the Christian faith, whether conveyed by speaking or writing. What was being preached is here called "foolishness" because this is how it is regarded from the perspective of worldly "wisdom": "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). But it is through what this world regards as "foolishness" that men are saved, while what the world regards as "wisdom" keeps men in spiritual blindness, resulting in their damnation.

Contrary to non-Christian religions and philosophies, the Christian worldview has as its foundation not human "wisdom" or speculation, but divine revelation, delivered to us through the prophets, the Lord himself, and the apostles: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe….This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Hebrews 1:1-2; Hebrews 2:3). Paul testifies that what he preaches came to him not by human wisdom, tradition, or speculation, but by divine revelation: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12).

Paul announces that whereas his hearers are ignorant, he will "proclaim to them" the truth. Paul does not operate on the same intellectual level as his opponents; he does not try to construct a better system than theirs while standing on the same foundation of human speculation. Instead, Paul declares the truth to his hearers from a position of final knowledge and ultimate authority, and he is able to do this because he stands on the intellectual foundation of divine revelation. He speaks and functions as one who clearly perceives reality by the grace of God, and not as one who gropes around in epistemological darkness.

Commenting on our passage, F. F. Bruce writes, "[Paul] does not argue from the sort of 'first principles' which formed the basis of the various schools of Greek philosophy; his exposition and defense of his message are founded on the biblical revelation of God."41 Every system of thought must begin with certain first principles on which the rest of the system is based. If the first principle of a system is self-contradictory, too narrow, or otherwise inadequate, then the system fails at the starting point, and the rest of the system crumbles. Paul has been converted by the sovereign grace of God, and thus he has adopted biblical revelation as the foundation or first principle of his thought system. Compared to those of the non-Christian philosophers, Paul's first principle is not merely a different one of the same kind, but it is of a different kind altogether.

Instead of having a man-centered foundation, upon which sinful man builds his system of thought with the assumption that he can obtain knowledge of the truth by his own power, Paul rejects the anti-Christian assumptions of human autonomy and sufficiency; rather, he acknowledges that man is bound by moral depravity and mental finitude. If man is to know the truth - any truth - he must depend on God. Christian epistemology is superior because instead of trying to find out the truth by our own power when we have no such power, it accepts the verbal revelation of Scripture as the only way to ground and obtain any knowledge. Non-Christian philosophy is ultimately founded on human speculation, but Christian philosophy is ultimately founded on divine revelation. In non-Christian philosophy man pretends to find the truth by his own power, but in Christian

philosophy the omniscient God tells us the truth, making it plain by his omnipotence.

Following the apostle Paul, when we confront non-Christian belief systems today, we need not begin by accepting their first principles or basic assumptions, since ultimately these are the very premises that we are arguing about. Instead, by demonstrating the failure of non-Christian religions and philosophies, and by holding forth the self- authenticating revelation of Scripture, we may confidently declare to unbelievers the truth about God. Unbelievers will try to force us to accept their presuppositions, and they will try to bully us with empty arguments and sarcastic insults, but if we can show that their presuppositions make knowledge impossible and lead to absurd conclusions, why must we accept them? By their presuppositions, they can know nothing, but by divine revelation, we can know the truth about God, his creation and commands, and receive the knowledge that leads to salvation through faith in Christ. When we take this approach to apologetics and evangelism, we avoid the mistake of pitting our mere human wisdom against their mere human wisdom; rather, we are pitting the wisdom of God against the wisdom of man. They may consider the gospel foolishness, but even the "foolishness" of God is greater than the wisdom of man (1 Corinthians 1:25), and there is no real contest between the two. Divine revelation will always be superior to human speculation at every point and on every issue. We who profess the Christian faith must also confidently rely on the content of Scripture; it is more than adequate to tear down all non-Christian religions and philosophies, exposing them to be sinful attempts to know truth without submitting to God. Therefore, we may announce without arrogance and exaggeration that the Christian worldview has an absolute monopoly on truth, and that every non-Christian religion and philosophy is false. As it is written, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Paul does not "dialogue" with the Athenians to see what they can learn from each other. He has no respect for their religions and philosophies. Instead, he says, "What you do not know, I am going to tell you," and he proceeds to tell them in Acts 17:24. Although what follows is almost certainly a condensed version of Paul’s speech, it contains enough to inform us of the content and scope of what he says, from which we can derive a biblical approach to apologetics and evangelism.

Paul first underscores the ignorance of the non-Christians, and in contrast, he claims to speak from a position of knowledge and authority. After this, he moves on to address the nature of God and the nature of creation - that is, he expounds on the biblical view of metaphysics, or the theory of reality. He begins by saying, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands" (Acts 17:24).

Contrary to the philosophy of the Athenians, the world - not just the planet earth, but the kosmos, or the entire universe - and everything in it have not always been in existence; rather, this one God about whom Paul is preaching created the universe and everything in it. Against the Epicureans, Paul declares that the universe was not formed by the random collision and combination of ever-existing atoms. Against the Stoics, Paul declares that God and the universe are not identical, but that God is distinct from the universe, and that this God does not only animate the universe, but he created the universe.

Contrary to the religion of the Athenians, there is not a god for this and a god for that. There is not a god for war, a different god for love, a different god for wisdom, and a different god for harvest. Rather, this one God about whom Paul is preaching is the Lord of hosts, the Lord who provides;

he is love and he is wisdom, so that there is no true love and wisdom apart from him. He is "the Lord of heaven and earth," the kurio, the possessor of all that exists, the ruler of every sphere of physical existence and intellectual contemplation. This is the God about whom the Athenians did not know, and since this true God is the sole deity, the mere fact that they worshiped other "gods" necessarily implies that they were not worshiping this true God.

God is transcendent, meaning that he is distinct from the universe, although he is free to become involved in it and he does become involved in it (divine immanence). On the other hand, the mythological gods of the Athenians were part of the universe. Contrary to this, Paul states that the true God "does not live in temples built by hands" (Acts 17:24), and that "he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything" (Acts 17:25). Paul deals with the nature of God with his particular emphasis because he is addressing the Greek popular religions in particular. Other parts of the Bible provide us with enough information to know that our view of God agrees with no other religion or philosophy, and we need to adapt our remarks to them when addressing them to make our disagreements apparent. Of course we contradict the atheists and Hindus on their views of God, but even some professing Christians deny that we radically differ with the Mormons and Muslims. These people are ignorant of both Christian theology, which condemns all other religions, and non-Christian religions, which contradict biblical revelation on all major points. The Mormons are not even monotheistic, claiming that Elohim is the god of only this world, that there are many gods for many different worlds, and that a man’s "salvation" is his attainment of godhood to rule a particular world. They make Elohim and Jehovah into different entities, so that Jesus is Jehovah, who was created by the sexual union between Elohim and Mary. Christians may chuckle at the Mormon claim that the Garden of Eden was located in what is now Independence, Missouri, but when they make Satan the brother of Jesus, both Christians and non-Christians ought to have enough sense to note the differences between Christianity and Mormonism. But of course stupid people still insist that the two are in essential agreement. Doubtless some Mormons will say that this is a misrepresentation of their beliefs, but they probably do not know what Mormonism really teaches.42 In any case, if the Christian faith has been "once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3), then it is not subject to revisions or additions; therefore, Joseph Smith was a false prophet. Will the Mormon agree with this assessment? If not, Christianity is not in agreement with Mormonism, even though we have mentioned only a few major points. As for Islam, Allah is certainly not the same as the God described by the Bible. The person who says that Allah is just another name for the Christian God must also show that Allah is a trinity, because this is what Christians affirm, that God is one in terms of godhood and three in terms of personhood, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all participate fully in the divine attributes. No true Muslim agrees with this. In addition, Robert Morey shows that Allah was in fact a pagan moon god.43

Because Muslims consider the Hadith just as inspired and authoritative as the Koran, they must therefore venerate its teaching about Muhammad’s psychological obsession with urine and feces. In vol. 1, chap. 57, no. 215 and vol. 2, no. 443, Muhammad says that people who soil themselves with urine will be tortured by hellfire, but a contradiction occurs in vol. 1, no. 234, when he ordered people to drink the milk and urine of camels as medicine. Muslims must accept and defend the claims that Adam was ninety feet tall (vol. 4, no. 543), that "Satan stays in the upper part of the nose all night" (vol. 4, no. 516), that Satan urinates into the ears of those who fall asleep during prayer (vol. 2, no. 245), that Allah will refuse to hear those who pass wind during prayer (vol. 1, no.

628; vol. 9, no. 86), and Allah will reject your prayers if you have bad breath (vol. 1, nos. 812, 813, 814, 815; vol. 7, nos. 362, 363), among other strange and vulgar teachings.44

It is true that some professing Muslims, probably embarrassed by the Hadith, choose to reject its status as divinely inspired. But when the discussion is about whether Christianity agrees with Islam, the Koran alone supplies enough information to establish radical differences between the views of the two religions on all major doctrines, such as the nature of God, the status of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation. I have already mentioned the Trinity as an example - Christians insist on it, but Muslims reject it. No one can say that the two religions worship the same God.

Since this book is not specifically about Islam, we cannot document its many problems here; nevertheless, we will mention one error in the Koran about the Trinity, since we have already brought up the topic. Muhammad (Sura 5:73-75, 116) thought that Christians worshiped three gods: the Father, the Mother (Mary), and the Son (Jesus). The Koran makes the mistake of saying that Christians believe Jesus to be the "Son" of God in the sense that he was the product of sexual relation between the "Father" God and Mary. However, the Bible affirms that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Christ. If Muhammad was a prophet of God, we would expect him to at least understand the basic doctrines of Christianity when he commented on it.45

Although some professing Muslims are also embarrassed by the Koran, so that they reject both the Koran and the Hadith as divinely inspired, they probably should not be called true Muslims, just as professing Christians who reject the Bible are not true Christians. In cases where professing adherents to a religion reject the official authority of that religion, they are not true adherents to that religion, and we must deal with them as individuals and ask about their personal beliefs. Our approach to apologetics and evangelism toward them is the same, so that unless they are already true Christians and explicitly biblical in their worldview, their beliefs concerning all major issues will contradict biblical revelation, and ultimately the conflict will be settled on the presuppositional level.

Every attempt to rob Christianity of its uniqueness by allegedly exposing (but in reality imposing) its similarities with other worldviews, philosophies, and religions have been refuted.46 But the spirit of Babel lives on, and so non-Christians (including false Christians) continue trying to force essentially contradictory worldviews together. Deep down in their minds they know that Christianity is the only truth, but they think that if they can neutralize the biblical worldview, they will not have to obey the only true God or confront his revelation. As John the apostle writes, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19-20). To achieve unity at the expense of their rationality or even their sanity seems to be a small price to these people, but in the end it will cost much more than that, because they will be condemned to suffer extreme torment in hell forever.

Acts 17:24-25

Since God is the creator and ruler of all that exists, he is also distinct from and greater than the universe. It follows that he "does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything" (Acts 17:24-25). Positively, Acts 17:24-25 set forth the Christian view of God and his relationship to the universe. Negatively, what Paul says here subverts the Athenians' whole religious and intellectual foundation, and indeed their very way of life. He is

saying that they were living a big lie, that their entire culture and their deepest beliefs are false.47

Paul has set up the situation such that to maintain their way of life with intellectual integrity, the Athenians must destroy Christianity in argumentation, or else have their ultimate commitments be destroyed by Christianity. Those who cannot resist the truth of Christianity, but desire to maintain their non-Christian commitments, choose the route of self-deception, telling themselves that they have the right to maintain their non-Christian beliefs without refuting this biblical worldview that challenges and contradicts every aspect of their thought and conduct. This translates into greater condemnation against them.

Following the apostle, our approach to apologetics and evangelism must avoid finding ways to agree with anti-biblical thinking. We must clearly expound the faith so that all who hear will understand that the biblical worldview disagrees with all non-biblical worldviews on all major issues. Thus they cannot just avoid us, or compromise with us; rather, they must destroy us or be destroyed. The apologist then takes the additional step of demonstrating the impossibility of non-biblical worldviews, leaving the non-Christians no intellectual foundation on which to support their resistance toward the Christian faith. Contrary to what is implied by some Christians' approach, biblical evangelism does not only add Jesus to the unbelievers' belief systems, but it destroys their entire belief systems and replaces them with the biblical worldview. Anything short of this is unworthy of being called biblical apologetics or evangelism.

We need to recover the offensiveness of the gospel rather than settling for a "seeker-friendly" message so diluted that non-Christians can agree with it without a genuine and complete conversion. The non-elect ought to be offended by the gospel, and say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60). But when confronted with the plain truth, the elect, or those whom God has chosen for salvation, will say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). The gospel message, when properly preached, should draw the elect and repel the reprobates (John 10:27). The word of God divides the sheep from the goats, and the wheat from the weeds (Hebrews 4:12). Even then, in the wisdom of God, he has ordained that some will appear to rejoice at the word of God, only to fall away at a later time (Luke 8:13). Therefore, let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Php 2:12); let us test our faith so as to remove false assumptions about our standing with God (2 Peter 1:10).

If we, as Sanders does, grant that non-Christians are intellectually "on the right track," then we have distorted both the Christian and the non-Christian positions. It is because they are on the wrong track that Scripture commands them to repent, which refers to a turning of the mind. For example, we must not say that unbelievers are fairly good scientists, that if they will only do a little better, they would approve of the Christian faith; rather, we must say that they are extremely poor scientists, that they have rejected the truth from the start. We must not say that unbelievers are already quite moral, but that they are just not good enough; rather, we must say that they are thoroughly corrupt, that they have not even started being moral. They are intellectually inferior and morally depraved. Christianity does not call people to merely improve their lives based on their present foundation, but it calls for genuine and complete conversion. In addition, conversion is not about changing only several aspects of your life, but it results in a comprehensive transformation. If your "conversion" does not produce such a change, or the beginning of such a change that will

clearly lead to continued growth in the correct direction, then you have not been converted; the life of God is not in you, and you remain in death and darkness. When Paul says that God does not live in man-made temples and that he is not served by human hands (Acts 17:24-25), he effectively declares his rejection of all popular religions in Athens. He does not state any point of agreement he has with the unbelievers, but he states his denials - what God is not like and how he is not served, that it is wrong to think of God a certain way and that it is wrong to serve him a certain way. This alone suffices in showing that apostolic revelation denies that there are many ways to God, since here it is stated that God is not like some of the conceptions that people have of deity, and that he is not served in some of the ways that people try to perform their worship. Of course, Paul is addressing a particular audience, and therefore he adapts his comments to correspond to his hearers' beliefs and culture. Since the rest of the Bible provides us with enough information to rule out all other ways to God except Christianity, those who claim to be Christians must either reject this biblical claim, in which case they are no longer Christians, or they must accept it, and in turn cease to be embarrassed about the exclusivity of the Christian faith. We should boldly admit, "Yes, Christianity teaches that all non-Christian religions are false, and all adherents of all non-Christian religions will suffer endless and extreme torment in hell. If you disagree, then this is why we are debating."

Some time ago, I came across a review of a Christian book, written by a woman who at least implied that she was a Christian. Although she liked the book in general, when it came to the book's negative comments about Mormonism, she objected and wrote that only God has the right to judge whether a religion is true or false. Since she implied that she was a Christian, this objection made no sense. It is true that God alone has the right to judge whether a religion is true or false, but this should not stop us from speaking against non-Christian religions, because he has made his thoughts known to us through his verbal revelation. When she said that God alone has the right to judge religions, and used this as an objection against anti-Mormon remarks in a book, she was implying that God had not made a judgment about Mormonism in particular, or even non-Christian religions in general. Or, if he had already made such a judgment, he had not made it known to her. But God has already pronounced his judgment through Scripture, and all religious and non-religious propositions that contradict what has been revealed in Scripture must be considered false by the Christian.

Thus this reviewer either had such a poor knowledge of Scripture as to disqualify her from critiquing a Christian book, or she had rejected the divine inspiration of Scripture, in which case she had no justification for claiming to be a Christian - she was merely a non-Christian stating her disagreement with the Bible. God alone has the right to judge the various religions - of course this is true - but he has already judged them, and he has made his judgment plain to us through the Bible. We can agree with him and be saved, or disagree with him and perish.

Paul continues in Acts 17:25, "He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." God does not need us, but we need him. When praying to God, David says, "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Since "life" (Greek: zo-e-) was popularly associated with Zeus, the supreme Greek god, and since the triad of "life and breath and everything" reflects terminology current to his hearers, it is possible that Paul is again deliberately contradicting their religion. He is saying, in effect, that the Christian God, who does not live in temples and who is not served by human hands, is the author and sustainer of life,

not Zeus. Even if this is not Paul’s intention, his statement contradicts the religion and philosophy of the Athenians, who attributed life to another source.

Acts 17:26 a

Continuing with this theme that it is the one true God who gives life to man and all living things, Paul elaborates on the biblical view, and says in Acts 17:26, "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth." The Athenians believed that they were indigenous, having sprung from the earth, so that they were different from and superior to all other peoples, whom they consider to be barbarians. Paul’s statement contradicts not only the religious and philosophical explanations of the Athenians, but it attacks the belief that was the source of their ethnic pride.

Since the Greek does not state who or what the "one" is, various suggestions have been given, but "from one man" seems most suitable to the context. The main thrust of the phrase is that God created mankind from one starting point, which Christianity asserts to be Adam, the first man. Different races and nations of men originated from one man, and not many. Since all races and nations of men originated from one man, there is no justification for the belief that any race or nation of men is inherently superior or privileged than another, at least not in the sense that many believed themselves to be superior or privileged. Even if there are some differences between the races and nations, at least all human beings have been made in the image of God.

Non-Christian science and philosophy have no basis from which to affirm the unity and equality of the races. For example, apart from biblical revelation about the origin of man, from what reliable and authoritative principle can you assert that genocide and cannibalism are immoral? Why is it wrong for one race to destroy another, or for the people of one race to slaughter the people of another race for food? Science cannot demonstrate that we all came from one man.48 If these questions appear to be shocking and outrageous, then unbelievers should have a ready answer for them. However, apart from biblical authority, no principle can provide an adequate foundation on which to ground moral judgments about these issues. By what universal and absolute moral authority do you impose your morality upon me, forbidding me to commit genocide and cannibalism? Is something morally "wrong" for me to do just because you do not want me to do it? Unless moral principles have biblical revelation as its foundation, they will all be annihilated when challenged.

Since I have given my argument against evolution elsewhere, I will not repeat it here.49 But I mention evolution to illustrate an earlier point. As on all other major topics, on the subject of human origin, we should not say that the unbelievers are doing "good science," that they are brilliant and honest scholars, and if they will just be a little more careful, then they will come to believe in divine creation. No, they are not brilliant; they are not honest; and they are not doing good science. To come to a knowledge of the truth, it would not suffice for the unbelievers to simply do "better science," but they must change their first principles or foundational axioms altogether, and not just their subsidiary theorems. This takes a sovereign work of God in their hearts, and if it does not happen, they will remain in spiritual and intellectual darkness.

Unbelievers may tell you that they are intellectually neutral, but do not believe them, because intellectual neutrality does not exist. You are either for Christ or against Christ. A person who

claims to be examining the arguments for Christianity to determine whether it is worthy of belief is against Christianity while he is examining the arguments, and he will not be for Christianity until God changes his heart. Unbelievers are prejudiced against God; they have an agenda against him. They have taken up presuppositions that preclude the truth as revealed by the Scripture. Yet they claim that they will follow the facts wherever they may lead, and then they will challenge you to prove that the facts lead to your conclusions using their presuppositions and methods! Christians should not fall into this trap. But although our first principles differ from that of the unbelievers, we need not assume that it is futile to argue with them; rather, we can challenge their presuppositions as our negative case, and present the self-authenticating principle of biblical infallibility as our positive case. Unless they can provide an adequate first principle to justify their subsidiary claims, they do not even have the right to present their subsidiary claims to us for consideration, as in the case of evolution.

Acts 17:26 b Not only is God the creator and sustainer of humankind, but he is also the present ruler of humankind: "He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26). There are two possible interpretations for the words, "He determined the times set for them." One takes the phrase to mean that God controls and maintains the seasons and natural cycles of life that are crucial to human survival and development, as in Acts 14:17. The other takes the phrase to mean that God determines the course and periods of human history, as in the rise and fall of nations. Scripture as a whole supports both assertions about God, but the question is which one Acts 17:26 intends to convey.

Either interpretation would contradict Greek religion and philosophy. Besides proclaiming a God totally unlike the irrelevant deities of the Epicureans, Paul is "setting his own belief in divine providence over against the fatalism of his Stoic auditors."50 But he is doing more than that, since he is presenting a view of divine providence to which no non-Christian would give consent. Only Christians affirm that God - this God and no other - having created the universe, now sustains life and determines history. The broad point is that Paul asserts a biblical view of divine providence as an explanation to the whole of human history that no one else agrees with.

God determines the exact territories of nations; his control is exhaustive and precise. Some professing Christians can tolerate mention of divine providence as long as we are talking only about his control over groups of people, and this is indeed the main emphasis of the verse. However, some of these same professing Christians put up tremendous resistance when it is pointed out that the Bible speaks of God’s control over individuals in the same way.

Since I have defended divine sovereignty over human individuals elsewhere, I will not repeat the relevant arguments here; however, I will at least point out that if one affirms divine omniscience, as every Christian must, then to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over groups of people obligates him to also acknowledge God’s sovereignty over individuals. This is because an omniscient being does not think of a group of anything without knowing every individual object that makes up the group. For example, when I use the word "trees" without setting a limit on the word, as in "these trees," I am using it as an universal, as in "all trees." But I do not know all trees, I have made none of them, I have determined none of their properties, and I do not even exhaustively know any one tree in particular. So do I know what I am saying? Not on the basis of empiricism. On the other hand, when God uses the word "trees," he says it as one who has made and who knows all of

them. His knowledge of all particular trees corresponds to his use of the universal "trees." When I say "trees," the actual content of my knowledge does not include all trees, although I intend to refer to all trees by the word. Therefore, when God says that all trees are a certain way, he has in mind every tree, that every tree is a certain way, and not just trees in the abstract without the actual content of all trees. Because God is omniscient, to him "trees" must mean the sum of all individual trees, and not trees in the abstract.

If you have two children, named Tom and Mary, then every time you say "my children," you are in fact referring to Tom and Mary in particular. You would not intend to mean "my children" without the actual content of "Tom and Mary." The words, "my children," represent for you "Tom and Mary." Suppose that you are omniscient, but you do not have children yet. In this case, "my children" would still mean "Tom and Mary," since you know for certain that you will have these children in the future. Therefore, an omniscient being never uses a designation of a group without conscious awareness of all the members of that group. That is, the universal term always represents the sum of all the individuals belonging to the group. A being who lacks omniscience uses the universal term without knowledge of all the individuals in that group, but a being who possesses omniscience uses the universal term with a conscious awareness of all the individuals in that group. This is a necessary implication of omniscience.

Accordingly, when God thinks of a nation, he is also thinking of all the individuals comprising that nation at any given time, since a nation is the sum of all those individuals whom God has chosen to belong under that nation, and he has exhaustive knowledge of every individual. Indeed, he creates each individual to be included in the nation he has chosen for that individual. It is not as if God decides to enforce a given policy toward a certain group, such as male humans, and then allow each human being to volunteer to become members of that group. Instead, God creates all human beings, and groups them together as he pleases.

Therefore, it makes no sense to say that God exercises absolute sovereignty over a group, such as a nation or the elect, without also affirming the necessary implication that he exercises absolute sovereignty over each individual within that group. It makes no sense to say that God elects a group for salvation without determining which individuals would be in that group, or that he controls a nation without controlling the individuals within that nation. The individuals do not make themselves. The point is that even when the Bible is only talking about God’s sovereignty over groups, his sovereignty over individuals is implied. That said, the Bible also contains many passages that directly assert God’s absolute sovereignty over individuals, and not only groups or nations.51

Acts 17:27

Acts 17:27 proceeds from divine providence to its implication for religion, and therefore it is crucial to Paul’s presentation. But since it is easily misunderstood, we must study it with care: "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." The word "this" here refers to what he says in the previous verse, so that he is saying, "God [determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live] so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

There are two main interpretations of this verse. One says that God in his works of providence makes it possible for men to find him apart from special revelation, and that he indeed intends for men to find him apart from special revelation.52 The other says that God in his works of providence makes it obligatory for men to seek him, but that it is impossible to find him apart from special revelation. In other words, the first has Acts 17:27 saying that divine providence stirs men up to seek God, and that God himself intends to be found by men apart from special revelation, but the second understands Acts 17:27 as saying that divine providence makes seeking God a moral obligation, although no one can actually find him without special revelation. Although the first interpretation immediately appears to be inconsistent with the previous verses of our passage, we will also provide several specific reasons for rejecting the first view and accepting the second.

Henry Alford writes that the expression translated "perhaps" (NIV) or "if perhaps" (NASB) "indicates a contingency which is apparently not very likely to happen."53 On the other hand, Rendall proposes that it should not be translated "perhaps," but rather "indeed," so that the verse would read, "if they might indeed feel after him."54 He takes this to convey a real intention on God's part to have people seek after him and find him apart from special revelation. However, when Rendall himself admits that the optative mood of "to reach out" and "to find" points to "the fact that this intention had not yet been realized,"55 his exposition suddenly amounts to saying that what God really intends to happen can indeed fail to happen. If so, then the full force of all the biblical arguments for God's absolute sovereignty now stand against him; therefore, his interpretation is impossible. Now, even if the verse should read, "if they might indeed feel after him," it does not necessarily convey a real intention for the accomplishment of something, but rather an imposition of a moral obligation.

However, we do not have to settle this using only arguments about the fine points of grammar. Instead, we may look to another relevant passage in Paul's writings to determine the meaning of the verse in question. Earlier we have cited 1 Corinthians 1:21, which says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." Pay special attention to the words, "in the wisdom of God" and "God was pleased." To paraphrase, Paul is saying, "God, in his own wisdom, has determined that man will never come to know God by man's own wisdom - that is, by human philosophy and science - but God is pleased that the chosen ones will come to know him by the content of his verbal revelation." Accordingly, the GNT reads, "For God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom."

What does this say about God's "intention" in Acts 17:27? Did he intend for people to find him by their own wisdom, although 1 Corinthians 1:21 says that he himself made it impossible? No, God never intended for sinful men to seek him and find him on their own. To say otherwise, besides contradicting 1 Corinthians 1:21, is to portray God as having intended for men to do something without knowing the outcome, not knowing what to expect, and he was later disappointed that men indeed failed to seek him and find him. This contradicts the omniscience and sovereignty of God. If something did not happen, then God did not intend for it to happen. However, God's works of providence did impose the moral obligation upon men to seek him and find him. Romans 1:1-32 shows us that, rather than doing what they were morally obligated to do, humans have suppressed the innate knowledge that they had about God, and worshiped idols instead. With this in mind, let us read the verse again, this time paying special attention to the final portion: "God did this so that

men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." Since God displays his power and goodness in providence, men ought to seek him; however, men have failed to seek him and find him, even though he is not far, and therefore all who do not know God are subject to condemnation. This is the thrust of the verse. Again, it is a statement that opposes the religion and philosophy of his audience; it does not comfort or compliment them in any way, nor does it indicate that they are already "on the right track." Rather, they are heading the very opposite direction that God wants them to go, and that is why they need to repent, and not merely improve. The statement, "He is not far from each one of us," is highly relevant for contemporary philosophy of religion, and it also provides an apt illustration for the biblical approach of apologetics and evangelism, which in turn exposes the misguided approach of today's Christians. Unbelievers in both academic and non-academic circles have voiced the objection that the evidence for God and Christianity are unclear or unconvincing. They claim that if there is a God, if he really wants people to believe in him, and if he will punish people for not believing in him, then should he not provide clearer and better evidence than what we have so far witnessed? Should not the existence of God and the truth of Christianity be less ambiguous? This problem or objection is often called "divine hiddenness." The typical approach taken by Christian theologians and philosophers is first to admit that God indeed hides himself from us, and having agreed to this, they then try to provide arguments as to why God is justified in hiding himself, even though he wants people to believe in him. Many works that attempt to answer the problem of divine hiddenness never challenges the assumption that God is hidden.

However, this is an anti-biblical approach, since the Bible itself denies that God is hidden at all. Instead, it says that "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27) and that "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Romans 1:19). Christians who attempt to answer "divine hiddenness" by first agreeing that God is hidden have adopted non-Christian assumptions and principles without argument. Why scramble to defend God for doing something when the Bible says that he has done the opposite? Why be so hasty to defend God's alleged hiddenness when the Bible says that he has made himself plain and evident to all? Why admit that God is hard to find when the Bible says that he is not far from each of us? Some of us who profess to be Christians are nevertheless too quick to think like non-Christians, and in doing so, even when we think we are defending the biblical faith, in reality we have denied it from the start.

According to what standard of epistemology or "evidence" is God hidden? Non-Christian epistemology is fatally flawed in the first place; they must justify their epistemology before saying that God is hidden to them. Some of them may claim that they will come to believe in God if they see him as a great ball of light. But since the God that we affirm is invisible, he is not a ball of light. Therefore, if he manifests a ball of light in front of an individual, he is not in fact revealing his own person to him, but only doing something for him to see. That is, if the unbeliever holds a false epistemology, then any evidence that will satisfy him will not be evidence that reveals the truth.

If the individual nevertheless accepts this as evidence, then he has made an irrational leap of logic from the ball of light to the existence of God. And does this "evidence" compel him to conclude that the Christian God exists? Similar problems exist with "evidences" such as miracles or apparitions. The problem is that empiricism itself cannot justify any belief, regardless of what it admits as evidence. And since no necessarily implication follows from observation, one who relies on

empiricism can always avoid the conclusion he dislikes. But then the person is to blame, and not the evidence. Of course, there are other non-Christian epistemologies besides empiricism, but if only Christian epistemology is true, then non-Christian epistemologies rule out the truth from the start, and then when they demand evidence that will satisfy them, they may not come to the right conclusion even if provided with the evidence that they want, since their epistemologies are faulty. And since their epistemologies oppose Christian first principles, the evidence that they demand will often contradict the very nature of our claims. For example, God is invisible, but they may demand visible evidence - but then any evidence that satisfies them does not reveal the true and essential nature of God.

There are indeed visible evidences for Christianity, so that even if we assume non-Christian first principles for the sake of argument, we can show that Christianity remains the most rational. But the effect of such an approach is always limited by the unbeliever's faulty epistemology, and we must not be satisfied with it if we were to honor God in our apologetics and evangelism. In other words, we must not be satisfied with showing that Christianity is only more probable or more rational than other worldviews; rather, we must argue for what the Bible actually claims - that is, Christianity is the only possible and the only true worldview. Other worldviews are not merely less probable, but impossible and foolish.

Within the intellectual framework constructed by Christian presuppositions, God is perfectly clear - so clear that he is inescapable, that literally everything is evidence for the existence of God and the truth of Christianity. Within the framework of non-Christian presuppositions, things are not as clear. But why must we be challenged on the basis of non-Christian presuppositions unless they can justify these presuppositions to us? Of course, they may demand justification for our presuppositions, and this is why we must learn to argue about them. The lesson is to avoid being bullied into using non-Christian presuppositions, when presuppositions are the very things that we should argue about. But once we have pushed the debate to the presuppositional level, then we have already won. The solution to divine hiddenness is very simple. The first part of this solution is to deny that God is hidden in the first place, since the Bible states that he is not far and that he has made himself evident. But then, it seems that we have to explain why so many people do not acknowledge God. We will first try to find the answer from Acts 17:27, and then briefly refer to Romans 1:1-32 again. The words "reach out for him" in the NIV is better translated "grope for Him" in the NASB. The expression rejects the picture of sharp-minded unbelievers attempting to discover the truth about God through sound procedures; instead, it paints the picture of ignorant and confused people groping around in the dark, desperately trying to make contact with reality, but never attaining knowledge of the truth. The same language had been used by Homer when referring to the blinded Cyclops, and by Plato when referring to vague guesses at the truth. This is Paul's opinion of the non-Christian thinking of his day. What is your opinion of contemporary non-Christian philosophy and science? Do you admire the pagan mind? But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul's presentation in Acts 17:1-34 is completely consistent with his exposition of pagan thinking from God's perspective as recorded in Romans 1:1-32 : The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine

nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:18-22)

Just as Acts 17:1-34 says that God is not far from each one of us, Romans 1:1-32 says that what can be known about God is plain because God has made it plain. But since not all acknowledge this God, this gives rise to the question of divine hiddenness. What is obviously implied by Acts 17:1-34 is here explicitly stated in Romans 1:1-32, namely, that the reason unbelievers do not make a conscious affirmation of God is not because the "evidence" is unclear, but because unbelievers "suppress the truth," and they suppress the truth because of their "wickedness." Consistent with the idea that unbelievers are groping in the dark, Romans 1:1-32 says that "their thinking became futile," that "their foolish hearts were darkened," and that "they became fools."

Therefore, while the first part of the biblical answer to alleged divine hiddenness is to deny divine hiddenness, the second part of the biblical answer exposes the real problem, namely, that unbelievers are sinful fools. The real problem is not divine hiddenness but human blindness! The evidence for God is so clear that unbelievers already know about him; in fact, they are born with knowledge about him. But because they are sinful, they suppress their knowledge about him and push their awareness of him to a level below their immediate consciousness. They refuse to worship him even though they know about him.

They deceive themselves into thinking that they do not know him and that the evidence about him is unclear. However, since they should know better than to think this way, and since they only think this way because of their sinful rebellion, God has determined that they will also suffer endless torment in hell for such stubborn wickedness. Atheists and other non-Christians - such as Muslims, Mormons, and Buddhists - do not differ in this regard, in that both are guilty of refusing to worship the true God, although God has made himself evident to both kinds of people. The apostle Peter teaches that unbelievers "deliberately forget" the power and judgment of God (2 Peter 3:5-7);56 biblical apologetics is our refusal to let them get away with it.

Just as you would not accept an insane person’s diagnosis of your mental condition, you should not accept a fool’s opinion of your religion. Doubtless unbelievers refuse to acknowledge their intellectual blindness and incompetence, but going back to our illustration, just as you should not accept an insane person’s diagnosis of his own mental fitness, neither should you accept the unbeliever’s opinion about religious or other matters. He is intellectually blind, and he is incompetent to judge anything. Of course, he will insist that the Bible is wrong about him, but since biblical infallibility is our first principle, we will only take his denial as yet another manifestation of his blindness and self-deception. Again, it is evident that this conflict can only be settled on the presuppositional level.

How do we settle an intellectual confrontation on the presuppositional level? I have discussed some of this earlier, and also in greater detail elsewhere.57 At this time I will only emphasize one point. Any statement one makes implies presuppositions concerning epistemology, metaphysics, logic, linguistics, and sometimes things like ethics and history. When I make an objection against any non-Christian worldview, I speak from within an intellectual framework formed by biblical presuppositions, so that the intelligibility of my objection depends on the coherence of these prior

principles. When challenged by the opponent, I will need to demonstrate the coherence of these presuppositions, and finally, the invulnerability or the self-authenticity of my ultimate authority or first principle. This requires that I have a fairly comprehensive knowledge of Christian theology, and to have the ability to present it well. If the content of Christian theology satisfies the above requirements, then I have successfully defended the worldview. Or, to put it another way, the worldview has successfully defended itself by the sheer truth and coherence of its content. But then, I also have the right to challenge the truth and coherence of non-Christian presuppositions. Whatever my opponent affirms, whatever objection he raises against Christianity - whatever he says at all - I have the right to demand him to reveal and justify the foundation of his statement by which he makes it intelligible. If his statement is an objection against Christianity, then I have the right to demand him to reveal and justify the presuppositions that make this objection intelligible, before I even begin to answer it.

If the claim or objection is that, "The resurrection of Christ was impossible," I have the right to ask, "From what intellectual foundation or framework are you making this statement? And on the basis of such a foundation or framework, is your statement even intelligible? Based on what principle do you decide what is possible and what is impossible? And what is your justification for believing such a principle? What is your view concerning this universe, within which the resurrection of Christ was impossible? And what is your justification for believing this view of the universe?" The opponent cannot say to me, "Just answer the question!" My position is that the biblical framework is the only true intellectual framework from which to view reality, and from this framework, the resurrection of Christ was both a possibility and a historical fact. But my opponent does not believe that the biblical framework is true at all, let alone being the only one that is true! That is, since the resurrection poses no problem within my intellectual framework, then my opponent must be making his objection from within another intellectual framework, and I need to know the characteristics of this framework before I can answer him. And if his intellectual framework makes no sense at all, then he cannot rightly make his objection in the first place.

If God has revealed himself through the Bible, then it begs the question to say that we cannot believe the Bible because God has not revealed himself. If the Bible is what it claims to be, then verbal revelation is the best means of divine disclosure, and if the Bible is what it claims to be, then we have no right to demand anything else. Therefore, any objection against Christianity based on divine hiddenness presupposes a rejection of Scripture, and since Scripture is our ultimate authority and first principle, the conflict immediately goes to the presuppositional level. You can then see that nothing can be settled without presuppositional confrontations, because it is impossible to argue about anything without presupposing an intellectual foundation or framework, which in turn determines the direction and content of our arguments.

Now, since I believe that the biblical framework is the only one that is true, I cannot sincerely assume my opponent’s framework in order to demonstrate a biblical claim. However, I can often reduce the unbeliever’s framework to absurdity, or demonstrate that Christianity is more rational even if I assume his presuppositions for the sake of argument. But unless he can demonstrate the falsity of biblical presuppositions, he cannot force me to assume his presuppositions in order to prove biblical claims, since that is precisely the point at issue - the argument is over whose presuppositions are correct. And if he indeed tries to disprove biblical presuppositions, we only return to the question of what intellectual foundation he is standing on when he makes his

objections.

Some people deny that they have any presuppositions, but this only means that they are unaware of them. It is true that most people never consider philosophical issues with precision. If anyone claims to be making an intelligible statement, then he has numerous presuppositions that we may require him to justify. For example, to say that miracles are impossible, one must have an intellectual principle or standard by which he decides what is possible and what is impossible. What is this principle? We challenge him to reveal and defend this principle or standard. If he cannot reveal or defend it, then he himself does not know what he is asking, and his objection is meaningless. And if he must borrow biblical presuppositions in order for his statement to be intelligible - all unbelievers do this without admitting it - then is it still an objection, or is it merely an obscured endorsement of Christianity? His confusion, of course, is thoroughly consistent with what the Bible teaches about the unbeliever's intellectual condition.

Acts 17:27-29 In the NIV, Acts 17:27-29 read as follows:

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill.

However, I will paraphrase and divide the passage thus:

God is not far from each one of us, for it is by him - his will and his power - that we live and move and exist. (Acts 17:27-28)

Some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." But if we are his "offspring," then it is self-contradictory for you to represent God with man-made images of gold or silver or stone. (Acts 17:28-29) This paraphrase and arrangement is based on the understanding that "for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 a) is topically connected with "he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27 b), and that "since we are God's offspring…" (Acts 17:29) is topically connected with "some of your own poets have said…" (Acts 17:28 b). This understanding, and thus this arrangement, is not unique. For example, the GNT says, "Yet God is actually not far from any one of us; as someone has said, 'In him we live and move and exist.' (Acts 17:27-28) It is as some of your poets have said, 'We too are his children.' Since we are God's children…(Acts 17:28-29)" And the CEV says, "…though he is not far from any of us: 'We live in him. We walk in him. We are in him.' (Acts 17:27-28) Some of your own poets have said: 'For we are his children.' Since we are God's children…(Acts 17:28-29)"58

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) had ascribed Paul's quotation of a Cretan writer to the second line of a quatrain by Epimenides of Crete (Titus 1:12). The fourth line reads, "For in thee we live and move and have our being." However, it is unclear that Paul is quoting the poem in Acts 17:28, because the wording does not reflect the expected poetic meter or diction, and he does not introduce the expression as a quotation as he does the other statement, "We are his offspring." Thus the NASB does not include quotations around the first expression in question, and it reads, "…though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist…" This first expression in verse 28, then, illustrates the last portion of verse 27, and thus my paraphrase: "God

is not far from each one of us, for it is by him - his will and his power - that we live and move and exist." God is not far from us in the sense that we are constantly depending on him, for our life, our activities, and our very existence. Relating this to the point made earlier, this is why it is inexcusable when unbelievers deny the reality and supremacy of the Christian God. They grope in the dark as if God is difficult to find, but the very act of groping in the dark depends on his divine sustenance and his general benevolence!

One writer notes that to argue about the existence of God is like arguing about the existence of the air - you need to be breathing air while arguing about it, and if it does not exist, you would not be alive to argue about it in the first place. This coincides with what we have said about debating unbelievers, that God is both the epistemological and metaphysical precondition of all arguments so that unless the unbeliever can supply non-biblical presuppositions with which he makes his statements intelligible, the very fact that he argues against Christianity presupposes the truth of Christianity. The inescapable knowledge of God within him is inconsistent with his explicit denial of God and his other explicit beliefs.

Those who wish to show that Paul is seeking common ground with the unbelievers say that the apostle is quoting pagan literature to support biblical claims in Acts 17:28. But if we keep in mind all that we have already established when discussing Acts 17:16-27, interpreting Acts 17:28 from the "common ground" perspective should be ruled out from the start. Nevertheless, we will make some additional observations about the verse and its apparent references to pagan literature.

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that the first part of Acts 17:28 is at least an allusion of the quatrain by Epimenides, if not a direct quotation. What does the expression mean in its original context? "For in thee we live and move and have our being" is a statement about Zeus made from within a polytheistic or pantheistic intellectual framework, and really has no contact with Christianity. The words may sound like something that Christianity would say, but the meaning is completely different. If the two sides were to state their beliefs in a precise manner, all the superficial resemblances would disappear.

If Paul is here using the line from Epimenides "as is" - without modification or qualification - then how can he say that the non-Christians are blind and ignorant (Acts 17:23, Acts 17:27, Acts 17:30), since it would show that they have true knowledge? In Romans 1:1-32, he says that the unbelievers suppress the truth about God, and in 1 Corinthians 1:1-31, he says that God has ordained it so that men would fail to know God through human wisdom. But if the non-Christians are able to acknowledge that we live and move and exist in God in the Christian sense - that is, if they mean what they say in a same or similar way as what a Christian would mean when saying the same words - then they would not be so blind and ignorant, nor would it appear that they are suppressing the truth about God, nor would it appear that human wisdom cannot attain the knowledge of the true God.

However, since Paul does consider unbelievers blind and ignorant, since he does believe that they suppress the truth about God, and since he does assert that human wisdom cannot attain knowledge of the true God, he cannot be using the line from Epimenides without modification or qualification. Rather, if Paul is really using the expression (Acts 17:28 a) to illustrate the biblical claim that "[God] is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27 b), then it would appear that he is in fact using the same words in an explicitly Christian sense, having emptied the expression of all its

original meaning.

Having said the above, it is unclear that Paul is quoting Epimenides in the first place. As Lenski writes, "Paul's statement is not metrical in form, nor does he indicate that he is quoting. All that one may say is that Paul may have read Epimenides and have used his statement in a formulation of his own."59 In other words, although the statement may sound similar, Paul is probably not using it as a quotation from Epimenides, and the two of them intend to convey something very different. The other expression in Acts 17:28, "We are his offspring," is indeed a quotation from pagan literature as Paul himself indicates, and therefore we must deal with it as such. However, just because Paul quotes something does not mean that he agrees with the statement or its author. It depends on how he is using the quotation. Earlier, I gave the example that although I was quoting Sanders, I was not using the quotation for support, but as an example to refute. Likewise, we will see that Paul's usage of the statement, "We are his offspring," lends no support to the "common ground" perspective of religion or apologetics, but instead it proves to be another assault against the truth and coherence of pagan beliefs. The quotation comes from Aratus (315-240 B.C.), in a line from his work Phaenomena. Among other things, he was a medic, astronomer, mathematician, and poet. For a number of years, he lived in Athens and was a student of Zeno. While in Athens, he wrote Phaenomena, which became very popular for a number of centuries in the Greek-speaking world. Paul uses the plural in "as some of your own poets have said," because the same thought appeared at least in one other author in another form, namely, in the "Hymn to Zeus" by the Athenian Stoic philosopher Cleanthes (300-220 B.C.). In a relevant context, Chrysostom named another poet, Timagenes. Nevertheless, we know that Paul is quoting from Aratus because the statement quoted is as Aratus wrote it. As an aside - an important aside - although having a knowledge of Homer and Plato would hardly make one especially well-educated in that day (or even today), Paul's knowledge of the relatively minor writers, his close academic relationship with Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and the fine expositions contained in his writings, certainly warrant the assessment that, "Paul was a scholar."60 He was indeed an extraordinary intellectual, and if we are to imitate other aspects of the apostle's life and thought, such as his integrity and his zeal, let us not hesitate to also imitate this aspect of his life, even if it means going upstream against the anti-intellectual tendencies of the church and the world. May God grant the church many believers who are "well informed, quick to understand," having "knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature," and "showing aptitude for every kind of learning" (Daniel 1:4; Daniel 1:17). An army of believers having these qualities will spell the doom of non-Christian dominance in the academic world.

Returning to the quotation in question, let us quickly remind ourselves of the biblical teaching regarding the expression, "the children of God." Scripture denies that all human beings are the children of God; rather, it teaches that all non-Christians are the children of the devil, of wrath, and of darkness (John 8:44, Ephesians 2:3; Ephesians 5:8). The apostle John even tells us how to distinguish between the children of God and the children of the devil (1 John 3:10). Thus not all are the children of God in the spiritual sense; however, all human beings are the creatures of God, since God made all of them. Therefore, all human beings - Christians and non-Christians - are the creatures of God, but only Christians are the children of God. It is amazing how even some professing Christians can say that, "We are all God's children," and include non-Christians in such a statement. No, if you are a non-Christian, you are a child of the devil.

There is no way that Paul can have any agreement with the statement by Aratus. Whether Aratus is referring to creation or relationship, he is speaking of Zeus, and Zeus is nothing like the God of the Bible. It is most foolish to admit that Aratus is speaking of Zeus, and then to assert that Paul's usage of the quotation as having any agreement with Christianity. We cannot simply apply a statement meant for Zeus to the Christian God, because the "his" in "We are his offspring" has a very definite meaning, so that the statement really means, "We are [Zeus'] offspring." Can we apply this latter, more precise version to the Christian God? Of course not, but this is what Aratus means by, "We are his offspring," so that in his mind, "We are his offspring" = "We are [Zeus'] offspring." A word like "his" always has a definite referent when it appears within a given context, and we cannot treat it as without meaning or as completely flexible. It is not up to us to take the "his" from another person's statement, and substitute it with whatever referent we wish. To do so would change it into a different statement altogether. If by, "We are his offspring," Aratus means, "We are Zeus' offspring," then when we say, "We are his offspring," but mean, "We are Jehovah's (the Christian God's) offspring," we are saying something completely different, since "We are Zeus' offspring" is obviously different from "We are Jehovah's offspring." Paul would assert that all human beings are the Christian God's offspring in the sense that all are his creatures, but then Aratus would not have agreed. This should be very simple to understand, if not for so many people's eagerness to show that Paul cites pagan authorities with approval, when he is citing them with a very different purpose in mind. To understand Paul's intention, we need to see how he uses the quotation from Aratus. Thus we proceed to Acts 17:29 : "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill." If we are God's offspring (whether Zeus or another), then how can God be something lower than ourselves or even be represented by something lower than ourselves? If God is something lower than ourselves or is represented by something lower than ourselves, then how can we be his offspring, or how can God himself be something higher than ourselves? Which one is it? They could not affirm both.

Paul is citing one thing that many of them affirm to contradict another thing that many of them also affirm. Therefore, the best explanation of the quotation is that Paul is not using Aratus to support the Christian view of the nature of God, but he is using Aratus to refute the Athenian view of the nature of God. Thus Paul defeats the popular Greek religion on this point by an argumentum ad hominem, which is meant here not as an irrelevant personal attack, as it is sometimes meant, but "an argument proving a conclusion from the principles or practices of an opponent himself, often by showing them to be contrary to his argument."61

Eugene Peterson's loose paraphrase of Acts 17:28-29 is helpful in making apparent the ad hominem argument: "One of your poets said it well: 'We're the God-created.' Well, if we are the God-created, it doesn't make a lot of sense to think we could hire a sculptor to chisel a god out of stone for us, does it?" (Peterson, The Message). Remember that the first instance of "God-created" in this paraphrase means "Zeus-created," and therefore has no agreement with Christianity. However, the second instance may refer to a general concept of deity, since this is what Paul is arguing about - the nature of God. It is less misleading if the paraphrase reads:

One of your poets said, "We are the Zeus-created." But if we are the "God"-created, then it is self-contradictory to think of the divine being or the divine nature as consisting of or represented by an image of gold, silver, or stone. That is, "While claiming to be creatures of 'God,' at the same

time you think that the divine being can be represented by an image made of gold or stone, and thus you contradict yourself, and your religion self-destructs." The biblical approach to apologetics involves exposing the internal contradictions of non-Christian religions and philosophies. To begin with, the human intellect is finite, and it is impossible for human wisdom alone to construct a true, comprehensive, and yet coherent worldview. Human sinfulness has further damaged the mind, and thus it is impossible for man to know the truth about God and his creation without special revelation, as in the words of Scripture. However, non-Christian religions and philosophies are attempts to grasp the nature of reality and its implications without divine revelation from the only true God. Therefore, all non-Christian religions and philosophies are bound to fail. In addition, since the knowledge of God is inescapable, being innate in the mind and evident in creation, non-Christian religions and philosophies invariably pilfer Christian presuppositions that make perfect sense within the biblical framework, but contradict other major presuppositions within the non-Christian systems. But at the same time, these biblical presuppositions, even though distorted in the hands of the unbelievers, are necessary to anchor some of their most cherished beliefs, such as in the area of ethics.

Adherents of non-Christian systems can also claim that the Bible contradicts itself, and this is why Christians must learn how to respond by showing that the Christian worldview, when properly understood, contains no contradictions, but that all non-Christian worldviews, when properly understood, are full of contradictions and other fatal flaws.

Acts 17:30 a

Then, Acts 17:30 says, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." This verse carries important implications for the history and philosophy of religion, the intellectual status of non-Christian systems, the basis of ethics, and the universal and exclusive moral domination of Christianity. We cannot discuss all of these in detail, and in fact, before we begin talking about any of these things, we must explain the first part of the verse to prevent some gross misunderstandings.

Commentators do not hesitate to point out that it is very misleading to translate as "winked at" (KJV) what is translated as "overlooked" in the NIV, since "winked at" can imply approval, or at least indifference. Although "overlooked" is a better translation, it is still subject to similar misinterpretations, and it seems that very few commentators can state with clarity and accuracy exactly in what sense God had "overlooked" the ignorance of the Gentiles. However, we need not be agnostic about the meaning of this verse, because there are relevant and parallel passages in the writings and sermons of Paul that clarify for us what he means here in verse 30. These passages include Romans 1:21-32 and Acts 14:15-17.

First, we should read Romans 1:21-32 to establish several things that, if we will keep them in mind, will help us understand the meaning of Acts 14:15-17 and Acts 17:30. Of course, I cannot take time to expound on the passage in detail, but read it carefully, and note the emphasized words: For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

We have already mentioned the relevance of Romans 1:1-32 to Acts 17:1-34 - both passages deal with pagan beliefs, and in both passages Paul is consistent in his theology and approach toward these pagan beliefs. Here in Romans 1:1-32, Paul says that because the people failed to acknowledge the true God but rather worshiped false gods, God "gave them over" to all kinds of destructive beliefs, unholy attitudes, and vile practices. Thus from this passage alone, we know that when Paul says, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance" (Acts 17:30), he cannot mean that God approved of, or was indifferent toward, the pagan religions. Rather, it appears that all along God had been judging the pagans in a sense. From the biblical perspective, God extends his grace toward a nation when he calls it to repent by means of verbal proclamation and temporal judgments. Although biblical history records numerous occasions upon which God dealt very strongly with the nation of Israel, he had never dealt with the Gentile nations with the same explicit terms. Make no mistake about it - God frequently dealt with pagan nations about their idol worship and sinful practices; he even converted some Gentiles, and required them to abandon their idols and make an explicit profession of faith. But he never dealt with them the same way as he did with Israel, sending prophets and miracles, many punishments and several exiles to restrain their evil hearts and bring them back to proper religion. For example, here are several passages from Jeremiah, illustrating God’s policy toward Israel:

"From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets"…."For they have not listened to my words," declares the LORD, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the LORD…."They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline"…."Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you." They said, "Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers." But you have not paid attention or listened to me. (Jeremiah 7:25; Jeremiah 29:19; Jeremiah 32:33; Jeremiah 35:15)

Jesus himself focused on preaching to the Jews when he was on the earth, and he told his disciples to do the same: "He answered, ’I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’" (Matthew

15:24); "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel'" (Matthew 10:5-6). This is the way that God had chosen to deal with the world until after the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Before Christ ascends to heaven, he leaves instructions to the effect that Christianity is to be a global faith, and as such his disciples must exert themselves in what we now call world evangelism or world missions: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). With the above in mind, we hardly need Acts 14:15-17 to understand Acts 17:30, but it is still helpful, since we will see that the passage corresponds to the above explanation:

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Compared to how he dealt with the Jews, God has in a sense "let all nations go their own way" until Pentecost. But the next verse says that God did not leave himself "without testimony," so it is not that God had ignored the Gentiles, but only that he had a different policy toward them until that time. This difference in policy involves the relative scarcity of verbal revelation among the Gentiles and less spectacular acts of divine providence among them. Again, he did not leave himself "without testimony," so that he indeed gave the Gentiles some verbal revelation about himself through his prophets, showed them some acts of special providence, although he mainly testified about himself through the general providence mentioned here in Acts 14:17, so that even joy is a testimony to the Christian God. As Romans 1:1-32 and other passages show, although unaided human wisdom cannot arrive at a knowledge of God and a knowledge of salvation from general providence, such general providence is sufficient to make men culpable for their ignorance about God and their rebellion against him. Therefore, let no one misunderstand that God "overlooked" the sinful rebellion of the Gentiles in the sense that none of the Gentiles went to hell until Pentecost!

Scripture is clear that all unbelievers are condemned to hell. Even the Jews under the Old Covenant must explicitly profess Christ to be saved, even if they did not know many of the details surrounding his life and ministry: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11). The "gospel" was not introduced by Jesus himself, as if no one knew about it before his ministry. Galatians 3:8 says that God himself "announced the gospel in advance to Abraham," telling him outright that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith." Moses says to his people, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Hebrews 11:26 says that Moses suffered disgrace "for the sake of Christ," and not some indefinite character or principle. Even before that, immediately after Adam and Eve had sinned, God announced that salvation would come through Christ: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"

(Genesis 3:15). We grant that the gospel was not fully revealed until the time of Christ and the apostles, but it remains that the people of God had considerable knowledge about it all along. In fact, 1 Peter 1:10-11 implies that the main area of the prophets' ignorance was in "the time and circumstances" of what they already know was going to happen. 1 Peter 1:11 says that they knew about "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." Thus they certainly had enough knowledge to be saved through Christ, and so in a sense, we may call them "Christians." Since faith in Christ has always been the only way to salvation, and since even Old Testament believers were saved only by faith in Christ, we may without reservation say that in all of past history, including Old Testament times, only "Christians" were saved, and all deceased non-Christians are now in hell. With even greater clarity and force, Scripture now declares that only Christians will be saved, and all non-Christians will suffer endless torment in hell. There is no hope for anyone apart from an explicit profession of faith in Christ; he is the only escape from perpetual extreme torment in the afterlife. This leads us to the second portion of Acts 17:30. The verse says, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." In the past, God's salvific dealings were mainly directed at the Jews,62 and in this sense "overlooked" the ignorance of the Gentiles, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, signifying that the authority and the blessing of the gospel transcend all ethnic, cultural, and geographical borders. Positively, this means that God is placing his elect among all kinds of people groups and the salvific power of the gospel is extending to the whole earth. Negatively, it means that since the verbal revelation of God is now extending to the whole earth, the wrath of God is being multiplied and poured out to all kinds of people who scorn the gospel.

Acts 17:30 b

Paul begins his speech by underscoring the Athenians' ignorance and his own knowledge and authority (Acts 17:23); now he stresses their ignorance again as he nears the end of his speech, and from a position of knowledge and authority, he proclaims God's command for all to repent and believe in Christ (Acts 17:30). As mentioned, many commentators wish to see Paul as trying to compliment the Athenians for the knowledge that they have already attained, if they will only allow him to supply the little that they still lack. But when Paul summarizes his speech by saying that their religions and philosophies are examples of ignorance (Acts 17:30), it becomes even more obvious that the intent of his speech (Acts 17:22-29) is to contrast their ignorance to his knowledge, and the futility of pagan philosophy to the grandeur of biblical philosophy. He does not say that he admires their philosophical competence, and that he only wishes them to go a little further and affirm the biblical worldview. Instead, Paul says that they are ignorant people, that they do not know what they are talking about, that Paul himself is the one with the answer, and that they must now turn from their idols and worship his God instead.

Note the urgency, authority, and universality of Paul's statement - "now he commands all people everywhere to repent" - now…commands…all…everywhere…repent! No one is excluded from this moral obligation; no one is acceptable to God apart from repentance and faith in Christ. Unbelievers want you to think that this is too narrow-minded, arrogant, and insensitive. How dare you say that only you are right and everyone else is wrong? But they are asserting an exclusive view just as much as we are. They are saying that everyone who does not think like them is wrong,63 just as we are saying that everyone who does not think like us is wrong. The difference is that we admit it, but they do the same thing and lie to us about it. Every proposition necessarily

excludes its contradictories; therefore, anyone who says anything is in a sense asserting an exclusive proposition. The question is which exclusive claim is correct, and not whether we should make exclusive claims.

Calling us wrong or arrogant in asserting that only the biblical worldview is true begs the question in the first place, since if what we are saying is indeed true, then we are not wrong or arrogant. But do we have to be so confrontational when discussing these things? Can we not give the unbeliever some place to stand on? Do we have to embarrass him, and contradict him on every point? These questions or challenges again beg the question. If the biblical worldview is exclusively true, then if what we are using is the biblical approach, then this approach is correct. The unbeliever should stop hiding behind superficial issues like hurt feelings and social propriety, and answer the ultimate questions. From the biblical perspective, the Christian is not confronting the unbeliever on the basis of his own human credentials, but on the basis of divine revelation. He is the means by which God says to the non-Christian, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:3).

If you are an unbeliever, then all of your major beliefs are wrong - all of them.64 You are wrong, and I am right. But I am right only because I believe what Scripture teaches me, and I am right only to the extent that I affirm what Scripture teaches. The words of Scripture are the very words of God, and since I speak to you on the basis of Scripture, I am therefore speaking to you by the authority of God. This God is the only God - there is no other God; Christianity is his only revelation - there is no other revelation. And now this only God who has revealed himself only through Christianity commands you to repent and believe the gospel. Since he has made such a command, he has therefore imposed a moral obligation upon you to repent and believe. Since he has imposed a moral obligation on you to repent and believe, if you do not, you are held guilty of blatant defiance against such a command, along with the many other sins for which you are guilty before God.

Believing Christ leads to salvation; disbelieving Christ leads to destruction. However, whether you believe is not even up to you, but since faith is a gift from God, it is up to him whether he will give you this gift. Yet there is no other way -- atheism will damn you forever, agnosticism is a damnable farce, and Islam and Buddhism cannot save you. Only the Christian gospel and its God can save you, and you are completely at his mercy. If you truly realize your wretched state and sincerely call out to God for mercy and salvation through Christ, then you will know that God has already chosen you and regenerated you; otherwise, your present life will be a meaningless existence, and your next life will be endless suffering in hell. On the other hand, if you are a believer, then you are right, and the unbelievers are wrong - all of them. The above summarizes the gospel that you must preach. Many believers claim to affirm the exclusivity of Christianity, but when it is stated in such explicit terms, they shrink back from identifying with it. But if you say that you are a Christian, the above gospel message is what you claim to believe, and it is what you must profess and preach before believers and unbelievers. You may have been indoctrinated with non-Christian ideas about how civilized society should operate, that we should "tolerate" the beliefs of other people, that we should not claim to be right and say that all who disagree are wrong, and that we should not argue against others' beliefs. But these are unbiblical principles that people use to neutralize the influence of Christianity, and to avoid confrontations with biblical truth. Do not be deceived by them. So you must preach an explicitly exclusive gospel - one that offends the non-elect. But if

even you who claim to be a Christian are offended by it, then what gospel do you profess? And what gospel do you preach? Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). There is no neutral position - you are either a friend of Christ or an enemy of Christ. If you claim to be a friend of Christ, then he has commissioned you to "take captive every thought" for him, and "make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). This means that you must not let the unbeliever get away with anything that he has against Christ; it is a declaration of war against every detail of non-Christian thought. Are you for Christ, or are you against him? If you are for Christ, then you are against the world.

Repeating a point about ethics will provide us with an appropriate introduction to the next verse. Acts 17:30 says, "Now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Christian ethics is based on divine commands, so that something is morally good because God commands it, and something is morally evil because God forbids it. For example, it was a moral evil for Adam and Eve to eat from the forbidden tree not because the act of eating the fruit of a tree, or even eating from that tree, was inherently evil, but it was a moral evil because God verbally prohibited them from eating the fruit of that particular tree.

Moral obligation is based on and generated by divine command. Therefore, when Paul says that God commands all people everywhere to repent, it means that God has imposed a moral obligation upon all human beings to repent. It is more than a suggestion or invitation; the failure to obey constitutes sin. Since the command is universal, the moral obligation generated is also universal. However, the ability to fulfill this moral obligation is not necessarily universal. The assumption that moral obligation implies moral ability is false. Moral obligation only implies the prior issuance of a divine command and the divine commitment to enforce such a command by reward and punishment. Whether the person upon whom the moral obligation falls has the ability to fulfill this moral obligation is a separate issue altogether. In fact, the Bible teaches that no one can be justified by obeying the law because no one has the ability to obey the law; nevertheless, the moral obligation is there, and unless God chooses to save, all are under condemnation because of the law. The ability to repent and believe comes as a result of God’s sovereign grace in regenerating the sinner, giving him the moral ability that he lacked before.

Acts 17:31

Without elaborating further on the above, we proceed to Acts 17:31 where Paul says that God will indeed enforce his moral commands to all human beings: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." Of course, God’s command for humans to repent assumes their prior disobedience toward his other moral commands, and the only way to escape the wrath of God is to obey this command to repent. Those who do not repent will face divine judgment and eternal condemnation.

Paul uses the resurrection of Christ as the basis from which he proclaims divine judgment to the unbelievers: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The word "this" refers to the judgment, and "he" refers to God. To paraphrase, "God has given proof to all men that he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed by raising this same man from the dead." That is, the resurrection of Christ is proof for the judgment of the world, or more specifically, that God has chosen him to judge the world. But

the Athenians denied that resurrection was possible; they did not even believe in immortality, and certainly not the personal immortality consistent with the biblical worldview. Greek mythology has it that at the founding of the Areopagus by the goddess Athena, Apollo declared, "Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection." Now, if these Athenians were to become Christians, they must affirm Christ's resurrection, and this means that they must turn away from their religion to reject Apollo's statement. Can you see that Paul's conflict with the Athenians was not over some superficial disagreement? Can you see that if Paul was correct, then the Athenians were never "on the right track"? If contemporary non-Christian philosophies are not closer in their beliefs to Christianity than the Athenians' beliefs were close to Paul's, then the disagreement between the Christian worldview and all non-Christian worldviews are at least just as deep today. The Athenians and the philosophers deny the doctrine of divine judgment, but instead of using the "common ground" approach, so that Paul would argue with the unbelievers about something that they disagree with on the basis of something that they do agree with, he instead argues about something that they disagree with (the judgment) on the basis of something that they also disagree with (the resurrection)! As with all the previous stages in his speech, Paul is here stressing their ignorance and proclaiming his own philosophy to them from a position of knowledge and authority. Paul never admits that the Athenians are correct about anything, or that they are "on the right track," as Sanders puts it.

Now, there are in fact some non-Christians who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead based on empirical arguments; they cannot deny the historical reliability of the scriptural testimony even on empirical grounds. However, this does not make them Christians because these same people deny the interpretation or the significance that the same scriptural documents attribute to the resurrection of Christ. Thus we have another example of the inherent weakness of empirical proofs. Christians should not act as if their ultimate authority is an empirical epistemology when their ultimate authority is the Scripture, which is divine revelation. From this revelation we have knowledge of both Christ's resurrection and its significance. Those who disagree must defeat us on this presuppositional level, and not on the merely empirical level, although they fail in both areas.

However, it remains that most non-Christians do not believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, because to them the resurrection of the dead is an impossibility. But as Paul says, "Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Resurrection poses no problem within the biblical framework. So if you reject the resurrection of Christ, you must be speaking from within another intellectual framework. But if you are not speaking from within the biblical framework, then by what authority or principle do you pronounce resurrection an impossibility?

According to whom is resurrection impossible? According to you? Then are you the ultimate standard of what is possible and impossible? If this is what you claim, why must I accept what you say when my ultimate standard, the Bible, says that you are practically insane? Can you refute the Bible? And why should I accept you as the ultimate authority unless you can justify what you say - including the presupposition that you are the ultimate authority - on the basis of your own authority? Is resurrection impossible according to science? Even if science is reliable, how does it show that resurrection is impossible? You may say that science shows resurrection to be at least improbable, but improbable relative to what? Is it improbable according to God? If God decides

that he wants to raise someone from the dead, then that person will indeed rise from the dead; it would be impossible for him not to rise from the dead. But why is science the standard in the first place? Science may produce the desired practical results (sometimes), but to use the practical success of a theory to argue for the view of reality assumed by the theory commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent.

If you measure truth by some other standard, you must justify that also, and if you cannot destroy my right to hold to the biblical framework, then how can you challenge my belief in resurrection? This same intellectual framework that you fail to destroy informs me of the historicity and the significance of Christ's resurrection. If you cannot destroy my framework, you cannot destroy my belief in resurrection. Many people say that they reject the Bible because it contains myths and fables, and by this they often refer to the miracles recorded in it. But this presupposes without argument that the Bible is false. If the Bible is true, then the miracles are not myths and fables (2 Peter 1:16). Unless you can destroy my first principle, it begs the question for you to reject my first principle by denying my subsidiary claims using your own first principle.

Christians must be very careful, lest they be ensnared by the illegitimate but popular assumptions of the non-Christians, thus making their defense of the faith unnecessarily cumbersome and difficult. For example, the notion that empirical and scientific methods are possible or reliable ways of attaining knowledge about reality is a foolish but stubborn assumption among both Christians and non-Christians. Whatever a Christian thinks about empiricism and science, he must not allow them to become his ultimate authority, since by definition the ultimate authority of a Christian is biblical revelation. My position is that we should completely reject empiricism and science as methods of attaining any knowledge about reality.

Every Christian who permits any degree of reliance on empiricism and science for knowledge about reality does so for the wrong reasons. For example, the Christian philosopher Ronald Nash writes as follows:

[Some] important content of the Bible depends upon human experience and testimony. If the senses are completely unreliable, then we cannot trust the reports of witnesses who say, for example, that they heard Jesus teach or saw him die or saw him alive three days after his crucifixion. If there is no sensory testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, then the truth of the Christian faith is open to serious challenge.65 Depending on how we understand the above, it is either very misleading or it is complete nonsense.

He says, "[Some] important content of the Bible depends upon human experience and testimony." No, this is false. Not one proposition in the Bible depends on human experience and testimony. All the content of the Bible depends on divine inspiration, which at times may include the writers' infallible record and interpretation about human experience and testimony. Here we have one view that says the biblical writers must depend on human experience and testimony as they write, at least to obtain some of the content; the other says that they depend only on divine inspiration even as they are writing about human experience and testimony. There is a big difference. Non-Christians believe the first, but Christians believe the second.

Then, "If the senses are completely unreliable, then we cannot trust the reports of witnesses who say, for example, that they heard Jesus teach or saw him die or saw him alive three days after his

crucifixion." Unless the senses are completely reliable, there is no way to know by sensation how reliable our senses are. But if the senses are completely unreliable, we cannot even know by sensation that they are completely unreliable, since this would mean that we can indeed verify by sensation that each sensation is false, and thus we would be getting something right by sensation, which contradicts the notion that our senses are completely unreliable. We may then say that the senses are at least sometimes unreliable, but then again, there is no way to judge by sensation how unreliable the senses are, or whether the senses are reliable in a particular instance. The truth is that we cannot know by sensation which sensation is correct and which sensation is incorrect, or the degree of sensation's reliability. Therefore, any degree of dependence on empiricism on a given issue results in complete agnosticism about that issue. This is different from a mere involvement of sensation, as in Scripture's infallible testimony about the empirical observations of some people. Scripture's dependence is on inspiration, with zero dependence on sensation. If God so willed it, any biblical passage written about a person's empirical observation could have been written with no involvement of anyone's empirical observation at all. For example, the first chapter of Genesis was written without any dependence on or any involvement of empirical observation by the writer of Genesis, but it is no less true. The same could have been done with all the biblical passages on the resurrection of Christ, if God had so willed it. Therefore, none of the biblical passages really depend on human experience and testimony, although the content of some biblical passages indeed involve human experience and testimony without depending on them.

If the senses are less than infallible, we will need an infallible authority or standard to judge each instance of sensory perception to achieve complete reliability. But when we accept a certain instance of sensory perception to be accurate because of the testimony of this non-sensory infallible authority or standard, then we are in fact accepting the testimony of this infallible authority or standard, and not at all the accuracy of sensory perception. The Bible includes infallible testimonies about what some people have perceived by the senses, and it is biblical infallibility that we respect. Nash fails to note this simple but essential distinction.

Finally, he says, "If there is no sensory testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, then the truth of the Christian faith is open to serious challenge." First of all, why must "the truth of the Christian faith" depend on "sensory testimony"? Where does this claim come from, and how is it justified? Of course there are sensory testimonies to the resurrection of Jesus, but we have no immediate contact with them. Even if we do, it would not help much, since we are not apostles, and therefore our opinion about these testimonies are not infallible. However, we have immediate contact with the infallible apostolic testimonies about these sensory testimonies, as well as the apostles' own infallible testimonies about what they themselves saw.

Now, if the Bible claims that some people saw the resurrected Christ, when the truth is that no one saw the resurrected Christ, then of course "the truth of the Christian faith is open to serious challenge." In this case, it is still true that the resurrection could have happened, but the Bible would have erred in saying that someone saw him when the truth is that no one did. And if the Bible contains errors like this, then it cannot be a reliable ultimate authority. But then this point would be about the truth of biblical inspiration, and not the reliability of sensation. Since Nash is attempting to preserve at least some reliability for sensory perception, this point is irrelevant to what he is saying, and fails to help his case.

Let us briefly discuss several relevant passages, beginning with one about a battle between Israel and Moab:

[Elisha] said, "This is what the LORD says: Make this valley full of ditches. For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink. This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD; he will also hand Moab over to you. You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones." The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was - water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.

Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border. When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red - like blood. "That's blood!" they said. "Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder, Moab!" But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites. (2 Kings 3:16-24)

What did the Moabites see - blood or water? The Moabites thought they saw blood, but their senses deceived them. But we believe that they saw water that looked like blood because this is what the infallible testimony of Scripture says. So this passage in fact points out the unreliability of the senses, rather than showing a dependence on them.

Another passage is Matthew 14:25-27, where Jesus walked on the water: "During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'" The apostles thought that they were seeing a ghost, when they were in fact looking at Jesus. Therefore, even the sensory perceptions of the apostles were wrong at times. But Matthew 14:1-36 itself is not subject to the fallibility of sensory perceptions because it is not based on sensory perceptions; instead, it is an infallible testimony about how the sensory perceptions of the apostles deceived them in this particular instance.

John 12:28-29 says, "'Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him." So did they hear thunder or a voice? Based on sensation, we cannot tell - even the people who were present did not agree. However, the infallible testimony of Scripture gives us the interpretation; therefore, if you believe that this voice was more than thunder, you believe this without regard to sensory testimony, but only to the authority of Scripture, which is the Christian's first principle and ultimate authority.

Here is another example: "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted" (Matthew 28:16-17). "But some doubted"?! They were right there looking at the resurrected Christ - how could they doubt? But this is no surprise under a biblical epistemology that rejects the reliability of sensation. Empiricism cannot justify any belief, and therefore cannot logically withstand scrutiny. Therefore, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if

someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). For the same reason, rather than focusing on using empirical evidence to convince his disciples of his resurrection, Jesus preferred that they would believe on the basis of infallible Scripture: As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him….He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:15-16; Luke 24:25-27)

Luke 24:16 says, "They were kept from recognizing him." The person who depends on his sensations would really be at a disadvantage here, would he not? In fact, Luke 24:24 seems to imply their dependence on sensations: "Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." If these disciples are being kept from recognizing Christ, short of an infallible testimony giving us the truth, would we know what they did or did not see? Christ responds, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). We can act like fools and believe only what we see, or we can be wise and believe only what Scripture says. In another place, Jesus says, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). How will people believe if they do not have the relevant sensory experiences? Jesus refers to "those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20); that is, people will come to faith in Christ because of what the apostles speak and write.

1 John 1:1-3 is a favorite passage for Christian empiricists, but does it prove what they want it to prove? The passage is as follows: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. For sure, the passage contains several references to sensations, but it gives no assurance that all of our sensations, some of our sensations, or even any of our sensations, are reliable. Rather, this is the infallible testimony of the apostle John about his own particular experience with Jesus Christ. From this passage, we cannot say that all of John’s sensations are reliable. In fact, we cannot even say that all of John’s sensations about Christ are reliable, since he could have been one of those who thought he saw a ghost walking on the water when it was really Jesus.

What the passage does say is that Jesus was the incarnation of God, and that he appeared in a real human body. That is about all that one can deduce about sensation from this passage. Much of what this passage says is in fact independent from sensation. For example, John calls Jesus "that which was from the beginning," "the Word of life," "the life," "the eternal life," and "[God’s] Son." But how is it possible to know from a present sensation of Christ’s bodily appearance that he was "that which was from the beginning"? His body was a real human body, so you could not have known that he was God just by seeing or touching him. When Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus replies, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Peter did not come to know that Jesus was the Christ and the Son by sight or touch, but by the

grace of God illuminating his mind. In 1 John 1:1-3, the apostle is telling the readers what he saw and touched; he never says that he discovered the nature and identity of what he saw and touched by seeing and touching. He found out the nature and identity of what he saw and touched the same way Peter did - by the grace of God illuminating his mind. And this is how you and others today come to know about and agree with the truth concerning Christ. What a difference! As you can see, the passage gives zero support to empiricism; rather, it exposes its epistemological impotence.

There are other examples, but we will stop with this one where Paul writes about the resurrection of Christ: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Many Christians, as Nash, maintain that we must grant some legitimacy to sensation in our epistemology because the Bible grants it such legitimacy and even depends on it in some passages, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is the type of passages that they use as examples.

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 contain the portion immediately relevant to empiricism. But again, the passage comes to us as an infallible biblical passage, and not as a testimony based on fallible empirical observations. The passage may contain information about empirical observations, but the authority of the testimony resides in the divine inspiration of Scripture, and not in the empirical content that it speaks about. In fact, Paul begins by emphasizing that what Christ did was done "according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Can you see the difference? When the Bible testifies about something, its authority does not rest on what it testifies about, but on divine inspiration. That is, the Bible is true not because it has been confirmed by fallible empirical observations, but because it has been produced by infallible divine inspiration. Of course there are "empirical" evidences for Christ’s resurrection - the disciples saw him after his resurrection. But we know about these empirical observations from the Bible, and we know that they indeed saw what they thought they saw also from the Bible. We know that Christ resurrected because the Bible says so, and we know that the disciples saw the resurrected Christ also because the Bible says so.

If you believe in the resurrection of Christ because of the sensory perceptions of other people or even your own sensory perceptions, then you have no defense against all alleged visions and apparitions, even those that contradict your own. But contradictory visions and apparitions cannot all be true; therefore, basing religious beliefs on sensory perceptions, whether other people’s or your own, can only result in complete religious agnosticism. However, if our ultimate authority is Scripture, then on the basis of this authority, we may pronounce those who have anti-biblical experiences or visions as delusional. In contrast, Christians believe in the resurrection of Christ because of the apostle’s infallible testimony, and sometimes the apostles record what they or other people saw, judging these particular instances to be accurate by infallible divine inspiration. This is what the Bible shows about sensory perceptions - sometimes they are accurate and sometimes they are not, and we only know when they are accurate based on the divine inspiration

of the prophets and the apostles. It is obviously impossible to take this and infer that Scripture grants sensation any degree of epistemological reliability or legitimacy! But this is the false conclusion that Nash and many other Christians have made.

It is the infallible testimony of Scripture that gives confirmation to particular instances of empirical observations, and so those who say that we must give some place to empirical observations in our epistemology because parts of the Bible depend on them have the order of authority reversed. Fallible empirical observations cannot authoritatively prove or disprove scriptural claims; rather, scriptural claims prove or disprove particular instances of empirical observations. But since no one can claim prophetic or apostolic infallibility today, no contemporary empirical observation can be certified by infallible authority.

It is obvious, then, that everything about Christianity rests on biblical infallibility, that Scripture is our ultimate authority, and nothing else matters in contrast. You may then ask the all-important question, "Vincent, you bring everything back to the truth and infallibility of the Bible, but is the Bible indeed true and infallible?" Once you ask this question, the focus of the debate immediately moves away from the historicity of Christ's resurrection, and to the Christian first principle of biblical infallibility. If the Bible is indeed infallible, then everything that it says is true, including all that it says about Christ's physical resurrection and its spiritual significance. Unless the subsidiary claim on either side self-destructs due to self-contradiction, if pursued long enough, every debate must eventually be settled on the presuppositional level, but once the debate goes to the presuppositional level, then we have already won.66

Acts 17:32-34

There is some debate concerning whether Paul is interrupted at this point, but at least some of those who say that he is interrupted believe this because they are dissatisfied with how the speech concludes, and not because there is any strong evidence that such an interruption is occurring. In any case, Paul has presented a reasonably comprehensive summary of the Christian faith given the circumstances and constraints. What follows describes the various responses from his audience: When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. (Acts 17:32-34) In other words, some mock, some wait, and some believe. Or, we may say that the gospel message produces in its hearers provocation, procrastination, or profession.

How does the Bible account for these different reactions? Humanistic Christians explain people's different reactions to the gospel by human free will, but they cannot show the coherence of human free will itself, nor can they provide biblical justification for it. On the other hand, the Book of Acts itself provides us with the proper explanation, that people respond differently because God has chosen some and not others: On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. (Acts 16:13-14) On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively

against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:44-48)

Lydia believed the gospel because "The Lord opened her heart," and those Gentiles who believed the gospel did so because they were "appointed for eternal life." Since all who were so appointed also believed (Acts 13:48), and not all believed, it follows that not all were appointed to eternal life.

Likewise, in Acts 17:1-34, all those who were appointed to eternal life believe, and the rest respond exactly as they should as reprobates: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God….Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

Due to their own depravity and foolishness, the reprobates consider the gospel message as foolish, but we can defeat them in argumentation: For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:19-21)

Some commentators, often due to their anti-intellectual and anti-philosophical bias, oppose Paul's approach in Acts 17:1-34, and they cite Acts 17:32-34 as evidence for their assertion, that Paul fails to generate a decisively positive outcome. They say that Paul abandons this approach after Athens, and when he arrives at Corinth, he takes a different approach, preaching the "simple" gospel of Christ rather than arguing with unbelievers. For this, they cite 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 as evidence: When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

If you have been paying attention, you will see that this is in fact what Paul did at Athens! He did not base his preaching on human wisdom or eloquence, but depended on the content of biblical revelation, which is just another way of saying, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." I have shown elsewhere that 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 shows that Paul only avoided the use of philosophical sophistry,67 or empty arguments void of substance that are based on human speculation, but that he definitely used arguments that are derived from the very wisdom of God, and thus the "demonstration" - axiomatic proof - of the Spirit. In addition, the Book of Acts itself states that after "Paul left Athens and went to Corinth" (Acts 18:1), "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts

18:4), just as he did at Thessalonica and Athens (Acts 17:1-3, Acts 17:16-17). There is no evidence that Paul changed his approach after leaving Athens, but there is evidence that he continued to argue against unbelievers. Commentators assert otherwise only because of their own anti-intellectual prejudice. We should just accept the fact that Paul was an intellectual, that he used an argumentative approach, and that he eagerly addressed the major philosophical questions in his preaching.

Paul used the correct approach to apologetics and evangelism in his Areopagus address, and the Holy Spirit intends it to be an example for us. What believers - even some Christian scholars - need to overcome is their bias against philosophical argumentation, and their tendency to measure evangelistic success by the sheer number of converts. God says that his word will not fail; it will do exactly what God intends. The fallacy is in thinking that God always intends conversion: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). True gospel preaching does not convert everyone; rather, it awakens the elect to faith, and confirms the non-elect to damnation. Therefore, "success" in apologetics and evangelism should be measured by whether we have presented Christianity faithfully and defended it cogently, and not by practical results. That said, Paul does obtain some positive practical results: "A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others" (Acts 17:34). One of the converts, Dionysius, was "a member of the Areopagus" - the prominent council to which Paul was brought to explain his philosophy. Another convert was a woman named Damaris. The very fact that her name is mentioned here suggests that she was a woman of some consequence. And then, there are also "a number of others" who believed.

Endnotes:

1. C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, Inspired Preaching; Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002; p. 117.

2. David J. Williams, New International Biblical Commentary: Acts; Hendrickson Publishers, 1990; p. 302.

3. For example, a church has no justification in excommunicating a murderer or rapist, but does not at the same time excommunicate one who rejects the infallibility of Scripture. If infallible biblical revelation is the very basis upon which we excommunicate the murderer or rapist, how then, can we excommunicate one who has violated a scriptural principle of morality, but tolerate one who rejects the very authority by which we enforce this scriptural principle? Theological coherence is destroyed unless the church regards a rejection of biblical infallibility as worse than murder and rape, and formulates its policy accordingly. against anti-biblical beliefs and practices, in whatever contexts that these are found. Indifference toward and appreciation for anti-biblical religions, philosophies, beliefs, and cultures constitute treachery against the kingdom of God.

4. The main context of the passage may suggest that Christ is opposing the use of violence in defending personal innocence when falsely accused by the authorities, and not a defense of religion in particular.

5. I. Howard Marshall, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000 (original: 1980); p. 283.

6. Ibid., p. 283.

7. Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Hendrickson Publishers, 2002 (original: 1896); p. 139.

8. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 3; Broadman Press, 1930; p. 267.

9. Marshall, Acts; p. 283.

10. Another possibility is that Marshall himself does not know what he is trying to say about Paul.

11. Anthony Kenny, A Brief History of Western Philosophy; Blackwell Publishers, 2001; p. 85.

12. Marvin R. Vincent, Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 1; Hendrickson Publishers; p. 539.

13. Greg L. Bahnsen, Always Ready; Covenant Media Foundation, 2000; p. 242.

14. Christians should not be disturbed that the biblical writers sometimes use terms employed by non-Christian philosophy. In such instances, they never intend to accept the pagan view of things, but rather use the same terms to make apparent a contrast against the non-Christian positions. Examples of such contrasts include John's use of the logos in John 1:1-51 and Paul's teaching on self-sufficiency in Php 4:1-23. Bible readers must note how the biblical writers are using those terms, and what they are saying about the concepts associated with those terms.

15. Gordon H. Clark, Ancient Philosophy; The Trinity Foundation, 1997; p. 308.

16. Bahnsen, Always Ready; p. 243.

17. Life Application Bible Commentary: Acts; Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999; p. 300.

18. Lawrence C. Becker, A New Stoicism; Princeton University Press, 1999.

19. Frederic R. Howe, Challenge and Response; Zondervan Publishing House, 1982; p. 41.

20. Ibid., p. 41.

21. John Sanders, editor; What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; InterVarsity Press, 1995; p. 41.

22. Ibid., p. 41.

23. Howe, Challenge and Response; p. 42.

24. The real common ground that the Christian has with the non-Christian is that they are both made in the image of God. However, the non-Christian suppresses and denies this common ground in his explicit philosophy. Therefore, in terms of our explicit philosophies, there is no common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian. But the knowledge of God is inescapable, and surfaces in distorted form at various points of the non-Christian's philosophy. Thus the Christian argues that the non-Christian already knows about the true God and denies it,

which means that the non-Christian is without excuse and subject to condemnation.

25. Marshall, Acts; p. 284.

26. Robertson, Word Pictures, Vol. 3; p. 281.

27. Love's Labor's Lost, v., 2. See Vincent, Word Studies, Vol. 1; p. 540.

28. Robertson, Word Pictures, Vol. 3; p. 282.

29. Life Application Bible Commentary: Acts; p. 301.

30. Robertson, Word Pictures, Vol. 3; p. 284.

31. Ibid., p. 285.

32. Vincent, Word Studies, Vol. 1; p. 543.

33. Marshall, Acts; p. 285.

34. Williams, Acts; p. 304.

35. New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition; InterVarsity Press, 2000; p. 1093.

36. Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians; William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987; p. 72.

37. Acts; p. 305. However, if we are correct, then Paul is doing more than just raising the question about God, but also declaring their admitted ignorance about him.

38. Word Studies, Vol. 1; p. 543.

39. New Bible Commentary; p. 1093.

40. Challenge and Response; p. 42.

41. F. F. Bruce, The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament; William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959; p. 18.

42. An adherent of a non-Christian religion may not know the official teachings of his own religion. When you tell him the ridiculous things that his religion teaches, he may say that you have misrepresented it, not because he really knows what his own religion teaches, but because the official doctrines of his religion seem ridiculous even to him, and thus he assumes that his religion cannot possibly teach what you allege that it teaches. If such is the case, then you should either cite the official authority of his religion, or challenge his personal beliefs. Of course, most professing Christians also lack knowledge of Christianity, and this is why theological education must be our first priority.

43. Robert Morey, The Islamic Invasion; Christian Scholars Press, 1992; p. 211-218.

44. Ibid., p. 177-208.

45. One explanation of Muhammad's misunderstandings on the Christian faith is that he had consulted extra-biblical sources that were heretical from the Christian perspective, and mistakenly

thought that they represented the Christian faith. But that means he was not infallible, and that he was a false prophet by biblical standards. The Koran contains many errors about secular history, Jewish history and religion, Christian history and religion, as well as many self-contradictions.

46. See James W. Sire, The Universe Next Door; Ronald H. Nash, The Gospel and The Greeks; Fritz Ridenour, So What's the Difference?

47. Some commentaries continue to allege that some of the philosophers would agree with some of the things Paul says, but I have already exposed their folly. By verses 24 and 25, Paul is talking about another kind of God altogether. How then can the two parties agree on what follows?

48. My position is that science cannot prove anything about anything. But for the sake of argument, even if science can demonstrate that we all came from one man, there is still no justification against genocide or cannibalism, unless there is a divine interpretation of the moral implication of this fact, disclosed to us by verbal revelation.

49. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology. Briefly, since biology presupposes cosmology, and both biology and cosmology presupposes epistemology, unless the evolutionist can make explicit his epistemology and metaphysics, and show that both are justified and coherent, we do not even need to hear about his theory on biology.

50. Williams, Acts; p. 307.

51. Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology.

52. Special revelation here refers to Scripture.

53. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 2; Hendrickson Publishers, 2002; p. 375. See Henry Alford, The Greek New Testament; Lee and Shepherd Publishers, 1872; 2:198.

54. Ibid. See Psalms 14:2-3 and Romans 3:10-12.

55. Ibid.

56. The NASB says, "it escapes their notice," and obscures the meaning of willful ignorance. Marvin Vincent maintains that the words literally means, "this escapes them of their own will" (Word Studies, Vol. 1; p. 704). It appears that many modern translations are able to grasp this, so that the NRSV says, "They deliberately ignore this fact," the ESV, "They deliberately overlook this fact," and the GNT, "They purposely ignore the fact." See also Barclay, Lattimore, Phillips, and Wuest.

57. Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

58. In a moment, we will cast doubt on whether we should put quotations around "for in him we live and move and have our being."

59. R. C. H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: Acts; Hendrickson Publishers, 2001 (original: 1934); p. 732.

60. Kenneth S. Wuest, Treasures from the New Testament; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941; p. 54.

61. Also, "An appeal to the known prepossessions or admissions of the person addressed." See Lenski, Acts; p. 741.

62. It follows that if relatively few Gentiles were converted in the past, then God had placed relatively few elect individuals in Gentile nations and cultures.

63. That is, they are saying that only those are right who say that it is wrong to say that only we are right and everyone else is wrong.

64. Although I emphasize major beliefs in this chapter, in a sense all the minor beliefs of an unbeliever are also wrong, because it is the major beliefs that form the context for all minor beliefs. The basic axioms of a worldview determine its subsidiary theorems.

65. Ronald H. Nash, Life’s Ultimate Question: An Introduction to Philosophy; Zondervan Publishing House, 1999; p. 152.

66. See also Vincent Cheung, Systematic Theology and Ultimate Questions.

67. Vincent Cheung, "Chosen for Salvation," in Ultimate Questions.

02.03. THE REVELATIONAL CONQUEST

Presuppositional Confrontations 3. The Revelational Conquest

Paul’s speech to the Athenians in Acts 17:1-34 is a wonderful piece of philosophical preaching. While the modern man tends to have an aversion to all things intellectual and philosophical, the apostle Paul does not share this attitude. For a biblical verse on this subject, Colossians 2:8 is as clear as any: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

He warns us about "hollow and deceptive" philosophy, but some people misconstrue this as a warning against philosophy itself. However, Paul also warns us about false doctrines, but only the most stupid individuals would take this as a warning against all doctrines, that is, even biblical doctrines. This verse is saying that we should reject man-centered philosophy, and instead adopt a Christ-centered philosophy. Paul implies his approval of a philosophy that depends on Christ as its foundation and tells us to reject any philosophy that is built on another principle; therefore, the Bible approves of only an explicitly Christian philosophy, and not even theism in general.

While non-Christian religions and philosophies are ultimately built upon nothing more than human speculation, Christian philosophy has divine revelation as its foundation. In philosophical terms, this is not a form of fideism, but a form of foundationalism, or to be exact, it is biblical or revelational foundationalism. As every system of philosophy has its first principle or starting point, so no one can forbid the Christian from presupposing biblical infallibility as its first principle; scriptural revelation is the starting point of our philosophy. Of course, adherents to non-Christian religions and philosophies may choose to attack our faith. We are not afraid of them. Rather, although God has already commissioned us to invade the world with his divine weapons - thus we have divine license to preach - the non-Christians’ relentless attacks against the Christian faith grant us even the social license to respond with a comprehensive and terminal assault against all of their non-biblical beliefs.

Paul tells us that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). But this does not mean that they are right; it does not mean that the gospel is indeed foolish. 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength." Non-Christians are not competing against our wisdom, but they are competing against God’s wisdom, and even the "foolishness" of God is wiser than anything that unbelievers can come up with.

We triumph over non-Christian religions and philosophies not by human sophistry or eloquent presentation, but by the sheer superiority of the content of our philosophy, or the biblical worldview. Paul explains: For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the

foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:19-21)

God’s revelation has made foolishness of the wisdom of this world. Therefore, our task is not to make biblical propositions appear true from non-Christian perspectives, but it is to refute the non-Christian perspectives themselves. Instead of saying that they are wrong by only a little, we are saying that they are completely wrong, and wrong from start to finish in their religions and philosophies. This is why they must change their very perspectives or frameworks, and not just see things a little more clearly from the same fatally flawed perspectives or frameworks. And this means that not all approaches to or positions on apologetics and evangelism are correct. Specifically, we must rule out all approaches that compromise biblical content in their attempts to defend Christianity. We must never depend on "the basic principles of this world" to defend Christ. On the final page of his book, Humble Apologetics, John G. Stackhouse, Jr. writes, "We Christians do believe that God has given us the privilege of hearing and embracing the good news, of receiving adoption into his family, and of joining the Church. We do believe that we know some things that other people don’t, and those things are good for them to hear. Above all, we believe that we have met Jesus Christ." This is fine, but what follows is horrible: "For all we know, we might be wrong about any or all of this. And we will honestly own up to that possibility. Thus whatever we do or say, we must do or say it humbly."1

What he says here is unbiblical and outrageous! He has just stated what represent some of the central claims of the biblical gospel message, and that he affirms these claims as true, so when he says that "we might be wrong about any or all of this," he necessarily implies that Scripture itself might be wrong about any or all of this. However, since the Bible itself does not admit that it "might be wrong about any or all of this," when Stackhouse says that he "might be wrong about any or all of this," he is no longer defending the Bible. Of course, his emphasis is that he himself might be wrong that the Bible is the revelation of God, but this still returns to the point that if this is what he means, then he is no longer defending the Bible. He is saying that he might be wrong when he says that the Bible is right, which translates into him saying that the Bible might be wrong. Because he is saying that he might be wrong when he affirms that the Bible is true, so that the Bible might in fact be false after all, he is no longer doing biblical apologetics. The Bible itself says that we can know with certainty that what we believe is true when we affirm what it teaches:

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:3-4)

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. (John 17:6-8)

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see….And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:1; Hebrews 11:6)

If the Bible itself claims to be the revelation of God and therefore completely true, then by what standard of humility does Stackhouse call his less than certain approach to apologetics "humble"?

Since the Bible is the ultimate standard of ethics, it also defines humility; therefore, when Stackhouse implies that the Bible itself might be wrong, he is not being humble, but arrogant - so arrogant that he says he might be wrong if he affirms what God reveals. According to biblical standard, it is not humble to say that you might be wrong when you affirm what the Bible affirms; instead, you are arrogant if you say that the Bible might be wrong. For Stackhouse to assume the identity of a Christian and then say that his religion might be wrong is to say that Christianity might be wrong; therefore, instead of doing apologetics - humble or not - he is in fact attacking Christianity. If the Bible is the word of God, then to say that we might be wrong about it being the word of God is not humility, but blasphemy. If Stackhouse admits that he himself does not have certainty, then we may perhaps still accept him as a weaker brother, but when he says that we should not ever claim certainty, then he has made himself an enemy of Christ.

Rather than saying that we must "own up to that possibility" that we might be wrong, we must insist on the impossibility that we are wrong when we are affirming what the Bible teaches. When we affirm what the Bible affirms, it is impossible that we are wrong. If Stackhouse is so "humble," he must also confess that he might be wrong when he says that he might be wrong about Christianity, for how can he be so sure there is "that possibility" that Christians can be wrong who affirm the Bible? Is he fallible when he affirms that Bible, but infallible when it comes to "that possibility"? How arrogant!

Stackhouse's position is unbiblical and irrational; therefore, let us reject such pretended humility, unfaithful spirituality, and asinine pseudo-scholarship in exchange for an approach to apologetics that is biblical, which is one that says, "We are right, and we are sure that we are right. You are wrong, and we are sure that you are wrong." If this biblical position brings the world's reproach, then so be it; let the unbelievers try to defeat us in argumentation. On the other hand, if you who claim to be a Christian are so drunk with "tolerance" that you prefer to adopt Stackhouse's anti-biblical stance, then why not go all the way and stop calling yourself a Christian? The point is that your approach to defending the Bible must be consistent with the Bible itself. If you contradict biblical claims in your very approach to defending biblical claims, then you are really no longer defending biblical claims. When arguing about religion, why must Christians pretend to be non-Christians, and then from there argue to the truth of Christianity, when the atheists, agnostics, the Muslims, and the Buddhists never pretend to be Christians, and from there argue to their respective beliefs? Many Christians have been tricked. The basic stance of the Christian in apologetics and evangelism, then, is one of extreme opposition to all non-Christian thought. Now, I never said that we must be hostile in our mannerisms, although some will doubtless misunderstand me this way. Rather, we can be very polite, or act in such a manner as wisdom dictates. However, we must never yield an inch of intellectual ground - not an inch. This is the biblical attitude. As for the content of preaching, Paul's example in Acts 17:1-34 is very informative. In philosophical terms, he addressed the topics of epistemology, metaphysics, religion, biology, history, and ethics. In theological terms, he addressed the topics of revelation, theology proper, creation, providence, anthropology, ethics, christology, soteriology, and eschatology. Depending on the vocabularies we are using to describe it, his speech resembles a basic outline for systematic philosophy or systematic theology.2

Since "Paul's approach was to accentuate the antithesis between himself and the philosophers,"3 and since the content of his speech is rather comprehensive, it follows that a biblical approach to

apologetics must demonstrate our comprehensive opposition to pagan beliefs, and our constructive presentation must likewise be thorough, covering all major topics. One implication is that those who do not have a basic grasp of what we now call systematic theology cannot do apologetics or evangelism in a sufficiently biblical manner. In connection to evangelism, Jesus tells his disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations…teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Teach them everything? Most Christians today hardly know anything about biblical doctrines and how they all fit together. But such comprehensive biblical knowledge is the prerequisite of a comprehensive preaching ministry, which is what Jesus demands here. Since biblical apologetics and evangelism require comprehensive understanding of at least the basics of theology, those who are without such knowledge cannot rightly claim to be doing biblical apologetics and evangelism. As evident in Acts 17:1-34, there are often constraints imposed upon us by time and other factors. But as circumstances allow, we must offer a systematic and comprehensive presentation of the biblical worldview, and a systematic and comprehensive refutation of the non-biblical worldviews represented by the hearers. Our goal should be nothing short of a complete vindication of Christian claims, and a thorough annihilation of non-Christian beliefs. This may be done over the course of days or even months. And in some situations, it is done over the course of many years, as should be the case in parenting our children. Sometimes, we may only have half an hour, but whatever the case may be, we should seek to cover the major points, that is, to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJ). While doing all of this, we must make clear that we are only loyal to the biblical foundation and heritage, and not a pagan foundation or heritage.

Jude says, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Apologetics is so important that although this apostle wants to write about soteriology, he decides to talk about defending the faith instead. It is time for Christians to stand up and meet the challenge, and it is time that Christians compel non-Christians to stand up and meet the presuppositional challenge of biblical apologetics and evangelism. It is time that you speak to the ignorant unbelievers around you, not from a non-biblical intellectual foundation, but from a revelational foundation, so that from a position of authority and knowledge you may proclaim to them what they do not know.

If we are committed to a faithful application of the biblical approach to apologetics and evangelism, then we will always win and never lose when confronting unbelievers, and Christian scholarship will spell the doom of all non-Christian systems, by which the reprobates attempt to justify their unbelief and disobedience.

Most Christians are not aggressive enough, even if they know something about biblical apologetics and evangelism. We can all take a lesson from the exchange between Elisha and Jehoash:

Now Elisha was suffering from the illness from which he died. Jehoash king of Israel went down to see him and wept over him. "My father! My father!" he cried. "The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" Elisha said, "Get a bow and some arrows," and he did so. "Take the bow in your hands," he said to the king of Israel. When he had taken it, Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands. "Open the east window," he said, and he opened it. "Shoot!" Elisha said, and he shot. "The

LORD’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!" Elisha declared. "You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek." Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times." (2 Kings 13:14-19)

God has given us divine weapons with which to destroy all non-Christian religions and philosophies (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), but what are we doing with them?4 As Elisha was angry with Jehoash for not being aggressive and thorough enough, so would this man of God be very angry with most of us today; he would have no patience for our "tolerance" and propriety. But God is faithful to himself and to his people, and he has preserved some of us who have not bowed the knee to relativism, pluralism, and other non-biblical perspectives. We who know our God will do great things in his name. We will ceaselessly attack non-Christian religions and philosophies with biblical argumentation and persistent prayer. We will strike them again and again. When they run, we will pursue them; when they hide, we will expose them; and when they fall, we will trample them. We will not make Jehoash’s mistake, who struck three times and stopped - we will never stop. When we finally learn to fight by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, we will find that unbelieving thought really has no defense against our assaults; we will be an invincible army, and the very gates of hell will not be able to stand against us.

Endnotes:

1. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today; Oxford University Press, 2002; p. 232.

2. Some of the points are not developed in detail, but this is to be expected under the circumstances and constraints Paul faces.

3. Bahnsen, Always Ready; p. 272.

4. These are spiritual or intellectual weapons, expressed in the form of preaching and arguments. For more works by Vincent Cheung go to Reformation Ministries International

Chapter 20

03.00. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY by Vincent Cheung Copyright © 2003 by Vincent Cheung disclaimer on webpage:

"Under our copyright policy, you are permitted to print, copy, and distribute unlimited copies of our publications for any ministry purpose, such as for your church, study group, or personal outreach."

03.000. PREFACE

Preface to 2003 Edition The most important task a Christian can perform at any stage of his spiritual development is to study systematic theology. This may sound extreme to the anti-intellectual mindset of popular Christianity, but it is a necessary conclusion derived from the nature of theology. Theological study possesses intrinsic value, and it is the precondition of every Christian concept and activity. For example, it is the intellectual enterprise of theology that governs the object and mode of prayer, defines the reason and manner of worship, and formulates the message and strategy for evangelism.

I consider this book an adequate text for the beginning reader. Perhaps some will even find it challenging. But being an introduction, it cannot include everything important to a comprehensive understanding of theology. And since its primary purpose is to provide a positive construction or statement of biblical doctrines, the emphasis is not on polemics. The reader should pursue my other writings for more detailed discussions on the topics mentioned in the following chapters. This book emphasizes the interrelatedness of biblical doctrines, and arranges them in a logical progression from the epistemological precondition of a worldview to the preservation of the believer. The three central motifs of this book are the infallibility of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the centrality of the mind. Some of my other works offer additional explanation and defense of these biblical pillars of the Christian system. Especially relevant is my book, Ultimate Questions, which serves well as a companion text to Systematic Theology by giving biblical answers to the questions of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and soteriology. Whereas Systematic Theology is an outline of Christian theology, Ultimate Questions is an outline of Christian philosophy and apologetics.

03.01. THEOLOGY

Systematic Theology

1. THEOLOGY THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY

Theological reflection is the most important activity a human being can perform. This statement may astonish some readers, but an explanation of the meaning and implications of the theological enterprise should provide justification for such a claim. We will consider the nature, possibility, and necessity of this field of study in the next several pages. THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY The word THEOLOGY refers to the study of God. When used in a broader sense, the word may include all the other doctrines revealed in Scripture. Now, God is the supreme being who has created and even now sustains all that exists, and theology seeks to understand and articulate in a systematic manner information revealed to us by him. Thus, theology concerns itself with ultimate reality. Since it is the study of the ultimate, nothing is more important. Because it contemplates and discusses the ultimate, it in turn defines and governs every area of life and thought. Therefore, as long as God is the ultimate being or reality, theological reflection is the ultimate human activity. This book is a presentation of several major biblical doctrines that come under the study of systematic theology. A doctrine consists of a set of propositions relating to a certain theological topic it is the biblical teaching on a given subject. Theology then refers to the study of Scripture or the systematic formulation of doctrines from Scripture. A truly biblical doctrine is always authoritative and binding, and a system of theology is authoritative only to the extent that it reflects the teaching of Scripture.

Many warn against studying theology for its own sake. The anti-intellectual spirit of the age has so infiltrated the church that they refuse to believe that any intellectual activity possesses intrinsic value. To them, even knowing God must serve a greater purpose, probably a pragmatic or ethical one. Although the knowledge of God ought to affect one’s conduct, it is nevertheless a mistake to think that the intellectual enterprise of theology serves a purpose that is greater than itself. Christians should affirm that since to study theology is to know God, and knowing God is the highest purpose of man, theology therefore possesses intrinsic value. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says: This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

There is no higher purpose for which the knowledge of God intends to reach, and there is no higher purpose for man but to know God. Theological knowledge produces moral demands and other effects in one’s life, but these are not higher purposes than the theological task of knowing the verbal revelation of God. THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY A prerequisite to constructing a theological system is to establish that theological knowledge is possible. Jesus says that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); he transcends the spatio-temporal existence of man. The question then arises

as to how human beings may know anything about him. Deuteronomy 29:29 has the answer: The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29) Theology is possible because God has revealed himself to us through the words of the Bible.

God has revealed his existence, attributes, and moral demands to every human being by including such information within the mind of man. The very structure of the human mind includes some knowledge about God. This innate knowledge in turn causes man to recognize creation as the work of a creator. The grandeur, magnitude, and complex design of nature serve to remind man of his innate knowledge about God. The heavens are declaring the glory of God, The vast expanse displays his handiwork. Day after day they "pour forth speech"; Night after night they display knowledge. They have no speech, there are no words; No sound is heard from them. Their "voice" goes out into all the earth, Their words to the ends of the world. (Psalms 19:1-3)1 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)2

Although the testimony of nature concerning its creator is evident, man's knowledge of God does not come from the observation of creation. A later passage in Romans informs us that the knowledge of God does not come from empirical procedures, but that it has been directly "written" on the mind of man - it is an innate knowledge:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Romans 2:14-15)3

Theologians call this God's GENERAL REVELATION. This knowledge of God is innate in the mind of man and does not originate from observing the external world. Man does not infer from what he observes in nature that there must be a God; rather, he knows the God of the Bible prior to having access to any empirical data. The role of observation is to stimulate the mind of man to recall this innate knowledge of God, which has been suppressed by sin, and it is also by this innate knowledge that man interprets nature.

Every person has an innate knowledge of God, and everywhere he looks nature reminds him of it. His every thought and every experience gives irrefutable testimony for God's existence and attributes; the evidence is inescapable. Therefore, those who deny the existence of God are accused of suppressing the truth by their wickedness and rebellion, and that in claiming to be wise, they have become fools (Romans 1:22). In other words, God's general revelation of his existence and attributes through his creation - that is, the innate knowledge in man and the characteristics of the universe - renders those who deny his existence without excuse, and so they are rightly condemned.

Although one has an innate knowledge of the existence and attributes of God, and the created universe serves as a constant reminder, general revelation is insufficient to grant a saving knowledge of God and of information impossible to be so obtained. Thus, God has revealed what has pleased him to show us through verbal or propositional revelation - that is, the Scripture. This is his SPECIAL REVELATION. Through it, one gains rich and precise information concerning God and the things of God. It is also through the Scripture that one may obtain a saving knowledge of God. One who studies and obeys the Scripture gains salvation in Christ: But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Knowledge of God is also possible only because God has made man in his own image, so that there is a point of contact between the two despite the transcendence of God. Animals or inanimate objects cannot know God the way man can even if they are presented with his verbal revelation.

God has chosen to reveal information to us through the Bible - in words rather than images or experiences. Verbal communication has the advantage of being precise and accurate when properly done. Since this is the form of communication that the Bible assumes, a worthy theological system must be derived from the propositions found in Scripture, and not any non-verbal means of communication such as religious feelings or experiences.

Now, every system of thought begins from a first principle, and uses deductive or inductive reasoning, or both, to derive the rest of the system. A system that uses inductive reasoning is unreliable and collapses into skepticism,4 since induction is always a formal fallacy, in that it often depends on empirical data, and that it produces universal conclusions from particulars. Absolute certainty only comes from deductive reasoning, in which particulars are deduced from universals by logical necessity.

However, since deductive reasoning never produces information that is not already implicit in the premises, the first principle of a deductive system must contain all the information for the rest of the system. This means that a first principle that is too narrow will fail to yield a sufficient number of propositions to provide its adherents with a meaningful amount of knowledge. Thus, both induction and an inadequate first principle in a deductive system make knowledge impossible.

Even if a first principle appears to be broad enough, we must provide justification for affirming it. Its justification cannot come from a higher authority or principle, for then it would not be the first principle or the ultimate authority within the system. A lower authority or principle within the system cannot verify the first principle, since it is on this very first principle that this lower authority or principle depends. Therefore, a first principle of a system of thought must be self-authenticating - it must prove itself true. The ultimate authority within the Christian system is Scripture; therefore, our first principle is biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God." Although there are compelling arguments to support such a first principle even if one were to employ empirical methods, such that no unbeliever can refute them, the Christian must regard them as inconclusive since empirical methods are unreliable.5 Moreover, if we were to depend on science or other empirical procedures to verify the truth of Scripture, these tests would then stand as judge over the very word of God, and thus Scripture would no longer be the ultimate authority in our

system.6 As Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." Since God possesses ultimate authority, there is no higher authority by which one may pronounce Scripture as infallible.

However, not every system that claims divine authority has within its first principle the content to prove itself. A sacred text might contradict itself, and self-destructs. Another might admit dependence on the Christian Bible, but then the Bible condemns all other alleged revelations. Now, if the Bible is true, and it claims exclusivity, then all other systems of thought must be false. Therefore, if one affirms a non-Christian worldview, he must at the same time reject the Bible. This generates a clash between the two worldviews. When this happens, the Christian can be confident that his system of thought is impervious to the attacks from others, but the biblical system itself provides the content for both defense and offense in such encounters. The Christian may destroy his opponent's worldview by questioning the first principles and subsidiary propositions of the system. Does the first principle of the system contradict itself? Does it fail to satisfy its own requirements?7 Does the system crumble because of the fatal problems of empiricism and induction? Does its subsidiary propositions contradict one another? Does it borrow Christian premises not deducible from its own first principle?8 Does the system give adequate and coherent answers to the ultimate questions, such as those concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics? To repeat, the first principle of the Christian system is biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God." From this first principle, the theologian proceeds to construct a comprehensive system of thought based on infallible divine revelation. To the extent that his reasoning is correct, every part of the system is deduced by logical necessity from the infallible first principle, and is thus equally infallible. And since the Bible is the verbal revelation of God, who demands our worship and commands our conscience, a system of theology deduced with logical validity is authoritative and binding. Therefore, to the extent that this book is accurate in presenting what Scripture teaches, its content summarizes what all men ought to believe, what Christians have pledged to believe, and what is objectively true. THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY

Theology is necessary not only for Christian activities, but also for all of life and thought. Since God is both ultimate and omnipotent, he has the right and the ability to address every aspect of our lives. Theology seeks to understand and systematize his verbal revelation, and it is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teaching of Scripture. The necessity of theology is a question of the necessity of communication from God. Since this is God's universe, the ultimate source of information and interpretation regarding all of life and thought is divine revelation. And since it is necessary to hear from God, theology is necessary.

Theology is central to all of life and thought because it deals with the verbal revelation that comes from the supreme being - the essential reality that gives existence and meaning to everything. For example, ignorance of musical theories has no direct relevance to one's ability to do algebra or to reason about moral issues. However, ignorance regarding divine revelation affects all of life and thought, from one's view toward history and philosophy, to one's interpretation of music and literature, to one's understanding of mathematics and physics.

Since this is God's universe, only his interpretation about anything is correct, and he has revealed his thoughts to us through the words of the Bible. It follows that an ignorance of theology means that one's interpretation of every subject will lack the defining factor that puts it into the proper

perspective. In the area of ethics, for example, it is impossible to set forth any universally binding moral principle without an appeal to God. Even the concepts of right and wrong remain undefined without his verbal revelation. And since the Bible is the only objective and public divine revelation, the only way to appeal to God's authority is by an appeal to the Bible.

One of the greatest reasons for studying theology is the intrinsic value of knowledge about God. Every other category of knowledge is a means to an end, but the knowledge of God is a worthy end in itself. And since God has revealed himself through the Scripture, to know the Scripture is to know him, and this means to study theology.

Succumbing to the anti-intellectual spirit of the age, some believers distinguish between knowing God and knowing about God. If "knowing about" God refers to the formal study of theology, then to them one may know much about God without knowing him, and one may know God without knowing much about him. A person's theological knowledge is disproportionate to how well he knows God. But if it is possible to know God without knowing very much about him, what does it mean to know God? If knowing God means to have fellowship with him, then it involves communication, which in turn necessitates the exchange of thought and intellectual content, thus bringing back the concept of knowing about something. One cannot communicate with another without exchanging information in the form of propositions, or in a manner in which the information conveyed is reducible to propositions.

How does one know God, if not through knowing about him? Some may answer that we know God through religious experience, but even that is defined and interpreted by theology, or knowledge about God. What is a religious experience? How does one know he has received one? What does a particular feeling or sensation mean? Answers to these questions can only come by studying God's verbal revelation. Even if it is possible to know God through religious experience, what one has gained is still knowledge about God, or intellectual information reducible to propositions.

One may claim to know God through prayer and worship. But both the object and practice of prayer and worship remain undefined until one studies theology. Before one can pray and worship, one must first determine to whom one must offer prayer and worship. Afterward, he must determine from biblical revelation the way in which he must offer prayer and worship. Scripture governs every aspect of prayer and worship. Knowledge of God therefore comes from his verbal revelation, and not from non-verbal means or religious exercises. Most people who resist theological studies have not thought through these questions, but they are able to pray and worship by assuming, often without warrant, the object and manner of these spiritual practices.

Yet another person may say that we get to know God by walking in love. But again, the concept of love remains undefined until one studies theology. Even the relationship between knowing God and walking in love originates from the Bible:

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

Without this and other similar passages in the Bible, one cannot justify the claim that to know God is to walk in love. Many who claim to know God through walking in love are doing nothing other than being kind to others, with kindness as defined by societal norms rather than the Scripture.

These individuals possess nothing more than an illusion of knowing God.

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

One slogan that reflects the anti-intellectual attitude of many Christians says, "Give me Jesus, not exegesis." However, it is the Scripture that gives us information about Jesus, and it is through biblical exegesis that we ascertain the meaning of Scripture. Without exegesis, therefore, one cannot know Jesus. One only needs to test this assertion by questioning those who say such things as this slogan on what they know about Jesus. Most of the time, their version of Jesus does not remotely resemble the biblical account. This means that they do not know him after all, let alone other important theological topics such as biblical infallibility, divine election, and church government. What we need to say is, "Give me Jesus through exegesis." A repudiation of theology is also a refusal to know God through the way prescribed by him. Knowing the Scripture - knowing about God or studying theology is prior to all of human life and thought. Theology defines and gives meaning to all that one may think or do. It ranks above all other necessities (Luke 10:42); no other task or discipline approaches it in significance. Therefore, the study of theology is the most important human activity.

Endnotes:

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

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

3. "So, when gentiles, not having the Law, still through their own innate sense behave as the Law commands, then, even though they have no Law, they are a law for themselves. They can demonstrate the effect of the Law engraved on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness..." (v. 14-15, NJB).

4. The self-contradictory position that knowledge is impossible.

5. See my other writings that show how scientific and empirical methods of investigation preclude the discovery of truth.

6. As a minor part of his apologetic strategy, the Christian may employ empirical arguments to refute objections from unbelievers, who often claim to rely on empirical data. Nevertheless, the strongest arguments for Christianity do not depend on empirical reasoning and induction, which are fatally flawed. I have argued elsewhere that empiricism renders knowledge impossible.

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

8. For more information on induction and deduction, empiricism and rationalism, first principles, worldviews, and how to defend the Christian faith, see Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and The Light of Our Minds.

03.02. SCRIPTURE

Systematic Theology

2. SCRIPTURE THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

We have established that the Scripture is the ultimate authority in the Christian system, and that our knowledge of God depends on it. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin the study of theology by examining the attributes of Scripture. THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

We must emphasize the verbal or propositional nature of biblical revelation. At a time when many deprecate the value of words in favor of images and feelings, we must note that God chose to reveal himself through the words of human language. Verbal communication is an adequate means of conveying information from and about God. This not only affirms the value of Scripture as a meaningful divine revelation, but it also affirms the value of preaching and writing as ways to communicate the mind of God as set forth in the Bible. The very nature of the Bible as a propositional revelation testifies against the popular notions that human language is inadequate to speak about God, that images are superior to words, that music is of greater value than preaching, or that religious experiences can teach a person more about divine things than doctrinal studies.

Some argue that the Bible speaks in a language that produces vivid images in the mind of the reader. However, this is only a description of the reaction of some readers; other readers may not respond the same way to the same passages, although they may grasp the same information from them. So this does not count against the use of words as the best form of theological communication.

If images are superior, then why does the Bible not contain any drawings? Would not their inclusion be a way to ensure that no one forms the wrong mental pictures, if images are indeed an essential element in theological communication? Even if images are important in theological communication, the fact that God chose to use word images instead of actual drawings implies that words are sufficient, if not superior. But besides word images, the Scripture also uses words to discuss the things of God in abstract terms, not associated with any images. A picture is not worth more than a thousand words. Suppose we present a drawing of Christ’s crucifixion to a person with no Christian background. Without any verbal explanation, it would be impossible for him to ascertain the reason for his crucifixion and the significance it has for mankind. The picture itself shows no relationship between the event to anything spiritual or divine. The picture does not show whether the event was historical or fictional. The person looking at the drawing would not know if the one being put to death was guilty of any crime, and there would be no way of knowing the words he spoke while on the cross. Unless there are at least several hundred words explaining the picture, the image itself carries no theological meaning. But once there are that many words to

explain it, one would hardly need the picture. The view that extols music over verbal communication suffers the same criticisms. It is impossible to derive any religious meaning from music if it is performed without words. It is true that the Book of Psalms consists of a large collection of songs, providing us with a rich heritage for worship, reflection, and doctrine. However, the original tunes do not accompany the words of the psalms; no musical notation accompanies any of the songs in the Bible. In the mind of God, the value of the biblical psalms is in the words and not the tunes. Although music plays a role in Christian worship, its importance does not approach that of the words of Scripture or the ministry of preaching. As for religious experiences, even a vision of Christ is not worth more than a thousand words from Scripture. One cannot test the validity of a religious experience, be it a healing miracle or an angelic visitation, without knowledge of the Scripture. The most spectacular supernatural encounters are void of meaning without verbal communication to inform the mind. The entire Exodus episode could not have occurred if God had remained silent when he appeared to Moses through the burning bush. As Jesus appeared in a bright light on the road to Damascus, what if he had refused to answer when Saul of Tarsus asked him, "Who are you, Lord?" The only reason Saul realized who was speaking to him was because Jesus answered with the words, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-6). Religious experiences are meaningless unless accompanied by verbal communication carrying intellectual content.

Another erroneous perception regarding the nature of the Bible is to regard the Scripture as a mere record of revelatory discourses and events, rather than God’s revelation in itself. The person of Christ, his actions, and his miracles revealed the mind of God, but it is a mistake to think that the Bible is merely a written account of them. The words of the Bible themselves constitute God’s revelation to us, and not only the events to which they refer.

Some fear that a strong devotion to Scripture implies prizing the record of a revelatory event more than the event itself. But if the Scripture possesses the status of divine revelation, then this concern is without warrant. Paul explains that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture itself was breathed out by God. Although the events that the Bible records may be revelatory, the only objective divine revelation with which we have direct contact is the Bible.

Since the high view of Scripture we advocate here is the only one that the Bible itself affirms, Christians must reject every proposed doctrine of Scripture that compromises our access to the infallible revelation of God. Holding to a lower view of Scripture destroys revelation as one’s ultimate authority, and it is then impossible to overcome the resulting problem of epistemology.1 As long as one denies that Scripture is divine revelation in itself, it remains "just a book," and one hesitates to give it complete reverence, as if it is possible to excessively adore it. There are so-called Christian ministers who urge believers to look to "the Lord of the book, not the book of the Lord," or something to this effect. But since the words of Scripture were breathed out by God, and those words are our only objective and explicit revelation from God, it is impossible to look to the Lord without looking to his book. Since the words of Scripture are the very words of God, one is looking to the Lord only to the extent that he is looking to the words of the Bible. Our contact with God is through the words of Scripture. Proverbs 22:17-21 indicates that to trust the Lord is to trust his words:

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

God rules his church through the Bible; therefore, our attitude toward it reflects our attitude toward God. No one who loves God does not love his words just as much. Those who claim to love him ought to demonstrate it by a zealous obsession with his words:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long...How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalms 119:97; Psalms 119:103) The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psalms 19:9-10) A person loves God only to the extent that he loves the Scripture. There may be other indications of one’s love for God, but love for his word is a necessary element, by which all other aspects of one’s spiritual life are measured. THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE The Bible is the verbal or propositional revelation of God. It is God speaking to us. It is the voice of God itself. The very nature of the Bible indicates that verbal communication is the best way to convey divine revelation. No other way of knowing God is superior to studying the Scripture, and no source of information about God is more precise, accurate, and comprehensive. The apostle Paul says:

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

All the words of the Bible were breathed out by God.2 Everything that can be called Scripture was breathed out by God. That the Scripture is "God-breathed" refers to its divine origin. All of Scripture proceeds from God; therefore, we rightly call the Bible, "the word of God." This is the doctrine of DIVINE INSPIRATION. The content of Scripture consists of the entire Old and New Testaments, sixty-six documents in total, functioning as an organic whole. The apostle Peter gives explicit endorsement to Paul’s writings, recognizing their status as inspired Scripture:

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

Peter explains that the men who wrote Scripture were "carried along by the Holy Spirit," so that no part of it "had its origin in the will of man," or by "the prophet’s own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is an exact verbal revelation from God, so much so that Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). God exercised such precise control over the Bible’s production that its content, to the very letter, is what he desired to set in writing. This high view of scriptural inspiration does not imply dictation. God did not dictate his word to the prophets and apostles as an employer would dictate his letters to a secretary. At first one may tend to think that dictation would be the highest form of inspiration,

but this is not so. An employer may dictate his words to the secretary, but he has no control over the daily details of the latter's life - whether past, present, or future - and still less does he have power over the secretary's thoughts. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God exercises total and precise control over every detail of his creation, to the extent that even the thoughts of men are under his control.3 This is true of every individual, including the biblical writers. God so ordained, directed, and controlled the lives and thoughts4 of his chosen instruments, that when the time came, their personalities and backgrounds were perfectly suited for writing those portions of Scripture God had assigned to them:5 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." (Exodus 4:11-12) The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ...Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1:4-5; Jeremiah 1:9)

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

Then, at the time of writing, the Spirit of God superintended the process so that the content of Scripture was beyond what the writers' natural intelligence could conceive.6 The product was the verbal revelation of God, and it was to the very letter what he desired to set in writing. God did not find the right people to write Scripture; he made the right people to write it, and then superintended the writing process.7

Therefore, the inspiration of Scripture does not refer only to the times when the Holy Spirit exercised special control over the biblical writers, although that indeed happened, but the preparation began before the creation of the world. The theory of dictation, which the Bible does not teach, is in comparison a lower view of inspiration, ascribing to God less control over the process. This view of inspiration explains the so-called "human element" evident in Scripture. The biblical documents reflect the various social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds of the authors, their different personalities, and their unique vocabularies and literary styles. This phenomenon is what one would expect given the biblical view of inspiration, in which God exercised total control over the writers' lives, and not only the writing process. The "human element" of Scripture, therefore, does not damage the doctrine of inspiration, but is consistent with and explained by it. THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE The inspiration of Scripture implies the unity of Scripture. That the words of Scripture proceeded from a single divine mind implies that the Bible should exhibit a perfect coherence. This is what we find in the Bible. Although the distinct personality of each biblical writer is evident, the content of the whole Bible exhibits a unity and design that betrays a single divine author. Internal consistency characterizes the various scriptural documents, so that one part does not contradict another.

Jesus assumes the coherence of Scripture as he responds to the following temptation from Satan:

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

Satan encourages Jesus to jump from the temple by citing Psalms 91:11-12. Jesus counters with Deuteronomy 6:16, implying that Satan's use of the passage contradicts the instruction from Deuteronomy, and therefore it is a misapplication. When one understands or applies a passage of Scripture in a manner that contradicts another passage, he mishandles the text. Christ's argument here assumes the unity of Scripture, and even the devil does not challenge it. On another occasion, as Jesus deals with the Pharisees, his challenge to them assumes the unity of Scripture and the law of noncontradiction:

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

Since David was "speaking by the Spirit," he could not have erred. But if Christ was to be a descendent of David, how could he be his Lord at the same time? That this poses a problem in the first place means that both Jesus and his audience assume the unity of Scripture and the law of noncontradiction. If they acknowledge that the Scripture contradicts itself, or that one can affirm two contradictory propositions, then Jesus would not be making a meaningful point at all. The answer here is that the Messiah is to be both divine and human, and therefore both "Lord" and "son" to David. But it is popular to encourage a tolerance toward contradictions in theology. Alister McGrath writes in his Understanding Doctrine: The fact that something is paradoxical and even self-contradictory does not invalidate it...Those of us who have worked in the scientific field are only too aware of the sheer complexity and mysteriousness of reality. The events lying behind the rise of quantum theory, the difficulties of using models in scientific explanation to name but two factors which I can remember particularly clearly from my own period as a natural scientist point to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality...8 This is nonsense. Granting that McGrath knows science well enough to speak on the subject,9 this is a testimony against science, and not an argument for tolerating contradictions in theology. He assumes the reliability of science and judges all other disciplines by it. To paraphrase him, if there are contradictions in science, then contradictions must be acceptable, and one must tolerate them when it comes to theological reflection as well.

However, one reason to reject the reliability of science is precisely because it often contradicts itself. Science is a pragmatic discipline, useful for manipulating nature and advancing technology, but it cannot discover anything about reality. Knowledge about reality only comes from valid deductions from biblical revelation, and never from scientific or empirical methods.10 McGrath gives no argument for us to ignore or tolerate the contradictions in science; he just assumes the reliability of science despite the contradictions. But he gives no justification for doing this.

What makes science the ultimate standard by which we must judge all other disciplines? What gives science the right to make the rules for all other fields of study? McGrath states that science points "to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality." But science is not theology. Beyond "the most superficial engagement with reality" - although I deny the reliability of science even on such a level - science generates contradictions and crumbles, but this does not mean that theology suffers the same fate.

Theology deals with God, who has the right and power to govern all of life and thought. God knows the nature of reality, and communicates it to us through the Bible. Therefore, it is theology that makes the rules for science, and a biblical system of theology contains no paradoxes or contradictions.

Any proposition affirming one thing is by necessity also a denial of its opposite. To affirm X is to deny not-X, and to affirm not-X is to deny X. For the sake of simplicity, assume that the opposite of X is Y, so that Y = not-X. Then, to affirm X is to deny Y, and to affirm Y is to deny X. Or, X = not-Y, and Y = not-X. Since to affirm a proposition is to at the same time deny its opposite, to affirm X and Y at the same time is the equivalent of affirming not-Y and not-X. To affirm two contradictory propositions is in reality to deny both. But to affirm both not-Y and not-X is also to affirm X and Y, which again means to deny Y and X. And thus the whole operation becomes meaningless. It is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions at the same time. To affirm the proposition, "Adam is a man" (X), is to at the same time deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y, or not-X). Likewise, to affirm the proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y), is to deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is a man" (X). Now, to affirm both "Adam is a man" (X) and "Adam is not a man" (Y) does nothing more than to deny both propositions in reverse order. That is, it is equivalent to denying "Adam is not a man" (Y) and "Adam is a man" (X). But then this returns to affirming the two propositions in reverse order again. When we affirm both, we deny both; when we deny both, we affirm both. Affirming two contradictory propositions therefore generates no intelligible meaning at all. It is to say nothing.

Assume that divine sovereignty and human freedom are contradictory. Some theologians, claiming that the Bible teaches both, encourage their readers to affirm both. However, if to affirm divine sovereignty is to deny human freedom, and to affirm human freedom is to deny divine sovereignty, then to affirm both only means to reject both divine sovereignty (in the form of an affirmation of human freedom) and human freedom (in the form of an affirmation of divine sovereignty). In this example, since the Bible affirms divine sovereignty and denies human freedom, there is no contradiction - not even an apparent one.11 On the other hand, when unbelievers allege that the incarnation of Christ entails a contradiction, which is the context for the above passage from McGrath, the Christian does not have the option to deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ. Rather, he must articulate and clarify the doctrine as the Bible teaches it, and show that there is no contradiction. The same applies for the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is futile to say that these doctrines are in perfect harmony in the mind of God, and only appear to be contradictions to human beings. As long as they remain contradictions, whether only in appearance or not, we cannot affirm both of them. And how can one distinguish between a real contradiction from an apparent one? If we must tolerate apparent contradictions, then we must tolerate all contradictions. Since without knowing the resolution, an apparent contradiction appears

to be the same as a real one, to know that a "contradiction" is only so in appearance means that one has already resolved it, and then the term no longer applies.

Scientists and unbelievers may wallow in contradictions, but Christians must not tolerate them. Rather than abandoning the unity of Scripture or the law of noncontradiction as a "defense" against those who accuse biblical doctrines of being contradictory, we must affirm and demonstrate the coherence of these doctrines. On the other hand, Christians should expose the incoherence of non-Christian beliefs, and challenge their adherents to abandon them. THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

Biblical infallibility follows by necessity from the inspiration and unity of Scripture. The Bible contains no errors; it is correct in whatever it asserts. Since God does not lie or err, and the Bible is his word, it follows that everything written in it must be true. Jesus says, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and that "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law" (Luke 16:17). The INFALLIBILITY of Scripture refers to an inability to err - the Bible cannot err. INERRANCY, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Bible does not err. The former refers to the potential, while the latter addresses the actual state of affairs. Strictly speaking, infallibility is the stronger word, and it entails inerrancy, but sometimes the two are interchangeable in usage.

It is possible for a person to be fallible, but produces a text that is free from error. People who are capable of making mistakes nonetheless do not constantly err. However, there are those who reject the doctrine of inerrancy but at the same time desire to affirm the perfection of God and the Bible as his word, and as a result maintain the impossible position that the Bible is indeed infallible, but errant. Sometimes what they mean is that the Bible is infallible in one sense, perhaps as it relates to spiritual things, while it contains errors in another sense, perhaps as it relates to historical matters.

However, biblical statements about spiritual things are inseparably bound to biblical statements about history, so that it is impossible to affirm one while rejecting the other. For example, one cannot separate what Scripture says about the resurrection as a historical event and what it says about its spiritual meaning. If the resurrection did not happen as the Bible says it did, what it says about its spiritual significance cannot be true. The challenge to those who reject biblical infallibility and inerrancy is that they have no authoritative epistemological principle by which to judge one part of Scripture to be accurate and another part to be inaccurate. Since Scripture is the only objective source of information from which the entire Christian system is constructed, one who considers any portion or aspect of Scripture as fallible or errant must reject the whole of Christianity. Again, this is because there is no higher epistemological principle to judge one part of Scripture to be right and another part to be wrong.

One cannot question or reject the ultimate authority of a system of thought and still claim allegiance to it, since the ultimate authority in any system defines the entire system. Once a person questions or rejects the ultimate authority of a system, he is no longer an adherent of the system, but rather one who adheres to the principle or authority by which he questions or rejects the ultimate authority of the system that he has just left behind. To have an ultimate authority other than the Scripture is to reject the Scripture, since the Bible itself claims infallibility and ultimacy. One who rejects biblical infallibility and inerrancy therefore assumes the intellectual stance of an

unbeliever, and must proceed to defend and justify his personal worldview against the believer's arguments for the truth of the Christian faith.

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

We need to determine the extent of the Bible's authority in order to ascertain the level of control that it ought to have over our lives. The inspiration, unity, and infallibility of Scripture imply that it possesses absolute authority. Since the Scripture is the very word of God, or God speaking, the necessary conclusion is that it carries the authority of God. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is identical to the authority of God.

Biblical writers sometimes refer to God and Scripture as if the two are interchangeable. As Warfield writes, "God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them."12 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3) The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8)

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me...But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth...'" (Exodus 9:13-16) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

While the Genesis passage says that it was "the Lord" who spoke to Abraham, Galatians says, "The Scripture foresaw...[The Scripture] announced..." The passage from Exodus states that it was "the Lord" who told Moses what to say to Pharaoh, but Romans says, "the Scripture says to Pharaoh..."

Since God possesses absolute and ultimate authority, the Bible also carries absolute and ultimate authority. Since there is no difference between God speaking and the Bible speaking, there is no difference between obeying God and obeying the Bible. To believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God; to disbelieve and disobey the Bible is to disbelieve and disobey God. The Bible is not just an instrument through which God speaks to us; rather, the words of the Bible are the very words that God is speaking - there is no difference. The Bible is God's voice to mankind, and the authority of Scripture is total. THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE The Bible is necessary for precise and authoritative information about the things of God. Since theology is central to all of life and thought, Scripture is necessary as a foundation to all of human civilization. Those who reject biblical authority nevertheless continue to assume Christian presuppositions to govern their life and thought, although they refuse to admit this. One task of the Christian apologist is to expose

the unbeliever’s implicit assumption of biblical premises despite their explicit rejection of them. But to the extent that any worldview consistently excludes biblical premises, it degenerates into skepticism and barbarism.

Biblical infallibility is the only justifiable first principle from which one may deduce information about ultimate issues such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Knowledge belonging to subsidiary categories such as politics and mathematics are also limited to propositions deducible from biblical revelation. Without biblical infallibility as the starting point of one’s thinking, knowledge is not possible at all; any other first principle fails to justify itself, and so a system that depends on it cannot even begin. For example, without a verbal revelation from God, there is no universal and authoritative reason to forbid murder and theft. The Bible is necessary for all meaningful propositions.

Scripture is necessary for defining every Christian concept and activity. It governs every aspect of the spiritual life, including preaching, prayer, worship, and guidance. Scripture is also necessary for salvation to be possible, since the information necessary for salvation is revealed in the Bible, and must be conveyed to the individual for him to receive salvation. Paul writes, "the holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). An earlier section of this book points out that all men know that the Christian God exists, and that he is the only God. Men are born with this knowledge. Although this knowledge is sufficient to render unbelief culpable, it is insufficient for salvation. One gains knowledge about the work of Christ either directly from Scripture, or indirectly through the preaching or writing of another.

Therefore, the Scripture is necessary for knowledge leading to salvation, instructions leading to spiritual growth, answers to the ultimate questions, and for any knowledge about reality. It is the necessary precondition for all knowledge. THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

There are two extremes regarding the clarity of Scripture that Christians must avoid. One maintains that the meaning of Scripture is totally obscure to the average person only an elite and chosen group of individuals may interpret it. The other view claims that the Scripture is so clear that no part of it is difficult to understand, and that no training in hermeneutics is required to handle the text. By extension, the interpretation of a seasoned theologian is no more reliable than an untrained person’s opinion. The former position closes off the use of Scripture from the general populace, and prevents anyone from challenging the biblical understanding of the established professionals, even when they are mistaken. The latter position is also dangerous. The Bible is not so easy to understand that every person can interpret it with equal competence. Even the apostle Peter, when referring to the writings of Paul, says, "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand." He warns that "ignorant and unstable people distort" the meaning of Paul’s words, "as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Many people would like to think of themselves as competent in important matters such as theology and hermeneutics, but instead of praying for wisdom and studying the Scripture, they assume that they are just as capable as the theologians or their own pastors. This way of thinking invites disaster and confusion. Diligence, training, and divine endowment all contribute to one’s ability to interpret and apply the Bible.

Although many passages in the Bible are easy to understand, some of them require extra diligence and special wisdom to accurately interpret. It is possible for a person to read the Scripture and gain from it sufficient understanding and knowledge for salvation, although sometimes one may need help from an instructed believer even for this:

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

It is also possible to learn the basic tenets of the Christian faith just by reading the Bible. But there are passages in the Bible that are, to differing degrees, difficult to understand. In those cases, one may enlist the assistance of ministers and theologians to explain the passages, so as to avoid distorting the word of God.

Nehemiah 8:8 affirms the place of the preaching ministry: "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." However, the final authority rests in the words of Scripture themselves, and not in the interpretations of scholars. Scripture is never wrong, although our understanding of and inferences from it may at times be mistaken. This is why every church should train its members in theology, hermeneutics, and logic, so that they may better handle the word of truth.

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

Those chosen by God to be doctrinal ministers are able to interpret the more difficult passages in Scripture, and can also extract valuable insights that may elude others from the simpler passages as well. Ephesians 4:7-13 refers to this office as one of Christ’s gifts to his church, and therefore Christians ought to value and respect those standing in such a ministry.

We live in a generation in which people despise authority; they detest being told what to do or believe.13 Most do not even respect biblical authority, let alone ecclesiastical authority. They consider their opinion just as good as that of the apostles, or at least the theologians or pastors; their religion is democratic, not authoritarian. But Scripture commands believers to obey their leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17). Every believer has the right to read the Bible for himself, but this must not translate into illegitimate defiance14 against the learned teaching of scholars or the authority of church leaders. THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

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

thought, either by the explicit statements of Scripture, or by necessary inferences from it. The Bible contains all that is necessary to construct a comprehensive Christian worldview that enables us to have a true view of reality.15 The Scripture conveys to us not only the will of God in the general matters of Christian faith and conduct, but by applying biblical precepts, we can also know his will in our specific and personal decisions. Everything that we need to know as Christians is found in the Bible, whether we are functioning at home, work, or church.

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

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The necessary implication is that extra-biblical means of guidance such as visions and prophecies are unnecessary, although God may still provide them when he pleases.

Problems occur when Christians hold a position that amounts to a denial of the Scripture's sufficiency in providing comprehensive instruction and guidance. Some complain that the Bible lacks specific information one needs to make personal decisions; however, in light of Paul's words, it must be that the fault rests on these individuals, and not that the Bible is insufficient.

Those who deny the sufficiency of Scripture lack the information they need because of their spiritual immaturity and negligence. The Bible is indeed sufficient to guide them, but they neglect to study it. Some also exhibit strong rebellion and impiety. Although the Bible addresses their situations, they refuse to submit to its commands and instructions. Or, they refuse to accept the very method of receiving guidance from Scripture altogether, and demand that God guides them through visions, dreams, and prophecies when he has given them what they need through the Bible. When God does not grant their illegitimate demands for extra-biblical guidance, some even decide to seek it through forbidden methods, such as astrology, divination, and other occult practices. Their rebellion is such that if God does not provide the desired information in the ways prescribed by them, they are determined to obtain it from the devil.

Knowledge of God's will does not come from extra-biblical guidance, but an intellectual grasp and application of Scripture.16 The apostle Paul writes: Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Christian theology must affirm without reservation the sufficiency of Scripture as a comprehensive source of information, instruction, and guidance. The Bible contains the whole will of God, including the information one needs for salvation, spiritual development, and personal guidance. It contains sufficient information so that, if one were to fully obey it, he would be fulfilling the will of God in every detail of life. But he commits sin to the extent that he fails to obey Scripture. Although our obedience will never attain perfection in this life, it remains that there is no information that we require to live a perfect Christian life that is not already in the Bible.

Endnotes:

1. See Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

2. The word translated "given by inspiration of God" (KJV) or "inspired by God" (NASB) is theopneustos. It means expiration (to breath out) rather than inspiration (to breath in), thus the

"God-breathed" in the NIV. Although "inspiration" is an acceptable theological term referring to the divine origin of Scripture, and as such remains useful, it fails to convey the literal meaning of theopneustos.

3. The Bible denies that man has "free will." Although the will of man exists as a function of the mind, it is not "free" in the sense that it can function independently from God's control. I will take up this topic later in this book.

4. God determines every detail of a person's life his ancestry, wealth, intelligence, education, personality, life span, geographical location, etc. Later sections of this book discuss the sovereignty of God.

5. God's precise control over men does not apply only to the prophets and apostles, but to every person (even the reprobate). However, God specifically ordered the lives of the biblical writers to the end that they may be prepared to write Scripture when the time came.

6. Scripture exceeds what human beings could produce without divine inspiration, but it is not beyond the ability of human beings to read and understand.

7. Some call this position ORGANIC INSPIRATION, but others consider the term ambiguous or misleading.

8. Alister McGrath, Understanding Doctrine; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990; p. 138.

9. He did his doctoral work in the field of molecular biophysics.

10. See Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

11. See the relevant sections of this book that discuss the incarnation, the Trinity, and divine sovereignty vs. human freedom.

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

13. But of course they think this way only because they have been taught to do so.

14. Since there is no difference between obeying God and obeying Scripture, and since Scripture is our direct contact with the revealed will of God, the immediate object of our allegiance is the Bible (Acts 17:11), by which we may test the teachings and practices of those with learning and authority in the church. Therefore, teachings and practices that deny scriptural doctrines, such as biblical infallibility and Christ's resurrection, constitute sufficient grounds for defying authority. "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).

15. See Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions, for a system of apologetics that is consistent with the sufficiency of Scripture. Although it permits the use of extra-biblical arguments for certain purposes, it does not require them; rather, it affirms that the Bible is sufficient for both defense and offense when confronting any non-biblical worldview.

16. See Vincent Cheung, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making," Godliness with Contentment.

03.03. GOD

Systematic Theology

3. GOD THE EXISTENCE OF GOD THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD THE WORKS OF GOD

Just as biblical infallibility is the epistemological foundation of the Christian faith, the doctrine of God is the metaphysical foundation on which other biblical doctrines depend. Therefore, the Christian must strive to attain a correct understanding of God. This chapter deals with the existence, attributes, and works of God. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD The Bible says that he who comes to God must believe that he exists (Hebrews 11:6). It is impossible for one who denies God’s existence to develop a relationship with him or to consciously serve him.1 I will introduce two categories of arguments for the existence of God. We may call the first type the traditional or classical theistic arguments, which various theologians and philosophers have favored in demonstrating the existence of God. The second type consists of arguments derived from Scripture itself, and so we may call them biblical arguments. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from the idea of God to his necessary existence. God is by definition the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and since the being than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot lack the very property of being, God must exist by necessity.

Succeeding Lanfranc, Anselm (1033-1109) became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. His Cur Deus Homo and other works have exercised profound influence on the development of Christian theology. However, he is perhaps most famous for his ontological argument as articulated in his Proslogion.2 The following reproduces the argument in part:

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

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

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

...No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he may say these words in his heart either without any signification or with some peculiar signification. For God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. Whoever really understands this understands clearly that this same being so exists that not even in thought can it not exist. Thus whoever understands that God exists in such a way cannot think of Him as not existing.3

Many people’s first reaction is to object that just because a being is conceivable or exists in the mind does not mean that it must also exist in reality. One may conceive of a perfect car, but that does not mean it exists other than in his mind. A flying horse is conceivable, but this tells us nothing as to whether it exists in reality.

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

Ambiguity exists concerning what it means for something to exist "in reality." We may agree that what exists in the mind does not necessarily exist in the physical world, but this is again irrelevant to the argument because God is incorporeal; he is not a physical being. When we affirm that once the idea of God is present in the mind, he must also be understood to exist, we do not say that he must be understood to exist as physical matter. And thus the concept of existence itself poses a problem. In some sense, anything can be said to exist even unicorns, dreams, and mathematical equations, although they do not exist as physical objects. However, unicorns did not create the universe, dreams did not predestinate some men to salvation and others to perdition, and mathematical equations did not take up human flesh to die as a ransom for many.

Some theologians and philosophers suggest that perhaps we should not be asking, "Does God exist?" Instead, a more intelligible question is, "What is God?" Even Zeus "exists," but only in mythology. The Christian God is not a physical object, but neither is he like dreams, equations, or Zeus. Rather, he is the creator and ruler of the universe, who decrees our history and decides our destiny, and who deserves and demands our worship. It is not a problem to say that God "exists" insofar as this represents an affirmation of all that the Bible says about him, and not that he is a physical object or mythological character. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from

contingent effects to the existence of the first cause, or the creator God. The argument may begin from self-consciousness or the existence of the physical universe.4 Everything that has a beginning everything that comes into being is an effect, and thus must have a cause. The universe must then have a cause if it has a beginning. The universe indeed has a beginning, and therefore it must have a cause. An infinite regression of causes is impossible; therefore, there must be a first cause that has no beginning, but that is necessary and eternal. This being we acknowledge to be God. We will now discuss the premises.

We begin by affirming self-consciousness or the existence of the universe. It is self-refuting to doubt one's own existence, since one must first exist before he can deny his own existence. One who does not exist cannot affirm the proposition, "I do not exist." Also, a person who denies his own existence withdraws from the debate, and therefore poses no threat to the cosmological argument. Once we have established the proposition, "I exist" or "The universe exists," the argument can begin.

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

Although an infinite progression of causes is possible, an infinite regression of causes is not. An infinite progression can occur since causes can continue to lead to new effects, and it is logically possible that this process will never end. However, if we were to assume an infinite regression of causes, then it is impossible for us to have reached the present, since it is impossible to travel across an actual infinite.

Just as it is impossible to reach the end of an infinite progression, our present is an "end" as seen from the past. Any particular moment is an "end" or stopping point as seen from the past, so that if the past is infinite, we could never have reached the present; otherwise, the past would not be infinite, but finite. For example, if one were to begin counting at noon on Monday and decide that he would stop at noon on Friday, he would reach the stopping point when the time arrives. But if there is infinite time between his starting point and his stopping point, then he would never reach the stopping point. Likewise, if a man runs toward a finish line a designated "end" analogous to our present - he would never reach it if there is an infinite distance between the starting point and the stopping point; otherwise, the distance between the two points would not be infinite, but finite.

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

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) is best known for his "Five Ways" of demonstrating the existence of God.5 Here we will reproduce only the second and third from his Summa Theologica: The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God. The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.6

Some have recently attempted to assert an uncaused or eternal universe based on quantum theory, but their arguments at most only push the question one step backward so that the existence of the universe still requires an explanation, or a cause. None of them show that the universe is uncaused or eternal, or that something can come out of nothing. Besides, there are strong disagreements among scientists as to the implications of quantum theory, and arguments of this sort often misapply scientific speculations.

If the immediate cause of the universe itself requires a cause, then we still have not arrived at the first cause. There must be a cause to explain every cause that is also an effect, but infinite regress is impossible, so there must be an uncaused first cause that is eternal, that had always existed, and that had created time itself. Since no effect can be uncaused, this first cause has no beginning, and is thus not an effect. This argument is invulnerable to the challenge, "If everything has a cause, then God must also have a cause." This typical objection betrays a lack of attentiveness, since the argument states only that every effect, or everything that comes into being, must have a cause. But the argument shows that God is not an effect, but is the uncaused first cause. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT may also be called the argument from design. It is historically associated with the work of William Paley,7 who argued as follows: In crossing a heath,

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

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

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

Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity...8

Ordinary observations and scientific studies indicate that the physical universe exhibits an intricate structure and complex order; it presents itself as a product of deliberate design. THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE represents the observation that many aspects of the universe seem to be fine-tuned to permit the existence of life. If these factors were to be even slightly different than what they are, life would be impossible. A large number of precise conditions must be present simultaneously to permit the existence of organic life.

Since what is designed requires a designer, the observed design of the universe necessitates the existence of a designer. This being exhibits the characteristics of a rational mind, capable of thought and planning, and possesses such power to execute his intentions that he created the universe with no preexisting matter available. This description is consistent with what the Bible teaches about God. The magnitude and complexity of his creation demonstrate his power and wisdom: But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. (Jeremiah 10:12) With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. (Jeremiah 27:5) How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (Psalms 104:24) THE MORAL ARGUMENT argues from objective moral

laws to a giver of moral laws. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) writes in his Critique of Practical Reason:9

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.10 To make sense of objective moral laws there must be justice. Since we observe that justice is often not served in this life, there must be an afterlife where precise justice is rendered. Moreover, for there to be justice there must be a Judge who will deliver such justice. But for this Judge to judge rightly, he must be omniscient, knowing every thought and deed, and their various relationships. And to execute justice, there must be unlimited power at the Judge's disposal.

Now, Kant had argued for the concept of God as a heuristic principle in ethics, and did not mean for the argument to serve as a proof in the classical sense: By a postulate of pure practical reason, I understand a theoretical proposition which is not as such demonstrable, but which is an inseparable corollary of an a priori unconditionally valid practical law.11

Nevertheless, if one denies that there is an afterlife in which everyone must face this all-knowing and all-powerful Judge, he can no longer account for object morality. Yet we find men everywhere speak and act as though objective morality exists. Even those who verbally deny objective morality react to the actions of others as if such a thing exists. One cannot consistently affirm objective morality, either by word or action, and reject its necessary precondition. Hastings Rashdall writes: The belief in God…is the logical presupposition of an "objective" or absolute Morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute ideal can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective reality in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.12

Concluding our discussion of the classical arguments, we will now proceed to examine the biblical arguments, called such because of their dependence on both the apologetic strategy and actual content of the Bible. THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT, sometimes called an abductive argument, argues from a known or acknowledged Y to a necessary precondition X. Or, as Robert Stern explains: As standardly presented, transcendental arguments are usually said to be distinctive in involving a certain sort of claim, namely that "For Y to be possible, X must be the case," where Y is some indisputable fact about us and our mental life (e.g. that we have experiences, use language, make certain judgments, have certain concepts, perform certain actions, etc.), but where it is left open at this stage exactly what is substituted for X.13

One aspect of the biblical system of apologetics involves arguing that given any Y, the necessary precondition (X) is the entire biblical worldview. For example, among other things, science assumes the uniformity of nature (Y), but such an assumption demands the biblical worldview (X);14 therefore, the biblical worldview is a necessary presupposition that makes science possible. The implication is that science can never disprove the Scripture, or even argue against it.

Biblical teaching generates a particular type of transcendental argument15 that is irrefutable, since in the process of argumentation it shows that the biblical worldview (X) is applicable to any Y at all. Whatever is substituted for Y in the context of debate, the biblical worldview (X) is its necessary precondition. This is true even concerning arguments against Christianity - without the biblical worldview as the presupposition, no objection against Christianity is even intelligible.16 But once

the entire Bible is already acknowledged as true, no objection against it can be true. This is a positive indirect argument for the biblical worldview. A biblical strategy of apologetics should employ both direct and indirect arguments.17 What follows, then, is a positive direct argument for the Christian faith, which I call THE DOGMATICAL ARGUMENT.18 The word "dogmatic" has some very unfavorable connotations in colloquial speech. One dictionary defines "dogmatism" as "positiveness in assertion of opinion especially when unwarranted or arrogant; a viewpoint or system of ideas based on insufficiently examined premises," and a "dogma" is "a point of view or tenet put forth as authoritative without adequate grounds."19 Although this reflects common usage, it is not what we mean.

"Dogmatic" can simply mean "doctrinal"20 or "based on a priori principles, not on induction."21 Both of these definitions are applicable in our context. The synonyms of this word include, "dictatorial, authoritative, magisterial," and in another sense, "deductive, a priori, deducible, derivable, and reasoned."22 The whole of the Christian Scripture is a revelation from God. And since God speaks by an absolute and "dictatorial"23 authority, his verbal revelation forms the precondition of all of life and thought, and any knowledge only comes from valid deductions from it. In his God and Reason, Ed. L. Miller explains very well the philosophical position of dogmatism:

One of the distinctive features of the Judeo-Christian tradition is its belief in a divine self-disclosure: God has intervened in human history and spoken; he has unveiled himself in a "special revelation." And the knowledge of God drawn from this revelation is an example of revealed theology. Such theology is sometimes called "dogmatic" (in the best sense of the word) or "confessional" theology because it seeks to elucidate the divinely bestowed articles of faith (dogmas) that it takes as its fundamental and nonnegotiable data. Not unlike the mathematician, the dogmatic theologian begins with certain givens, though in this case revealed givens; the system is bounded by revelation, self-contained, and offered as a package deal.24 The Christian system takes biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God," as its self-authenticating first principle. By self-authenticating, I do not mean that the Bible verifies itself in our experience (although it does), since if it is by our experience that the Bible proves to be true, it would not be self-authenticating. Neither am I referring to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is true, although this happens to those chosen by God for salvation. Rather, I mean that the content of the Bible verifies itself; it needs not appeal to any premises external to itself. From this first principle of biblical infallibility, the rest of the system follows by necessity through valid deductions. Since the first principle verifies itself to be true, any propositions validly deduced from it is also true. Since biblical revelation condemns all other systems of thought, and whatever it says is true, the Christian faith is therefore the only true system of thought, by which every proposition is evaluated and made intelligible. The method is similar to rationalism. Although its tenacious use of deduction is commendable, non-Christian rationalism fails because its first principles are arbitrary and unjustified. On the other hand, the Bible contains the content to justify itself as the infallible first principle of the Christian faith. But dogmatism is perhaps the better name,25 since it conveys the idea that the biblical worldview consists of, in the words of Miller, self-contained revealed givens offered as a package deal.

Everyone has a worldview - a network of interrelated propositions the sum of which forms "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world."26 There is a starting point or first principle to every worldview from which the rest of the system is derived. It is not possible for a

worldview to be a web of propositions that depend on one another without a first principle, since even such a conception of a worldview requires an epistemological justification. Also, it would remain that some beliefs are more central to the web, the failure of which destroys the propositions farther from the center of the web. Even the most central claims require justification, and a worldview in which the propositions depend on one another in a way that lacks a first principle or ultimate authority is exposed as having no justification at all.

Therefore, every worldview requires a first principle or ultimate authority. Being first or ultimate, such a principle cannot be justified by any prior or greater authority; otherwise, it would not be the first or ultimate. The first principle must then possess the content to justify itself. For example, the proposition, "All knowledge comes from sense experience," fails to be a first principle on which a worldview can be constructed, since if all knowledge comes from sense experience, this proposed principle must also be known only by sense experience, but prior to proving the principle, the reliability of sense experience has not yet been established. Thus, the principle results in a vicious circle, and self-destructs. It matters not what may be validly deduced from such a principle - if the system cannot even begin, what follows from the principle cannot be accepted. A worldview that begins with a contradiction is impossible, and must be rejected. This is because contradictions are unintelligible and meaningless. The law of contradiction27 states that "A is not non-A," or that something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. A denial of this law must itself employ it to be meaningful. If truth can be contradictory, then truth cannot be contradictory, dogs are cats, elephants are rats, and "See Jane run" means "I am married." If it is not true that "A is not non-A," nothing is intelligible.

Since no legitimate first principle can contradict itself, epistemological skepticism, being contradictory, must be ruled out. A philosophical skeptic maintains that "no knowledge is possible...or that there is not sufficient or adequate evidence to tell if any knowledge is possible."28 He either claims to know that nothing can be known, or to know that there is inadequate evidence to know anything. Both options claim and deny absolute knowledge at the same time, and are therefore self-contradictory.

Self-contradictory first principles are untenable, and skepticism is self-contradictory. This means that an adequate first principle must guarantee the possibility of knowledge. In addition, this first principle must yield an adequate amount of knowledge, and not merely make knowledge possible. Even if "My name is Vincent" is a true statement, it does not yield any information about the origin of the universe, or whether stealing is immoral. It does not even define morality. But how do I know that the proposition is true in the first place? It does not have a self-contained and self-justifying epistemology in its content. A principle is therefore inadequate that fails to provide information concerning necessary categories of thought such as epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. A first principle cannot be based on induction, which reasons from particulars to universals.29 No amount of empirical investigation can tell me, for example, that "Every human being has a brain." To establish a general proposition such as this, I must examine every human being. And while examining human beings in one part of the world, I must somehow ensure that the nature of man has not changed in those parts of the world whose human beings I have already studied. If I intend to apply the claim to all human beings in the past and the future, I must also examine all the human beings in the past and the future. Since this is impossible, inductive reasoning and empirical methods cannot justify the proposition. On the basis of empirical methods, it would be

impossible to define a human being in the first place, since that concept is also a universal. Similar problems are inherent in establishing a proposition such as "All men are mortal." Some seek to rescue induction by saying that, although it cannot conclusively establish any proposition, at least it can establish a claim as probable. However, if probability is "the ratio of the number of outcomes in an exhaustive set of equally likely outcomes that produce a given event to the total number of possible outcomes,"30 even if we grant that empirical methods can discover the numerator of the fraction - although I deny even this to empiricism - to determine the denominator requires knowledge of a universal, and omniscience is required to establish it in many cases. Since empirical methods cannot know universals, to say that it can come to probable knowledge is nonsense.

Induction is always a formal fallacy, and a system based on an empirical principle cannot succeed. Deduction, on the other hand, produces conclusions that are guaranteed to be true if the premises are true, and if the process of reasoning is valid. Rationalism employs deduction, and as such is superior to empirical methods. Rationalistic systems appear to be less popular, but we will point out some of its difficulties before proceeding.

Rationalism selects a first principle and from it deduces the rest of the system, much like how one begins with one or more axioms in geometry. If the first principle is true, and the process of deductive reasoning is valid, the subsidiary propositions, or theorems, would all be true by necessity. The problem with non-revelational rationalism is how one may select a first principle.31 Now, if the axiom selected is self-contradictory, then it is of course rejected. But assuming that a non-contradictory principle is selected, it must still justify itself.

Only the Christian first principle is self-justifying, but even if we assume that a number of self-consistent and self-justifying principles exist, they must be broad enough to render knowledge possible. So to posit "My name is Vincent" as the first principle in a deductive worldview would result in the failure mentioned earlier. Finally, there are various schools of rationalistic systems, and their starting points are different and incompatible. Which one is correct? A rationalistic worldview with an arbitrary first principle cannot succeed. Although the result is no better, the method itself is still superior to the inductive procedure. By this point, all non-Christian systems have already failed, including the alleged revelation of Islam.32 They cannot satisfy all the requirements thus far listed. However, for the sake of completeness, we must also mention that the propositions within a worldview may not contradict one another. A first principle must not produce a proposition in politics that contradicts another proposition in ethics. I trust that there is no need to recite again the problems with contradictions. The present apologetic strategy begins with the recognition that Christianity is the only deductive system with a self-consistent and self-justifying first principle revealed by an almighty omniscient being. The principle is broad enough to yield an adequate number of propositions sufficient to construct a complete worldview that entails no self- contradiction. Therefore, the biblical worldview is the precondition of intelligibility, knowledge, and truth. All other systems of thought cannot make knowledge possible and thus collapse into philosophical skepticism. But since skepticism is self-contradictory, one cannot remain in such a position, and Christianity is the only way out of the epistemological abyss.33

What the classical arguments for the existence of God do not accomplish is to provide positive proof of the entire biblical worldview. Each only argues for the truth of several biblical propositions, such as God as the creator, God as the designer, or God as the giver of moral laws. However, the dogmatical argument simultaneously proves all biblical propositions and all of their logical implications. If the entire Bible is true, then of course the biblical God exists, and any other concept of God is automatically excluded. A more serious objective defect of the classical theistic arguments is their dependence on science and empiricism.34 If science and empiricism are fatally flawed as means to discover the nature of reality, any argument that relies on them fails before it even begins, although in the case of the theistic arguments, we seem to attain the proper conclusion. That is, science may affirm the existence of God, but I reject the reliability of science even though I affirm the existence of God.

Nevertheless, the theistic arguments remain useful as a type of ad hominem arguments,35 where one employs premises assumed by the unbeliever, and from them reasons to either absurd conclusions, thus demonstrating the falsity of the unbeliever's premises, or to conclusions favorable to the believer, such as the existence of God.36 The theistic arguments are capable of showing the rational superiority and exclusivity of the Christian faith even when one assumes the false premise that scientific and empirical methods are reliable, or can discover truth.37 Although they do not rest upon an infallible foundation, they are useful as the part of apologetics that defeats the unbeliever on his own territory. However, an infallible argument for Christianity, or for that matter any infallible argument, requires the infallible revelation of God as its starting point.38 Proverbs 26:4-5 teaches two principles of argumentation that help summarize the biblical strategy of apologetics:

1. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself."

2. "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." The fool trusts in science and empiricism.39 He thinks that his finite mind and flawed methodology can discover the truth about reality, that he needs no divine revelation, and that he can gain knowledge through autonomous investigation and reasoning. Proverbs 26:4 warns the believer not to reason like the fool, so as to avoid becoming like him. From the infallible foundation of God's verbal revelation, we can deduce an infallible and comprehensive system of truth and knowledge. This is the positive aspect of the biblical strategy of apologetics, and it consists of both direct and indirect arguments, both deductive and abductive reasoning.40

However, without becoming like the fool in our thinking, we may temporarily assume the premises he holds, merely for the sake of argument, to see where they lead.41 We may contend that it is foolish to trust in science as a means to discover the truth about reality, but then we may also show that scientific discoveries favor the Christian faith more than any other worldview, and at the same time inflict damage upon secular values and beliefs. We may formulate historical arguments against our opponent, while knowing that his method of historical investigation precludes any knowledge of history in the first place.42 This is the negative aspect of the biblical strategy of apologetics, and it often includes arguments using scientific and empirical premises. This dual strategy of argumentation works against all non-Christian systems of thought, including non-biblical religions.43 Since the Bible is true, and since it condemns all other religions, then all non-biblical religions are declared false by the same infallible authority of God that declares the

Bible to be true. Anyone who challenges this must disprove the Bible, at which point the believer may employ the dogmatical argument and the transcendental argument to defend his faith and to continue tearing down his opponent's position.

We may demonstrate our opponent's religion to be self-contradictory, and that some of the ethical values he treasures can only be accounted for by the biblical worldview. For example, the ethics of Buddhism lacks any authoritative foundation; it is arbitrary. And if the opposing religion affirms the secular method of historical investigation, we may then use its findings to expose the historical errors of their doctrines, such as in the Koran and the Book of Mormon. In this manner, the Christian apologist skillfully uses both positive and negative argumentation to defend his faith, while he confounds and refutes his opponent. As the apostle Paul writes: The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Peter admonishes his readers: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). And Jude says, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." It is the duty of every Christian to defend his faith and to destroy his opponent's beliefs. The biblical strategy elucidated above, with the dogmatical argument as its central thrust, equips the believer to "demolish arguments" and "take captive every thought" even when confronting the most crafty and hostile enemies of the biblical faith.

How are we to regard the non-Christian? Psalms 14:1 states, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Now, the Bible would not call one a fool who rejects Zeus, Allah, or the Buddha as false gods, since it is protective of only the God that it reveals. Therefore, the fool in Psalms 14:1-7 is not just one who rejects any deity, but one who rejects the God revealed in Scripture - that is, the biblical or Christian God. And since there is only one Christian God, Psalms 14:1-7 is not calling only the atheist a fool, but anyone who rejects Christianity, even though he may belong to another religion.

Romans 1:22-25 confirms this: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles....They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator..." So the Bible calls any non-Christian a fool, whether he is an atheist, agnostic, Buddhist or Muslim. Psalms 53:2 implies that anyone who does not seek after God44 lacks understanding: "God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God." Verse 4 says that the "workers of iniquity" have "no knowledge" (KJV). On the other hand, the Scripture affirms that, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalms 111:10). Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the Bible acknowledges only the biblical or Christian God, the implication is that non-Christians have not even started to gain wisdom. It is not that they have only a little wisdom, but that they have not even started to have any wisdom at all. In addition, the Bible says it is because of their

"wickedness" that men "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18) concerning the existence and nature of God, even though he has given them an inescapable revelation about himself through the innate knowledge of their minds and the words of Scripture. Paul comments that these individuals "neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22).

Thus, the biblical assessment of all non-Christians is that they are both foolish and wicked. Every non-Christian is intellectually and morally defective; it is unscriptural to consider any non-Christian as intelligent or moral. They demonstrate their lack of intellectual aptitude in failing to assent to the Christian faith, and to assent to it in its entirety. And in denying Christianity despite the innate knowledge God has placed in their minds and the irrefutable arguments of biblical apologetics, they show themselves to be not only intellectual ostriches but active suppressers of the truth about God. This is wickedness at its worst. Paul writes, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18).

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

Although the Bible describes the unbelievers as living in a pitiful state of existence, we who have believed were also in such a condition. If left to ourselves, we would have remained in ignorance and darkness. It is by the election of God and through hearing the gospel that we were enlightened to the truth, and brought to faith in Christ. Therefore, by saying that unbelievers are fools, we do not mean that those who are now Christians have always been wise and enlightened, but it is only by the sovereign choice of God that we have been saved from a state of stupidity and futility. We are not Christians because we were wise, but we were made wise because God chose us to be Christians. Knowing this, Christians should not be arrogant, but should be grateful to God for their salvation.

Nevertheless, it remains that the Bible characterizes all unbelievers as foolish and wicked. Christians are thus obligated to view non-Christians as intellectually and morally inferior. Some may think that this is an overly unkind assessment. This may be true from the viewpoint of the unbelievers, but Christians must not think like them. Since the Bible teaches that unbelievers are foolish and wicked, and to be a Christian is to believe the whole Bible, then to be a Christian is also to believe that all unbelievers are foolish and wicked. Therefore, we should without reservation say with Anselm, "Why then did ’the Fool say in his heart, there is no God’...unless because he was stupid and a fool?" THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD The divine attributes are the characteristics of God the sum of which defines who he is. The first issue to settle is the KNOWABILITY of God. If God is greater than human beings both in degree and in kind, then the

question arises as to whether we may acquire reliable information about him. We answer that since God made man according to the divine image, then no matter the difference between God and man, there remains a point of contact between them so that meaningful intellectual communication is possible. That God has chosen to convey information to us through the Bible means that language is adequate, and so we must affirm that it is possible to know detailed and reliable information about God through his verbal revelation. To argue that man cannot know God due to the difference between the two is self-refuting, since the statement itself necessitates considerable knowledge about God. The person who says that God is unknowable is asserting a piece of information about the very nature of God. But if God is indeed unknowable, no one can know that he is unknowable. That we have the concept of God in our minds and that we can debate the question demonstrate that God must be knowable.

It is likewise self-refuting to say that human language is inadequate to convey information about divine things, since the statement itself carries a piece of information about divine things, namely, that they are of such nature as to render verbal descriptions about them impossible. Since the statement itself is a verbal description about the very nature of divine things, it refutes itself.45 The Bible teaches that God has revealed himself through the words of Scripture. This alone affirms both the knowability of God and the adequacy of human language. God is capable of telling us about himself, and we are able to understand what he communicates. Therefore, God is knowable, and he has chosen to tell us about divine things through verbal communication, rather than through religious experiences or intuition. Objections against the knowability of God and the adequacy of language thus goes against the biblical worldview, and must confront the arguments for the Christian faith presented in the previous section of this book.

After determining the knowability of God, the next logical question is how much we can know about him. The Bible teaches the INCOMPREHENSIBILITY of God. Psalms 145:3 says that "no one can fathom" his greatness, and the apostle Paul writes in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" God is infinite and we are finite; therefore, we can never know everything about God. But just because we cannot know everything about God does not mean that we cannot know anything about him. In our context, to "comprehend" means to have a complete understanding of God. This is impossible for finite beings, including sinless angels. No matter how much about God we come to know, there will always be more to know about him.

Since God is infinite in his being, there are an infinite number of propositions that may be said about him.46 Our cognitive abilities are limited and we live in time. If there are an infinite number of propositions about God, then it would be impossible for any finite being to know all of them. This limitation will remain even after the resurrection of believers. Although our minds and bodies will undergo considerable improvements, we will remain finite, and therefore God will remain incomprehensible to us.

However, it remains that we can know much about God. We can know and understand everything that the Bible says about him. Jeremiah 9:24 says that one can understand and know God’s very character, that he is one "who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth." The doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility does not nullify the possibility of true and abundant knowledge about him by finite human beings through scriptural exegesis.

We must not allow God’s incomprehensibility to negate his knowability. Although we cannot possess exhaustive knowledge about him, we can indeed have true knowledge about him. Whatever God reveals to us through the words of Scripture is true, and we have true knowledge about God to the extent that we know and understand these words. I may know another person’s name or age without knowing anything else about him, but this does not mean that my limited knowledge about him is false.

Although it is true that the more that I know about a person, the better I will understand what I already know about him, what I know about him before is nevertheless true. By gaining additional information about a person, I acquire a richer context from which to understand the implications of his name or age, but my knowledge about his name or age was true even before gaining the additional information. Likewise, although we do not have a comprehensive knowledge about God, what we know about him from the Bible is nevertheless reliable and accurate.

Although we cannot know God fully or exhaustively, we can know him truly by knowing the words of Scripture. The doctrines of God’s knowability and incomprehensibility preclude the claim that we know everything there is to know about God, but they also remind us that we can have true and accurate knowledge about him.

Christians who do not immediately grasp certain biblical doctrines sometimes give up by calling them "mysteries," but the knowability of God warns us against doing this. This tendency of some to illegitimately label biblical doctrines as mysteries exposes a defect in their mentality - it may imply a misunderstanding of the nature of revelation, or even a slothful or rebellious attitude toward the Scripture. Often the person indeed understands the doctrine, but he refuses to accept it. Since he cannot deny its biblical origin, he calls it a mystery to avoid affirming it. For example, many have labeled as mysteries the doctrines of the Trinity and divine election. However, since the Bible teaches these doctrines and tells us what to think about them, we should not call them mysteries, but rather authoritative doctrines that all believers must affirm. Revealed doctrines are not mysteries. Since God has revealed considerable amount of information about these topics, they are clear biblical doctrines that demand universal acceptance. To close one’s eyes and call them mysteries is nothing short of blatant defiance against divine revelation. Refusing to understand or accept anything that the Bible teaches is to insult the God who has given us the priceless gift of his verbal revelation.

We may now proceed to examine other divine attributes, beginning with those that elaborate on the form of his existence, or his metaphysical attributes. One such attribute is the NECESSITY of God, meaning that he exists by logical necessity. Recall from an earlier discussion that, by saying "God exists," the Christian does not refer to some generic God, but only to the biblical or Christian God; that is, God is as the Bible says he is. It is not general theism that believers should defend, but the entirety of the Christian faith.47 In terms of modal logic, we are affirming that God exists in every possible world. A "possible world" is reality as it can be, in which any contingent being or event can be otherwise. For example, it is possible for a given person to be taller than he is, and it is possible for a certain car to be red instead of green. Any reality that does not contain a contradiction is a possible world. A statement such as 2 + 2 = 4 is true in every possible world, and 1 + 1 = 10 is false in every possible world. To say that God’s existence is a logical necessity means that the proposition, "God does not exist" entails a contradiction in this and every other

possible reality. The Scripture’s description of God necessitates such a conclusion.

Some maintain that God does not exist by logical necessity, but only by factual necessity in our present reality. Since our claim is that he exists by logical necessity in every possible world, we should agree that he also exists by factual necessity in this reality. But given what we know to be true about God, it is inadequate to say that he only exists by factual necessity in this reality, and may not be in other possible worlds. Our knowledge of the divine attributes necessitates the conclusion that God exists by logical necessity, and not only factual necessity. The dogmatical argument and the transcendental argument from the previous section also render any possible reality inconceivable unless the entire biblical worldview is first presupposed.

God is an uncaused being, and since he is the one who created and now sustains all that exists, he had also existed before all else. No one besides himself sustains his being. This refers to the ASEITY of God, sometimes called his SELF-EXISTENCE or INDEPENDENCE. He exists "from himself,"48 and does not depend on anything external to himself for his existence. He is a "self-contained" God, and exists by his very own nature. The Bible says that "the Father has life in himself" (John 5:26), but our existence is dependent on the will and power of God: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Revelation 4:11 says, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." The apostle Paul says in Acts 17:25 that God "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything," but that he is the one who "gives all men life and breath and everything else." The divine name that God revealed to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14), points to his self-existence. It also suggests that God exists in an eternal state. He created time itself, and he is therefore independent of it. This attribute of God’s existence is called his ETERNITY or TIMELESSNESS. Genesis 21:33 says that he is "the Eternal God." The Book of Psalms reveals that he is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalms 41:13), and that he is "from all eternity" (Psalms 93:2). The apostle Peter writes, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8).

One implication of God’s eternity is that all knowledge is as an eternal intuition to him. Although there is a succession of ideas in the mind of man, this is not true with God. Man reasons from the premises to the conclusion, a process that requires time and a succession of ideas in the mind. However, since God is timeless, all propositions are before his mind as one eternal intuition or thought. Therefore, God thinks without mental associations or a succession of ideas. He thinks by pure intuition, since all knowledge is immediately present before him, even facts that pertain to our future. This does not mean that logic is different to God or that propositions are inadequate to express his thoughts. Logic is the same to God as it is to us, but a succession of ideas does not exist in his mind because of his timelessness and unlimited intellect. If he were to put his thoughts into words for us, there would be a succession of ideas in his message, with one thought leading to another.

He would follow all the valid rules of logic, which proceed from his rational nature. We affirm this not through empty speculation, but since the Scripture is the word of God, we know how he expresses himself in words. In addition, the Son of God took on human attributes and entered time. The biblical account of him shows that Christ articulated his mind through intelligible speech, following all the valid rules of logic.

Some maintain that our mental makeup is so different from God’s that logic itself is different with him. They suggest that "God’s logic" is different from "human logic," and therefore our reasoning according to human logic does not apply to him. This betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of logic itself. Logic is not only what makes human communication convenient or intelligible, but they are necessary rules for right thinking, having their origin in God’s nature. Since God himself is rational, all thinking about him and reality must adhere to logical rules. A concept such as a square circle is just as nonsensical and inconceivable to God as it is to us.

Besides, to argue that "human logic" does not apply to God is to use human logic to say something about God, which is self-refuting. If human logic is inapplicable to him, one can never say so and expect to make sense at the same time. Far from saying that logic does not apply to God, Jesus was a master debater, as seen from his encounters with the hostile religious leaders. One theologian-philosopher translates John 1:1 as follows: "In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God." This may horrify anti-intellectual Christians, but the word logos can just as easily be translated "logic" or "reason" as it can be translated "word." That God does not reason from premises to conclusions does not mean that his is not a rational mind, but it means that he is simultaneously aware of all premises and conclusions, and therefore does not need to think through logical arguments as we do. But we must insist that logic is the same to God as it is to us, and although his knowledge exists as an eternal intuition, he can express his thoughts in propositional form, as he has done in the Scripture. The IMMUTABILITY of God follows from his eternity. Since there is no "before" or "after" with God, he is unchangeable in his being and character. This attribute is also associated with his perfection. If God’s being has every possible perfection, then any change in him must be for the worse. But since he is immutable, he cannot change for the worse. And since he already possesses every perfection, he has no need to change or experience development.

Psalms 102:25-27 says that, although the physical universe undergoes decay and will perish, God remains the same: In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

God says in Malachi 3:6, "I the LORD do not change." The apostle James writes that God does not "change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). God says in Isaiah 46:11, "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do," and Psalms 33:11 says, "the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." Finally, Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" The immutability of God implies his IMPASSIBILITY. This means that God is without "passions" - emotions or feelings. Less thoughtful believers are quick to protest against saying that God has no emotions, since the Bible seems to reveal a God who experiences emotive states such as grief, joy, and wrath (Psalms 78:40; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 19:15).

Proponents of divine impassibility explain that passages appearing to ascribe emotions to God are anthropopathisms. The opposition then protests that this is to avoid the obvious teaching of Scripture by relegating to anthropomorphism or anthropopathism anything that they do not wish to

associate with God. But those opponents of impassibility who are otherwise orthodox in their beliefs readily accept those biblical references as anthropomorphic that ascribe to God bodily parts such as hands and eyes. Therefore, one must not dismiss anthropomorphism or anthropopathism as an explanation without good reason. To say that God experiences emotions in a similar way as human beings appear to incur a number of contradictions: A man may become angry against his will in the sense that he does not choose to become angry, nor does he choose to experience whatever caused the anger, but given his present state of mind and character development, the "trigger" incites this emotion in him against his preference. The same applies to human experiences of joy, fear, and grief. Although one may develop a remarkable level of self-control by the sanctifying power of the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, it remains that one's will and emotion do not maintain a one-to-one relationship. A person's emotional state is not always exactly the way he wishes or decides it to be.

However, the above cannot be true about God even if he were to experience emotions, since such lack of self-control contradicts his sovereignty, immutability, and omniscience. For example, that God is all-knowing and thus cannot be "surprised" eliminates certain ways of experiencing emotions. Thus, omniscience alone renders impossible some emotions, or at least the ways or reasons for experiencing them. If my actions can grieve or anger God in a similar way that I can grieve or anger a human being, then it means that I can cause God to grieve or become angry whenever I wish. On the other hand, if my actions can generate joy in him in a similar way that I can generate joy in a human being, then it means that I am able to cause joy in God by my will. In this manner, I would be exercising a measure of control over God himself, which contradicts his sovereignty and immutability.

We must therefore affirm some form of divine impassibility. If God is grieved by our sins, it is only because he wills to be grieved by them, and not because his mental state is beyond his control or subject to our influence. At least in this sense and to this extent, we must affirm that God is without passions. Even if God has emotions, they are under his complete control, and they will never compromise any of his known attributes.

Christians in some cultures are quicker to defend the role of emotions, whether in God or in man, because they have been influenced by modern psychology, and not just because they refuse to accept the explanation that the biblical descriptions of God as having emotions are anthropopathisms. A discussion on the nature of emotions will help us better understand how they relate to God and man. The dictionary defines "emotion" as "disturbance, excitement; the affective aspect of consciousness; a state of feeling; a psychic and physical reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling and physiologically involving changes that prepare the body for immediate vigorous action."49 The word originally means a disturbance of the mind. Although this meaning is now obsolete in colloquial speech, I know of at least one theologian-philosopher who still defines emotion as a mental disturbance. Even in common usage, it remains a "psychic and physical reaction." Whether it is a disturbance or a reaction, it no longer sounds as good or necessary as people make it appear.50

Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible never says that the mind consists of the will, intellect, and emotion. This borrows from secular psychology, not biblical psychology. Under such a scheme, the will, intellect, and emotion are distinct parts of the mind, so that the mind is only real as the

aggregate of the three. Since they are independent, there is no necessary relationship between the growth and development of each part. Thus, Christians who assume this false framework sometimes say that one must not only develop his intellect, but that he must also develop his emotion.

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

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

Christians do not need to be more emotional; they need more self-control. The Bible contains not nearly as many emotional words or phrases as people want to believe. Some may even misinterpret the contentment in Php 4:12 as an emotional satisfaction, that is, before they realize that it is a Stoic word denoting indifference.51 And is "happy" even an emotion in the Bible? Love is not an emotion in the Bible, but a volition.

One mark of the spiritual man is self-control, including mastery over his emotions. The mind of God is so integrated that he only does what he wills, and he is never "disturbed" against his will, if at all. As we grow in sanctification, our emotion ought to increasingly come under our conscious control, so that we get excited because we decide to get excited, become angry because we decide to become angry, and we can stop the moment we decide to stop.

I grant that Jesus experienced emotions, but the question is what one may infer from this fact.52 Those instances when Jesus experienced emotions were indeed disturbances of the mind (Mark 14:34), but since Hebrews 4:15 says that he never sinned, we are to conclude that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful. However, one cannot argue from this that emotions are good, or that it should not be restrained or suppressed. Jesus also experienced hunger and fatigue (Matthew 21:18; Luke 4:2; John 4:6), but this fact only proves that the Son of God indeed took on human attributes.53 Therefore, that Jesus experienced emotions only proves that he possessed real human attributes and that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful. What we see in the Gospels is that Jesus was always in full control of himself.54 The Bible favors self-control over mental instability, which is often what having an emotion means. However, when having an emotion merely means expressing a certain type of thought, as in strong approval or disapproval, then to the degree that the person remains in control of his mind, and to the degree that this is not an involuntary or immoral disturbance of the mind, then perhaps it is acceptable. But this already excludes many instances of emotional expression.

Therefore, by affirming divine impassibility, we are not robbing God of any valuable qualities. Rather, we are saying that he has perfect mental stability and self-control; he cannot be disturbed

against his will. But there is really no reason against affirming full divine impassibility, that the mind of God is never disturbed at all.

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

Although a given part of the Bible may emphasize a specific divine attribute, it does not mean that the divine attributes are completely separable, that one attribute may at times override another, that one is more important than another, or that one more closely expresses God's essence than another. Scripture shows us that God is his attributes: 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light," and 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love." Therefore, God is not a being who is love with light as an attribute, or vice versa; rather, he is love and light, as well as his other attributes.

We should not think of God as emphasizing a certain attribute during one period in history, and then emphasizing a different attribute during another. Even some Christians think that God is wrathful in the Old Testament but merciful in the New Testament. However, it is the Old Testament that says, "His love endures forever" (Psalms 136:1-26), and it is the New Testament that says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). The unity of God means that he is both loving and just at all times. He has always been merciful to his elect and wrathful to the reprobates, whether in the Old or New Testament.

Another metaphysical attribute of God is his SPIRITUALITY. God is incorporeal; he is without a body. Jesus says, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Given some of the known attributes of God, we understand that a number of biblical passages referring to him as having bodily parts are anthropomorphic. For example, 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." The NASB says that the eyes of the Lord "move to and fro throughout the earth." But to say that God has physical eyes to see would compromise his omniscience, since then he would not be seeing the areas where his eyes are not looking. Also, our eyes do not work by themselves, but they are organs that work with our brain and optical nerves. For his physical eyes to be useful, God must then also have a brain, optical nerves, a spinal cord - just like a man. This is what some heresies maintain, but it contradicts the doctrines of divine transcendence and invisibility (1 Timothy 1:17; Job 9:11). The cited portion of 2 Chronicles 16:9 should be understood as figurative - among other things, it is saying that God is aware of all that happens on the earth.

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

Luke 11:20 also illustrates that the biblical references to God's body parts are anthropomorphic: "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Jesus

indicates that he casts out demons by "the finger of God," and so it seems to some that God has a hand with fingers like us. However, in the parallel passage of Matthew 12:28, Jesus says that he casts out demons "by the Spirit of God." It should be obvious that the finger of God is figurative of the Spirit of God, and not that God possesses bodily parts like the human fingers. In Deuteronomy 4:15-16, Moses says to the people of Israel, "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman." Unlike human beings, God has "no form"; therefore, Moses forbids anyone from constructing an image that claims to resemble the appearance of God, not even one that is in the form of a human being. If it is forbidden to construct a physical image of God because he has no form, then it is also unjustifiable to assume that God has a form in our thinking and in our theology.

More than a few professing Christians have succumbed to the teaching that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have bodies. They do not realize that the doctrine is a heresy, and that it is a Mormon or pagan doctrine rather than a Christian one. To summarize, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have bodies, but God the Son has taken on human attributes, including a physical body. Yet the divine attributes are not mingled or confused with the human attributes even in him. For example, God the Son is omnipresent in his divine nature, but his human nature is not omnipresent.

God possesses each divine attribute in an unlimited way and to an unlimited extent. This is the INFINITY of God. Psalms 119:96 says, "To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless," and Psalms 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (NASB). The attributes of God are infinite and boundless. For example, the doctrine of divine omnipotence indicates that God has unlimited power or ability. Now, what is infinite is not simply greater than the finite in degree, but also in kind. A person who has a billion times the wealth of another still operates within human limitations and the monetary system, but one who has unlimited and infinite resources operates on a different level altogether. One who lives a thousand times longer than another person is still mortal, but one who is immortal is not only greater in degree, but in kind. That God is infinite means that he is not just a greater version of ourselves; he is more than a "superman." His power and wisdom are infinitely greater than ours, not just much greater. An understanding of this fact should ignite the fear of God in us, and put an end to the flippant attitude that even Christians have toward God nowadays.

Even those who call themselves lovers of God often challenge his verbal revelation and his way of doing things. However, defiance against God is not a characteristic of the genuine believer; those who truly love God and know what he is like would also fear him. Unlike those whom God had rescued from Egypt but who unceasingly murmured against him, we should heed the words of Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." The metaphysical attributes of God demonstrate his TRANSCENDENCE. Although divine transcendence means that God is "outside" of space and time, it is not in fact an idea that denotes his "location," since God is incorporeal. Rather, the emphasis is that God is independent of space and time, and not limited by them.

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

Related to this is the OMNIPRESENCE of God. Although God is transcendent, his immanence is such that he is present everywhere. Psalms 139:7-10 says: Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. This does not mean that God occupies every point in space, since he has no spatial dimensions at all. Yet we can affirm that God is indeed present everywhere in the sense that he knows all that occurs at any point in space, and can exercise his full power there. God is omnipresent because nothing can escape his knowledge and power.

God is a TRINITY, and all the divine attributes apply to each member of the Godhead. Although there is only one God, he subsists in three persons, each fully participating in the one divine essence. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit fulfilled their unique roles at the baptism of Christ: As soon as Jesus [God the Son] was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God [God the Spirit] descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven [God the Father] said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

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

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

1. "...into the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

2. "...into the name of the Father, and into the name of the Son, and into the name of the Holy Spirit."

3. "...into the name of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." The first and second versions would imply that we are dealing with three separate beings. And since the third retains the word "name" in the singular, it does not make a clear distinction between the three persons. However, Jesus does not put his statement in any of these three ways.

What the verse says is "...into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each receives a definite article, thus indicating a clear distinction between the three, but the word "name" remains in the singular, thus indicating the essential unity and equality of the three.

1 Peter 1:1-2 is another text that assumes the Trinity of God and indicates the unique role each member plays in the work of redemption:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says, "God is one in essence and three in person." This proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." To affirm that God is one and three (not one) at the same time and in the same sense is self-contradictory.

However, our formulation of the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense: "God is one in essence and three in person." Moreover, although each of the three persons fully participates in the one Godhead, the doctrine does not turn into tritheism since there is still only one God and not three. The "essence" in the above formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God, so that all three persons of the Godhead completely fulfill the definition of deity. But this does not imply tritheism because the very definition of deity involves each member of the Trinity, so that each member is not an independent deity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three centers of consciousness within the Godhead. Therefore, although all three fully participate in the divine essence so as to make them one God, these three centers of consciousness render them three persons within this one Godhead. For example, all three members of the Trinity know that Christ would die on the cross to save the elect, but neither the Father nor the Spirit thought, "I will die on the cross to save the elect," but rather, "He [the Son] will die on the cross to save the elect." On the other hand, God the Son affirmed the same thought in the first person, as "I will die on the cross to save the elect." Thus, although all three members of the Trinity possess omniscience, their relationships to the propositions known are different.

Other than the charge of self-contradiction, attacks on the Trinity often involve compromising the deity of one or more persons of the Godhead. Since the deity of God (the Father) is not in dispute, and since a later chapter will discuss the deity of Christ, here we will briefly demonstrate the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

Other passages that affirm or imply the deity of the Holy Spirit include the following:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:2) Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I

flee from your presence? (Psalms 139:7) The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19) The passages cited at the beginning of this section on the Trinity (Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Peter 1:1-2) also imply the equality of the three divine persons, and thus the deity of the Son and the Spirit.

There is a distinction of roles within the Trinity. The Bible portrays the Son as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as subordinate to the Father and the Son (John 14:28; John 15:26). However, since we have already established the essential equality of the three members of the Godhead, we recognize that such subordination is only functional. Although the Son performs the will of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, the three persons are equal in essence. Such submission within the Godhead occurs only by mutual consent. This provides a basis for us to understand submission among human beings. Although all people are equal as human beings, God commands us to obey the designated leaders (Ephesians 5:23; Hebrews 13:17; Romans 13:5). This is not because the leaders are inherently superior as human beings, but God is pleased to establish certain authority structures within legitimate institutions such as the church, the family, and the state. So, there are times when God requires one person to submit to another, but in essence the two are equal. Since it is God who ordains legitimate authority structures, one's willing submission under the appointed leaders demonstrates his love and obedience toward God.

Moving forward from our overview of God's metaphysical attributes, we will now examine some of his other attributes, such as those related to his intellect, character, and power. The divine attributes are closely related to one another, and thus it was unavoidable that we have already mentioned the OMNISCIENCE of God several times. That God is omniscient means that he knows all propositions. Some theologians and philosophers add that he also knows the relationships between all propositions. Although this is true, it is redundant because even the relationships between propositions can be stated as propositions, which of course God knows. It is also unnecessary to say that God knows the truth or falsity and the actuality or potentiality of all propositions, since these can also be stated as propositions. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that divine omniscience means that God knows all propositions, and this is to affirm that God possesses all knowledge.

Since God is timeless, all knowledge exists before his mind as an eternal intuition. For us to "think through" something implies a process, or a succession of thoughts in our mind where one thought leads to another. That our minds are finite means that we can hold only a limited number of propositions in our immediate consciousness at any moment. Only an omniscient being can hold in his immediate consciousness all propositions and be fully aware of them. Such is the mind of God, and he can indeed perceive all things with exhaustive depth and clarity at all times, even things pertaining to our future. The Bible says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). God is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and he "[makes] known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:10).

God’s exhaustive knowledge of everything includes even our thoughts and intentions: "For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths" (Proverbs 5:21); "the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts" (1 Chronicles 28:9); "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Revelation 2:23). The omniscience of God makes it possible for the Christian’s mind to become an altar of worship, constantly offering prayer and thanksgiving to God: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalms 19:14); "The LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him" (Proverbs 15:26).

Other biblical passages teaching the omniscience of God include the following:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. (Psalms 139:1-4) Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. (Isaiah 40:28)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33) An attribute related to divine omniscience is the WISDOM of God. To say that God is wise places emphasis on his exhaustive understanding of all things, his ability to make the best decisions, and that he will always accomplish his purposes through the best means.

Paul says that ours is "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27). The prophet Jeremiah says that God "founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding" (Jeremiah 10:12). Romans 11:33 indicates that his wisdom, as with his knowledge, is unlimited: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" The OMNIPOTENCE of God refers to his unlimited power and ability to create what he wills and to control his creation.

It is often asked whether this means that God can create something that amounts to a contradiction; however, the question suffers from what we may call the CATEGORICAL FALLACY. This means that a term or concept has been misapplied to an issue in question such that one does not even belong in the same category with the other, and thus the statement or question becomes unintelligible and meaningless. For example, the question "How big is your cat?" makes sense, since size is a category that can be meaningfully applied to animals. The same is true for "How fast is your car?" and "How smart is your son?" However, it makes no sense to ask, "Is the color green fast or slow?" or "Is that rock smart or stupid?" Speed does not apply to color and intelligence does not apply to a rock. Green cannot be fast or slow; a rock cannot be smart or stupid.

There is a similar problem with the question asking whether divine omnipotence implies the ability to perform a contradiction, such as, "Can God create a rock so big or heavy that he cannot lift?" However, God is incorporeal, and thus physical forces do not act upon him at all. When God "lifts" an object, there is no physical force to restrain him. What force is going to make the rock "heavy" to God? Whether the object is big or heavy to us is completely irrelevant. If God creates a rock, he will always be able to do anything he wants with it.

Now, a square circle is a self-contradictory concept. The category of ability does not apply to creating a contradiction, since a contradiction is not something to be created a contradiction is nothing. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask whether God can create a square circle, since it is nothing to be done at all. The omnipotence of God is defined as his ability to create what he wills and to exercise complete control over his creation. God does not act contrary to his own will or nature, and he does not perform contradictions, since contradictions are nothing to be performed.55

God reveals himself as "God Almighty" to Abraham in Genesis 17:1. The creation account of Genesis 1:1-31; Genesis 2:1-25; Genesis 3:1-24 is no doubt a testimony to his unique abilities not only is he capable of creating inanimate objects, but he has also created living things, with man as the crown of his creation. Psalms 115:3 says, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him," and Job says to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). God says in Jeremiah 32:27, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

Other biblical passages teaching the unlimited power of God include the following:

O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. (2 Chronicles 20:6) If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:12) For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27)

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

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

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

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27) For nothing is impossible with God. (Luke 1:37) The LOVE of God is a favorite topic among people. It is often stressed that "God is love" (1 John 4:8); however, few people understand the meaning and implication of this.

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

Now, Acts 10:34-35 states, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The type of universality referred to here is one of national or ethnic universality, that God has chosen some to be saved from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). It does not say that God accepts everyone "unconditionally," but that he accepts only those who approach him on his terms, and the Bible makes it clear that only those whom God has chosen for salvation will come to him in such a fashion.

Since God chooses his elect without consideration of any prior or foreseen conditions found in them, and then supplies all the necessary conditions by which he makes them right with himself, it is accurate to say that God unconditionally loves the elect. But he does not unconditionally love everyone.

It is true, therefore, that God does not show favoritism, but this only means that he condemns all reprobates and saves his elect regardless of their ethnic and social background, or any other irrelevant condition in them, and that any relevant condition in them has been decreed by him in the first place. It does not mean that he favors every person.

Nevertheless, God shows a general benevolence to his creatures. Jesus says, "[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). God sends rain and supplies other non-spiritual benefits through his providential government over creation. This is his general benevolence since the benefits included are available to both believers and unbelievers. No one can live one additional moment without it. Other natural provisions such as air, light, food, and certain kinds of knowledge also come under this category of God’s providence. We may acknowledge that the "love" of God is universal in this restricted sense. On the other hand, the love of God has special meaning for those whom he has chosen for salvation. God has chosen to save the elect and condemn the reprobates, and in such a context, he loves only the elect. As Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." John H. Gerstner writes:

"Repent or Perish" forces people to ponder seriously the popular slogan, "God hates the sin and loves the sinner." Is a necessary repentance consistent with "God loves the sinner"? If God loves the sinner while he is alive, it is strange that God sends him to hell as soon as he dies. God loves the sinner to death? Loves him to everlasting torment?

There is something wrong here. Either God loves the sinner and will not send him into the furnace of His eternal wrath; or He sends him into His eternal wrath and does not love him....

What leads almost everyone to believe that God loves the sinner is that God does the sinner so much good. He bestows so many favors including letting him continue to live. How can God let the sinner live and give him so many blessings, unless He loves him? There is a kind of love between God and sinners. We call it the "love of benevolence." That means the love of good will....God can do well to the sinner without loving him with the other kind of love....56 The command of Jesus for us to love our enemies is said in the same context as the universal benevolence of God: But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31) To love one's enemies is to "do good" to them, just as the Father does good to those who hate him. Paul confirms that this is what is meant when we are instructed to love our enemies: "'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20-21). To be faithful to the command of Jesus that we must love our enemies, we should do good to those who hate us. That said, we are to also participate in the divine hatred of God against the reprobates. As Psalms 139:21-22 says, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."

Other verses referring to a holy hatred against the reprobates and their deeds include the following:

Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you... (2 Chronicles 19:2) The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. (Psalms 5:5) Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. (Psalms 6:8)

I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (Psalms 26:4-5) I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. (Psalms 31:6)

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

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

I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (Psalms 101:3-4) I hate double-minded men, but I love your law. (Psalms 119:113) Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! (Psalms 119:115) If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! (Psalms 139:19) My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. (Proverbs 8:7) To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. (Proverbs 8:13) The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace. (Proverbs 13:5) The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be

sure of this: They will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 16:5) The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright. (Proverbs 29:27)

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1; Ecclesiastes 3:8) For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. (Isaiah 61:8) My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me; therefore I hate her. (Jeremiah 12:8) Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. (Amos 5:15) I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. (Amos 5:21) Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9) Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

...snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. (Jude 1:23) As Gerstner points out, it is popular to teach that "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," and that believers ought to hold the same attitude. However, the above verses contradict the notion that we are to love the reprobates but hate their sins; they indicate that we are to hate both the evil people and their evil deeds.

Some are so prejudiced against saying that God hates certain individuals that their assertions concerning the subject contradict their otherwise sound biblical knowledge. For example, H. L. Drumwright, Jr. is correct when he writes, "It must...be recognized that the Hebrew thought-form makes no sharp distinction between the individual and his deeds. A man in Hebrew thought is the sum total of the actions of his life..."57 It ought to follow from this that there is no sharp distinction between hating a man and his deeds.

Drumwright thinks otherwise! He continues, "...so that to say God hated a man is not to say that God was maliciously disposed toward a particular personality, but to note divine opposition to evil that was registered in that life."58 This is pure lunacy. If A = B, then to hate one is to hate the other; there is no difference. But according to Drumwright, if A = B, and God says he hates A, it means that he only hates B and not A.

He is saying that because a person (A) is the sum total of his actions (B), when God says that he hates a person (A), he does not in fact hate the person (A), but only the sum total of his actions (B). This inference is ridiculous. He acknowledges that a person is the sum total of his actions (A = B); therefore, it cannot be that whatever applies to A is somehow transferred to B so that it no longer applies to A. But if A = B, then whatever applies to either A or B applies to both A and B. If God hates either A or B, he hates both A and B, since A is B. This should be easy to understand.

What has controlled Drumwright’s thinking is a prior determination that God does not hate any person regardless of what the Bible teaches, and incompetent scholarship is the result. Based on the first portion of the quotation from Drumwright, one can infer only the conclusion proposed here,59 that God hates both the reprobate and his evil deeds, since the person is the sum of his beliefs, thoughts, and actions.

However, God sovereignly chose to extend mercy to his elect, imputing to them the very righteousness of Christ, who was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The elect are also sinners, and deserve to be hated by God. But God set his love upon them in eternity,

redeemed them through the work of Christ, determined to transform them by his Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19), and ordained in advance the good works that they are to perform (Ephesians 2:10). The elect are "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).60 Now, the Bible says that God regards the wickedness of the reprobates as continuous: The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5) ...every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood... (Genesis 8:21) In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. (Psalms 10:4)

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

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:17-18) But if a person is the aggregate of his thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of the reprobates are continuously evil, then it is nonsense to say that one can love the sinner and hate the sin, since one cannot be considered apart from the other. Gerstner agrees: "As far as 'hatred of sins' is concerned, sins do not exist apart from the sinner. God does hate sinning, killing, stealing, lying, lusting, etc., but this alludes to the perpetrator of these crimes."61

Peter Kreeft once told a homosexual college professor, "I love the sinner but hate the sin."62 After some discussion, the professor responded:

Well, suppose the shoe was on the other foot. Suppose you were in the minority. Suppose what you wanted to do was to have churches and sacraments and Bibles and prayers, and those in power said to you: "We hate that. We hate what you do. We will do all in our power to stop you from doing what you do. But we love you. We love what you are. We love Christians; we just hate Christianity. We love worshipers; we just hate worship. And we're going to put every possible pressure on you to feel ashamed about worshiping and make you repent of your sin of worshiping. But we love you. We affirm your being. We just reject your doing." Tell me, how would that make you feel? Would you accept that distinction?63

Kreeft had to admit that hatred directed against Christianity is tantamount to hatred directed against his own person: "You're right. I would not be comfortable with that distinction. I would not be able to accept it. In fact, I would say pretty much what you just said: that you're trying to kill my identity."64

Misconceptions about what it means to love our enemies have resulted in a loss of holy indignation and bold opposition against those who hate God. The desire to obey Christ's command to love our enemies is commendable, but as mentioned, he is telling us only to do good to those who hate us. This is analogous to the general benevolence that God shows toward all human beings (Matthew 5:43-45). However, the Bible never says to think of the reprobates as something that they are not; rather, the scriptural position is that all reprobates are depraved fools and evil rebels. To think of them as something better amounts to a rejection of Scripture.

Therefore, although we are to exhibit a general benevolence toward the reprobates, we must also imitate God's holy hatred against them, and be jealous for his honor. The way some people "love"

their enemies amounts to taking sides with them against God, but the reprobates are still reprobates even if we are commanded to love them. We love them when we offer to do them good and refuse to do them harm (Romans 12:20-21; Romans 13:10). On the other hand, we have "nothing but hatred" (Psalms 139:22) for the reprobates in that we oppose the totality of who they are, what they believe, and what they do. We strive to diminish their influence and resist their agendas by the power of the gospel. Contrary to popular belief, we are even to rejoice over the judgments that God inflicts upon the reprobates:

Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (Psalms 48:11) The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. (Psalms 58:10) When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. (Proverbs 11:10)

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

Biblical hatred may be defined as "an intense aversion or active hostility that is expressed in settled opposition to a person or thing."65 Love and hate in our context are not emotions, but volitions. They are policies of thought and action toward their corresponding objects. Since God is impassable, and his mind cannot be disturbed, it means that divine love is not a disturbance of the mind, but an intellectual disposition of favor toward its objects; hate is its opposite. Likewise, when the Bible commands believers to hate certain people or things, it is dictating our intellectual dispositions of favor and opposition, not our emotions.

What most Christians fail to understand is in what sense we are to love the reprobates and in what sense we are to hate them. Now it should be clear that we love the reprobates in the restricted sense of showing them general benevolence, but we hate them in the rather unrestricted sense that we are against everything about them. Therefore, both the love God and Christians have toward the reprobates are on a more restricted level, offering to them temporal kindness, while on a deeper level the two groups are in direct opposition.

Complete hostility to the thoughts and actions (beliefs, desires, preferences, values, lifestyles, habits, etc.)66 of another person, which is the same as hating the person himself, is hatred at the deepest level, much deeper than stripping him of his temporal and superficial welfare. By this definition, God and Christians hate the reprobates at the deepest level possible, and likewise, the reprobates hate God and Christians at the deepest level possible. For example, to regard the Christian faith as false is to hate me at the deepest level possible, since the content of the Christian faith permeates all of my thinking and behavior. Any aspect of my life that is not yet controlled by biblical precepts is only because I am still imperfect in sanctification, and not that I oppose Scripture in that area. Therefore, for one who regards Christianity as false, there is nothing in me for him to love. He cannot love me and hate my beliefs I am my beliefs; I am a Christian.

Likewise, I may treat the reprobate with kindness in speech and action (and in this sense I walk in love toward him), but if I regard his entire worldview and lifestyle as sinful, and if it is my duty from God to order both the private and public aspects of my life in opposition to such a worldview and lifestyle, then I indeed hate him at the deepest level possible. The reason that we are to do good to the reprobates even though we must have "nothing but hatred" (Psalms 139:22) for them is that

God has reserved for himself the right to avenge his own honor and to preserve justice for his elect: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). This is why Christians are not to spread their faith and diminish the influence of unbelievers through violence or any unjust means. It is up to God to exact revenge upon the reprobates. Christians can doubtless endorse legal punishments against unbelievers, such as the execution of dangerous criminals (Romans 13:4).67 God ordained the government for this purpose. On the other hand, the church must use spiritual weapons to advance its cause, so that we demolish the wicked mainly through biblical arguments in preaching and teaching: For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

If the love of God applies to all people in the above restricted sense, it refers to his favorable disposition toward the elect without the same qualifications and restraints: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).68 Whereas we have been speaking of a general benevolence available to all, now we are focusing on a special benevolence that is directed only to those whom God has chosen, and it is an effectual love that results in their salvation. This is God's SPECIAL GRACE or SAVING GRACE.

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

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

We must delay a fuller treatment on divine election to later portions of this book; nevertheless, from these verses we see that not everyone in the world will or can be saved. One can only be saved if God enables him, but he does not enable everyone.

Therefore, God does not love everyone in the saving sense, although we may say that he loves everyone in the restricted sense of a general benevolence. Concerning those who are the object of God's saving love, Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). This does not apply at all to the reprobates those whom God has not chosen for salvation - since they will indeed be separated in the afterlife from God's love, in every sense of the term.

Other passages referring to God’s love for his elect include the following: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

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

One important but neglected benefit that the love of God makes available to Christians is spiritual illumination:

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

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

Theological knowledge that is, intellectual knowledge about spiritual things is one of the least prized gifts from God. But to be a friend of God means to have such knowledge. The scorn with which many professing believers regard doctrinal studies shows that they do not truly love God, although they would like to think that they love him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us that our priority is to obtain understanding and knowledge about God: This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)69 The knowledge of God is the most valuable treasure, and everything else is "dung" (Php 3:8, KJV) in comparison. In offering his elect reliable information about himself, God is giving them one of the greatest gifts that he can give to them. The Bible says that God’s children are to imitate the Father’s divine attribute of love. The first and greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love other human beings:

Jesus replied: "’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ’Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40) To understand these two great commandments, we must know what it means to love God, and what it means to love other human beings.

One common misconception about the love of God is that it is only a greater version of human fondness and courtesy.70 This is what many people mean when they claim that they love God - they are fond of him. But to the extent that one has a distorted conception of God, this means that he is fond of his misconception of God, so that he is not even fond of God at all. Nominal Christians would turn against God and grow to hate him once they find out what he is truly like. God is the triune deity who judges every thought and intention, demands exclusive worship and obedience, condemns all the reprobates, redeems only the elect, establishes Christianity alone as truth, and does all that he pleases. Such a God is repugnant to the unregenerate.

Faithful biblical preaching helps to decrease the number of false converts in the church, since reprobates would find the true Christian faith intolerable once they realize what it teaches. The truth attracts the elect, but repels the reprobates (1 Corinthians 1:18): On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"...He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:60-61; John 6:65-66) Of course, if the church has been preaching the true word of God in the first place, there would not be so many false believers in our congregations now.

Again, a common misconception about the love of God is that it is an emotional fondness, and at best added to that an element of selfless giving. When such a concept of love is applied to what it means to love God, a shallow and sub-biblical spirituality results. The Bible gives us a different definition of what it means to love God: So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul... (Deuteronomy 11:13)

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

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (John 14:23-24) You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14) The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4-6) This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome... (1 John 5:3) And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. (2 John 1:6)

Only a true Christian can love God as defined by these verses - he obeys God’s commands, and submits to him in thought and action. Of course a Christian is also fond of God, but such fondness is feigned if he does not also obey the divine commands in the Bible. Thus, love for God is not defined by fondness or admiration, but obedience.

Since to love God means to obey biblical teaching, and to obey biblical teaching, one must first know about it, it follows that theological knowledge is the prerequisite of walking in love. This

destroys the anti-intellectual notion that one can love God without studying theology, or that loving God is superior to knowing about him. To love God is to obey his teaching, but to obey his teaching, one must first grasp it with the intellect, and this is to study theology. Theology makes love possible. To further emphasize this, we may look more closely at the "first and greatest commandment." The relevant biblical passages are as follows:

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

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

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:28-33)

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

1. "...with all your heart"

2. "...with all your soul"

3. "...with all your strength"

4. "...with all your mind"71 The answer that Jesus gives comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-25; Deuteronomy 7:1-26; Deuteronomy 8:1-20; Deuteronomy 9:1-29 However, in Deuteronomy, Moses only says to love God:

1. "...with all your heart"

2. "...with all your soul"

3. "...with all your strength" In his answer, Jesus adds his interpretation of the greatest commandment, namely, that we must love God "with all [our] mind." His interpretation is authoritative and binding, and even the Deuteronomy passage itself provides sufficient information

for this conclusion, that the commandment is telling us to love God with our minds. Deuteronomy 9:5 is the one that says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The verses that follow explain what this commandment implies:

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

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

Therefore, rather than divorcing love for God and the intellectual life, or regarding them as antagonistic to each other, the Bible explicitly states that love for God rests upon our very intellect. The greatest commandment is to love God with our mind. Paul writes to the Colossians: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds" (Colossians 1:21), and Jesus explains that sin originates from the mind: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).73 The reprobates hate God with their minds, but regeneration reverses this, and enables the elect to fulfill the greatest commandment. God says that the new covenant is one in which, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33; also Hebrews 10:16). As for love toward other human beings, in addition to what has already been said above, Paul writes that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Some people have the idea that love is the replacement of the law, rendering the Old Testament moral commands irrelevant. But the Bible teaches that to walk in love is to fulfill the law, or to do what it says rather than to ignore it.74 The ceremonial laws have been permanently fulfilled in Christ. What they foreshadowed have not been done away with, but only fulfilled in the person of Christ. As the priesthood of Christ is continuous, the fulfillment of these laws are still in effect. Therefore, there is now no need for the animal sacrifices and purification rites.

However, the moral laws of God remain relevant and binding on all people. To walk in love toward other human beings is to obey the moral laws of God concerning how we ought to treat people. For example, among other things, we must not steal from others or lie about them; we are to uphold justice and show mercy to the poor. Paul writes: The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:9-10)

Love is a summary of the moral laws, not a replacement. Therefore, since we are commanded to walk in love, the moral laws of God are still in full effect. To recapitulate, the love of God implies general benevolence toward all his creatures, but to the elect, self-sacrifice (in redeeming them through Christ) and self-disclosure (in giving them theological knowledge). Among other things, to love God means to devote our intellect to the worship and service of God, to acquire knowledge about him and his commands, and to obey all biblical precepts. As for loving other human beings,

it means to obey the laws of God in our relationships with people. The love of God is never in competition with his JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS. Since God is the ultimate authority, and all propositions find meaning only in relation to him, all moral concepts are defined by his own nature. To say that God is loving and just is to say that he always acts according to his own nature, with specific emphasis placed on the type of actions that the words such as love and justice describe.

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

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

God’s justice demands that he punishes evildoers. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), it means that he must punish everyone unless there is a way through which his justice may be satisfied without destroying those he wishes to save. To accomplish this, God sent Jesus Christ to die for the elect, and thereby saving from damnation those who would believe in him. On the other hand, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

God "presented [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25) so that God "might be just and the justifier" (Romans 3:26, NASB) of those who have faith in Christ. This addresses the question of how God can justify sinners if justice demands that they be punished. God sent Jesus to die for the elect, to accept the punishment that they deserved. Thus, God maintains his own standard of justice in condemning the reprobates, but he is also just in pardoning the elect, since Christ has paid for their sins.75 Other biblical passages affirming the justice and righteousness of God include the following:

He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4) Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. (Psalms 36:6) He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. (Psalms 72:2) Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. (Psalms 89:14) He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity. (Psalms 98:9) May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. (Psalms 119:172) For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

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

One purpose of the reprobates "the objects of his wrath" or those who are "prepared for destruction" is that God may reveal this aspect of his nature to "the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory" (Romans 9:22-23). Since Christians have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) through Christ, this is one divine attribute that the elect will never experience, and therefore it must be demonstrated to them in other people. Recall that one benefit God gives to the elect is information or knowledge about himself, and this shows us to what lengths he will go to make himself known to his people. The wrath of God is his divine anger against all that is contrary to holiness and righteousness;76 it is his intense hatred toward sin and wickedness. Unlike much of human anger, divine anger is not emotional or petty, but it stems from God's holy nature, and it is altogether good and justified. The wrath of God is directed against all who reject Jesus Christ:

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

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (Romans 2:8)

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

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6) That the wrath of God will be poured out against those who reject Christ does not mean that the reprobates who have never heard the gospel are exempt, since every non-Christian who has not directly rejected the person and work of Jesus Christ has nevertheless rebelled against the knowledge of God that is innate within them: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Romans 1:18-19). Therefore, all reprobates will suffer under God's intense anger. But the wrath of God will not come upon the elect: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). God appointed the reprobates to "suffer wrath," but he has appointed us to "receive salvation" through Christ. Therefore, we can credit our salvation only to God's sovereign appointment, and not to a non-existent "free will" by which we choose to follow Christ, so that no one may boast before him. The bulk of the discussion concerning divine election is reserved for the chapter on salvation, but since we have already brought up the subjects of election and wrath, we should also consider the divine attribute of the WILL of God.77

Theologians distinguish between the "secret" and the "revealed" will of God based on Deuteronomy 29:29, which says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." "The things revealed" would include all that is recorded in Scripture God's precepts, commands, doctrines, and predictions. Having been revealed to us, the content of Scripture "belongs" to us. It is the immediate object to which we owe our allegiance and obedience - "that we may follow all the words of this law." On the other hand, the "secret things" belong to God. People experience disappointment when they attempt to discover God's secret will while making decisions. Worse yet, many fall into serious spiritual error and bondage as a result. The very nature of his secret will is that its content is concealed, and therefore those who try to penetrate it always fail. These people chase after visions, dreams, and prophecies - sometimes even through forbidden practices, such as astrology and various kinds of divination. Christians should affirm the sufficiency of Scripture instead.

Since the Bible is able to equip a person "for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17), it must already contain sufficient information so that he who is familiar with its content will never make any personal or moral decision that offends or displeases God. The Bible contains all the information one needs to live a life that is fully acceptable to God. It may not show us everything that we wish to know, but it contains all that God wishes us to know. The Scripture is sufficient so that having learned its content, we will not require additional and tailor-made directions about our lives and circumstances to make decisions that are pleasing to God. As for God's secret will, it includes things that we do not know about until they have happened. Such things include future contingencies that have not been predicted in the Scripture, whether major historical events or personal circumstances.78 The will of God determines every major and minor event, to the point that not even a sparrow can die without his willing it: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29).79 Thus, God's will is inseparably connected to his power. He says in Isaiah 46:10, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." His predictions, declaring the end from the beginning, are more than mere forecasts, but they are at the same time declarations of what he will do, since not even a sparrow can die apart from his will. For God to predict the time and manner of a sparrow's death is to reveal his active decree concerning the time and manner of its death. For God to predict what will happen is to reveal what he will do. Everything that occurs must be willed by God, else all the power of the universe cannot cause its occurrence.

We must by extension also affirm that the recipients of salvation have been chosen by God's will. Therefore, salvation is not dependent on the will or work of man, but on the sovereign mercy of God (Romans 9:16).80 He is not obligated to be merciful to anyone, but "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

Even the choices and the circumstances of man are determined by his sovereign will:

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalms 139:16) The LORD works out everything for his own ends even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4) In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9) A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his

own way? (Proverbs 20:24) The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1)

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

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

Everything is subject to God’s will there is nothing that is beyond his control, and he has not chosen to forego making a decision on any matter. To those who abhor the rule and glory of God, this is a repulsive doctrine, and so they protest against it. But to those who love him, the absolute sovereignty of God is a source of joy and comfort. What better way can we have it, than to have God to rule over all?

Divine election to salvation will receive additional treatment; meanwhile, it is settled that God’s reign over his creation is total, and that nothing happens apart from his will. This contradicts the assumption that God does not decree evil. Of course God decrees events that are contrary to his moral precepts; otherwise, there could be no evil. However, this does not make God himself evil. To sin or commit evil, one must violate a moral law of God, but God cannot sin, since his own actions define what is right or wrong, and Scripture says that his actions are always good and just. Therefore, the very fact that he decrees certain evil events only means that it is right for him to do so.81 There is no authority or standard higher than God by which to condemn him. Does this make God a tyrant? If the word simply means, "an absolute ruler,"82 then of course God is a tyrant. And since he is the sole moral authority, the very fact that he is a tyrant means that he ought to be one, that it is good and just for him to be one. The negative connotations of the word apply only to human beings, since no human being should possess absolute authority. But God is "an absolute ruler" that is what it means to be God. The Bible calls frequent attention to the HOLINESS of God. There are two aspects to this divine attribute, emphasizing the moral purity and the transcendence of God. Both aspects imply separation from that which is sinful or that which assumes a lower form of existence. To be holy is to be righteous, moral, and pure, but also aloof, separated, and different.

Combined, these two aspects of divine holiness mean that there is no one like God in his moral purity and superior state of existence. In connection to his holiness, the Bible emphasizes that God is unique, and that no one approaches his greatness: "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:2); "’To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25).

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

Some people wish to stress the possibility of having genuine fellowship with God, and therefore favor his immanence in a way that denies his transcendence. Detecting this distortion, others who desire to maintain a high view of God overcompensate by denying his immanence. However, divine transcendence does not preclude divine immanence, and divine immanence does not diminish divine transcendence. These two qualities of God are true and consistent with other divine attributes. Our passage says that God is indeed "high and lofty," and no one is like him, but by his own will, he is also close to those whom he has chosen, and who will humble themselves before him. A right understanding of divine holiness should cause us to worship and fear God:

Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy...Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy. (Psalms 99:5; Psalms 99:9) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. (Revelation 15:4) The holy God is inherently worthy of worship and extreme reverence; it is a serious sin to deny him of proper worship.

God demands that his people be holy like himself. Of course, we cannot be transcendent in the sense of assuming a metaphysically "high and lofty" state of existence. However, God has chosen us for himself in eternity, and once he calls us to faith in Christ and sets us apart in history, we can be morally separated from the world, and remain pure from its filth. God demands holy living from his people under both the Old and New Testaments: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own" (Leviticus 20:26); "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ’Be holy, because I am holy’" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Besides moral separation from the world, there is another sense in which we exist in a different manner from unbelievers. As a result of God’s work in us, our thinking, source of help, social community, and even reading literature should be very different from those who wallow in the sinful manners of living in the world. We are to hate "even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 1:23).

Jesus prayed that God would not remove believers from the world, but that he would protect them from evil while they are in the world: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). This verse is sometimes used as a basis to criticize the Christians who mistook retreat from the world as a necessary implication of holy living. They avoid contact with the world to prevent being contaminated by it. But this is not what God commands, and this approach neglects some of our Christian responsibilities such as evangelism and charity. The correct use of John 17:15 encourages Christians to enter the sphere of existence of the unbelievers to engage the spiritual enemies by preaching and teaching, and to be salt and light to them through our holy speech and conduct (Matthew 5:13-16). On the other hand, many contemporary Christians misuse this verse another way by turning it into a license for excusing a lack of personal discipline and maintaining unhealthy relationships with the world. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world" only means that Jesus does not ask God to physically remove Christians from the world, that God would not immediately take them to heaven once they come to faith in Christ. One can see this by observing the context. Jesus discusses his upcoming physical departure in John 17:11 and John 17:13 : "I will remain in the world no longer, but they

are still in the world, and I am coming to you....I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world." Jesus was certainly not "in the world" in the sense of being in sin or too involved with unbelievers, but he means that he was still physically present with the disciples. So in John 17:15, Jesus only asks that the Father would not immediately remove Christians from the earth, but that he would protect them from the evil one.

Therefore, those who present John 17:15 (or similar biblical verses) as an encouragement for Christians to become involved in the world in the sense of befriending unbelievers or attending parties have distorted its meaning. The verse has a different purpose altogether.

Instead, the Bible says that we are to refrain from illegitimate relationships with unbelievers: Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

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

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

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

Holy living entails that we separate ourselves from the world, mainly not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. That is, we do not need to reside in exclusively Christian communities or monasteries, but it is imperative that we distinguish ourselves in our speech, conduct, habits, priorities, preferences, the choice of friends, reading materials, and forms of entertainment. It is not true that we can befriend whomever we wish Paul warns, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

We know that we should preach to sinners, and for this purpose we come into frequent contact with them, but the question is whether we should befriend them. In connection to this, it is often argued that Jesus associated with sinners. This is true, and we should do the same if we are doing it in the same sense that he did it. However, Jesus associated with sinners not for social enjoyment, but he demanded nothing less than full spiritual conversion from them. For example, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). The people disapproved, and said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner" (Luke 19:7). Does this not support the position that Jesus associated with sinners? But Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8). And it appears that he had undergone spiritual regeneration, since Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). Then he added, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Therefore, this incident does not grant permission to associate with sinners for just any purpose, but only for spiritual ends. Jesus did not associate with sinners for social enjoyment, but "to seek and to save what was lost."

Another example comes from Luke 7:1-50 : "When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them" (Luke 7:37-38). An observer disapproved: "When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is that she is a sinner'" (Luke 7:39). But even this encounter had a spiritual end the woman's action expressed her love for God and repentance for her sins. Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven....Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:48, Luke 7:50). The wedding of Cana in John 2:1-25, where Jesus turned water into wine, is often used to support the assertion that he participated in secular social and recreational activities even when they was no explicit spiritual agenda. But again, we find that his purpose was not social but spiritual, since here he worked his first miracle that manifested his glory: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (John 2:11). I have no objection against a Christian who participates in social and recreational events with unbelievers if he can consistently draw their attention to the glory of Christ.83

If we list several more examples, the pattern will emerge showing that although Jesus associated with sinners, his purpose was not social or recreational, but spiritual. He demanded spiritual change from the sinners, and those with whom he remained were willing to listen to his teaching and to repent of their sins. He also taught his disciples not to endlessly pursue those sinners who refuse to accept the gospel. He said, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6), and "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matthew 10:14).

Other related passages include the following: But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. (Acts 13:50-51) On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 13:44-47) But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:6)

Many Christians have succumbed to a popular idea in our culture, that when people of different worldviews and religions come together, there ought to be a free and mutual exchange of ideas. But the Scripture commands us to resist the influence of non- Christians. Jesus and the apostles never had any free exchange of ideas with unbelievers, but for them the gospel message was to dominate all situations. There is no scriptural support for the exchange of ideas among believers and unbelievers, only that of domination by believers.

We may have friendly conversations with unbelievers, but an exchange of ideas implies learning from them, and even the possibility of adopting their beliefs. However, just as Christ has nothing to learn from the devil, Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:15),84 and certainly we may not adopt their beliefs. Jesus commanded us to teach the nations (Matthew 28:18-20), not to learn from them. This exclusive and high view of the Christian religion is often accused of being arrogant. But this is a foolish charge, since we are not teaching private opinions, but "everything that [Christ has] commanded" (Matthew 28:20). To teach God's word as exclusive truth is a mark of obedience and faith, not arrogance. On the other hand, to suggest that biblical ideas need modification or improvement through an exchange of ideas with non-biblical worldviews is more than arrogant it is to commit the sin of blasphemy.

Some may argue that although the biblical worldview requires no modification or improvement, an exchange or dialogue with unbelievers will nevertheless aid in increasing mutual understanding. I agree to this as long as the Christian's motive for understanding the non-biblical viewpoint is to refute it. We must never allow the unbelievers to think that we are prepared to accept their beliefs or to make the slightest adjustment to the biblical worldview that we affirm.

Christians are to "demolish" all non-Christian ideas and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Scripture thus forbids showing respect to or learning from non-Christian worldviews and religions. Scripture condemns all non-biblical worldview and religions, and to imply even for a moment that we have one iota of respect for non-biblical ideas and beliefs betrays a lack of faithfulness to Christ and amounts to spiritual treason. We must continuously indicate our utter disdain for any idea that "sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Unless one is truly willing to consider non-biblical ideas, in which case the authenticity of his faith comes into question, it is dishonest to allow others to think that we are open and respectful to their beliefs.85

Returning to our topic, those who use the argument that Jesus associated with sinners as a reason for befriending unbelievers can freely participate in social and recreational activities only if they have some sort of spiritual agenda in mind, and only if they carry it out when associating with non-Christians. Of course, working in a secular environment necessitates some sort of interaction with sinners, but we are speaking of befriending them on a personal level. Very few Christians who befriend unbelievers on the basis that "Jesus did it" are effective in ministry to sinners, assuming that they have ministry in mind in the first place. Most of them are lying to God and to themselves they have no intention of demanding conversion from those with whom they befriend. To repeat Paul's admonition: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). That is, do not be deceived into thinking that it makes little difference with whom one associates; do not assume that one who enjoys the company of unbelievers will reap no tragic consequences.

Other relevant verses include the following:

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

Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him

will I not endure. (Psalms 101:4-5) Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! (Psalms 119:115)

Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies....Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. (Psalms 141:4-6) Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. (Proverbs 4:14-15) He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20) Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared. (Proverbs 22:24-25) Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? (1 Corinthians 5:6) But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you. (1 Timothy 6:20-21) Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. (2 Timothy 2:16)

Most professing believers become involved with the world because they like the world, and not because they are determined to change it toward a more godly direction. But the Bible says, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Therefore, although it is unscriptural to retreat from the world and its social, economic, and political structures, we must evaluate our motive for associating with sinners, and make sure that we always remember our spiritual mission. The Bible also gives instruction concerning relationships among believers. Although many of the restrictions applicable to dealing with unbelievers are lifted, it remains that the primary agenda and content of conversation in relationships among believers should be spiritual, and dominated by theological discussions.

Relevant biblical passages include the following:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. (Psalms 119:63) May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes. (Psalms 119:79)

Let a righteous man strike me it is a kindness; let him rebuke me it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers. (Psalms 141:5) He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

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

him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. (Malachi 3:16-18)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42) When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:23)

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. (1 Corinthians 14:26) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

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

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:9-10) Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)

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

Although Christians have nothing to learn from unbelievers, conversing with other faithful Christians to gain a better understanding of Scripture is profitable. True Christians will enjoy such fellowship in which God remains at the center of our thought and conversations, even when we are engaging in social and recreational activities. Therefore, although Christians may freely befriend other genuine believers and participate in social and recreational activities with them, it remains that their priorities consist of spiritual and theological concerns at all times. This concludes our overview of the divine attributes. There are some that we have not mentioned, and we can say much more about those that we have discussed, but the subject is too rich for us to attempt an exhaustive introduction. Nevertheless, this section on the divine attributes provides a foundation that will prevent any serious distortion in one's view of God. We may now proceed to the final section of this chapter, which is a discussion on the works of God. THE WORKS OF GOD

Although the Bible presents us with a transcendent God, it also reminds us that he is deeply involved in the affairs of the universe and humanity, beginning with its teaching on his CREATION of the universe. Genesis 1:1-31; Genesis 2:1-25 contain the historical account in which God brings forth the earth, the stars, the seasons, plant life, and all kinds of animals. The crown of his creation is man, whom he made in his own image. We will be studying the creation and nature of man in the next chapter.

God created the universe ex nihilo, or "out of nothing." No preexisting materials were available when God created the universe, but he created all matter by his word and his power:

You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9:6) By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. (Psalms 33:6) This is what the LORD says - your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself. (Isaiah 44:24)

Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. (Jeremiah 32:17) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,86 whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (Colossians 1:16) By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

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

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

God does not leave the universe to exist on its own, since it indeed cannot exist on its own, but he continuously sustains its existence and actively governs its operation. It is an unbiblical view that says God created the universe with certain laws that govern its operation. The biblical position is that God is holding the universe together, and controlling the most minute event within it. In other words, the entirety of this universe is being governed by a personal mind instead of impersonal powers or laws.87 This is the doctrine of the PROVIDENCE of God. Theologians distinguish between the GENERAL PROVIDENCE and the SPECIAL PROVIDENCE of God. The former refers to his precise control and supervision88 of events that he causes through ordinary means. The latter refers to his precise control and intervention of events that he causes through extraordinary means. Together, the general providence and the special providence of God embrace every event that occurs.

Paul writes that God the Father, through the agency of God the Son, had created not only all things "visible and invisible," but that "[the Son] is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Christ is before all of creation, and even now he is holding together the entire universe. God had created the universe by his word, and even now he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). Paul observes in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live and move and have our being."

We learn from this that all contingent beings must not only be given existence by God through his creative power, but they can continue to exist only by his sustaining power, since only God is self-existent. Nothing can exist apart from God, and claims to autonomy at any level by created things are excluded.

Besides preserving the existence of his creation, God also governs and causes every aspect of it. Not even a seemingly insignificant animal can die apart from his will (Matthew 10:29). This implies that all else are subject to his governance, but there are many other biblical passages that describe the extent and scope of his supervision over creation: So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt....You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 45:8; Genesis 50:20)

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

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. (Job 14:5) He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. (Job 36:32) Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? (Job 37:15) I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2) For dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. (Psalms 22:28) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (Psalms 47:8) No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. (Psalms 75:6-7)

He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate bringing forth food from the earth. (Psalms 104:14) My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalms 139:15-16)

He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. (Psalms 147:8-9) For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27) When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. (Jeremiah 10:13) I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10:23) With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him. (Jeremiah 27:5-7)

He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. (Daniel 2:21) The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men. (Daniel 4:17)

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

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

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

Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:17) And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:25-26) For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Php 2:13) That God exercises such precise and extreme control over all of creation is disturbing to many people, including some who claim to be Christians. Therefore, they often try to distort the relevant biblical passages to justify a false theology that allows them to maintain the sense of freedom and dignity that they treasure above the truth and honor of God. But seeking to be free from God is a wicked thing. Those who love God are glad that he possesses absolute control over all things. They can say with Isaiah 33:22, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us," and they would not have it any other way. They are bold to say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" (Psalms 96:10).

Although everything is under God’s direct providential control, there are times when his involvement is especially evident, so much so that we may describe each of these occasions as an intervention of God. Such occurrences are distinct from his ordinary direction of the natural course of events, but they are instances when God chooses to use extraordinary means to achieve his purposes. They are sometimes so spectacular so as to be called "miracles." God’s works of special providence also include his works of redemption, but since a later chapter will address the subject of salvation, here we will only focus on his miraculous acts. The Bible testifies to a God who performs miracles and works wonders: Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11) He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. (Job 9:10) For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God. (Psalms 86:10)

Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. (Psalms 136:3-4)

Jesus worked so many miracles during his time on the earth that the miraculous was recognized as a prominent feature of his ministry:

He replied..."I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." (Luke 13:32) When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see

him perform some miracle. (Luke 23:8)

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (Acts 2:22)

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (John 21:25) The disciples of Jesus also worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit:

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mark 16:20) Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43) The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. (Acts 5:12) So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. (Acts 14:13)

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11-12)

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:18-19) The things that mark an apostle signs, wonders and miracles were done among you with great perseverance. (2 Corinthians 12:12) This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:3-4)

Modern Christians are also authorized to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the gospel accompanied by miraculous signs: And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:17-18)

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

Opponents of Christianity reject biblical supernaturalism, denying the very possibility of miracles. Now, every argument proceeds from a given worldview and not from a vacuum. And if Christianity is a true worldview, if it is the only true worldview, and if it is true in its entirety,89 then every argument that presupposes another worldview is without justification, and every claim that contradicts any biblical proposition must be false. From what theories of epistemology and

metaphysics do the arguments against miracles originate? They certainly do not come from the biblical worldview itself, and thus they fail before they begin. If the entire Bible is true, then what it says about creation and providence are also true.

Endnotes:

1. Since God controls every detail of his creation, even those who deny his existence think and act only as God wills, and in this sense they "serve" the purposes of God. However, these individuals are unaware of God's control over them, and thus perceive themselves to be autonomous. Their thoughts and actions, all decreed by God, lead to perdition and not salvation.

2. Alvin Plantinga is a recent proponent of a version of the ontological argument.

3. Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works (Oxford World's Classics); Oxford University Press, 1998; p. 87-89. Paragraph divisions and punctuations modified for readability.

4. To begin with self-consciousness is to begin with the proposition, "I exist."

5. Modern proponents of cosmological arguments include Norman Geisler and William Lane Craig.

6. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica; P. 1, Q. 2, A. 3. Translation by Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

7. Modern proponents of design arguments include Michael Behe and William Dembski.

8. William Paley, Natural Theology (1802), as cited in The Existence of God, edited by John Hick; New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964; p. 99-103. Paragraph divisions and punctuations modified for readability.

9. In more recent times, Kant's effort was emulated by C. S. Lewis, albeit with a different formulation and agenda.

10. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason; New York: Macmillan, 1956; p. 166.

11. Ibid. 127.

12. Hastings Rashdall, The Theory of Good and Evil; Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1907; II, p. 212.

13. Robert Stern, Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism; New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000; p. 6.

14. I have argued for this premise elsewhere. Here I am interested only in explaining the nature and use of the biblical strategy of apologetics.

15. See Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

16. See Vincent Cheung, "The Problem of Evil," The Light of Our Minds.

17. For examples and explanations of both types, see Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions and The Light of Our Minds.

18. Alternatively, we may call it "The Presuppositional Argument" or "The Revelational Argument."

19. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2001.

20. Webster’s New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition; IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.

21. The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

22. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus. The term "dogmatic theology" is the general equivalent of "systematic theology" in theological usage.

23. As in, "imposing one’s will or opinions on others"; Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.

24. Ed. L. Miller, God and Reason, Second Edition; New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972, 1995; p. 9.

25. Alternatively, we may call the method "biblical rationalism," "biblical foundationalism," or "presuppositionalism."

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

27. Or, the law of noncontradiction.

28. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, "Skeptics," p. 850.

29. Induction is always a formal fallacy since it yields conclusions that say more than what the premises permit.

30. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition; "probability."

31. As Miller says, the mathematician (and also the rationalist) begins with certain givens, but the dogmatic theologian begins with revealed givens that is, information provided by an omniscient God. 39 40>

32. A system may claim to be a divine revelation, but can it survive scrutiny? Besides the self-contradictory claims of Islam, the Koran at some points acknowledge the Christian Bible, but then makes claims contradictory to it, and thus the entire religion self-destructs.

33. Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions.

34. But this may not be a defect from the unbeliever’s viewpoint, and this is why the classical arguments are able to turn his presuppositions, faulty as they are, against his own position. That is, even if we assume our opponent’s false premises, he is still mistaken, and Christianity is still vindicated.

35. This is not the fallacy of irrelevant personal attack, but a case of turning the opponent’s premises against his own position.

36. Also, the historical reliability of the Bible, the resurrection of Christ, or the superiority of biblical ethics.

37. Since science is constantly changing, perhaps the modern versions of the classical arguments are more useful against contemporary opponents, whereas the dogmatical argument requires no revision. It is often said that science is progressive and that it will continue to progress. This is a tacit admission that science has never been right and that it will never be right. The Bible has been correct in all that it affirms since it was first written; no change or "progress" is needed in its content.

38. By revelation, I refer only to the words of Scripture, and not to charismatic intuitions, visions, dreams, and prophecies these have their own epistemological difficulties and are not infallible.

39. I only use science and empiricism to represent the unbeliever's source of information since they are favored by the modern man. Other methods of discovering truth, such as non-Christian rationalism or non- biblical religious texts, are just as vulnerable to our arguments.

40. The transcendental argument is an indirect argument for the necessity of what the dogmatical argument directly demonstrates.

41. As Paul says, "I am speaking as a fool" (2 Corinthians 11:21).

42. The only infallible source of historical knowledge is biblical revelation, and our knowledge of history is limited to what it reveals. Secular knowledge in any area can never rise above the status of unjustified conjecture.

43. It poses no difficulty to the biblical strategy of apologetics whether the opponent's position is atheism, agnosticism, communism, nihilism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Islam, or some other system of thought. The method of argumentation is the same, with only slight modifications to direct the arguments against the thinking of the immediate opponent.

44. That is, again, the Christian God the only God that biblical revelation acknowledges.

45. Language is always adequate to represent any thought. For example, one may use "X" to designate any concept or sum of concepts, and it will always be adequate, since words are only arbitrary symbols that can refer to anything. The question is whether human beings have the ability to think about God, not whether words are adequate to talk about him. And man can indeed think about God, having been made in the divine image.

46. There are an infinite number of true propositions about God, but this is not the same as saying that all propositions about him are true.

47. I would even argue that there is no such thing as general theism, since any theistic outlook is always tied to a worldview, so that there is Christian theism, Islamic theism, and other varieties. None of them agrees on what the "theistic" God is like. Therefore, one cannot argue for theism alone to make all theistic religions possible, and then proceed to argue for other claims within a particular theistic worldview. Since each worldview has a unique view of God, one must argue for his own view of God (which already means that he must argue for his worldview as a whole), and not a general God that several worldviews can accept, because there is no such thing. Therefore,

to establish the existence of the Christian God does not serve Islam or Mormon interests at all. In fact, establishing the existence of the Christian God automatically refutes Islam and Mormonism, since their views of God are mutually exclusive.

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

49. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition. 50 51>

50. In my view, a definition of emotion should include, "a disturbance of the mind that may interfere with the normal process of rational thought."

51. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

52. We should be careful in using the example of Jesus to justify our own actions, or to produce arguments on how Christians should behave. We must make sure that there are indeed good parallels.

53. However, just as Jesus as the second person of the Trinity could never experience hunger or fatigue, he as pertaining to his divine attributes, which were never put aside even as he ministered on earth, would still be without passions. Only his human nature experienced hunger, fatigue, and passions.

54. He was so disturbed before his arrest that he bled through his skin, but he never lost control. He was able to pray, resolve to fulfill the will of God, and rebuke his disciples for sleeping. Although some understand the passage as saying that he was only sweating in a manner similar to bleeding, the point remains that he was under intense pressure, but still retained full control of himself.

55. When responding to the question (often intended as a challenge to the coherence of biblical theism) of whether God can create or perform contradictions, many Christians are too quick to insist that divine omnipotence does not mean that God can do everything. For example, God "cannot" lie or die. Then, they would apply this to contradictions, saying that God cannot create or perform them.

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

Even the common illustrations that are meant to clarify divine omnipotence demand our reconsideration. First, does the Scripture really say that God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2, KJV), or is it in

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

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

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

56. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish; Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000 (original: 1990); p. 208. 63 64>

57. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976; p. 46.

58. Ibid.

59. What he says about Hebrew thinking contradicts his own conclusion, but supports the one proposed in this book.

60. God sent Christ to redeem the elect because he loved them, but how could he love those he ought to hate? This is an insoluble problem under INFRALAPSARIANISM, in which the decree for the fall of all men occurs before the decree to redeem the elect, so that the various decrees follow a historical order. However, the problem does not appear under SUPRALAPSARIANISM, in which the election of some to be saved in Christ occurs before the decree for the fall of all men, so that the various decrees follow a teleological order. When speaking of the order of eternal decrees, we are of course only considering a logical order and not a temporal one, since all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God.

61. Gerstner, Repent or Perish; p. 211.

62. Peter Kreeft, How to Win the Culture War; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002; p. 90. 67 68>

63. Ibid., p. 93.

64. Ibid., p. 94.

65. Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3; p. 46.

66. "Good works" performed by the reprobates are sinful, since they do not do them to glorify God, but for some other purpose. Now, we have said that any proposition only finds its proper meaning in relation to God, but since the reprobates do not have a right relationship with God, nor do they consider even true propositions in their proper relations to God, all the thoughts of the reprobates are sinful.

67. Whereas God pardons the elect of their sins, punishments dispensed by earthly governments apply also to Christians who have committed crimes.

68. The context of the verse demands that we understand "us all" to be all the elect, and not all human beings. Thus, God lavishes his sacrificial and giving love upon those whom he has chosen for salvation.

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

70. Oxford American Dictionary of Current English: "deep affection or fondness...delight in; admire; greatly cherish."

71. The passage from Matthew leaves out "strength," but this helps reinforce the fact that the terms are synonymous in the first place.

72. "Love your neighbor as yourself" comes from Leviticus 19:18.

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

74. Jesus says in Matthew 23:23 that the "more important matters of the law" include "justice, mercy, and faith." These are not new concepts introduced in the New Testament.

75. Although we will discuss definite atonement in a later section of this book, this explanation by Paul about the work of Christ is sufficient to imply that the atonement was particular and not universal. Christ died only for his elect, and not every human being. If Christ had died for the sins of everyone, there would be no sin for which God will condemn the reprobates. However, the Bible says that God will condemn many reprobates; therefore, Christ did not die for the reprobates.

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

77. The will describes the decision-making function of the mind; it is not a distinct part of the person that is separated from the intellect.

78. See Vincent Cheung, Godliness with Contentment, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making."

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

80. REB: "Thus it does not depend on human will or effort, but on God’s mercy."

81. It is because of God’s absolute sovereignty that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the biblical worldview. See Vincent Cheung, The Light of Our Minds, "The Problem of Evil."

82. Webster’s New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

83. I am not objecting to necessary and official dealings with unbelievers, but I am against using Scripture, especially as it pertains to the life of Jesus, to justify social and recreational relationships with unbelievers, since no such support is available. In other words, there is no scriptural justification for any unnecessary association with sinners unless there is a spiritual agenda.

84. See Vincent Cheung, The Light of Our Minds, "The Light of Our Minds."

85. Peter tells us to answer unbelievers with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15), but this refers to the polite behavior that believers should usually exhibit, and not respect on an ideological level. Nevertheless, there are also occasions when it is appropriate to openly ridicule the unbeliever and to expose his folly for all to see. The prophets and apostles constantly mocked and condemned all non-Christian thought. In any case, Peter never says that we are to value what non-Christians believe.

86. God’s creation includes "invisible" things, such as angels and the spiritual realm.

87. This biblical view of the universe means a rejection of all theories that ascribe control of human lives and world events to impersonal forces, so that all teachings concerning astrology, karma, and so forth are denied. Mechanistic science is also excluded.

88. The sense intended here is one of causation, and not merely observation.

89. See Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions, and an earlier section of this chapter.

03.04. MAN

Systematic Theology

4. MAN THE CREATION OF MAN THE NATURE OF MAN THE FALL OF MAN

Since Christ precedes man in preeminence, it may appear that the doctrine of Christ deserves prior attention to the doctrine of man. But since the redemptive work of Christ permeates the study of Christ, and since it was for human beings - that is, the elect sinners - that Christ made atonement, it is therefore reasonable to first study the doctrine of man. In addition, since Christ took upon himself human attributes in the incarnation, having a prior understanding of biblical anthropology will facilitate our understanding of this and other aspects of christology.

Therefore, although Christ is the second person of the Trinity, and comes immediately after the doctrine of God in a Trinitarian structure of systematic theology, in the present course of study we will place the doctrine of man immediately after the doctrine of God so that we may understand something about the other party in the God-man relationship that is so central to Christian theology. THE CREATION OF MAN

After creating the earth, plant life, and the animals, God created man. In creating the former things, God simply commanded them to come into being. For example, in Genesis 1:3, he says, "Let there be light," and in Genesis 1:11 he says, "Let the earth produce vegetation." As for the creation of man, the Genesis account records what seems to be a conference between the members of the Trinity, agreeing to create him in the image of God: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Even without the other information contained in Genesis 1:26-30, this suggests a special relationship between God and man, and that special care was given to his creation.

Perhaps the most popular contemporary objection against the Genesis creation account of man is the theory of evolution. It denies the direct creation of man by God, and proposes that life originated from non-life, and that man is the product of mutations from the lower species. The theory of evolution contradicts what Scripture says about the origin of man. Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:21-22 recount the creation of man as follows: The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man was created before the woman, and since there already existed a member of the human species at the creation of the woman, God took preexisting materials from the man to create her. However, when God created the man, the Bible does not say that he used preexisting materials from the animals he had already made, but he went directly to "the dust of the ground," and directly "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

Therefore, the Bible teaches that man was created by a direct act of God, and not through biological evolution. Although there are other details in Genesis 1:1-31; Genesis 2:1-25 that reinforce such an understanding,1 the above is sufficient to show that the theory of evolution contradicts biblical revelation.

Now, the Bible itself claims that all of Scripture is divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16), and so the entire Bible speaks with one authority. This being so, to reject any part of the Bible is to reject that authority. In other words, since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is inspired by God, to reject any proposition in the Bible entails rejecting the Bible's self-claim that all of it is inspired by God.

Since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is true, to judge any part of it to be false requires an appeal to an authority or standard of truth foreign to the Bible. But if one has rejected the Bible's self-claim of infallibility by judging one of its propositions as false, he cannot then accept the Bible's self-claim of infallibility when he judges another one of its propositions to be true. That is, if a person appeals to a non-biblical authority or standard to reject a given biblical proposition, he must then continue to appeal to a non-biblical authority or standard when he agrees with another biblical proposition. For example, since the Bible itself affirms the deity of Christ, one who rejects the deity of Christ can only do so by assuming a non-biblical authority or standard by which he judges the Bible to be false.2 But then, if this same individual agrees with the biblical teaching that murder is immoral, he cannot do so just because the Bible teaches that murder is immoral. Instead, he must again appeal to a non-biblical authority or standard to justify his belief that murder is immoral.

Since he has rejected the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he rejected its teaching about the deity of Christ, he cannot now appeal to the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he affirms that murder is wrong. However, if the non-biblical authority or standard to which he appeals is unjustifiable and our position is that every non-biblical authority or standard is unjustifiable3 then he can justify neither his rejection of the deity of Christ nor his affirmation that murder is wrong.

If by an authority or standard foreign to the Bible one accepts one part of the Bible and rejects another, then the part of the Bible he accepts is no longer true because the Bible says so, but because the authority to which he is loyal says so. Therefore, he cannot justify his belief in the part of the Bible that he affirms because the Bible says it, but he must justify this belief by the epistemological authority or standard by which he evaluates the Bible. However, if his epistemology lacks justification, his verdict on any part of the Bible also lacks justification, and what he says is worthless.

Therefore, a person who rejects one part of the Bible cannot claim to accept another part of the Bible on the basis that the second part is the revelation of God, since he has rejected the revelatory status of the former. Likewise, to accept any one of the Bible's propositions because it is a part of the Bible obligates one to accept the entire Bible as true, since the authority behind all biblical propositions is one and not many. A person who rejects even one biblical proposition cannot at the same time appeal to divine authority to sustain his other beliefs. He must rely on that authority or standard by which he judges that one biblical proposition to be false. However, if only divine authority can justify any proposition or sustain any belief at all, then this person who relies

on a non-biblical authority or standard immediately and simultaneously loses justification for everything that he affirms. Since the Bible's self-claim of ultimacy and infallibility is attached to all of its propositions, one who rejects any part of the Bible must reject all of the Bible, and one who accepts any part of the Bible must accept all of the Bible. For our purpose, this means that one who rejects the biblical account of the direct creation of man cannot at the same time affirm the creation of the universe by God on the basis of Scripture. If one accepts the creation of the universe by God because the Scripture teaches it, he must also affirm the direct creation of man by God because the Scripture teaches it.

Now, the theory of evolution deals with what became of preexisting materials. Since no evolution could have taken place if there was nothing to evolve, the theory of evolution presupposes the existence of the universe. That is, biology presupposes cosmology. But both biology and cosmology presuppose the possibility of human knowledge, or epistemology. Thus, epistemology is prior to cosmology, which is prior to biology.

We have shown that evolutionary biology is a non-Christian biology. We have also shown that one cannot reject one aspect of the Christian worldview and then accept another aspect of the Christian worldview. Therefore, a non-Christian biology presupposes a non-Christian cosmology, and a non-Christian cosmology presupposes a non-Christian epistemology. However, if all non-Christian theories of epistemology are demonstrably false, then all non-Christian theories of cosmology are destroyed. And if all non-Christian theories of cosmology are destroyed, then all non-Christian theories of biology are also destroyed, including evolutionary biology. To affirm evolutionary biology presupposes a non-Christian epistemology, resulting in the destruction of one's entire worldview. But to presuppose a Christian epistemology in which the exclusive infallibility of Scripture is affirmed rules out evolutionary biology from the start. Therefore, Christian biology, which affirms the direct creation of man by God, is true by deductive necessity, but it is impossible for evolutionary biology to be true. Of course, within the context of debate, we may also temporarily take up the presuppositions of secular science for the sake of argument, and from that basis argue that evolution is "a theory in crisis" and that "the fossils still say No."4 But as I have pointed out elsewhere, all scientific reasoning is formally fallacious and cannot attain deductive certainty. Thus, the scientific arguments against evolution are weaker than the biblical argument against evolution that I am presenting here.5 An argument that destroys the evolutionist's entire worldview at its very starting point is certainly superior. The following is a summary of the above argument against evolutionary biology:

1. The theory of evolution contradicts the Bible.

2. Therefore, the evolutionist cannot borrow any Christian premise in his worldview.

3. A universe must first exist for life to exist in it (or to evolve from it).

4. Therefore, any theory of biology presupposes a theory of cosmology.

5. Knowledge must be possible before a theory of cosmology can be formulated.

6. Therefore, any theory of cosmology presupposes a theory of epistemology.

7. Only Christian epistemology is justifiable and true.

8. Therefore, only the Christian worldview is justifiable and true, and thus only Christian cosmology is justifiable and true, and thus only Christian biology is justifiable and true.

9. Christian biology affirms the direct creation of man by God.

10. Therefore, the view that God made man by direct creation is true, and the theory of evolution is false.

I demand the evolutionist to tell me how a non-Christian can know anything before he presents to me his theories of cosmology and biology. But since the evolutionist cannot find an epistemology to support his cosmology, and since he cannot find a cosmology to support his biology, his biology exists only in his own imaginary world, and his theory of evolution is just as much a fantasy as his universe. Thus, the evolutionist does not even have the right to present his case on evolutionary biology unless I choose to hear it.

Biology does not exist in a vacuum. We cannot just agree that the universe exists and argue only about biology, since the kind of universe assumed determines what is possible within it. If non-Christian epistemology is impossible, then non-Christian cosmology is impossible, and if non-Christian cosmology is impossible, then non-Christian biology is impossible. However, once we accept a Christian epistemology, and thus a Christian cosmology, then the direct creation of man by God follows by necessity, and all non-Christian theories of biology are ruled out.

All this is only to apply the dogmatical argument to the theory of evolution. The power of the dogmatical argument is such that it conclusively establishes the entire Christian faith as true, and simultaneously serves as a conclusive refutation to all non-Christian ideas and worldviews, whether known or unknown. Since we have shown all of Scripture to be exclusively true by the dogmatical argument, and since evolution contradicts Scripture, then evolution is automatically false. That is, since only the Bible is right, and since evolution contradicts the Bible, evolution is wrong. No additional argument is required.

We may now proceed with the understanding that God made man through direct and complete creation, without any sort of evolutionary processes. Having directly formed man’s body using the preexisting materials of the earth (but not from the animals), God gave him life, and man became a living being: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). As for the purpose of man’s creation, the Bible teaches that man was created by the will of God for the glory of God:

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

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7) In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12) And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. (Exodus 14:4)

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

Some teach that God's loving nature compelled him to create suitable objects of affection to satisfy his need to exercise sacrificial and giving love. But it is heretical to say that God has any needs. Paul says in Acts 17:25, "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." Being eternally self-existent, God is self-sufficient. Since man is not eternal, but has a definite time of origin before which he did not exist, and since "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8), if ever God could exist without man, he could have continued to exist in the same state forever. Therefore, the creation of man was not due to a necessity in God. The above passages show that God created both the elect and the reprobates for his own glory. Although the reprobates do not consciously glorify God, he gains glory for himself through them, so that he is glorified by the elect in their salvation and by the reprobates in their destruction.

Only the order of the eternal decrees in SUPRALAPSARIANISM, as opposed to INFRALAPSARIANISM, is consistent with the biblical data:

1. The election of some sinners to salvation in Christ; the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind.

2. The application of the redemptive work of Christ to the elect sinners.

3. The redemption of the elect sinners by the work of Christ.

4. The fall of man.

5. The creation of the world and man.

Although all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God, the logical arrangement of the eternal decrees begins with the decree that God would glorify himself through the salvation of the elect by Christ and the destruction of the reprobates. Each subsequent decree is then made as the means by which the former one would be accomplished.

Therefore, God chose to glorify himself, and the means by which he would be glorified is the salvation of some by Christ and the damnation of all others. The means by which the latter would be accomplished is the redemptive work of Christ. And the means by which the redemptive work of Christ is made meaningful is the fall of mankind. For the fall of mankind to be possible, God decreed the creation of the world and man.

Infralapsarianism confuses the execution of the eternal plan with its formulation, so that it begins where the supralapsarian order ends. However, a rational mind formulates a plan first by determining the end, and then working backward, determines the means by which it would reach the determined end. The execution of such a plan, however, reverses the order of the formulation so that it begins where the formulation ends.

Supralapsarianism is the teleological order and infralapsarianism is the historical order. Since the purpose for discussing the order of the eternal decrees is to discover the logical arrangement of

the formulation, and not the historical order of the plan’s execution, supralapsarianism is the biblical position. This means that God actively decreed the fall of mankind as one of the steps by which he would fulfill his eternal plan. Sin was not an accident, and redemption was not a mere reaction on the part of God. As the Scripture says, "The LORD works out everything for his own ends even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Proverbs 16:4). THE NATURE OF MAN

According to the Bible, God made man in his own image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Genesis 1:27). Whatever is meant by the image of God, it cannot refer to something that God himself does not possess. Since it has been established that God is incorporeal, the image must therefore be unrelated to man’s body.

However, since there are those who assert otherwise, we must take some time to deal with the issue here. We must approach the question by asking in what way man is like God, and what constitutes man’s point of contact with God. We should also consider in what way man is superior to the animals.

If the image of God is seen in man’s body, then it is arguable that some animals are also made in God’s image, since the physical differences between man and some animals are not so vast as to say that one is made in the image of God and the other not that is, if the image includes the physical appearance of Man 1:6 But this is unacceptable since the Scripture tells us that what distinguishes man from the animals is precisely the image of God. Therefore, the image of God cannot refer to the body of man or his appearance, but something else.

Deuteronomy 4:15-18 says that God has "no form," and therefore it is unlawful to make any idol or image to represent God, even if it is in the appearance of a human being:

You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. This passage alone is sufficient to establish that any substance with a form or appearance cannot be the image of God. Since God himself has "no form," the physical body or appearance of man cannot be the image of God; it cannot even be a part of it. An analysis of the biblical data demands that the image of God be defined in terms of the intellect. Although man has the advantage of being an upright primate biped possessing opposable thumbs, the bodies of many animals are superior to man’s in various ways. However, none of the animals can compare to man in intellectual abilities. That God had made man in his own image means that man is a rational mind. Many animals run faster than man, many are stronger, and some can even fly, but none can understand deductive syllogisms or solve algebraic equations. Animals sometimes seem to perform tasks that require rational thinking or design, such as building elaborate nests. But upon further observation, we discover that their creativity and ability to adapt are limited, and that they are able to perform these tasks only by instinct, and not through deliberate and rational thought. Most importantly, no animal can perform theological reflections.

Man’s rational mind is the likeness of God and his point of contact with him. Man’s intellectual qualities are evident from the beginning of Genesis. God blessed man in Genesis 1:28-30, giving him dominion over nature by a verbal pronouncement. Adam cared for Eden not by instinct, but in

obedience to God’s verbal instructions. God gave man a moral command in Genesis 2:16, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but allowed him to eat from all the other trees. Man was warned that to violate this command would result in his death. Only a rational mind can understand concepts such as duty, sin, and death. The Bible explicitly distinguishes man from the animals on the basis of his intellectual powers: The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. (Genesis 2:7, Job 32:8) [God] teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the air. (Job 35:11) God did not endow [the ostrich] with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. (Job 39:17) Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. (Psalms 32:9) The new self...is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

It is impossible to deny the conclusion that the image of God is man’s rational mind, but some have tried to add other elements to this definition, such as man’s morality and his dominion over nature. Although this is consistent with our position (Ephesians 4:24), we must maintain that rationality remains the basic element in defining the image of God in man.

Man has a moral nature that distinguishes him from the animals, and so it seems to some that we ought to include this as part of the image of God, even though rationality may be one element. Now, even animals and inanimate objects "obey" God’s commands, but instead of doing so by a rational mind, they are compelled by God’s power. But since man has a rational mind, he chooses to obey God through the intellect, and he sins by defying divine commands. Man can comprehend the concepts of good and evil, and can discuss them through the use of language. This means that man is moral precisely because he is rational; morality is a function of rationality. Therefore, although we may acknowledge that having a moral nature is part of what it means to be a human being, it is not necessary to include it as part of our definition for the image of God.

Man’s dominion over the animals is also an extension or result of his intellectual superiority (Genesis 1:28-30), and not to be confused as part of the image of God. James writes, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man" (James 3:7). Although man is physically weaker than many animals, his understanding and knowledge enable him to devise methods, tools, and weapons to tame and exploit them. Man’s rule over nature is made possible by his intellectual abilities, and not by any supernatural or mystical power given by God. The strong interest in animal rights and vegetarianism will justify a brief digression at this point. Scripture teaches that human beings are more valuable than animals and that human beings may eat animals for food: The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:2-3)

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

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do

good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:11-12)

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! (Luke 12:24) For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (1 Corinthians 9:9) The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5) The Christian’s priority should always be human beings, not animals. Given what the Bible says about the superior value of human beings, we should allocate our resources in such a way as to aid the cause of Christ among human beings, even at the expense of the comfort and the lives of animals. Much of what is done in the name of animal rights robs from the resources that ought to be devoted to helping humanity. This is an indirect denial that man is made in the divine image, that he is special among God’s creatures, and therefore it is an indirect rejection of Scripture. As for vegetarianism, God has granted man permission to consume "everything that lives and moves" (Genesis 9:3). Scripture states that man is not restricted to eating plant life: "Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Genesis 9:3). Therefore, to abstain from eating meat for spiritual reasons or as an acknowledgment of "animal rights" defies biblical teaching.

Although animal rights activists are in error, this does not mean that man may abuse and torture animals as he pleases. The Scripture gives instructions as to how we should treat them.7 For example, animals are to benefit from the Sabbath rest, and they must be allowed to eat while laboring (Deuteronomy 5:13-14; Deuteronomy 25:4). Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." We may conclude from such passages that it is wrong to torture animals for sport or to cause them any unjustified suffering. But it remains that we are to freely slaughter them for food, since Scripture itself grants that this is legitimate. Given the contemporary tendency to favor animals even at the expense of humanity, we must strive to give priority to human beings when thinking about the treatment of animals.

God always puts humanity before the animals. After citing the biblical command that says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," Paul adds, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" (1 Corinthians 9:9). Even such a command about the treatment of animals have the benefit of humanity and the just treatment of man in view: "Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest" (1 Corinthians 9:10). Therefore, we should say with Acts 10:13 where God calls to Peter the apostle, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat."

Returning to our topic, some who admit that the image of God is seen in the intellect of man nevertheless argue that since the body is necessary to express one’s rational mind, whether in words or in actions, it must be at least a part of the image of God. However, the earlier reference

to Deuteronomy 4:15-18 already eliminated this possibility; the body of man cannot be even a part of God's image. In addition, the argument confuses the image of God with the equipment required to express it in the physical world. The mind can certainly engage in rational communication with God without the body; we only need the body to interact with the physical world. Indeed, before the consummation of our salvation, "to be away from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The Bible views the physical body as very important, and the New Testament even says that the believer's body is the temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16); however, the body is not part of the image of God.

Another objection against equating the image of God with the intellect of man is rooted in the view that man is a TRICHOTOMY consisting of spirit, soul, and body. Proponents of this view assert that the Bible portrays man as a trichotomy, and since "God is spirit" (John 4:24), the image of God must therefore be man's spirit as opposed to his soul or body. This being so, the image of God is not the rational intellect of man, but it is a non-intellectual part of man called the "spirit." The problem with this view is that the Bible does not endorse trichotomy, but instead teaches that man is a DICHOTOMY consisting of soul and body.

Although trichotomists often cite Hebrews 4:12 to support their view, a proper reading of the verse renders their position impossible. The verse says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The trichotomists claim that although it is often difficult to distinguish between the soul and the spirit, this verse says that they can be divided by the word of God. Therefore, the soul and the spirit are two different parts of a person.

However, the verse does not say that the word of God can divide the "soul and spirit and body," but that it can divide "soul and spirit, joints and marrow." Since "joints and marrow" belong to the body, or the material part of man, the natural interpretation is that "soul and spirit" also belong together in the same part of a person, or the immaterial part of man.

If X = soul, Y = spirit, and Z = body, then the trichotomist understanding of this verse will make it say, "dividing X and Y, Z and Z," which generates an awkwardness to the verse that is absent in the dichotomist interpretation. Dichotomists understand that soul = spirit, and therefore X = Y. Thus, the verse reads, "dividing X and X, Z and Z," which preserves the symmetry intended by the biblical author.

Robert Reymond provides a grammatical argument on this verse, and writes:

Here the trichotomist insists, since the soul can be "divided" from the spirit, is evidence that they are two separate and distinct ontological entities. But this is to ignore the fact that "soul" and "spirit" are both genitives governed by the participle "dividing." The verse is saying that the Word of God "divides" the soul, even the spirit. But it does not say that the Word of God divides between soul and spirit...or divides the soul from the spirit.8 In addition, this verse does not in fact refer to any dividing power in the word of God, but its ability to penetrate. The word of God is so powerful that it reaches, affects, and transforms even the deepest regions of a person's mind that is, "it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).9 The next verse confirms this interpretation: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). The point is that

nothing about us is hidden from God, not even our thoughts and intentions.

Another verse the trichotomists use to support their position is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which says, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is true that the three words translated "spirit, soul and body" are different Greek words. Some take this to mean that Paul is referring to God's preservation of the "whole" human being, which the apostle asserts to be consisting of three parts: spirit, soul, and body.

However, Mark 12:30 makes such an interpretation impossible. The verse says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." He mentions four items here with which we must love God, namely, the heart, soul, mind, and strength. If 1 Thessalonians 5:23 demands the understanding that man consists of three parts, then Mark 12:30 demands the understanding that man consists of four parts. Thus, the trichotomist argument from 1 Thessalonians 5:23 fails.

Many biblical verses employ repetition for the sake of emphasis. That the above verses use different words to refer to man does not necessarily mean that each word designates a different part of man; rather, the intention is to refer to the whole person.

Popular Christian preaching often assumes a sharp distinction between the spirit and the soul of man, identifying the "heart" with the spirit, and the mind with the soul. However, the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament defines "heart" (Greek: kardia) as, "the inner person, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will..."10 Kittel contains a lengthy article on the word, and says, "The heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection."11 As with other lexicons, it confirms that "The NT use of the word agrees with the OT use…"12 The word "heart" in the Bible includes a range of meanings, but unless it points to the physical organ, it is speaking of the mind, with the context of the passage giving emphasis to its particular functions.

Gordon Clark estimates that, "the term heart denotes emotion about ten or at the very most fifteen percent of the time. It denotes the will maybe thirty percent of the time; and it very clearly means the intellect sixty or seventy percent [of the time]."13 Since both the emotion and the will are functions of the intellect, or the mind, unless the reference is to the physical organ, the word "heart" in the Bible means the mind.

Having presented several pages of relevant passages, Clark concludes, "Therefore when someone in the pews hears the preacher contrasting the head and the heart, he will realize that the preacher either does not know or does not believe what the Bible says. That the gospel may be proclaimed in its purity and power, the churches should eliminate their Freudianism and other forms of contemporary psychology and return to God's Word..."14

It is unbiblical to distinguish between "head faith" and "heart faith" or "head knowledge" and "heart knowledge." In the first place, the mind of man is not his "head" or his brain. The mind of man is incorporeal, made in the image of God; it is not part of the body at all. So to make a contrast between the "head" and the "heart" is to commit theological error on more than one level. The trichotomist distinguishes between the spirit and the soul, or the heart and the mind, not the head, since the head belongs to the body. Therefore, the contrast is between faith in the spirit and faith in the mind, or knowledge in the spirit and knowledge in the mind. But since trichotomy is false,

such a contrast is also false. Since the words spirit, soul, heart, and mind all refer to the same immaterial part of man, faith in the spirit is faith in the mind, and knowledge in the spirit is knowledge in the mind. They are just different words for the same part of man. This also means that faith and knowledge are always intellectual. In A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, Jonathan Edwards writes regarding the inclination and will of man, that, "the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart."15 Also, Thayer writes, "kardia...the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors...used of the understanding, the faculty and seat of the intelligence..."16 The point is that the heart is intellectual.

After an extensive presentation of the relevant evidence, Robert Morey concludes in his Death and the Afterlife:

Man’s immaterial side is given several different names in Scripture. It has been called the "spirit," "soul," "mind," "heart," "inward parts," etc., of man. The names should not be viewed as referring to separate entities but as descriptions of different functions or relationships which man’s immaterial side has....Indeed, spirit and soul are used interchangeably in various passages...17

Therefore, a human being consists of mind and body. We may consider the terms spirit, soul, heart, and mind as generally interchangeable: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1) For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. (Mark 7:19)

Since many readers tend to think of the spirit and the heart, or even the soul, as more or less non-intellectual, I often prefer the word mind so as to remind the reader that, no matter what one calls it, the immaterial part of man is intellectual in nature. Words such as spirit, soul, heart, and mind all refer to the same immaterial and intellectual part of man. In summary, the Bible teaches that man consists of two parts the material and the immaterial: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB). Man is a soul and a body. The soul entered into man when God breathed life into him, and it is this breath of God that gives man his intellectual powers. Our conclusion remains that the image of God is the intellect of man; that is, man is made in the image and likeness of God in the sense that man has a rational mind.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created male and female human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This verse indicates that both male and female are made in the image of God, and both belong to the category of man or mankind. The dominion that God gave to man belongs to both the male and the female, since verse 28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, ’Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’" (Genesis 1:28). The implication of these two verses is that one gender is not intrinsically superior to the other. However, although the ontological value of men and women are the same, God has imposed an authority structure upon

them so as to define their roles within society, especially in the marriage relationship and church government.18 In connection with this, we will examine several relevant passages below.

After the fall of mankind, God says to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). One common interpretation of this statement understands it as saying that the woman will experience great sexual desire for her husband, or at least a desire for his companionship. Reflecting this view, the Living Bible paraphrases the verse as, "You shall welcome your husband’s affections, and he shall be your master." But this interpretation fails to relate the first clause of the sentence to the second. In addition, a similar statement appears in Genesis 4:7, but this time it is translated, "It desires to have you, but you must master it." Therefore, a proper understanding of this verse should read it as, "Your desire will be to dominate your husband, but he will rule over you."

Some assert that man and woman had equal authority in the marriage relationship before the Fall, and it was only after mankind transgressed the law of God that man was given rule over the woman as part of the curse upon humanity. According to this view, the subordination of the woman is only a result of sin, and it has been negated after the death and resurrection of Christ.

However, not all the effects of the Fall have been eliminated after the resurrection of Christ. There are some things that must await the consummation of our salvation at his second coming. For example, sickness and death originated because of sin, but they are still in effect today. But if the work of Christ have removed all the results of sin for this stage of human history, they should be now completely absent from human experience, at least for the Christian. Therefore, even if the subordination of women resulted from sin, it does not follow that it has been negated after the resurrection of Christ unless the Bible explicitly teaches it. But the authority of man over the woman did not originate because of the Fall in the first place. Even before God created the woman, he said that she would be the man’s "helper" (Genesis 2:18). Paul teaches that the authority of the man over the woman did not originate because of sin, but that it is a creation ordinance. That is, by the nature and order of the creation of the man and the woman, the man has authority over the woman: For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:8-9) A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:11-13)

It is only natural that any ordinance of God instituted because of the very nature of creation is still in effect as long as we are human beings.19 In addition, both Paul and Peter wrote to believers saying that Christian wives are to obey their husbands. Thus the work of Christ and the apostolic teaching did nothing to abolish the authority structure instituted by God at creation, but rather reinforced it as an absolute moral law:

Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:4-5)

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2) The argument saying that the redemptive work of

Christ removed the "curse" of the subordination of women under men within the marriage relationship is an unbiblical position. The Bible teaches that the husband has authority over the wife at the creation of man, after the fall of man, and after the work of Christ.

Rather than teaching that the subordination of women resulted from sin, Genesis 3:16 indicates that sin produced their usurpation of men's authority. For Christian women to submit to male leadership in the home and the church is a sign of righteousness and regeneration; however, the rejection male leadership in the home and the church is a manifestation of sin and wickedness. Rather than abolishing male leadership in the home and the church, the work of Christ restored and reinforced the original divine design.

One important aspect of the feminist movement and feminist theology is to alter or abolish the biblical structure of the marriage relationship and church government. In their efforts to promote an anti-biblical "equality," the feminists have facilitated the erosion of the most basic unit of society, the family. God has designed that the man should be the head of the home from the beginning, but sin has produced in the woman an urge to usurp the husband's authority, and to be "liberated" from his rule. But the joy and hope of humanity depends on knowing and obeying biblical commands, and not in fighting against them.20 The leadership of man in the family has been a controversial topic, both within and without theological circles. The reason for much of the debate is not because Scripture is unclear on the topic, but rather because of the ideological climate of the day and the sinful tendency of human beings to resent legitimate authority. As Keil & Delitzsch says in relation to Genesis 3:16, the desire within the woman to defy the man's authority is one that is "bordering upon disease."21 Our second passages comes from 1 Peter 3:1-6. 1 Peter 3:1-4 say:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. The passage shows that not only are wives to subject themselves to Christian husbands, but they must be submissive even if the men are unbelievers. Since elsewhere we find that a Christian woman may only marry another Christian man (1 Corinthians 7:39), Peter here addresses women who became Christians after they were married to non-Christian men. The part concerning submissiveness enters into the discussion when the apostle says that the men may be "won over without words." This does not mean that a person may bring another to faith in Christ without verbally communicating the gospel message. It is popular to assume nowadays that "action speaks louder than words," but this is contrary to biblical teaching.

These husbands to whom Peter exhorts the wives to submit are said to have already rejected the gospel as verbally communicated, whether by the wives or by someone else. Thus the intellectual content of the Christian faith has already been conveyed to these men, but they have refused to give it their assent. Peter is then telling the wives that God may still use their "purity and reverence" as the means by which to impress and convert their husbands, so that they may give assent to what they have already heard. Therefore, this passage presupposes the preaching of the gospel rather than denying its necessity.

Peter continues in 1 Peter 3:5-6 : For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

How did the women make themselves beautiful? "They were submissive to their own husbands." Although Sarah was "a very beautiful woman" (Genesis 12:14) in terms of appearance, Peter cites her case as an example of achieving inner beauty through submissiveness and obedience. Being physically attractive is not enough Sarah made herself beautiful because she "obeyed Abraham and called him her master."

Just as Christians become the children of Abraham by imitating his faith (Galatians 3:7), women become the daughters of Sarah by imitating her obedience to her husband. Peter does not deny the existence of abusive husbands, but he says, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (1 Peter 3:6). The ungodly behavior of some husbands does not excuse the wives from following God's precepts. The biblical instruction is to "do what is right and do not give way to fear" in the context of being submissive and obedient to one's husband, so that "if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2). Our next passage on the subject is Ephesians 5:22-24. It says:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. The meaning of this passage is very clear, but many commentators have attempted to subvert it. For example, New Testament scholar Walter L. Liefeld writes as follows: To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word "obey" does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (Ephesians 6:1) and slaves (Ephesians 6:55).22

He admits that the word translated "submit" can mean obedience if the relationship described calls for it, but he says that the marriage relationship does not call for this meaning.

Now, Paul writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 6:22), and "as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 6:24). Wives must submit to their husbands as the church must submit to Christ, and Liefeld claims that the submission of the wives does not include obedience. But if this is true, then neither does the submission of the church include obedience. Therefore, according to Liefeld, the wives and the church do not need to be obedient to the husbands or to Christ, but one must be obedient to his superiors in the military.

Instead of assuming that submission does not include obedience, we should allow biblical teaching concerning Christ's absolute authority over the believers and the church to dictate the meaning of submission. And since the believers and the church are to obey Christ in their submission to him, the wives are also to obey their husbands "in everything."

Defining "to submit" as "to yield one's own rights" is problematic in the first place. Since the passage also applies "to submit" to our relationship with Christ, this definition implies that we have

a right to defy the Lord, only that we are to surrender such a right. However, since other biblical passages deny that we have a right to defy God, the definition is false.23

These blunders alone reflect terrible scholarship, and produce blasphemous implications. However, Liefeld's errors do not stop here, since his claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" is both misleading and false. The claim is misleading since although the word translated "submit" (hypotasso-) in Ephesians 5:22 is different from the one translated "obey" (hypakouo-) in Ephesians 6:1 and Ephesians 6:5, both words carry the meaning of obedience. For example, Luke 2:51 uses the word hypotasso-, but this time it is translated "obedient": "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient [hypotasso-] to them."

Ephesians 6:1 uses hypakouo- when it says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." In Ephesians 6:2, Paul assumes that the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," means that children must obey their parents. Since the word in Luke 2:51 is hypotasso-, is Liefeld insinuating that Jesus merely submitted to his parents,24 but did not obey them? If Jesus had obeyed the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," and this commandment entails obedience to one's parents, it follows that Jesus obeyed his parents, and that it is correct to translate hypotasso- as "obedient" in Luke 2:51.

However, Liefeld's claim is not only misleading it is simply false. Since he affirms that hypotasso- is correctly translated "submit" in Ephesians 5:22 and that hypakouo- is correctly translated "obey" in Ephesians 6:1 and Ephesians 6:5, his claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" would mean that hypakouo- is never used in Scripture when referring to wives. But 1 Peter 3:5-6 applies the word hypakouo- to Sarah: For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive [hypotasso-] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [hypakouo-] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.25

Since Sarah was the wife of Abraham, and she obeyed (hypakouo-) her husband, and since the wives are told in this passage to imitate her obedience, it necessarily follows that hypakouo- is being equally applied to all wives. This passage applies hypakouo- to Sarah as a wife, and by extension to all wives. How then can Liefeld assert that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives"? In any case, whether hypakouo- or hypotasso- is used, the Bible teaches that wives must obey their husbands.

Wives may protest that this is difficult to do, but it is arguable that the husband's duty is even more challenging: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The command is not for the husbands to merely show affection to their wives, but to love them to the death, and cherish her more than his own life and welfare. To the extent that one does not possess such love for his wife, he is less than a biblical man. Our estimation of a man should never rise higher than his love for God, the Bible, and his wife.

It may be true that many men are difficult to obey, but it is also true that many women are difficult to love. However, just as God empowers Christian men to love their wives as Christ loves his church, he empowers Christian women to obey their husbands as the church ought to obey Christ. In any case, each person is accountable to God regardless of what the other does, as the apostle

Peter affirms (1 Peter 3:1-7). That a husband is unloving does not excuse the wife's disobedience, and a husband must love his wife regardless of her shortcomings. A popular objection to the biblical authority structure for the family comes from a misuse of Galatians 3:28, and argues that the verse speaks against all gender "inequality" or distinctions: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Since there is "neither...male nor female" in Christ, some make the argument that there should be no role distinction or difference in authority within the marriage relationship.

However, this cannot be the intent of the verse, since elsewhere Paul prescribes role distinctions and recognizes differences in authority between husbands and wives and masters and slaves, saying, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," and "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (Ephesians 5:22; Ephesians 6:5). Therefore, Galatians 3:28 does not abolish all gender distinctions, and it does not contradict or nullify those biblical passages teaching the male headship of the family. When we read the verse in its context, it becomes obvious that it only refers to the equality of every elect individual in his ready access to justification by faith:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29) The verse does not teach social or gender equality at all, but it teaches a spiritual equality among the elect. All those whom God has chosen to receive salvation have equal access to justification through Christ by faith, whether they are men or women, Jews or non-Jews, masters or slaves. Gender, race, and social status are irrelevant to one's access to salvation through Christ by faith, although only the elect will obtain it (Romans 11:7). The verse carries no reference to gender equality in any other setting, and has no relevance to role distinctions among male and female.26

We have examined several passages that affirm male leadership in the marriage relationship, but there are many more that assert or imply the divinely instituted authority structure in the family as expounded above. Elizabeth Handford writes, "If you are intellectually honest, you have to admit that it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification...that a woman ought to obey her husband."27 Paul says that a wife must obey her husband, "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5); a disobedient wife brings shame to the kingdom of God. THE FALL OF MAN

Adam was created in the divine image, and in the beginning he was good and upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Then God placed him in Eden to work the land, and commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17) But Satan came in the form of a serpent, deceived the woman into eating from the tree, and she in turn gave Adam fruit from the tree to eat. In this manner, both of them sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Timothy 2:14). Then God pronounced a curse upon them that included pain, toil, and death (Genesis 3:16-19), and he expelled the two from Eden (Genesis 3:23). Thus man fell from his original

estate.

Sin produced devastating effects on humanity. The FEDERAL HEADSHIP of Adam refers to his role as the representative of all mankind in Eden. Scripture teaches that when he sinned, he acted on the behalf of all his descendants in the mind of God.28 Therefore, when Adam fell into sin, all of humanity fell with him: "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men..." (Romans 5:12; Romans 5:18).

Adam represented the human race in Eden as a "federal head" and not an "organic head." All of humanity is condemned by his sin not because of its physical relation to him, but because Adam represented humanity in the mind of God; that is, God sovereignly determined that Adam represented all of humanity in Eden.29 Therefore, every person conceived after Adam is condemned by inherited guilt even before the individual has an opportunity to commit any personal sins. When Adam sinned, all of humanity sinned; when Adam came under condemnation, all of humanity came under condemnation (Romans 5:18). The term ORIGINAL SIN refers to this inherited guilt rather than the sin committed by Adam. I agree with Wayne Grudem that the term is misleading.30 Alternatives may include "original guilt" and "inherited sin," but "original guilt" may be misunderstood as referring to the sin of Adam, and "inherited sin" may be misunderstood as referring to a transmission of guilt based on our physical relation to Adam. But as Adam was our representative in the mind of God, so is his guilt imputed to us in the mind of God. Thus IMPUTED GUILT is a more accurate term, and makes a good parallel to the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS that the elect receive by faith in the work of Christ.

Other than Romans 5:12-19, the following biblical verses also point to the imputed guilt we have received from Adam:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalms 51:5) Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. (Psalms 58:3) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)31 Not only did we inherit from Adam the guilt of sin, but we also inherited from him a sinful nature. This means that not only are we guilty in God’s sight because of Adam’s sin, but we also possess a disposition to sin and to rebel against God’s laws. Grudem uses the term INHERITED CORRUPTION to designate this sinful disposition that we have received from Adam.32 Many people favor the teaching of secular philosophy that human beings are born with a disposition toward good; however, the Bible teaches otherwise. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." Paul states that we all followed our "sinful nature" before God regenerated us, and that "we were by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

Many people resist the biblical teaching on imputed guilt and inherited corruption. Even some professing Christians would deny that they have ever sinned.33 They may admit to having done a number of things out of their "human weaknesses," and that they have made "mistakes," but they insist that it would be an exaggeration to label what they have done as "sins." The problem is that their definition of sin falls short of the definition given in Scripture. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God’s moral law: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). A person sins when he fails to do what God commands him to do, or when he does what God prohibits him from doing. Now, if sin is a violation of God’s moral law, then whether a

particular action is sinful must be defined by its relation to this law, that is, to see whether a violation has indeed occurred. And since the moral law of God addresses all areas of thought and conduct either by explicit command or by necessary inference, our thoughts and actions are never morally neutral (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Jesus makes it clear that each moral command from God does not only govern a person's actions, but also his thoughts. Murder does not include only the physical act of killing another human being without biblical justification,34 but it is also a sin of the mind:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Likewise, the moral law prohibiting adultery applies not only to the physical act of sexual infidelity, but adultery is also a sin of the mind: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus explains that sins proceed from the mind: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22). What appears to be physical sins are in fact first conceived in the mind; therefore, although not all sins of the mind result in physical expression, all physical sins imply prior sins of the mind. Some people commit fewer physical sins than others, but all of us often displease God in our thoughts. In addition, Jesus says in Matthew 12:36, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." How many of us have never uttered even one "careless word"?

Paul writes that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us....If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8; 1 John 1:10). Psalms 130:3-4 indicates that unless God forgives some of us, no one can be justified in his presence: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." Therefore, no one can say that he is sinless before God. Not only is every person guilty from birth because of the imputation of Adam's sin, but every person has inherited from Adam a sinful disposition, which causes him to defy God in thought and in action throughout his life. The result is that every man is headed for eternal damnation unless there is some sort of an intervention.

Sin has wrought considerable damage in the human person. Some people go as far as to argue that although God had created Adam in the divine image, the Fall had so marred and distorted it so that what Adam passed on to his offspring was no longer the image of God, but the image of man. Proponents of this view often make their argument from Genesis 5:1-3, which says, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.' When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth."

However, the passage does not indicate that the image was so altered or damaged that it was no longer the image of God. It says that God made Adam in the image of God, and then Adam in turn had an offspring in the image of Adam. If A = B and B = C, then A = C. The passage does not state if the image had changed or how it had changed. Its intent is to portray the continuation of God's image in humankind rather than its abolition. If the image had remained the same in Adam, then of course his offspring was also made in the image of God.

Other biblical passages indicate that God's image in man has indeed remained intact. Generations after the time of Adam, God said to Noah that murder was punishable by death because "in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). The apostle James likewise reasons that it is wrong to curse other human beings because they "have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9).

Appealing to the image of God in man would be illegitimate if man no longer exists as God's image, but these two instances of appealing to the image of God in man are obviously authoritative and legitimate, since the first comes from God and the second comes from an apostle. Also, if man is defined by the image of God, then man would no longer be man if this image is so marred or distorted from its original form that it can no longer be called God's image. Therefore, we must conclude that man continues to exist as the image of God.

However, this does not mean that the image of God in man was completely unharmed by sin. After the fall of man, and as early as Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." This verse provides an apt description of man's sinful nature, that it is the "inclination of the thoughts" toward evil. Paul says that to gratify "the cravings of our sinful nature" is to follow "its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:3). Likewise, Jesus says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

Thus the Bible defines the sinful nature in man as the evil disposition of the mind, or the disposition to think and act contrary to the precepts of Scripture. All the descendants of Adam except Christ have inherited such a disposition:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:5-7) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds [as shown by]35 your evil behavior. (Colossians 1:21)

Among other things, and in accordance with the above, the Bible portrays sin as a lapse in rationality. Ecclesiastes 7:25 mentions "the stupidity of wickedness,"36 and Proverbs 6:32 says, "one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense" (NASB). Speaking of those who refuse to worship the true God, Paul writes, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). Rebellion against God ultimately makes no sense. Insofar as one disobeys the Scripture, he is deficient in judgment and understanding. On the other hand, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalms

111:10). The implication of these verses is that although the intellectual equipment of the unbeliever remains in existence, the sinful disposition of his mind causes him to reason from false premises. His mind is biased against the truth of God, and causes him to select the wrong first principles with which to construct his worldview. The result is a comprehensively false and delusional view of all reality. Even if the unbeliever were to begin from true premises, such as biblical propositions, his sinful mind would still err in reasoning, and produces false conclusions through fallacious deductions.37 This corresponds to an earlier statement in this book that all non-Christians are intellectually defective. Their thinking is controlled by biases and fallacies so that they consistently form conclusions that are hostile to God. Recall that it is the rational mind of man that reflects his likeness to God; therefore, that evil has affected the intellect of man means that it has penetrated the core of his being. The above shows that although man still retains his likeness to God in that he still possesses a rational mind, this rationality has been so damaged that man is now born with a disposition toward evil. The destructive consequences of sin on the mind is called the NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN. To understand the redemptive plan of God, we need to grasp the extent to which man has fallen. The effect of sin on the spiritual aspect of man is more than that of a crippling blow, but a fatal one. The unregenerate are not only spiritually sick and blind (Luke 5:31; Matthew 15:14), but they are spiritually dead. And since they are spiritually dead, they are completely helpless when it comes to spiritual operations. Ecclesiastes 9:3 says, "Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives" (NASB), and the prophet Jeremiah observes, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Man in his unregenerate condition is here described as evil, insane, and incurable. Just as a dead person cannot request or respond to any assistance, a sinner cannot attain to or prepare for salvation by his own will or effort, and in himself he cannot even decide to repent or accept mercy from God. The biblical verses indicating that the unbeliever is spiritually dead include the following: But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:22)

"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate...."But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:24; Luke 15:32) For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (John 5:21) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1; Ephesians 2:4-5)

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 John 3:14)

Thus the Bible teaches what is called the TOTAL DEPRAVITY of man; however, the term may be misleading. It does not intend to say that every human being is as evil as he can be, but it means that the damage that sin has effected in man is comprehensive and pervasive, so that every part of the human person has been affected by evil. This damage is of such an extent that man is spiritually dead, and thus he is helpless to even cooperate with God when it comes to salvation. This means that unless the unbelievers experience regeneration, or spiritual resurrection, they will never recognize the truth of the gospel message, and they will never accept Christ. However, since they cannot effect or facilitate their own spiritual regeneration, the new birth occurs only by

the sovereign grace of God.

Endnotes:

1. For example, to understand the Hebrew word translated "day" in Genesis 1:1-31 as indicating a twenty-four hour period would rule out the theory of evolution, which claims that human life took many years to come about.

2. The deity of Christ is just an example. The point is that one who rejects any biblical proposition, even a seemingly insignificant one, cannot at the same time agree with another biblical proposition by recognizing its divine authority. Since he judges one to be false by a non-biblical standard, he must judge another to be correct also by a non-biblical standard.

3. See the previous chapter of this book, and Vincent Cheung, Ultimate Questions and The Light of Our Minds.

4. Michael Denton, Evolution: A Theory in Crisis; Adler & Adler Publishers, 1997; Duane T. Gish, Evolution: The Fossils Still Say No!; Institute for Creation Research, 1985. Also see Michael J. Behe, Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution; Touchstone Books, 1998; William Dembski, No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot be Purchased Without Intelligence; Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

5. This is not because the scientific case against evolution is weak, but because science itself is unable to discover any truth.

6. Having established the Christian worldview as true, similarities between the human body and that of the animals imply common design, not common descent.

7. Humans and animals do not have intrinsic rights; only God has intrinsic rights. Humans and animals have "rights" only in the sense that Scripture commands that they should be treated in the manner it prescribes. Such rights only exist in relation to other creatures, since God is free to treat his creatures in whatever way he desires. See my writings on human rights, animal rights, and vegetarianism.

8. Robert Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, p. 421-422.

9. "Attitudes" are just as mental or intellectual as "thoughts." Thus the symmetry of the verse extends to this latter part, so that if Q represents the intellect, the verse would read, "...dividing X and X, Z and Z; it judges the Q and Q of the heart." X and Q, then, would be referring to the same part of man.

10. Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981; p. 250.

11. Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 (Original: 1965); p. 612.

12. Ibid., p. 611.

13. Gordon H. Clark, The Biblical Doctrine of Man; Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1984; p. 82.

14. Ibid., p. 87-88.

15. The Works of Jonathan Edwards; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000 (Original: 1834); p. 237.

16. Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002 (original: 1896); p. 325-326.

17. Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife; Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984; p. 65.

18. George W. Knight III, The Role Relationships of Men and Women; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985. We will focus on the authority structure within the marriage relationship in the following paragraphs.

19. "While the male and female are equal in terms of their being or nature...the Scriptures also teach that they are not equal in terms of function or office. Man's headship did not arise because of the fall or as a result of Hebrew culture. Man was the head of the woman at creation as a direct institution of God Himself..."; Robert Morey, Introduction to Defending the Faith; Nevada: Christian Scholars Press, 2002; p. 34.

20. "Since marriage and the family belong to God, we must follow the structure of marriage which God instituted in the Garden. Adam was the head of the family and Eve was submissive to his headship. This structure is what 'ought' to be in every marriage. Thus the Women's Liberation Movement is in open violation of God's creation ordinance of marriage when it denies the man's headship over the woman"; Ibid.

21. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001; p. 64.

22. The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1995; Notes on Ephesians 5:22.

23. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: "to arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection; to subject oneself, to obey; to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice"; p. 645.

24. That is, submission as defined by Liefeld as something less than obedience.

25. Submission and obedience are interchangeable in this verse: "They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham..."

26. Richard W. Hove, Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute; Crossway Books, 1999.

27. Elizabeth Rice Handford, Me? Obey Him?; Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1994; p. 31.

28. To be more precise, he represented only every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, which is every member of the human race except Christ. Christ was Adam's descendant in the sense that he took on human attributes at his incarnation,

but he was sinless, born without imputed guilt or inherited corruption. This confirms that the effects of Adam's sin are sovereignly imputed to his descendants, and not passed on by his physical relation to them. Christ himself was the federal head of the elect, and the Scripture calls him another "Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45).

29. Some people may object that it was unfair for God to have chosen Adam as our federal head without our assent. Once again, the answer is that since God is the sole moral authority, everything that he does is just by definition.

30. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 494-495.

31. This verse does not teach universal salvation or universal atonement. In fact, given that Scripture elsewhere denies universal salvation, the verse by necessity teaches particular atonement with Christ as the federal head of the elect. Adam represented every member in his group, and all of humanity died under him. Christ also represented every member in his group, and every member in this group were made alive. However, not every member of the human race would be saved; therefore, Christ did not represent every member of the human race, but only the elect.

32. Grudem, p. 496.

33. Of course, these are not genuine Christians.

34. To kill a human being with biblical justification is not murder, such as the execution of a violent criminal.

35. This is the alternate rendering from the NIV footnotes.

36. An alternate translation is "the wickedness of stupidity." Either translation relates the evil in man to his diminished or inconsistent rationality.

37. This means that the unbeliever can never discover truth by himself, and even if given the truth, he will fail to grasp it or acknowledge its implications. Thus Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3), and such a new birth must be initiated and completed by God without any cooperation from man.

03.05. CHRIST

Systematic Theology

5. CHRIST THE PERSON OF CHRIST THE LIFE OF CHRIST THE WORK OF CHRIST THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Although God alone determines human destiny by choosing to save some and condemn all others, he saves his elect by means of producing within them faith in Christ. This means that one's destiny is revealed by what he thinks about Christ. Depending on the degree and manner of deviation from biblical revelation, holding to a false view of Christ may result in eternal damnation. Therefore, we must study the biblical doctrine of Christ with care and reverence, rejecting any position that compromises or distorts what the Scripture teaches about him. In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion on the person of Christ with an emphasis on his dual nature. We will then consider several significant points about his life and work, especially pertaining to his work of atonement. The chapter concludes with some comments on the supremacy of Christ and its implications for Christian living and world religions. THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Biblical Christianity holds that Christ possesses two natures, that he is both divine and human. He exists along with God the Father in eternity as the second person of the Trinity, but took upon himself a human nature in the INCARNATION. The result compromised or confused neither the divine nor the human nature, so that Christ was fully God and fully man, and he will remain in this condition forever. The two natures of Christ subsisting in one person is called the HYPOSTATIC UNION.

Some people allege that this doctrine generates a contradiction; therefore, before providing the biblical data for this doctrine, we will first defend its logical consistency.

Recall our earlier discussion on the Trinity. The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says, "God is one in essence and three in person." This proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." To affirm that God is one and three (not one) at the same time and in the same sense is self-contradictory. However, our formulation of the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense: "God is one in essence and three in person." Moreover, although each of the three persons fully participates in the one Godhead, the doctrine does not turn into tritheism since there is still only one God and not three. The "essence" in the above formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God, so that all three persons of the Godhead completely fulfill the definition of deity. But this does not imply tritheism because the very definition of deity includes the ontological attribute of the Trinity, so that each member is not an independent God. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three centers of consciousness within the Godhead. Therefore, although all three fully participate in the divine essence so as to make them one God, these three centers of consciousness render them three persons within this

one Godhead. In a similar way, the doctrinal formulation for the personhood and incarnation of Christ states that he is one in one sense, and two in a different sense. That is, he is one in person, but two in natures. To clarify this doctrinal formulation, we need to define the terms and relate them to the doctrinal formulation of the Trinity. The way "nature" is used in the doctrinal formulation of the incarnation is similar to the way "essence" is used in the doctrinal formulation of the Trinity. They refer to the definition of something, and the definition of something in turn refers to the attributes or properties something. Personhood is again defined by the consciousness or intellect. Now, the definition of God includes the ontological attribute of the Trinity, and therefore there is only one God although there are three divine persons who share fully and equally in the same set of attributes that define deity. In the incarnation, God the Son took upon himself the nature of man; that is, he added to his person the set of attributes that define man. He did so without mingling the two natures, so that both sets of attributes remained independent. Thus, his divine nature was not diminished by his human nature, and his human nature was not deified by his divine nature. This formulation also protects the immutability of God the Son, since the human nature did not modify his divine nature at all. The objection that divine and human attributes necessarily contradict one another when possessed by the same person fails to take into account that the two sets of attributes are independent from each other in God the Son. For example, Christ was not omniscient according to his human attributes, but he was omniscient according to his divine attributes, and this remains true even to this day. His divine attributes has not deified his human attributes. This doctrinal formulation of the incarnation is immune to the charge of contradiction, since we do not claim that Christ is one and two at the same time and in the same sense. What we assert is that Christ is one person with two sets of attributes. Since this formulation does not generate a logical contradiction, it is established as true if we can show that Christ is both God and man through biblical exegesis.

We will first consider a number of passages indicating the DEITY of Christ. At the beginning of his Gospel, the apostle John refers to Jesus Christ as the logos, or the Word: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

John 1:1 begins by asserting the preexistence of Christ, saying that he had existed before the creation event. Christ himself confessed his preexistence in John 8:1-59, saying, "I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). The word God (Greek: theos) in this verse refers to the Father, and "the Word was with God" indicates that Christ is not identical to the Father in terms of his personhood. Nevertheless, he is not less than God in terms of his attributes, since the verse continues to say, "the Word was God." This is an explicit statement attributing deity to Jesus Christ. The words, "He was with God in the beginning" in John 1:2 again assert his preexistence and the fact that he is distinguishable from the Father.

John 1:3 credits Christ as the agent of creation, saying, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." This agrees with the christology of Paul, who writes in Colossians 1:16, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Christ not only created the universe, but he is now sustaining its very existence. Paul says that "in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). It is through Christ that God

"made the universe," and it is also Christ who is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:2-3).

Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Titus 2:13 says, "We wait for the blessed hope the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." In Hebrews 1:3, we read, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Hebrews 1:8 makes a messianic application of Psalms 45:6-7, so that God says to Christ, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." Thus God the Father himself declares that Jesus is God, and says that his rule will "last for ever and ever." Finally, Paul writes in Php 2:6 that Christ, "being in very nature God," took on human attributes.

Now we will turn to some passages that indicate the HUMANITY of Christ. After strongly asserting the deity of Christ, the apostle John writes in his Gospel, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death..." Paul is very explicit about Christ's humanity when he writes in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Various passages in the Bible indicate that in his human nature, Jesus had genuine limitations. For example, he was "tired...from the journey" in John 4:6, hungry in Matthew 21:18, and thirsty in John 19:28. Most significantly, "he suffered death" (Hebrews 2:9) to purchase salvation for his elect.

Some passages in the Bible affirm or imply both the deity and humanity of Christ. For example, John 5:18 says that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." They saw him as a man, but they realized that he was claiming to be God. John 8:56-59 describes another such conflict:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. The people recognized that in his human life, Jesus was not yet fifty years old, but he claimed that he personally knew Abraham. Those who heard him did not dispute his humanity, but they also realized that his words amounted to a claim to deity.

Matthew 22:41-45 also affirms that Jesus was both God and man:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" The Pharisees acknowledged that the Christ would be the son of David, and if the son of David, Christ would be human. However, while he was "speaking by the Spirit," so that he could not have erred, David called Christ "Lord" as a designation of deity. Therefore, the Christ would be both the human descendent and the divine Lord of David Christ would be both God and man.
THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived in the virgin Mary. As Matthew 1:18 explains, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Matthew 1:20 emphasizes that she was not impregnated by a man, but that the child was "from the Holy Spirit." Christ was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), but rather than being conceived by the union of a man and a woman, he was conceived by "the power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35). Thus, the person born was both divine and human.

Unlike all other human beings after Adam, Jesus had no imputed guilt or inherited corruption. Now, the Bible does not say that imputed guilt and inherited corruption come from only the father, and we also know that Mary was sinful like the rest of humanity. Although the virgin conception testifies that he was no ordinary human being, by itself it was insufficient to protect the child from all contamination. Therefore, the sinlessness of Christ cannot be due to the virgin conception alone, but it was by God’s sovereign decree that no guilt was imputed on Christ and that no corruption was inherited by him. The "power of the Most High" did not only cause Christ’s conception without a human father, but also kept the child from both the legal guilt of Adam and the corrupt nature resulting from his sin. This is so that the child may be rightly called, "the holy one" (Luke 1:35).

Some people argue that Christ must have been subject to both error and sin simply by being a human person; complete immunity to sin would mean that he was not genuinely human. The tendencies to make mistakes and commit sins seem to be intrinsic to what it means to be human. Therefore, to say that Christ was human means that he was also prone to error and sin. If Christ was not subject to these shortcomings, he must not have been human. After all, these people claim, "To err is human."

However, this view forgets the fact that the entire human race exists in a depraved state that is different from the original condition of man. Adam and Eve were not created sinful, and yet they were fully human. This means that sinfulness is not an essential human attribute. That our sinful state is a universal factor of human life prevents some from seeing that it is in fact abnormal. In other words, it is possible to be a human being without imputed guilt and inherited corruption; however, only Adam, Eve, and Jesus were born without sin. This relates to what Paul says about Christ as the "last Adam" or the "second man" (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Corinthians 15:47). The "first man" Adam as a federal head represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the human race. The "second man" Jesus was also a federal head, and represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the elect. As for the ministry of Jesus, it was characterized by preaching, teaching, and healing:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35) But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:43) His preaching and miracles had drawn increasing hostility from his enemies. After several years of ministry, he was betrayed by his disciple Judas into the hands of those who wished to kill him. After a time of severe and unjust treatment by the Jewish officials and Romans

soldiers, he was sentenced to death through crucifixion by Pilate. Jesus died on the cross, and even his death testified to who he was: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Jesus had a real human body, and his death was literal and physical. The Gospels make it clear that he had in fact died: The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The Roman soldiers were well-trained, and doubtless had performed numerous crucifixions before this one; they could have easily determined whether their victims were dead or alive. When they found that Jesus "was already dead" (John 19:33), they saw no need to break his legs to quicken his death. But just to be certain, one of the soldiers ran a spear into his side, which brought a "sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34), proving his death from a medical standpoint.

Just as the death of Christ was literal and physical, so was his resurrection. The Bible records that Christ rose from the dead on the third day of his death. He was raised with the same body that he had before, but it was changed and enhanced. Paul writes that Christians will also receive such a body when Jesus returns and raises the dead: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:42). In any case, the resurrected or "glorified" body could still manifest and function in the physical realm, so that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he said to them, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples numerous times over a period of forty days, showing them "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3, KJV) that he was alive. Then, the Bible records that he was taken up into heaven and was given a position of authority by the Father: "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9); "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). THE WORK OF CHRIST The work of Jesus Christ is usually characterized by the ATONEMENT that he had obtained for the elect. The nature of the atonement is one of penal substitutionary death. Paul writes, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), but instead of requiring our own death, God sent Jesus Christ to pay for our sins by bearing our guilt and dying on the cross in our stead.

One question regarding the atonement is whether the substitutionary death of Christ was necessary to redeem sinners. Two significant answers to this question are the HYPOTHETICAL NECESSITY and the CONSEQUENT ABSOLUTE NECESSITY views of the atonement. John Murray explains these two views as follows: The view known as that of hypothetical necessity maintains that God could have forgiven sin and saved his elect without atonement or satisfaction - other means were open to God to whom all things are possible. But the way of the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God was the way which God in his grace and sovereign wisdom chose because this is the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and the way in which grace is more marvellously exhibited.... The other view we call consequent absolute necessity. The word "consequent" in this designation points to the fact that God's will or decree to save any is of free and sovereign grace. To save lost men was not of absolute necessity but of the sovereign

good pleasure of God. The terms "absolute necessity," however, indicate that God, having elected some to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure, was under the necessity of accomplishing this purpose through the sacrifice of his own Son, a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature.1

If only these two options are available, consequent absolute necessity would be the preferable one. The atonement was not necessary in the sense that God did not have to save anyone at all. Peter writes, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell" (2 Peter 2:4). Just as it was not necessary for a loving God to save the angels from sin, neither was he required by his own nature or anything external to himself to save man. Nevertheless, because of his love for the elect, God sent Jesus Christ to save sinners even though he was not required to do so.

Although it was not necessary for God to save sinners, once the decision was made, the death of Jesus Christ became necessary to pay the price of man's sins. In reference to his death, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He asked that if it is somehow possible, to let the effects intended by the atonement be accomplished another way, while insisting that whatever was God's will to be done. After praying this way, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). The Father's will was for Jesus to go through with the work of atonement, thus implying that the death of Christ was inevitable in order to achieve the intended results. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26, NASB), implying that it was indeed the only way.

We may press further to inquire as to why the death of Christ was the only way. If there were no atonement, everyone would have to die for his own sins (John 8:24), and the Bible indicates that the punishment would be torturous and endless. One can be free from receiving just punishment only if another were to die in his place. But one sinful human being cannot die to redeem another, since any sinner who suffers the wrath of God would only be doing so because of his own sins. Thus atonement requires a perfect and innocent offering. Although God had instituted the practice of animal sacrifice under the Old Covenant, it was only to anticipate the atoning death of Christ, seeing that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, Christ was the only acceptable and sufficient sacrifice.

Consequent absolute necessity is the "classic Protestant position,"2 but there is a better answer to the question of the necessity of the atonement. From the perspective of supralapsarianism,3 the decree to redeem the elect is logically prior to the decree of the fall of man:

1. The election of some sinners to salvation in Christ; the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind.

2. The application of the redemptive work of Christ to the elect sinners.

3. The redemption of the elect sinners by the work of Christ.

4. The fall of man.

5. The creation of the world and man. The redemptive work of Christ was not a reaction to the sin of man; rather, God decreed the fall of man so that the atonement could occur.

Christ was "chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20) to be the lamb of God. Paul writes that "eternal life" was "promised before the beginning of time" to "God's elect" (Titus 1:1-2), and that God chose those whom he would redeem "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). God determined the identity of the elect, chose to redeem them, and selected Christ as the redeemer before the creation of the world.

Since God is eternal or timeless, it means that the possibility never existed that God would not redeem his elect through the substitutionary death of Christ. In fact, the plan of redemption was logically a certainty even before God decreed the fall of man. Therefore, given the supralapsarian order of the eternal decrees, the substitutionary atonement of Christ was an ABSOLUTE NECESSITY.

Although many people tend to associate the redemptive work of Christ only with his death and resurrection, it is impossible to ignore the other events of his life when discussing redemption. The actions that Christ performed to save his elect from sin were not limited to the events after his arrest, but include those what were before it. We should consider his entire life as one whose purpose was to redeem those whom God had given to him. For example, even his very act of taking on human attributes to become like us and identified with us is part of his redemptive work.

Therefore, some theologians distinguish between the ACTIVE OBEDIENCE and the PASSIVE OBEDIENCE of Christ on our behalf. Both of these terms suggest that he came to succeed at the point where Adam had failed, namely, to live in perfect obedience toward God. Paul writes, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" (Php 2:8). These two terms designate the two aspects of obedience through which Christ paid for the sins of the elect and achieved for them perfect righteousness.

Christ's active obedience refers to his perfect adherence to the laws of God on our behalf. He completely satisfied the moral demands of God, who in turn credits such righteousness to those who would believe in Christ. Romans 5:19 says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Many people tend to neglect this aspect of Christ's redemptive work, but it is a necessary part of what he has done for the elect. To hold that Christ only needed to die for the sins of the elect to redeem them fails to explain why he did so many other things, such as obeying the laws of God, enduring severe temptations, performing numerous good works and acts of mercy, and living a uniquely righteous life. The truth is that besides saving us from sin, Christ also merited a positive righteousness on our behalf. This helps explain why only a short period of time in the life of Jesus consists of active public ministry, while before that he lived in relative obscurity. Before his public ministry, he was not only preparing for his preaching work and waiting for the right timing. The redemption of the elect depends not only on his final years or days, but also on the obedience and righteousness that he demonstrated throughout his life as the federal head of the elect. Through what he had done before his ministry, during his ministry, and in his death and resurrection, Jesus secured a perfect righteousness to be credited to those who would believe on him.

Christ's passive obedience refers to his suffering the penalty of the sins of the elect. Sin demands punishment, and the just penalty of defiance against God is endless torment in hell. Since the punishment is endless, there is no escape or restoration for those who would come under the

wrath of God. Someone else would have to die in place of the sinner for the sinner to go free and for God’s justice to be satisfied at the same time. However, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and so no human being qualifies to die for the sins of another, since each one is himself guilty of sin, and would be receiving just punishment only for his own sins if he were to suffer under the wrath of God. The only solution is for a sinless human being to die for another, and so to truly suffer the penalty of sin that he does not himself deserve. This is what Jesus has done for the elect: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Although Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), he suffered as a sinner as God sovereignly imputed the guilt of the elect upon him. Thus those whom he acted as a federal head namely, the elect would receive his perfect righteousness also by imputation.

Jesus suffered many things during his earthly life. These include the intense temptations that he experienced from Satan (Luke 4:1-14), the opposition against him from religious leaders (Hebrews 12:3), and the very fact that he had to endure numerous human limitations and problems such as hunger and weariness, things to which he was impervious in his divine nature. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering," and the writer of Hebrews states the following: In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering....Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 5:8) His sufferings intensified from the time of his arrest to his death on the cross. This is the portion of time most have in mind when they refer to the suffering of Christ:

Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:27-31)

Although what Jesus had to suffer here was painful and humiliating, and vastly different from the treatment appropriate to God the Son, he nevertheless endured all of it for his elect. But it was not over, for after all this, "they led him away to crucify him" (Matthew 27:31). Crucifixion was a way of inflicting death that produced extreme suffering for the victim.

Even more terrible than the physical pain was the spiritual or psychological suffering of bearing the guilt of the elect. Jesus was perfectly holy and without sin; he had never felt the effects of sin upon one’s consciousness. But it was at that time that God imputed upon him the entire weight of the guilt of the elect:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all....Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:6; Isaiah 53:12)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

Some people may wonder why one person's death is sufficient to pay for the sins of many. The answer is found in Romans 5:15; Romans 5:18-19: But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Just as Adam represented the entire human race when he sinned, so Jesus represented the elect in his perfect righteousness and atoning work. As for why such a short time of punishment was sufficient to take away the sins of so many individuals, and was accepted as a sufficient substitute for the endless punishment of sinners, we only need to consider the value of the sacrifice and the intensity of the suffering. The perfection of Christ was such that God accepted his once for all sacrifice and his suffering on behalf of the elect as sufficient to have obtained "eternal redemption" for them: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12); "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). In any case, it was God's sovereign acceptance of the atonement that determined and proved its sufficiency. Just as Adam was an appropriate and legitimate federal head and representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the human race), so Jesus was an appropriate and legitimate federal head and representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the elect). Ultimately, the atonement was sufficient and efficacious because it satisfied God's own standard of justice. As for the extent or scope of the atonement, many people assume that Jesus died for every human being; however, the Bible teaches that he only died for those whom God had chosen for salvation, that is, the elect. This doctrine is often called LIMITED ATONEMENT, but the term is misleading, since although only specific individuals have been chosen for salvation, Christ indeed saves them to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, many advocates of this biblical doctrine maintain that it is more properly called PARTICULAR ATONEMENT or DEFINITE ATONEMENT. I consider the term EFFECTIVE SPECIFIC ATONEMENT to be even more descriptive, as the following exposition of the doctrine will show. The popular challenge to the biblical teaching of definite atonement is the view saying that the work of Christ has made salvation merely possible for everyone, but actual for no one. Salvation is applied to a person when he chooses to appropriate for himself the benefits of the redemptive work of Christ. However, Scripture teaches that Christ has successfully achieved actual salvation from sin for everyone for whom his redemptive work was intended, and that he only intended to secure salvation for the elect. The doctrine of definite atonement is closely connected to God's election of individuals for salvation. While I will deal with the doctrine of election in more detail in the next chapter, it has already been sufficiently established in previous chapters of this book so that we may proceed with the assumption that it is indeed what the Bible teaches. That is, God in eternity has chosen a number of individuals to be saved, while the rest were rejected. Definite atonement teaches that Christ

came to die for only the elect, that is, these whom God has chosen for salvation.

If Christ had paid the price for all the sins of every human being, then why would anyone be condemned? Indeed, there are those who teach that in his work of atonement, Christ had completely paid the price for the sins of every human being, and therefore no one will suffer damnation. This position of UNIVERSALISM is blatantly false, since Scripture teaches that many will be sent to hell for their sins on the day of judgment. The Scripture teaches that there is an eternal hell and that many people will in fact be sent there. Below are only several examples:

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. (Matthew 18:8-9) You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matthew 23:33)

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels....Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:41; Matthew 25:46) In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire....Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." (Luke 16:23-24, Luke 16:27-28) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (Revelation 21:8) But most of the people who oppose the biblical doctrine of definite atonement do not affirm actual universalism; rather, they assert a position that may be called HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM. They maintain that Christ has made salvation possible for all human beings, and all of them could be saved if they would only believe in the gospel. However, if Christ had indeed paid the price of sin for everyone, then why would anyone go to hell at all? The usual answer is that one must accept by faith what Christ has done, else although the price of sin for the person has been fully paid, God would still condemn him. But this means that God would punish the same sins twice, once on the cross on Christ, and the second time on the person who had committed those sins.

One preacher tried to escape this problem by saying that the only sin for which God will send people to hell is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. But this position contradicts biblical passages saying that God will in fact take account of the personal sins of the reprobates: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (Romans 1:18-19) For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person such a man is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 5:5-6)

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

Also, this view saying that God will only condemn people for their rejection of Christ and not for their personal sins implies that the fundamental and most common sin of unbelief is one that Christ failed to pay for, thus rendering his atoning work desperately incomplete. Another problem is that since the imputed guilt of Adam is by itself sufficient to condemn, this preacher's position implies, perhaps unintentionally, that no one is born with imputed guilt anymore after the completion of Christ's atoning work. This is an implication that even this preacher may not accept. Nevertheless, at least he realized that the atonement of Christ made a real and full payment for sins, and not merely a potential payment; however, once he insisted on affirming universal atonement, his position became inconsistent and unbiblical.

Actual universalism is clearly false and heretical, but hypothetical universalism appears to many people as the position that best accords with justice, since everybody gets a chance to be saved. But as we have established earlier when discussing man's total depravity (Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:23), man is in a state of spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1). If so, there is no possibility that one will have positive faith in Christ if left by himself. This means that unless God chooses who would receive salvation through sovereign election, and redeems them through definite atonement, no one would be saved, since none would accept Christ.

Opponents of definite atonement may claim that although all are spiritually dead in sin, some in fact do respond in faith to Christ, not because they were chosen for salvation, but because they decide to be saved by their own wills. However, the very meaning of spiritual death makes this impossible, since a dead man cannot respond to or cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. Accordingly, the Bible says that faith and repentance are things that God grants as gifts to his elect (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:25-26), but he does not grant them to everyone, and so "not everyone has faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, and it is God who chooses to whom he grants faith and repentance, it follows that it is God who chooses the ones who receive salvation, and not the individuals themselves. For the sake of argument, let us assume for the moment that although all are spiritually dead, some would in fact respond to the gospel in faith by themselves. But this would mean that spiritually dead people require no special grace from God to make the most important spiritual decision in their lives. How then do we explain why one spiritually dead person would accept Christ, while another spiritually dead person fails to do the same? Does it not follow that those who are able to make the positive spiritual decision is more righteous than those who do not? If so, then we will have to say that Christ came to save only the relatively righteous individuals, and not the relatively sinful ones. But this contradicts the premise of the whole gospel. To say that God exerts an amount of influence on individuals to cause them to believe only delays the problem. Some people appear to require stronger influence from God than others. But if God exerts stronger influence on some people than he does on others, then he is in fact choosing who would be saved, especially if the amount of influence exerted does not exactly correspond to the degree of wickedness in the individuals. On the other hand, if God exerts approximately the same amount of influence on individuals, then once again only the relatively righteous will respond, which again means that Christ came only to save the relatively righteous, a notion that contradicts the teaching of Scripture. The necessary conclusion is as follows. Given other aspects of scriptural teaching, UNLIMITED ATONEMENT or UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT is impossible. Since the nature of the atonement involves actual and full payment for sin, universal atonement would necessarily entail universal salvation; however,

Scripture teaches that not everyone is saved, but that many people will be lost and suffer endless torment in hell. Therefore, the only scriptural possibility is that in eternity God had selected a definite group of individuals to be saved. Then, in his work of atonement, Christ died for only these individuals, and thus securing actual salvation for every one of them, not making it merely possible. This is why the redemptive work of Christ is an effective and specific atonement. The above shows that definite atonement is a necessary implication of biblical doctrines that are known to be true. Specifically, the doctrine of election, the atonement as a full payment for sin, and the denial of actual universalism converge to render definite atonement a logical necessity. Therefore, that the atonement is specific and effective appears to be true even without direct scriptural evidence; nevertheless, there are many biblical passages that affirm or imply this doctrine, and we will now turn to some of them. We will also discuss the claim that some biblical passages appear to teach universal atonement.

We begin by repeating from Scripture that the nature of the atonement is one of penal substitution, so that the death of Christ made a real and full payment for the sins of those whom he represented:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (Acts 20:28) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Christ made a full payment to purchase those for whom he died; therefore, the language of these and other passages like them (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-19) excludes the conclusion that he made salvation merely possible for those for whom he died, but that he has made salvation actual for them.

Since Christ was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) in the mind of God, and his death gave him actual legal ownership of all those for whom he died, the identities of all those who would be saved had been unchangeably determined from eternity. Christ then came in historical time to die for only those individuals.

Another clear indication of definite atonement comes from John 10:14-15; John 10:25-29, where Jesus says the following:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep....

I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and he says to some, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." He came to die for the sheep, but some people are not his sheep; therefore, he did not die for every human being. Those who are Christ's sheep belong to him since the Father "has given them to [him]," and all of them will believe the gospel, since he says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." On the other hand, just as the identities of the sheep have already been determined in eternity, there is no possibility that those who are not his sheep would believe, and thus he says, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." All those whom God has chosen will be saved, and once saved they will never lose their salvation, since Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Thus within several verses, Christ not only teaches the doctrine of definite atonement, but also the doctrines of election, reprobation, and preservation, which we will further discuss in the next chapter.

Opponents of definite atonement claim that some biblical passages appear to teach that the redemptive work of Christ was universal rather than specific. Here I will respond to two such passages: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

Only the most untrained and naïve exegete would assume without argument that the words "all" and "everyone" in the Bible must always refer to all human beings. We can find endless examples in our daily speech in which the scope of these seemingly universal terms are limited by the context. Nevertheless, for our case to be complete, we will first demonstrate this using biblical examples before examining the above two passages.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:22, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." But the statement does not intend to say that all human beings without exception would hate the disciples of Christ, since at least Christians themselves would love one another. Also, we may assume that those who do not know about Christians cannot hate them. It may be true that the beliefs and practices of even those unbelievers who know nothing about Christians amount to hatred against God and Christians, but this does not seem to be the intent of this verse. The meaning of the verse becomes clearer when we read the verses that come before and after it to obtain its context:

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10:21-23)

Matthew 10:21 and Matthew 10:23 contain information that restricts the scope of Matthew 10:22. It appears that the words "all men" in Matthew 10:22 primarily refer to those mentioned in Matthew 10:21 and Matthew 10:23. That is, "all men" means all kinds of people, such as the unbelieving members of one's family and those who reject the gospel message upon hearing it.4 In Acts 26:4, Paul says, "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of

my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem." Does he mean that every Jewish person without exception knew him? The next verse says, "They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee" (Matthew 26:5). It appears that the "all" in verse 4 is not intended to designate every Jewish person without exception, but all the Jews who are relevant to the situation at hand.

Psalms 8:6 says, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." Paul applies this verse to Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:27, but he explicitly restricts the meaning of "everything": "For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ."

Romans 8:32 is especially relevant to the atonement, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Opponents of definite atonement may be tempted to understand "us all" as referring to all human beings without exception, but the above examples have shown that we must not assume this without adequate reason. We must allow the context of the verse to dictate the scope of the words "us all."

Paul indicates in Romans 1:7 that this letter is addressed to the Christians in Rome: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Unless its immediate context widens the scope to include all human beings without exception, the meaning of "us all" in Romans 8:32 must be restricted by Romans 1:7. But the verses that surround Romans 8:32 themselves restrict the meaning of "us all" in explicit terms: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose....He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:28; Romans 8:32-33)

It is clear that the words "us all" refer only to "those whom God has chosen," or "God's elect" (NASB). Therefore, Romans 8:32 gives no support to universal atonement; rather, it favors definite atonement.

Another example comes from Acts 2:1-47, which begins with a description of what happened on the day of Pentecost: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

Peter then rose up to preach, quoting the prophecy of Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17). We have already established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, but we must allow the context of the relevant verses to restrict the meaning of these words. This simple principle holds whether in biblical hermeneutics or ordinary conversations; it is most foolish and unreasonable to ignore it.

Peter is here speaking within the context of the Spirit’s mighty manifestation on the day of Pentecost, saying that God will pour out his Spirit upon "all people." However, the scope of the verse is restricted by the surrounding verses listed below:

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. (Acts 2:5)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39) The words "all people" are spoken in the context of addressing people "from every nation under heaven," and thus the universality intended here is one of ethnic universality, not an absolute universality. That is, God would pour out his Spirit upon people from all ethnic backgrounds, and not just the Jews. Acts 2:38-39 say that the promise of the Spirit is indeed "for all"; however, these words do not signal an absolute universality, but they only apply to "all whom the Lord our God will call," thus restricting the promise of the gospel itself to a select group chosen by the sovereign will of God.

We will now return to 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:3-6, which are two of the favorite passages cited by opponents of definite atonement: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

2 Peter 1:1 indicates that Peter is addressing "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours," and 2 Peter 3:8 refers to the "beloved," which is a term designating Christians. Then, 2 Peter 3:9 says, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The word "you" here obviously refers to the group to which believers belong, and not the unbelievers. Therefore, the verse is saying that the Lord tarries so that the elect will have time to become Christians.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 says that God "wants all men to be saved," and that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all men." Now, we have already established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, and we have also established the doctrine of definite atonement by appealing to other biblical passages; therefore, we must not assume that this passage teaches universal atonement. In fact, since other passages have already made universal atonement impossible, we may assume that this passage does not teach it.

Nevertheless, as with the other passages, there is direct evidence from the context of the passage indicating that Paul does not mean all human beings when he writes "all men." 1 Timothy 2:1-2 say, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Paul says that believers should pray "for everyone," and proceeds to explain that by "everyone," he means even "kings and all those in authority." Therefore, by "everyone," Paul intends to designate kinds or groups of people Christians are to pray for all sorts

of people.

Revelation 5:9-10 was earlier quoted to show that the nature of the atonement involves a real and full purchase by Christ of those for whom he died, but the same verses also suggest that the universality of the atonement is not an absolute universality, but only an ethnic universality: And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." The Bible consistently teaches that the atonement is universal only in the sense that Christ died for people from every ethnic and social background; none teaches that he died for all human beings. Since this atonement is not merely a potential payment for sins, but an actual payment for sins, those for whom he died will surely be saved. Thus the good news is that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11), and not just to the Jews. The "good news" of Christianity has never been that Christ died to save every human being, but that he died to save people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." The greatness of Christ's atonement is that its effects are unlimited by ethnic and social borders: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This is the good news, and this is how we should understand the biblical passages saying that Christ died for all. An angel says to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." The doctrine of definite atonement takes seriously this verse and many others like it, affirming that Jesus came to actually save and not to make salvation merely possible, and that he came to save his people and not those whom God had not chosen. Thus the redemptive work of Christ consists of an effective and specific atonement. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST Paul writes that after Christ suffered a time of great humiliation, God exalted him to the highest place: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:5-11)

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:18-23) Thus the Bible teaches that Christ is in a state of exaltation under the Father unequaled by anyone else: For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1

Corinthians 15:27-28)

Romans 14:9 says, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." An early Christian confession was, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3), and Jesus himself tells his disciples in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The supremacy of Christ illustrated by the above biblical passages implies the sufficiency of Christ. Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that in everything Christ has "the supremacy," after which he adds, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (Colossians 1:19). This "fullness" includes "every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3) and "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). There is no blemish or lack in him: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10). The sufficiency of Christ implies that through him we have "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), and there is no need to seek other sources of spiritual power and guidance. Indeed, there is no other true source of spiritual power and guidance besides what is available through Christ. Nevertheless, many professing Christians in our day are seeking help from illegitimate sources when the solutions for their problems are readily available through prayer in the name of Jesus and knowledge of the Scripture.

Many people who claim to be Christians nevertheless become involved with occult practices such as astrology, horoscopes, necromancy, and all varieties of divination. But these are forbidden by God: Do not practice divination or sorcery. (Leviticus 19:26) Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:31)

I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. (Leviticus 20:6) A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads. (Leviticus 20:27)

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14) On the day of judgment, no astrologer or medium can save his followers from hell, and of course he himself will be condemned:

Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there

is not one that can save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 21:8)

One who seeks spiritual assistance or counsel apart from those sources approved by Scripture becomes a spiritual prostitute, and commits adultery against God. The Bible reserves some of the strongest terms in condemnation against such people. Christians have no business getting involved with extra-biblical spiritual activities, and those who wallow in them make their profession of faith questionable.

Isaiah 8:19 says, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (NASB). Christians by definition have entrusted all of their lives to God, and therefore the purpose of obtaining guidance is to conform their lives to his will in the first place. Why then should they consult the representatives of Satan on how to order their lives in conformity to the will of God?

Christians must obtain guidance from only the sources approved by Scripture. Of course, one may seek counsel from knowledgeable church leaders, but even their authority and direction are legitimate only to the extent that they are derived from Scripture. Thus in this very real sense, the Scripture alone is sufficient.

People commit spiritual adultery not because they have examined the verbal revelation of God and found it inadequate; rather, they have never taken the effort to gain the wisdom of God on the matter at hand by studying the Scripture. Christ is undoubtedly sufficient for all of life, but the apostle Peter explains that it is by obtaining knowledge about the things of God that we may walk in the provisions that he has given us:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:2-3) This is why the study of theology is the most important human activity. However, because of their slothfulness and wickedness, many people prefer to spend time consulting sources that are forbidden by God. Involvement with occult practices is adequate reason for excommunication; negligence in church discipline only allows such abominations to foster and spread. The sufficiency of Christ in turn implies the exclusivity of Christ. This means that Christ is the only way to salvation, and that Christianity is the only true religion or worldview The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:9)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12) For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5) He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12)

All other spiritual leaders are unworthy of worship, and those who accept or demand worship are liars and frauds. All non-Christian religions and worldviews are false, including those that retain the name of Christianity without upholding biblical orthodoxy; all of them lead to eternal damnation and endless punishment in hell.

Jesus calls himself "the way" - there are not many ways to God. Jesus calls himself "the truth" truth is not relative or changing. There is only one eternal being who is truth, and the New Testament writers identify Christ as this logos, or the eternal unchanging principle of reason and order in the universe (John 1:1; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3; Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, Jesus calls himself "the life" - all other options lead to everlasting death and torment. No one can reject Jesus Christ who at the same time finds God and life; apart from him there is only despair, death, and damnation.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." Any religion or worldview that does not affirm total biblical orthodoxy is anti-Christian. Some religions claim to uplift Jesus Christ, but they admire him only as an example of morality or mystical enlightenment. However, the biblical faith demands the affirmation and worship of the complete and unadulterated Christ. This entails belief in his preexistence and deity, virgin birth, incarnation and humanity, earthly life and ministry, atonement through his substitutionary suffering and death, and his physical resurrection. The Christ of Scripture is God manifested in human flesh. He is fully God and fully man. The apostle John testifies, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He also gives us a warning in 1 John 4:2-3: This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. The true Christ is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Paul gives us a summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, placing great emphasis on the historical nature of Christ’s redemptive work:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Faith in the historical Jesus and his work of redemption is of "first importance" (1 Corinthians 15:3). The apostle states that it is "by this gospel you are saved," and that we are to "hold firmly" to it. The biblical Christ is not a mystical or ideological figure, but the second person of the Triune God

manifested in time and space. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension were historical events with spiritual significance, and not symbolic or mythological ones. Peter says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

There are a number of false religions in which Christ is presented as little more than an ideological symbol or moral example. At most he is recognized as a true prophet, but not as God the Son. But any religion that does not affirm the person and work of Christ in the biblical and historical sense is of the antichrist. A symbolic Christ who is nothing more than an idea and robbed of his redemptive work performed in history cannot save anyone. A Christ who is not fully God and fully man is not the biblical Christ at all.

True Christianity must uphold the supremacy and exclusivity of Christ. However, the founders of some non-Christian religions had declared themselves the latest prophets from God; they claimed that they superseded the authority of Christ and that they had the authority to add to the biblical revelation. Although some of these who came after Christ each claimed to be the final prophet, others arose and declared the previous ones to be obsolete, that they were now the authoritative voice of God to humanity, and that they were the truly enlightened ones. The student of apologetics or comparative religion should honor Christ by examining the errors and contradictions within these false systems of thought, and thoroughly annihilate their claims to truth. All false religions such as Islam, Mormonism, and Buddhism are easily demonstrated to be foolish and incoherent.

Now, Paul says the following: My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge....For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (Colossians 2:2-3; Colossians 1:19) In Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Of course, this has to be true if Jesus is the omniscient God. Christ possesses all wisdom and knowledge, and he "has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). No previous prophet could claim to have possessed "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" or to be the incarnation of God. As Hebrews 1:1-3 says: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

God spoke through the prophets in the past, but now he had spoken through his Son, in whom are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is also the one who has created and even now sustains the universe. Therefore, the biblical Christ has exhaustive knowledge of all things.

If all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, then unlike the prophets who went before him, he was the full and final revelation of God to mankind. Since he was the complete expression of God (Hebrews 1:3), there is nothing else that anyone after him may reveal that is not already in Christ. Both the prophets before Christ and the apostles after Christ only proclaimed him as the full revelation of God, and no biblical writer claimed to supersede him. Since Christ is the full expression or revelation of God, there is no one after him who can rightly claim to be his equal or

superior, nor may anyone offer "revelations" that contradict, update, or supersede the Christian revelation in Scripture.

It is strange that many of the prophets who claimed to supersede Christ would at the same time attempt to honor him as a true prophet of God. However, this person whom they acknowledge to be from God also said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus was the perfect and complete revelation of God because he was God himself. How then can there ever be a greater or more current and relevant messenger or revelation?

If one admits that Christianity is true, then he must also confess that all other religions and worldviews are false; otherwise, he would not be really admitting that Christianity is true, since exclusivity is integral to it. If he claims that Christianity is false, then he distances himself from the Christian worldview and assumes another one. This generates a collision of worldviews, giving the Christian an opportunity to totally annihilate the beliefs of his opponent in debate and to make him a public example.

One either believes that Christianity is true, or he believes that it is false. If he believes that Christianity is true, then all other religions and worldviews are false; if he believes that Christianity is false, then he must defeat it in the battlefield of rational argumentation. To claim that Christianity is only partially true or even mostly true is tantamount to saying that Christianity is false, since Christianity itself claims to be wholly true in every aspect and detail.

It is popular to say that there is some truth in every religion, that one should not affirm his own religion to the total exclusion of others, and that one should always respect another’s religion. But this is an act of cowardly compromise. That even some professing Christians consider this a legitimate option reflects their feeble or non-existent commitment to Christ, the lack of proper biblical teaching, and the lack of church discipline.

If a religious worldview is a revelation from God, then no aspect of the system may be false or irrelevant. God does not reveal falsehood, and if he does, it would be impossible for one to distinguish the true from the false. If a given worldview consists of both true and false propositions, one would not be able to distinguish the true from the false on the basis of that worldview itself.

If one distinguishes between the true from the false in a given worldview, it necessarily implies that he is presupposing another worldview as his standard of truth, which he knows or assumes to be wholly correct, by which he is now evaluating the worldview in question. He must assume his standard of truth as wholly correct, since otherwise he would not be able to evaluate whether different aspects of another worldview is true or false. This being the case, he would not be learning anything from the worldview that is under scrutiny, since he has already adopted one that he assumes to be entirely true. For example, one who tests a truth-claim with the "scientific method" presupposes a worldview in which such a method for testing truth-claims is assumed to be reliable. But if the worldview based on which he makes this assumption is not wholly true, then he cannot know whether the scientific method is reliable in the first place. Therefore, a worldview that is only partially true is also a worthless one; it logically collapses into complete epistemological skepticism so that no knowledge is possible at all. The Christian claim is that all of the Bible is true, and if all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, then anything that is true in other religions and worldviews have been stolen from Christianity. If the non-Christians then claim that such

information comes from their own worldview, they have become plagiarists and hypocrites even from a human perspective. But it is much more serious from God's perspective: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them....For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:18-19; Romans 1:21-22)

Paul affirms that all human beings have an innate and inescapable knowledge of the Christian God, but the non-Christians refused to acknowledge him. They did not glorify or thank him as God and creator. Instead, they perverted their innate knowledge and tendencies, resulting in idolatry. Then they credited anything that is true in their system of thought to the idols that they worship. Romans 1:25 says, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator." This condemnation applies equally to the non-Christian scientists as it does to the Buddhists and Mormons.

Therefore, to say that non-Christian religions and worldviews possess some truth only serves to condemn them, and does nothing to support their credibility or usefulness at all. The recognition that false religions nevertheless have something true to say does not imply that we must respect them, but it only means that we have caught them "red-handed" in their crime of spiritual robbery against God. They have received from God, and yet they deny him.

We are not saying that God reveals himself in a limited way through non-Christian religions while he reveals himself most fully and truly through the Christian religion. Rather, we are saying that God does not reveal himself through any non-Christian religion or worldview at all. Each person is born with an innate knowledge of the Christian God, but in defiance against him, non-Christians suppress this knowledge and construct their own worldviews based on non-Christian premises. However, they cannot completely suppress all traces of Christian truth, and thus we see that all non-Christian religions and worldviews nevertheless borrow Christian principles that are impossible to justify on the basis of non-Christian premises. That is, the Christian principles in their religions and worldviews cannot be deduced from their non-Christian first principles. Therefore, any "truth" in non-Christian religions and worldviews is evidence of deceit and wickedness, and not evidence of genuine divine revelation.

They have set up their "golden calves" and loudly declare, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4)! However, God has said, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8). Rather than giving the glory due to the God of the Christian Bible, they suppress their knowledge of this true God, and give glory to idols instead. Therefore, adherents to non-Christian religions and worldviews are "without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). An idol worshiper fails to give glory to whom glory is due, since he does not receive rain and other provisions from his idol, but from the Christian God. Although God has given him an innate knowledge concerning himself, the person suppresses the truth because of his wickedness (Romans 1:18), and chooses to honor an idol instead (Romans 1:21). Likewise, an atheist receives rain and other provisions from God, but he credits them to natural causes

instead. For this reason, the wrath of God is poured out upon all non-Christians.

If Christ possesses all wisdom and knowledge, then the fact that any non-Christian can know 1 + 1 = 2 means that Christ, who is "the true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9), has given him this knowledge. This knowledge does not originate or reside in his non-Christian religion or worldview, but it is an integral part of the Christian system. If he does not give thanks to the Christian God for this knowledge, then he is committing spiritual and intellectual robbery in failing to give credit to the proper source of his knowledge. On the other hand, Christians receive knowledge freely from the one they worship: "It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Since Christ has a monopoly on truth, any person who knows anything at all owes his knowledge to Christ, and a failure to worship him and give him thanks is a sin deserving the ultimate punishment.

Therefore, it follows that it is sinful for Christians to say that they can learn anything from non-Christian religions and worldviews. Suppose that a non-Christian religion has within it a piece of true information. From our premise that Christ is the possessor of all wisdom and knowledge, this piece of information must necessarily be a "Christian" truth that this other religion has stolen, and therefore it is first a part of the Christian revelation. Attempting to learn a Christian truth from a non-Christian source is irreverent and foolish. Only the biblical revelation sets forth truth without mixture or distortion. To revisit an aforementioned issue, if a religious system is only partially true but not entirely true, it would be impossible to distinguish the true from the false on the basis of this religion itself. Christians who say that other religions contain some truths are able to recognize these truths for what they are precisely because they have already learned them from the Christian worldview, which they affirm to be entirely true; otherwise, there is no way to tell the true from the false.

Suppose a given system of thought includes the following propositions: (1) X is a man, and (2) X is an accountant. If in reality (1) is true but (2) is false, how will one know to affirm (1) and deny (2), unless he is already acquainted with X? Unless a given worldview A is true in its entirety, there is no way to tell which proposition is true without importing knowledge gained from outside of the system, such as a given worldview B, in which case the system in question (A) would be evaluated by the system from which one has obtained the said imported knowledge (B). But if one has already obtained this knowledge from another system of thought (B), how is he learning from this system in question (A)? He is judging it, not learning from it.

There is nothing to learn from a religion or worldview that is not wholly true. One can only learn from a system of thought if it is true in its entirety, and then one may use the knowledge acquired to evaluate another system that is not wholly true, but not to learn from it. To say that a given non-Christian religion or worldview possesses "some truth" is therefore to condemn it as unfit for belief, and not to praise or honor it at all.

There is nothing true that any non-Christian religion or worldview may teach that is not first part of the Christian system. All true and knowable information is already stated or implied in the Christian worldview; any true information not stated or implied by the biblical revelation is unknowable. To say otherwise would be to deny our basic premise that all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, in which case we may question whether the one making the denial is a Christian in the first place.

Therefore, I conclude that there is nothing that Christians may learn from non-Christians that is not already included or implied in the Christian worldview, only that the Bible reveals these truths without impurity or mixture, and in a way that is comprehensive and coherent. For me to say that other religions have "some truth" is to insult them I am implying that their prophets are wicked thieves, certainly not worthy of anyone's trust and respect.

Paul says, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10). God intends for the church to glorify him by manifesting his wisdom in the context of the proclamation of an exclusive message. He certainly does not intend for the church to praise non-Christian religions and worldviews for the wisdom and knowledge that they have stolen from us, and still less does he intend for the church to affirm the falsehoods in other religions and worldviews as truths. Non-Christian religions and worldviews may contain several true propositions always enough of them to render them culpable, but never enough to make salvation possible. The same criticisms against non-Christian religions apply to worldviews that claim to be non-religious. For example, Christians can learn nothing from the atheistic worldview unless atheism is true in its entirety. The atheist can know nothing at all if not for Christ the logos, who facilitates knowledge and communication among men. There is nothing in the non-Christian worldview that can offer any truth to the Christian that is not already in the Christian worldview. For example, a Christian may obtain a drink of water from an atheist, who has it to offer through collecting rain. But the rain does not come from, and cannot ultimately be explained by, anything inherent in the atheist's worldview; rather, rain comes from the Christian God. The difference is that the Christian gives thanks to God for the water, but the atheist does not, and in failing to acknowledge the true God who is the ultimate source of rain, the atheist sins and commits his soul to everlasting damnation.

Likewise, a Christian student may learn that 1 + 1 = 2 from an atheist tutor, but this piece of information belongs to Christ, who has all wisdom and knowledge. The atheist is simply teaching the Christian something that is inherent in the Christian worldview, which he has learned from Christ the logos without giving due thanks to God. On the other hand, the Christian acknowledges that all knowledge belongs to Christ, and gives thanks to God for this piece of information. To speak in terms of propositions, all true propositions are in fact Christian propositions they are the property of Christ; therefore, they are much more appropriately and accurately expressed within the context of the Christian worldview. Thus, to say that Christians may in fact learn true knowledge from non-Christians, such as 1 + 1 = 2, does not mean that it is desirable to do so, since some degree of distortion and limitation inevitably results because of the non-Christian presuppositions of the one who teaches.

Even knowledge that is seemingly non-religious in nature is best expressed and taught within an explicitly Christian context. For example, if God is the ruler and planner of history, then a textbook on Western civilizations that fails to mention divine providence is not a good history text at all, since it neglects the very factor that determines all historical events and progress. If what the Christian Scripture says about creation is true, then "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) is a superior explanation to the existence of the universe than any sophisticated system of cosmology that fails to acknowledge him as the first and sustaining cause of all that exists (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). Similar things can be said about the fields of economics, literature, music, and even sports.

One who insists on thinking independently from the biblical propositions revealed by God must refute the worldview challenge presented by the Christian system. If all things have been created and are now sustained by the divine logos, Jesus Christ, then thinking itself is without ultimate justification without first presupposing the Christian worldview. Reasoning cannot even be intelligible without the existence of an eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and rational mind, from whom we who are made in the image of God and thus patterned after his mind have received the laws of logic and grammar. The non-Christian must show on the basis of his worldview, without borrowing Christian presuppositions, that the laws of logic are not arbitrary rules or mere conventions; otherwise, any argument that he makes may be dismissed as based on arbitrary rules or mere conventions. Failing to overcome this obstacle, the non-Christian cannot even debate the Christian on any topic before presupposing the entire Christian worldview.

Unbelievers often accuse the exclusivity of Christians as indicating a lack of love toward people. However, the Bible teaches that true love "does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Christians are under no obligation to allow non-Christians to define the meaning of divine love for us. The intellectual coward who cannot refute the biblical worldview says that Christians are narrow-minded, hateful, and bigoted. But we reject all non-Christian religions and worldviews because they are false. An "openness" that would accept the lie just as quickly as it assents to the truth betrays a stupid, depraved, and twisted mind, not a sign of intellectual acuity or moral progress. Christians who boldly condemn all non-Christians religions and worldviews as false do so not because they are bigoted, but because they would believe the truth rather than the lie, and because they are not stupid.

Therefore, let us submit to the following apostolic declarations:

If anyone does not love the Lord a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! (1 Corinthians 16:22) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8-9) So be it. Let anyone be eternally condemned who advocates a religion or worldview that disagrees with biblical Christianity.

We must insist that only Christianity is true and that all non-Christian religions and worldviews are false, because this belief is an integral and necessary part of biblical Christianity, and those who claim to be Christians do not have the option to reject it. As Christians, we should glory in the exclusive nature of our faith instead of being ashamed of it. The matter is not whether one finds the claim emotionally satisfying, although we should, but whether it is objectively true that Christ, and therefore Christianity, is the sole possessor of truth, and that any so-called truths in other religions and worldviews are nothing more than stolen goods and evidence of their guilt. The Bible itself claims an exclusive status, and no name-calling against the Christian, saying that he is advocating hate and bigotry, can change the truth of this claim. Anyone who rejects the Christian’s claim to exclusivity must be ready to confront the Christian worldview with his own non-Christian worldview. Those professing Christians who oppose the total exclusivity and superiority of Christianity should recognize that they have rejected biblical infallibility, that they have repudiated the authority of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, and thus they have no biblical grounds from which to call themselves Christians.

If Christianity dares to declare itself as having a monopoly on truth and expect others to comply, then it is only right that it should demonstrate its superiority when assaulted by other worldviews. However, it would be intellectually dishonest and morally despicable for the non-Christian to remain resistant to the Christian worldview, including its claim to exclusivity, after the Christian has triumphed in argumentation. In connection to this, the church in general is at fault for not providing believers with better training in apologetics, so that many of them have succumbed to the cowardly appeal of the unbelievers to practice "tolerance," and thus have ceased to confront the false religions and worldviews embraced by them. Although Christians should be courteous toward unbelievers on a social level, those who are sympathetic to non-Christians on a theological or ideological level commit treason against Christ and his kingdom.

Colossians 2:9-10 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." If "all the fullness of Deity" is in Jesus Christ, no subsequent prophet can be greater than him, because there is nothing left to be revealed by another prophet that is not already in Christ, and those who claim to do so must be false prophets. Christ is "the head over every power and authority," and no one who comes after him may supersede him. If we "have been given fullness in Christ," who in turn has "all the fullness of the Deity," then there is nothing to learn from non-Christian religions and worldviews. If Christ is not merely a messenger or manifestation of God, but God himself, no prophet may alter, update, contradict, or add to the Christian revelation. Those who do are impostors and liars.

One may think that this type of language is surely too harsh and unkind; however, the Bible speaks of unbelievers as brutes, vipers, dogs, pigs, fools, hypocrites, whitewashed tombs, and sons of the devil. We do not use harsh words out of bitterness, anger, or discourtesy, but as an attempt to give adequate descriptions of the stupidity and depravity of unbelief. In addition, we do not assert that non-Christians must remain as they are. Those of us who are saved "also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). However, "because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). We do not gloat and triumph over the failures of non-Christians because of some superior qualities inherent in ourselves, but "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). And even now, we can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5).

Christians who have professed faith in Christ should understand to whom and to what they have committed themselves. Those who call themselves Christians who at the same time experience great difficulty with the biblical claims to exclusivity should examine themselves to see if they are genuine Christians (2 Corinthians 13:5), or whether they had greatly misunderstood the gospel message, and therefore experienced false conversions. Many people have accepted a diluted and distorted version of Christianity who at the same time would immediately reject an accurate presentation of biblical Christianity.

If they understand the true nature of Christianity as an exclusive religion and worldview, but continue to deny the supremacy and exclusive authority of Christ, thus repudiating the Christian faith, then by what definition are they genuine Christians? In what sense can a person be a

Christian who declares that Christ may be only one option among many, and that his own claims to exclusive authority and truth are mistaken (Matthew 28:18; John 14:6)? In what sense can a person be a Christian who knowingly contradicts the apostles Peter and Paul (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5)? This person falsely calls his faith "Christianity" since it defies biblical statements on a most important topic.

We must confront the indecisive professing Christians within the church, so that they must choose once for all whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15), and cease being double-minded or "between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). If Christianity is true, then all non-Christian religions and worldviews are false; if any other religion or worldview is true, then Christianity cannot at the same time be true.

Many Christians readily condemn stealing, adultery, and murder, with their stance seemingly immovable and not subject to compromise. However, they would at the same time encourage a type of non-confrontational dialogue with non-Christian religions and worldviews that betrays an attitude of viewing idolatry as not being as wicked as the sins. This reveals that their ethical standard is in the first place more humanistic than biblical, more man-centered than God-centered. They are horrified by violent crimes, but regard atheism and idolatry with a humanistic kindness and empathy.

However, false worship is a much greater sin than murder or rape. Jesus says that "the first and greatest commandment" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37-38), while loving our fellow human beings is designated as the second commandment (Matthew 22:39). Therefore, it is against the biblical standard of ethics to bemoan crimes against humanity more than sins against the only true God. My concern is whether Christians consider atheism and idolatry to be the most serious of sins, or whether they may ignore the first four of the Ten Commandments while obeying the rest. I am convinced that the nonchalant and accommodating attitude of many Christians toward the sins of atheism and idolatry fails to reflect the Scripture’s extreme denunciation against it. And to the extent that our thoughts disagree with God’s thoughts, we sin against him by making him out to be a liar.

We must call upon Christians to make up their minds, that if they profess Jesus Christ as Lord, they must permanently give up their idolatrous and syncretistic mindset, and to maintain that the knowledge of salvation is found in the Scripture alone, that God’s redemptive work is appropriated through Christ alone, and that it is applied to the individual by faith alone.

One who rejects the notion that a religion or worldview may be exclusively true is already practicing exclusivity in saying that it is exclusively true that no religion may make exclusive claims. All exclusive religions are to be excluded from acceptance. The appeal to tolerance or to be inclusive in our theology is often an excuse to avoid dealing with the numerous and irreconcilable contradictions between worldviews. The non-Christian should stop being an intellectual coward, face reality, and admit that because of these contradictory claims, not every worldview can be true.

What gives unbelievers the right to be intolerant of our exclusive claims in the first place? If they are truly tolerant, why do they not endure our attacks without fighting back? But they do fight back, and vehemently attack Christianity, but they do not attack the easy targets such as Islam and Buddhism nearly as often, if at all. However, these other religions also make strong exclusive

claims. Is it just a case of ignorance in the study of religions, or is it a case of selective prejudice amounting to a global satanic conspiracy against the true faith?

Why do unbelievers focus their efforts on attacking Christianity? A number of things may go on in their twisted and depraved minds, but there are two obvious possibilities. First, only the Christian worldview poses a threat to them from the intellectual point of view. Second, in reality there are only two groups of people in the world Christians and non-Christians (Genesis 3:15). Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). From God's viewpoint, all non-Christians are on the same side, whether they are atheists, Buddhists, or Mormons. It is ultimately a case of the only truth against a variety of falsehoods, and not a number of worthy worldviews competing for dominance.

There are those who say that intellectual and ideological intolerance results from ignorance; however, these individual themselves reject certain propositions based on what they claim to be knowledge, not ignorance. For example, they reject the idea that the earth is flat because of the knowledge that they claim to have. Therefore, intellectual and ideological intolerance is often a claim to knowledge. We may argue about whether this alleged knowledge is true, but the very act of debate implies that each one considers the others to be wrong, and that each is willingly to expose the errors of the others. On the other hand, tolerance is a mark of ignorance one who does not know what is true or false has no basis from which to reject any idea or belief.

We should never tolerate falsehood, but we should expose and destroy it. Nevertheless, we do not do this through physical violence, but by unrestrained intellectual ruthlessness in rational dialogue and argumentation. As Paul says: The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Honesty and courage demand that we promote the clash of worldviews in private and public debate, and decide beforehand that those who cannot withstand intense scrutiny should be abandoned as false. Christianity will be the only one left standing when the dust settles.

Endnotes:

1. John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955; p. 11-12.

2. Ibid., p. 11.

3. We have previously established the truth of supralapsarianism as opposed to infralapsarianism.

4. The meaning of "all men" narrows even more when one considers the historical context of the passage. Jesus was speaking to Christians in the first century, saying that they would not have finished evangelizing the cities of Israel before he would come in judgment to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

03.06. SALVATION

Systematic Theology

6. SALVATION

ELECTED

SUMMONED

REGENERATED

CONVERTED

JUSTIFIED

ADOPTED

SANCTIFIED

PRESERVED

We will now turn to study in what way and in what order the benefits of redemption are applied to the elect. Some of these benefits occur or begin simultaneously in the new Christian when he believes in Christ, so that the order of application may not always be chronologically distinguishable, but the fact that some benefits are the preconditions of others implies that there is a logical order for the application of redemption.

It is possible to derive an outline of the order of the application of redemption from Romans 8:29-30, although we must also consider a number of other biblical passages to obtain the full list of items and their positions on the list: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. This chapter will present the application of the benefits of redemption in the following order: election, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and preservation.

ELECTED The biblical doctrine of ELECTION teaches that God has chosen a definite number of individuals to obtain salvation through faith in Christ. The exact identities of these people have been determined and are unchangeable. God has chosen these individuals without any consideration of their decisions, actions, and other conditions in them, but the basis of his choice was his will alone. He chose these people for salvation just because he wanted to choose them, and not because he foresaw anything that they will decide or perform.

Although I will more fully discuss the doctrine of election and respond to several objections in this section, I have already been explaining and defending the doctrine throughout this book, and all the arguments in support of absolute sovereignty and divine election that had appeared in the

previous chapters also apply to this section. Remembering this will reduce the need for repetition. Our first biblical passage comes from Romans 9:1-33. Although national Israel was supposedly God's chosen nation, most of its people had rejected Christ, and thus were kept from salvation. Does this mean that God's promise toward Israel had failed? Paul resolves this question in his letter to the Romans:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." (Romans 9:6-9)

Although "Israel" was God's chosen nation, not everyone born a natural Israelite was a genuine Israelite. God never made the promise of salvation to national Israel, but only to the true descendants of Abraham, which constitutes the spiritual Israel. When his opponents claimed to be the descendants of Abraham, Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things" (John 8:38-40). Although these people were Abraham's natural descendants, Jesus said that they were not his real children, but that their father was the devil (John 8:44). On the other hand, Paul writes, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Those who have the faith of Abraham are the genuine children of Abraham (Romans 4:16). The promise of God was made to the spiritual descendants of Abraham, not to the natural descendants. Of course, the natural descendants of Abraham who believe in Christ are also his spiritual descendants, and thus are also heirs to the promise, but they are heirs only on account of their spiritual heritage and not their natural heritage.

Paul then cites the example of Jacob and Esau: Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:10-13)

Although both Jacob and Esau were natural descendants of Isaac, God treated them differently by favoring the younger over the elder. This decision was not based on "anything good or bad" that they had done, but it was so that "God's purpose in election might stand." The choice was unconditional, meaning that it was "not by works but by him who calls." Jacob was favored because of the sovereign will of God, not because of something that he had done or would do; God's choice was completely independent of any condition in Jacob. As verse 15 says, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Verse 16 expresses the necessary conclusion: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Paul says that God saved us "because of his own purpose and grace," not because of any condition that he saw in us, and he gave us this saving grace "before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9). "He predestined us," Paul writes, "in accordance with his pleasure and will"

(Ephesians 1:5), not because of what he knew we would decide or perform. We are called "according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). To the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "He has chosen you" (1 Thessalonians 1:4), and not, "You have chosen him." He repeats this in his next letter to them and says, "God chose you to be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and not, "You chose yourselves to be saved." Election does not depend on man’s decisions or actions, but on the mercy of God that is dispensed by his sovereign will alone.

Jesus says the following in John 6:37; John 6:44:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:37 says that everyone that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus, and John 6:44 excludes everyone else from coming to Jesus. That is, everyone will be saved whom the Father gives to Jesus (John 6:37), and no one will be saved whom the Father does not give to Jesus (John 6:44). Since other biblical passages indicate that not everyone will be saved, it necessarily follows that the Father does not give every person to Jesus to be saved. The word translated "draws" in John 6:44 also means "drags," "pulls," or even "compels," so that it may read, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him, pulls him, and compels him." For example, the word is translated as "dragged" and "dragging" in the NIV in the following verses: When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16:19) The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. (Acts 21:30) But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? (James 2:6)

Keeping in mind the total depravity of man (Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:23), that he is spiritually dead and cannot respond to or even request any assistance, Jesus is saying that no one can have faith in him unless chosen and compelled by the Father. Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12), and since it is the Father alone and not the human individuals themselves who chooses those who would come to Christ, it follows that it is the Father who chooses who would receive salvation, and not the human individuals themselves.1 Jesus repeats this teaching in John 6:63-66 :

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. No one can come to Jesus unless enabled by the Father; that is, no one has the ability to accept Jesus unless the Father gives it to him. This same passage shows that the Father does not give this ability to everyone, since many of them did not believe and "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."2

Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16; also John 15:19). He says, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to

reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). In Matthew 22:14, he says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen," and not, "For many are invited, but few accept the invitation." That is, many people may hear the preaching of the gospel, but only those "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) can and will believe. The elect are those "whom [God] has chosen" (Mark 13:20). Believers have been "chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5), and they are those who "by grace had believed" (Acts 18:27). Thus one does not choose himself for salvation by accepting Christ, but one receives salvation by accepting Christ because God has chosen him first. Faith is not the cause of election, but election is the cause of faith. We believe in Christ because God first chose us to be saved and then caused us to believe in Christ. We are saved because God chose us, not because we chose him. The following lists a number of biblical passages relevant to the doctrine of election, including fuller quotations of those passages that are only partially cited above. Some of these passages are also relevant to the other topics that we will discuss later in this chapter:

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalms 65:4)

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matthew 11:27) For many are invited, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14)

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. (Mark 13:20)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16)

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:19) When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48) When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. (Acts 18:27) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28) And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." (Romans 10:20) And what was God’s answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." (Romans 11:4-8) For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6) In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12) For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for

us to do. (Ephesians 2:10) For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Php 1:29-30)3

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Php 2:12-13)4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5) For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9)5 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)6 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10) But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)7 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (Revelation 17:8)8

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. (Revelation 17:14) The Bible does not paint the picture of humanity as a group of people drowning in the sea of sin, and as many as would cooperate with Christ would be rescued. Instead, it paints a picture in which all human beings are dead in the water (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10), and have sunken all the way to the bottom (Jeremiah 17:9). Since they are dead, they are unable to cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. In fact, they would choose not to be rescued if left by themselves (Romans 8:7; Colossians 1:21). Against such a situation, the Father has chosen some to be saved by Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4-5) by dragging them out of the water (John 6:44; John 6:65), purely by his own initiative (Romans 9:15). Having done so, he raises them from the dead into new life in Christ (Luke 15:24; Romans 6:13). The biblical doctrine of election teaches that although all human beings deserve endless torment in hell because of their sins, God has chosen to show mercy toward some of them. God chose them before the creation of the universe and the fall of man, and he chose them without consideration of any condition in them, whether good or bad. Having chosen some for salvation, God sent Christ to die as full payment for their sins, so that God may credit the righteousness merited by Christ to them when they come to Christ. On the other hand, those who are not chosen for salvation are appointed for damnation, and they will receive the appropriate punishment for their sins, which is endless torment in hell.

We will now respond to several objections. This will also give us the opportunity to clarify and expand on certain aspects of this doctrine.

Many of those who refuse to accept the biblical view of election assert that God has indeed chosen some for salvation, but the basis for his choice was his FOREKNOWLEDGE. That is, God knew beforehand which individuals would freely accept Christ, and on this basis he has chosen them. This unbiblical view destroys the meaning of election, since it means that God does not choose people for salvation at all, but that he simply accepts the choices of those who would choose themselves for salvation. When the word "foreknowledge" is used in the above manner, it is referring to God's cognitive awareness of future facts, such as the decisions and actions of individuals. Thus proponents of this view defines divine foreknowledge as prescience. Furthermore, it is implied that this knowledge is passive, so that it is not God who causes the future events that he knows, but he passively grasp what his creatures will cause to occur. In what follows, I will be showing that defining "foreknowledge" as passive prescience generates insuperable problems, and that the term means something different in the Bible.

First, we have already shown that every human being is in himself both unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation; a person can and will come to Christ only if the Father enables and compels him to do so (John 6:44; John 6:65). We have also established that the Father does not enable and compel every human being to come to Christ. This means that a person comes to Christ only because the Father causes him to come to Christ.

Since this is true, then to say that election is based on God's prescience of man's future decisions is only to say that God knows whom he himself will cause to accept Christ, and such prescience would not be passive. If God elects a person because he knows that this person will accept Christ, but if this person will accept Christ only because God will cause him to do so, then to say that God knows this person will accept Christ is the same as saying that God knows that he will cause this person to accept Christ. God's election of this person is then still based on his own sovereign decision to choose this person for salvation, and not based on a passive knowledge that this person will accept Christ without God causing him to do so. This is what the Bible teaches, but then it means that divine prescience is not a passive knowledge of what a person will decide or perform, but that it is a knowledge of what God will cause him to decide or perform. Divine prescience is a form of God's self-knowledge a knowledge of his own plans, and a knowledge of what he will actualize in the future. Therefore, to say that election is based on prescience does not challenge our position at all, since God's knowledge of the future is never passive, but it is he himself who causes everything that he knows will happen in the future (Isaiah 46:10).

Second, the Bible states that divine election is not based on man's decisions or actions, that God does not choose someone for salvation because of what this person will decide or perform. For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy....So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. (Romans 9:15-16; Romans 9:18; NRSV)

Divine election is not based on a passive prescience, and divine prescience is not passive in the first place. God chooses a person because he wants to choose that person, and he knows who will believe the gospel because he knows whom he will cause to believe the gospel.

Third, defining God’s foreknowledge as passive prescience in fact fails to make sense of the biblical passages saying that divine election is based on foreknowledge: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:1-2) Our opponents would interpret these two passages as saying that divine election is based on foreknowledge in the sense of passive prescience; that is, God has chosen those whom he passively knew would accept Christ.

Now, the structure of Romans 8:29-30 necessarily implies that all the individuals included in one phase of the order of salvation would also enter into all the subsequent phases, and that all the individuals in any phase of the order of salvation have also been included in all the previous phases. Thus all those foreknown are also predestined; all those predestined are also called; all those called are also justified; and all those justified are also glorified.

Michael Magill translates the passage as follows:

Because whom He foreknew, [these] He also predestined... And whom He predestined, these He also called And whom He called, these He also declared-righteous And whom He declared righteous, these He also glorified.9

Therefore, whatever foreknowledge means, everyone who is foreknown by God is also justified by God. However, the passage does not say that it is the people’s faith or choices that are foreknown by God, but that it is the people that are foreknown. Our opponents assume that foreknowledge means prescience in this passage. But since it is the people that are foreknown, since God’s knowledge of the future is exhaustive, and since everyone foreknown is also justified, then it necessarily follows that if one defines foreknowledge as prescience in this passage, one must also understand it to teach universal salvation. That is, if foreknowledge here refers to God’s knowledge of future facts (especially a passive prescience), if foreknowledge is applied to people in this passage and not to their faith or choices, if God knows about all human beings, and if all who are foreknown are justified, then all human beings are justified. But Scripture consistently teaches that not everyone is saved or justified; therefore, foreknowledge as related to divine election, and when used in this passage in particular, cannot mean prescience (especially a passive prescience). Foreknowledge must mean something else.

We will establish that, in a salvific context, the "knowledge" of God refers to his sovereign choice and purposive affection for persons and not to his passive awareness of facts. For example, Matthew 7:23 says, "Then I will tell them plainly, ’I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’" Since Jesus as God is omniscient, "I never knew you" cannot mean that he has never been aware of these people’s existence, thoughts, and actions. In fact, he knows that they are "evildoers." Therefore, the denial of "knowledge" here is a denial of a salvific relationship, and not a passive awareness of facts. Accordingly, "foreknowledge" would refer to a salvific relationship established

in the mind of God before the existence of the chosen individuals; that is, foreknowledge means foreordination.

Many biblical passages employ the concept of foreknowledge in this sense. For example, God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Of course God would know a person whom he himself intends to create; that is, God knows his own plans. The main sense here is that before Jeremiah was conceived, God has chosen him not that God was pleased with what he passively knew about Jeremiah, but that God has designed and made him.

God's foreknowledge as election and foreordination is made more evident by the parallelism of the lines in this verse. When one line or expression parallels another line or expression in a verse, one part expands on or clarifies the meaning of the other part. For example, "For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Psalms 24:2) does not necessarily mean that in addition to having "founded it upon the seas," he also "established it upon the waters." Rather, "established it upon the waters" carries a similar meaning as "founded it upon the seas," and helps to clarify its meaning. Another example comes from the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus says, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). It is not that we are to ask God to "deliver us from the evil one" in addition to "lead us not into temptation," but "deliver us from the evil one" is what is meant by "lead us not into temptation." With this in mind, the parallelism in God's call to Jeremiah helps to clarify the meaning of "I knew you." Again, Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Or, we may translate the verse as follows:

I knew you before I formed you in the womb, I consecrated you before you were born;

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. The words "I knew you" correspond to "I consecrated you" and "I appointed you," and the three expressions carry similar meanings. For God to know Jeremiah in the sense intended here is to consecrate and appoint him for God's own purpose.

S. M. Baugh also uses this passage to illustrate the meaning of divine foreknowledge, and writes as follows:

Another remarkable example of divine foreknowledge is expressed in Jeremiah 1:5, where God says to Jeremiah:

I knew you before I formed you in the womb, I consecrated you before you emerged from the womb;

I have given you as a prophet to the nations. The first two lines are closely parallel in the number of syllables and word order... But how can God have known Jeremiah before he was even conceived? Because he personally fashioned his prophet, just as he had fashioned Adam from the dust (Genesis 2:7), and just as he fashions all people (Psalms 139:13-16; Isaiah 44:24). God foreknew not only the possibility of Jeremiah's existence he knows all possibilities indeed but God foreknew Jeremiah by name before he was conceived, because he knew how he would shape and mold his existence.10

Huey writes, "Here it involves a choosing relationship (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 34:10). The Lord was thinking about Jeremiah before he was born. At that time God had already designated

Jeremiah to be a prophet."11 The point is that God's foreknowledge refers to a personal relationship originated by his sovereign decision, and not by a passive awareness of future persons and events. Since nothing occurs apart from his active decree (Matthew 10:29), his knowledge of the future is rooted in his own sovereign will. The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology says, "God's foreknowledge stands related to his will and power. What he knows, he does not know merely as information. He is no mere spectator. What he foreknows he ordains. He wills it."12 In the Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, J. M. Gundry-Volf writes:

Rather than referring to speculative or neutral knowledge (i.e., knowledge of who will believe), the Pauline notion of divine foreknowledge is understood by many interpreters as a knowing in the Semitic sense of acknowledging, inclining toward someone, knowledge which expresses a movement of the will reaching out to personal relationship with someone. This kind of knowing is illustrated by the meaning of the Hebrew yada, "to know," in texts such as Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; and Jeremiah 1:5....In Paul's use of proginosko the aspect of pretemporality is added to the Hebrew sense of "know" as "have regard for" or "set favor on." The result is a verb which refers to God's eternal loving election.13 The article on foreknowledge in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia helps to reinforce several points that we have discussed:

Arminian theology, in all its variant forms, contends that God's foreknowledge is simply a prescient knowledge, a knowing in advance whether a given person will believe in Christ or reject him. God's election, therefore, is said to be simply God's choice unto salvation of those whom He knows in advance will choose to believe in Christ. God foresees the contingent free action of faith and, foreseeing who will believe in Christ, elects those because they do. But this is destructive of the biblical view of election. In biblical thought election means that God elects people, not that people elect God. In Scripture it is God who in Christ decides for us not we who, by making a decision for Christ, decide for God.

Reformation theology has contended that the divine foreknowledge contains the ingredient of divine determination. The Reformers claimed that God indeed foreknows who will believe, because believing in Christ is not a human achievement, but a divine gift imparted to men by God's grace and Spirit. Thus God's foreknowledge is not merely prescience, but a knowledge that itself determines the event. That is, in Reformation thought what God foreknows He foreordains.... That God's foreknowledge contains the idea of divine determination does not rest merely on a few biblical texts but reflects a truth about God that comes to expression in a variety of biblical concepts descriptive of the unique and mysterious character of God's actions. God's foreknowledge is itself a form of determination which accounts for the reality of that which is divinely foreknown....14 Thus it is a mistake to define foreknowledge as passive prescience because the Bible means something else by the term.

Now that we have clarified the meaning of foreknowledge, we must apply the correct definition to the passage in dispute, which reads as follows: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30) Concerning this passage, Baugh writes: The classic Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29, that God's foreknowledge of faith is in view, is clearly reading one's theology into the text. Paul does not say: "whose faith he foreknew," but "whom he foreknew." He

foreknew us....But in Romans 8:29, predestination is not dependent on faith; rather, God predestines us on the basis of his gracious commitment to us before the world was....

Perhaps another rendering better expresses the concept behind Romans 8:29 : "Those to whom he was previously devoted...." This again, is not to say that God's foreknowledge is devoid of intellectual cognition; to have a personal relation with someone, such as a marriage relation, includes knowledge about that person....God has foreknown us because he fashioned each of us personally and intimately according to his plan.... That Paul refers to this concept of a committed relationship with the phrase whom he foreknew in Romans 8:29 is confirmed by the context....

Further confirmation of "foreknowledge" in Romans 8:29 as referring to a previous commitment is found in a nearby passage, Romans 11:1-2, where proginosko can have only this meaning: "God has not rejected his people, has he? No way! For I also am an Israelite....God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." As in Romans 8:29, the objects of foreknowledge are people themselves rather than historical events or a particular person's faith.... The Arminian notion of "foreseen faith" is impossible as an interpretation of God's foreknowledge in Romans 11:1-2, and, consequently, in the earlier passage, Romans 8:29, as well. The latter explains that God initiated a committed relationship from eternity with certain individuals whom he predestined for grace.15

F. F. Bruce agrees, saying that, "God's foreknowledge here connotes that electing grace which is frequently implied by the verb 'to know' in the Old Testament. When God takes knowledge of people in this special way, he sets his choice on them."16 Douglas Moo also argues that foreknowledge means foreordination when used in Romans 8:29: In [Arminianism] the human response of faith is made the object of God's "foreknowledge"; and this foreknowledge, in turn, is the basis for predestination: for "whom he foreknew, he predestined." But I consider it unlikely that this is the correct interpretation. (1) The NT usage of the verb and its cognate noun does not conform to the general pattern of usage....the three others besides the occurrence in this text, all of which have God as their subject, mean not "know before" in the sense of intellectual knowledge, or cognition but "enter into relationship with before" or "choose, or determine, before" (Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2). (2) That the verb here contains this peculiarly biblical sense of "know" is suggested by the fact that it has a simple personal object. Paul does not say that God knew anything about us but that he knew us, and this is reminiscent of the OT sense of "know." (3) Moreover, it is only some individuals...who are the objects of this activity; and this shows that an action applicable only to Christians must be denoted by the verb. If, then, the word means "know intimately," "have regard for," this must be a knowledge or love that is unique to believers and that leads to their being predestined. This being the case, the difference between "know or love beforehand" and "choose beforehand" virtually ceases to exist.17

Although foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 cannot mean passive prescience, John Murray contends that even if it does, it still does not challenge the doctrine of election: For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates....The interest, therefore, is simply one of interpretation as it should be applied to this passage....On exegetical grounds we shall have to reject the view that "foreknew" refers to the foresight of faith....18 As the Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary says, "In Romans 8:29; Romans 11:2, the apostle Paul's use of the word foreknew

means ’to choose’ or ’to set special affection on.’ The electing love of God, not foresight of human action, is the basis of His predestination and salvation."19

Some people who disagree with this understanding of foreknowledge argue that, if foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 means foreordination, then it would render redundant the word "predestined," since the verse says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined." It seems that the two words are referring to separate concepts in the verse; therefore, they argue that we ought to adopt passive prescience as the definition of foreknowledge.

However, they have failed to read the verse carefully. If the word foreknew means foreordained in this verse, it would be a reference to God’s work of election, that is, his choice of the specific individuals whom he would save. Then, the verse says that these whom God has elected, he has also predestined, not to repeat the concept of election, but that he has set forth a "destination" or purpose in advance for the elect namely, God’s will is for them "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Foreknowledge in this verse refers to God’s election of individuals to salvation, and predestination reveals the specific purpose or end that God has designed for his elect. In other words, God has not only chosen the elect to receive salvation from sin, but also to become like his Son, Jesus Christ. The verse is saying that the same people whom God has elected are also the people whom God has given the "destination" or purpose to become like Christ, and that he has made such a decision in advance, and thus he "predestined" them.

Accordingly, Gundry-Volf writes:

Paul distinguishes between divine foreknowledge and divine predestination in Romans 8:29 : "those whom he foreknew, he also predestined." While foreknowledge denotes the exercise of God’s will to establish a special relationship with those whom God graciously elect before all time, predestination expresses God’s appointing of them to a specific goal before all time...In Romans 8:29 this goal is conformity with the image of the Son, a reference to the final salvation of the elect. Foreknowledge as divine choice is thus the basis of predestination to glorification with Christ. Foreknowledge does not have to be understood as foresight of faith in order to be distinguished from predestination.20

Based on the above observations and arguments, it is necessary to understand foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 as foreordination. Kenneth Wuest recognizes this, and translates Romans 8:29-30 as follows:

Because, those whom He foreordained He also marked out beforehand as those who were to be conformed to the derived image of His Son, with the result that He is firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, those whom He thus marked out beforehand, these He also summoned. And those whom He summoned, these He also justified. Moreover, those whom He justified, these He also glorified.21 The word "foreordained" here corresponds to foreknowledge, and the phrase "marked out beforehand" corresponds to predestination. Similarly, these verses in the GNT are translated as follows:

Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many believers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.

We may further confirm this understanding of foreknowledge by examining Acts 2:23; Acts 4:28. The first verse says, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." This does not mean that God was passively aware of what men would do to Jesus, but it means that his suffering was in fact God's "set purpose," which is also the meaning of foreknowledge here. Acts 4:28 also refers to the death of Christ, but it says, "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." But we just saw that in Acts 2:23 Peter credits the incident to God's "set purpose" and "foreknowledge." It is evident that these terms have equivalent meanings, so that God's foreknowledge refers to his "set purpose" or what he has "decided beforehand." In fact, the words of Acts 4:28 gives us a good definition for God's foreknowledge it is "what [his] power and will had decided beforehand should happen." As Martin Luther writes, "It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal, and infallible will."22

Without further argument, we may conclude that foreknowledge in 1 Peter 1:2 also cannot refer to a passive prescience. The verse says that we are, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Of course we are - the verse means that Christians have been chosen and foreordained for salvation by the sovereign will of God.

Many people make the observation that biblical election contradicts the "free will" of man, and since they insist that man has free will, they accordingly reject the doctrines of absolute sovereignty and divine election as presented in this book. Against this objection, we may simply answer that human beings do not have free will at all. Although many Christians assume that human beings possess free will, this is a pagan notion that can find no support from the Bible.23

R. K. McGregor Wright defines "free will" as follows: "By the term free will I mean the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives. This is commonly called 'the power of contrary choice' or 'the liberty of indifference....' Ultimately, the will is free from any necessary causation. In other words, it is autonomous from outside determination."24 Free will assumes "the absence of any controlling power, even God and his grace, and therefore the equal ability in any situation to choose either of two incompatible courses of action."25 Assuming such a definition, I contend that man does not have free will. In the first place, it is impossible for finite beings to have free will. If we think of the exercise of the will as the movement of the mind toward a certain direction,26 the question arises as to what moves the mind, and why it moves toward where it moves. Even if we assume that the mind can move itself, we are still left with the question of why it moves itself toward a given direction, that is, why it chooses one option instead of another. If one traces the movement and direction of the mind to factors external to the mind itself factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside, and thus influencing or determining the decision then how is this movement of the mind free? On the other hand, if one traces the cause to the person's innate propensities, then this movement of the mind is likewise not free, since such in-built inclinations have not been freely chosen (that is, without external influences) by the person in the first place, yet they determine the decisions that he makes. If a person's decisions are determined by a mixture of innate propensities and external influences, it remains that he does not have free will.

If the mind makes decisions based on factors, causes, and influences not chosen by the mind itself, then these decisions are not free. Although we may affirm that man has a will, so that the mind can indeed move toward different options, the ability and reason for such movement is never determined by the mind itself, but by something other than the mind itself. Since this is true for all finite beings, it follows that only God possesses free will. As Luther writes against the humanist Erasmus:

It is a settled truth, then...that we do everything of necessity, and nothing by "free-will"; for the power of "free-will" is nil...It follows, therefore, that "free-will" is obviously a term applicable only to the Divine Majesty; for only He can do, and does (as the Psalmist sings) "whatever he wills in heaven and earth" (Psalms 135:6). If "free-will" is ascribed to men, it is ascribed with no more propriety than divinity itself would be and no blasphemy could exceed that!27 No one under the dominion of sin can simply "decide" to be free from it without God's intervention, nor would the person wish to be free from sin before such an intervention occurs. Salvation is wholly the work of God, so that no one may boast of his works or even his "good sense" in that he has "chosen" Christ (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8). Even after one has become a Christian, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13).

Scripture teaches that God is the one who determines the thoughts and decisions of man. He exercises immediate control over the mind of man, and determines all the innate propensities and external factors relevant to him. It is God who forms a person in the womb, who determines his inward dispositions, and who arranges his outward circumstances by divine providence. It is true that the doctrine of election contradicts the free will of man,28 but free will is a human invention a sinful assumption or aspiration and not a scriptural concept. Therefore, the "free will" objection against divine election fails because free will does not exist.

Many people think that there is a contradiction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They assume that human responsibility presupposes human autonomy, or free will. But if God has absolute and pervasive control over all human decisions and actions, then man is not free, and therefore divine sovereignty and human responsibility appear to be in conflict.

Now, the first definition for "responsible" in Webster's New World College Dictionary is, "expected or obliged to account (for something, to someone); answerable; accountable."29 Regardless of whether man is free or not, man is certainly "expected or obliged to account" for his actions to God. The Bible says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked; therefore, man is responsible.

Man is responsible precisely because God is sovereign, since to be responsible means nothing more than being held accountable to one's actions, that one will be rewarded or punished according to a given standard of right and wrong. Moral responsibility has everything to do with whether God has decided to judge man and whether he has the power and authority to enforce such a decision, but it does not depend on any "free will" in man. Man is responsible because God will reward obedience and punish rebellion, but this does not at all imply that man is free to obey or rebel.

Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Man is responsible for his sins not because he is free or able not to sin; this verse says that he is not. But man is responsible because God has decided to judge him for his sins. Therefore, human responsibility does not presuppose human autonomy or free will, but it presupposes the absolute sovereignty of God. Divine sovereignty contradicts human autonomy, but not human responsibility.30 For many people, the issue now becomes one of justice. They insist that it would be unjust for God to condemn those sinners who were never free to decide or perform otherwise, and who were created for and predestined to damnation by God in the first place. Since this objection will also be relevant when we discuss the doctrine of reprobation, we will deal with it there.

Some people find it impossible to deny that the Bible indeed teaches divine election, and that election is for salvation; nevertheless, they are not prepared to affirm that God chooses specific individuals. They propose that God indeed elects some for salvation, but that election is corporate in nature. They claim that Ephesians 1:4 supports this position: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Since the verse says that God's election is in Christ, the objection against the election of individuals for salvation is that the object of election is Christ, and whoever comes into Christ becomes one of the elect.

However, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30, "But God chose...so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." The apostle says that it is God who made the choice in election so that "no one may boast before him." Against those who say that only Christ is the object of election, and that whoever comes into him becomes God's elect, the passage says, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus." God chooses who becomes "in Christ," and therefore divine election is in fact a selection of individuals. In addition, corporate election fails to explain why anyone would want to come into Christ without having been individually chosen and then "dragged" to Christ by God.31 According to what we have already established about the depravity of man and his bondage to sin, if Christ were to be the sole object of election, no one would enter into him, and no one would be saved. For a given person to be saved, God must first choose and then directly and powerfully act on his mind. Therefore, we conclude that divine election consists of God's choice of individuals for salvation, and not the corporate church or Christ. In any case, it is possible to refute corporate election by directly dealing with the passage in question. Ephesians 1:4-6 says: For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Ephesians 1:4 says that he chose us "in him," with the object of God's selection as "us" and not Christ. That is, it says that he "chose us," and not that he "chose him." Ephesians 1:5 excludes corporate election when it says, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ." God predestined us not Christ, but the individuals to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. Likewise, verse 6 says, "he has freely given us in the One he loves." God gives salvation to us in Christ; he does not give salvation to Christ and then wait for us to come into Christ by some sort of self-election.

Christ is indeed the elect or chosen one to achieve salvation, but he is not the elect when it comes to who would receive salvation. Election in the context of salvation refers to the individuals that God has chosen to save through Jesus Christ. Christ is the one chosen to save, and the elect are the ones chosen to be saved. The "in him" in Ephesians 1:4 corresponds to the "through Christ Jesus" in Ephesians 1:5 and the "in the One he loves" in Ephesians 1:6, with all three expressions referring to him as the means of salvation, and not the object of salvation.

Another objection against the biblical doctrine of divine election is that it destroys the reason or motive for evangelism. It appears to some people that if God has predetermined the identities of those who would be saved, this would render the work of evangelism meaningless. On the surface, this seems to be an objection arising from a pious and noble concern for evangelism, but the assumption is that the only sufficient reason or motive for obeying the command of God to evangelize is that to disobey it will result in the damnation of many. In other words, one who makes this objection against divine election is implying that he finds it meaningful to obey God in preaching the gospel only if his disobedience will cause his potential audience to suffer endless torment in hell. Although God has commanded him to preach the gospel, he has no incentive to do so unless he knows that other people will be forever condemned for his disobedience. Unless his role in the salvation or damnation of others is determinative, he finds it meaningless to obey the command of God. This objection serves to expose the moral depravity of the one who raises it, but it poses no challenge to the doctrine of election.

Faithful Christians can affirm that God’s command to preach the gospel is more than enough to give meaning and purpose to evangelism. His commands are inherently meaningful, and demand obedience. In addition, we should understand that God controls both the means and the ends. He does not only determine what he wants to happen but also how he wants it to happen, and he has decided that believers should be the means by which other individuals whom he has chosen would be brought to faith in Christ. We should be grateful that God would use our preaching as the means by which he summons those he has chosen for salvation (2 Timothy 2:10).

It is true that God does not need us: "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). His commands toward us never reflect his need, since he has none, but they reflect his preceptive will for our lives. We preach so that those who are "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) will come to Christ, and not because they will be lost without us. Nevertheless, it means more to some people to be needed than to obey the commands of God. The other side of the doctrine of election is the doctrine of REPROBATION. Just as God has actively chosen to save some, he has actively chosen to condemn the rest of humanity. Just as he has determined which specific individuals would be saved, he has determined which specific individuals would be damned: Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction? (Romans 9:21-22)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message which is also what they were destined for. (1 Peter 2:7-8)

Many people attempt to dilute this doctrine by saying that God merely "passes over" the reprobates, but the Bible teaches that he actively hardens their hearts against himself and the gospel: But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go. (Exodus 10:20) For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20)

Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. (Isaiah 63:17)

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn and I would heal them. (John 12:40) Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. (Romans 9:18)

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." (Romans 11:7-8)

We have already established that free will does not exist in finite beings, and that human responsibility has no direct relationship to free will. It is God who governs all things, including the thoughts and actions of human beings, but human beings are still responsible for their thoughts and actions precisely because God holds him accountable for their thoughts and actions by his sovereign power.

Responsibility presupposes accountability, but accountability does not presuppose ability or freedom. Accountability merely presupposes one who demands accountability. Since God demands accountability since he will reward righteousness and punish wickedness man is accountable. Since God is sovereign, he decides what he wants to decide, and whether human beings have free will or not never has to enter the discussion at all.

Right away the question becomes one of justice. Many people may insist that it would be unjust for God to punish those whom he has predestined to damnation, who could never decide or perform otherwise.

Paul anticipates such an objection in Romans 9:19, and writes, "One of you will say to me: ’Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" He replies, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ’Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 5:20). God rules by absolute authority; no one can halt his plans, and no one has the right to question him. This is true because God is the creator of all that exists, and he has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 5:21). The apostle continues to say, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:22-24). This is still part of the answer to the question in Romans 9:19 :

"Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" Paul is saying that since God is sovereign, he can do whatever he wishes, including creating some vessels destined for glory, and some destined for damnation. The elect rejoices in this doctrine; the reprobate detests it. Either way, there is nothing that anyone can do about it. Peter says regarding those who reject Christ: "They stumble because they disobey the message which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:8).

It is only because of impiety and irrationality that the issue of justice is even brought up against the doctrine of reprobation. The objection in its various forms amounts to the following:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.

2. The doctrine of reprobation is unjust.

3. Therefore, the Bible does not teach the doctrine of reprobation.

Premise (2) has been assumed without warrant. By what standard is one to judge whether the doctrine of reprobation is just or unjust? If the Bible speaks of it, then it is not up to us to decide the issue. On the other hand, the Christian reasons as follows:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.

2. The Bible affirms the doctrine of reprobation.

3. Therefore, the doctrine of reprobation is just. The pivotal point is whether the Bible affirms the doctrine; whether it is just or unjust should not be assumed beforehand. Calvin notes: For God’s will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God’s will, which cannot be found. Let men’s rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist.32 To dictate how God’s mercy is to be dispensed is evidence proving the utter sinfulness and foolish audacity of man, and not an argument against the doctrines of election and reprobation. To better understand election and reprobation, we must fully affirm what the Bible says concerning human depravity. For example, Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:23 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every human being is a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23); therefore, justice demands that every person be damned. The doctrines of election and reprobation do not say that the elect receive mercy while the non-elect receive injustice. Since all human beings deserve damnation, the biblical doctrines of election and reprobation teach that those whom God has chosen for salvation would receive mercy, and what those whom he has chosen for damnation would receive is precisely justice and that is why they would be damned. God has no obligation to show mercy to anyone at all, and that he shows mercy to some does not mean that he must show mercy to all.

Once it is claimed that God is somehow required to be merciful to someone, we are no longer speaking of mercy, but justice. It is not mercy that grants what is required, but justice. Receiving justice in this case results in eternal damnation and not salvation. What is "fair" is for everyone to

be damned, since our sins have rendered this the just punishment. We should be thankful that God is merciful to save anyone at all, instead of accusing him with the blasphemous charge of being unjust or not merciful enough. As Benjamin B. Warfield writes: Shall we not fix it once for all in our minds that salvation is the right of no man; that a "chance" to save himself is no "chance" of salvation for any; and that, if any of the sinful race of man is saved, it must be by a miracle of almighty grace, on which he has no claim, and, contemplating which as a fact, he can only be filled with wondering adoration of the marvels of the inexplicable love of God? To demand that all criminals shall be given a "chance" of escaping their penalties, and that all shall be given an "equal chance," is simply to mock at the very idea of justice, and no less, at the very idea of love.33

Although we have no right to demand an explanation, Paul does tell us why God's work of reprobation is both good and necessary:

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

God has "prepared for destruction" certain individuals, so that he may "show his wrath and make his power known." Paul explains that, "he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." In other words, the reprobation of the non-elect is for the express purpose of making God's glory known to his elect.

Since the elect have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) by Christ, they will never have the opportunity to experience the wrathful aspect of his nature. But the wrath of God remains an essential divine attribute. As explained earlier, God's love toward his elect is characterized by his willingness to reveal himself to them (John 14:21-23; John 15:15; John 16:14; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12), and therefore he has prepared the reprobate for such a purpose.

We have already established that God has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation just as a potter has the right to do whatever he wishes with his lump of clay; therefore, one cannot accuse God of being cruel or unjust for creating and predestining the reprobates for the above purpose. God is the sole moral authority, and the Bible calls him just and good; therefore, whatever he says and does is just and good by definition. It follows that his work of reprobation is thus just and good by definition, and no one can accuse God of unrighteousness there is no standard of right and wrong outside of God by which to accuse God of wrongdoing. God is his own moral standard, and since he calls himself righteous, he must therefore be righteous.

Instead of causing us to question God's justice, the doctrine of reprobation should further enlighten us concerning God's great love for his elect. Since God governs even the reprobates to serve his own ends (Proverbs 16:4), and he "causes all things to work together" (Romans 8:28; NASB) for the good of the elect, it follows that he may manipulate the lives of the reprobates in ways that promote the good of his own chosen ones. And Scripture teaches that this is what he has been doing. Thus even the damnation of sinners is for the benefit and edification of Christians, for such is the love of God toward his chosen ones.

SUMMONED

Romans 8:29-30 tells us that to those whom God has chosen for salvation, he has also given a purpose, namely, to conform to the likeness of his Son. And to those whom he has given such a purpose, he also issues a call to them in due time so that they may come to Christ. Thus the passage says, "Those he predestined, he also called" (Romans 8:30).

Remember that all who are included in one phase of the application of redemption also enter into the next phase. All whom God has elected, he has also predestined, and all whom God has predestined, he also calls to Christ. But verse 30 goes on to say, "Those he called, he also justified." Thus all whom God calls will attain justification. And since justification is by faith in Christ, all whom God calls will believe in Christ and be justified. Therefore, God's calling toward the elect is bound to be effective, and so theologians call this act of God an EFFECTUAL CALLING.

Since the effectual calling is one whose result is guaranteed, it is not like an "invitation" that the elect may accept or reject. Rather, it is more like what we mean by the verb "to summon." In calling his elect, God does not merely invite them to do something, but God himself does something to them. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "He who calls them creates in them the ability to respond so that in the very act of his calling he brings them into new life."34 Thus those whom God has chosen and predestined in eternity, he also summons to Christ in historical time.

God summons the elect usually through the preaching of the gospel. Now, Christians do not first learn the identities of the elect, and then proceed to preach the gospel only to them. Rather, they preach the gospel "to all creation," and "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Therefore, whether it is in the form of public oration, private conversation, written literature, or other means, the preaching or presentation of the gospel goes forth to both the elect and the non-elect. The elect will come to faith; the non-elect will either reject the gospel, or produce a temporary and false profession of faith.

Because of this, theologians distinguish between the OUTWARD CALLING and the INWARD CALLING. The outward calling refers to the preaching of the gospel by human beings, and is presented to both the elect and the non-elect. On the other hand, the inward or effectual calling is a work of God accompanying the outward calling to cause the elect to come to faith in Christ. The preaching of the gospel appears to everyone as an outward calling, but it also comes as an inward summons to the elect. The outward calling is produced by human beings, but the inward calling is solely a work of God and occurs only to the elect. The inward calling is usually concurrent with the outward calling. In other words, many people may hear the gospel in a given situation, but God will cause only the elect to believe what is preached, while he hardens the non-elect against it.

Matthew 22:14 says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." The word "invited" in this verse may be translated "called," as many other translations have it. Many are indeed "invited" in that they hear the outward call of the gospel, but only a few are among God's elect, and therefore genuine and permanent professions of faith only come from the latter group.

REGENERATED

We may define the sinful nature of man as the mind's strong disposition to evil (Colossians 1:21; Romans 8:5-7). REGENERATION is a work of God in which he changes such an evil disposition

into one that delights in the laws and precepts of God (Ezekiel 11:19-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27), and this results in what amounts to a spiritual resurrection. Regeneration is a drastic and permanent transformation at the deepest level of one's personality and intellect, which we may call a RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION.35 The individual's most basic commitments are turned to God from the abominable objects and principles that he once served. This change in a person's first principle of thought and conduct generates a rippling effect that transforms the entire spectrum of his worldview and lifestyle.

Regeneration, or being "born again," occurs in conjunction with God's effectual call toward his elect (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18), and enables them to respond in faith and repentance toward Christ. This means that regeneration precedes faith; that is, one is not born again by faith, but he is enabled to believe precisely because God has first regenerated him. Faith is not the precondition of regeneration; rather, regeneration is the precondition of faith.

One reason why many Christians think that regeneration occurs by faith is because they have confused regeneration with "salvation" in general, and "justification" in particular. When the word "salvation" is applied to the sinner, it is a general term that may imply a number of things, such as the items that we are discussing in this chapter. On the other hand, in justification God confers upon the elect the legal righteousness merited by Christ in his redemptive work. The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith, and not that we are regenerated by faith. Confusion results when one considers justification and regeneration as both meaning "salvation."

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). The word "see" here mainly refers to the ability to understand, or "see into." Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." If they cannot "see" the gospel, they cannot accept it, which in turn makes it impossible for them to be saved.

Matthew 13:15 makes a similar point: "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." Or, as Mark 4:12 says, "Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" Only when one is able to see will one understand, and only when one understands will he be able to turn, that is, be "converted" (Matthew 13:15, KJV). If it is necessary to "see" before one has faith, and if the ability to "see" is only possible after regeneration (John 3:3), then naturally regeneration comes before faith. To review, God has chosen a number of individuals to receive salvation. After this, Christ came to this earth and paid the price of sin for the elect. Then, each of the elect is summoned to believe the gospel at specific times designated by God. However, since the elect are born sinners, there is present within them a strong disposition toward evil, rendering them unable and unwilling to respond. Therefore, God regenerates the elect sinners as he summons them, and places in each of them a new nature that is disposed toward God and righteousness. Thus regeneration is a MONERGISTIC work it is a work of God that produces its effects without any cooperation from the one being saved.

John 1:12-13 makes reference to the monergistic nature of regeneration: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of

God" (NASB). The passage indicates that regeneration does not occur by belonging to a particular bloodline, nor does it occur by "human decision" (John 1:13, NIV). The popular view of regeneration is that through a "decision" for Christ, man can become born again, and thus saved from sin. However, Scripture teaches that regeneration is wholly a work of God that he effects in his chosen ones, and that it does not occur through the will of man: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

It is easy to understand why regeneration must precede faith if we keep in mind that man is spiritually dead before regeneration (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:23). Because of the mind's hostility to the things of God before regeneration, the elect by themselves would never come to faith in Christ when presented with the gospel. It is God who acts first, and having changed their disposition from evil to good, and from darkness to light, they then respond to the gospel by faith in Christ, and thereby becomes justified in God's sight. Acts 16:14 records the conversion of Lydia, and the verse says that it was God who first "opened her heart" so that she could "respond to Paul's message."

CONVERTED

After God has regenerated him, the elect individual now "sees" the truth of the gospel and responds to the effectual call by undergoing CONVERSION, which consists of repentance and faith. The message of Jesus to the people was, "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). And he reprimanded "the chief priests and the elders of the people," that they did not "repent and believe" (Matthew 21:23; Matthew 21:32) under the ministry of John the Baptist. The word "conversion" signifies a turning, and includes both the concepts of repentance and faith. Repentance is the part of conversion in which a person turns from sin, while faith is when he turns to Christ for salvation. The close connection between repentance and faith is also indicated in Hebrews 6:1, where it says the "elementary teachings about Christ" consists of "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God." The writer calls this the "foundation" or beginning of the Christian life. In REPENTANCE, the sinner first comes to a true intellectual realization of his sinful condition. Since God has already regenerated him, he finds this sinful condition repugnant and determines to turn from both the lifestyle consisting of sins and the individual acts of sins.

Repentance is volitional and not emotional. Although much emotion may at times accompany the turning of the mind, it is not a necessary or defining element. Of course, a mental state consisting of nothing more than an emotional upheaval over one's sins and shortcomings without a volitional act of turning does not constitute repentance, and therefore will not result in faith and justification.

Conversion does not result only in a negative change, in which one turns from idols, but Paul states that the elect individual also turns "to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Further, a definite system of theology has been added to the person's thinking, replacing the former unbiblical worldview. This is the aspect of conversion that we call FAITH.

Many theologians propose that faith consists of three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. But the following will show that faith consists of only knowledge and assent, and that trust is only shorthand for assent.

KNOWLEDGE refers to the intellectual retention and comprehension of true propositions. This is a necessary element of faith since it is impossible to believe something without knowing what to believe. If one does not know what X represents, he cannot answer the question, "Do you believe in X?" Faith is impossible without knowledge.

God grants knowledge to an individual as the first element of saving faith usually through the preaching or presentation of the gospel. As the apostle Paul writes, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). Knowledge also implies understanding in this case. Just as it is impossible to believe in X while it remains undefined, so one cannot believe in something while the definition is not understood. Since the gospel is always presented in propositional form, the knowledge and understanding necessary for faith refer to the mental retention and comprehension of the meaning of the verbal statements presented.

ASSENT is agreement to the understood propositions. Although anyone may gain some understanding of the gospel message, not everyone will agree that it is true. It is easy for one to explain to another the scriptural claim of the resurrection of Christ, but whether the hearer will agree that it had in fact occurred is a different matter. As mentioned, the evil disposition of the unregenerate mind prevents one from assenting to the gospel regardless of the preacher's persuasiveness. Therefore, one must first be regenerated by God, so as to gain a new disposition favorable to the gospel, after which one will readily give assent to the gospel.

Since many theologians think that the non-elect can truly assent to the gospel without "personal trust" in Christ, they also argue that knowledge and assent are not sufficient to save. One must add to knowledge and assent the third element of TRUST, which they define as a personal and relational reliance on the person of Christ. They say that although the objects of knowledge and assent are propositions, the object of trust must be a person, namely, Christ. That is, saving faith believes in Christ as a person, and not a set of propositions.

Although not all theologians distinguish faith into these three elements, many of them define it in ways that amount to claiming that saving faith must move from the intellectual to the relational, the propositional to the personal, and from assent to trust. To them, assent corresponds to a "believe that" faith, while trust is a "believe in" faith. Assent believes that certain things about Christ are true, but trust goes beyond that to believe in the person of Christ. Faith is belief in a person, not certain facts about the person. They point to passages demanding a faith that believes in the gospel. For example, Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved," and 1 John 3:23 says, "This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."

However, there are conclusive reasons to reject this distinction between assent and trust, and instead to affirm that faith consists only of knowledge and assent.

First, the Bible does not exclusively use the "believe in" type of language when referring to faith. For example, Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The verse demands that one who comes to God must give assent to two propositions. He must believe that (1) "God exists," and that (2) "God rewards those who earnestly seek him." The writer says that such faith can "please God," and that "the ancients were

commended for" having it (Hebrews 11:2).

Second, the New Testament indicates that to believe in Christ means to believe that certain propositions are true: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

Third, we may demonstrate by an analysis of language that to believe in (or "trust") a person is simply shorthand for believing that (or "assent") certain propositions about him are true. For example, there are two ways to understand the question. "Do you believe in the devil?" The question may either be asking whether one believes that the devil exists, or whether he believes that the devil is worthy of worship.36 That is, the question implies one of the two propositions, and asks the hearer to affirm or deny it. A Christian would affirm the first and deny the second. However, unless the context of the conversation establishes the meaning of the question, or unless the hearer makes an assumption as to the meaning of the question if the context does not provide it, it is impossible to tell which of the two propositions the hearer is being asked to affirm or deny.

If D = "the devil," e = "exists," and w = "worthy of worship," then "I believe in D" may mean either "I believe that De" or "I believe that Dw." Either way, "I believe in D" must represent either of the two "believe that" statements, and thus it is nothing more than a shorthand for one of them.

Likewise, "I believe in God" is a meaningless statement unless it is reducible to one or more "believe that" propositions. In the context of Hebrews 11:6, if G = "God," e = "exists," and r = "rewarder," then "I believe in G" appears to have three possible meanings:37 1. "I believe that Ge"

2. "I believe that Gr"

3. "I believe that Ge + Gr"

Hebrews 11:6 calls for a faith that affirms (3), without which one cannot please God; it is a "believe that" kind of faith. Also, note that to believe in X may imply a "believe that" faith in more than one proposition. In Hebrews 11:6, to have faith means to believe that Ge + Gr.

Therefore, we may conclude that "I believe in X" is simply shorthand for "I believe that X1 + X2 + X3...Xn." This means that to believe or have faith in something or someone is to believe or have faith that one or more propositions about that something or someone are true. To have faith in God and in Christ is precisely to believe something about them to have a "believe that" faith. To say that faith is belief or trust in a person instead of assent to propositions and that faith must go beyond the intellectual may sound more pious or intimate to some people, but this kind of faith is a meaningless concept. A faith that does not "believe that" certain propositions are true does not believe anything at all; the content of this so-called faith is undefined.

Many people claim that James 2:19 is opposed to this view of faith that is only intellectual and propositional. The verse says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder." To them, this verse indicates that merely to "believe that there is one God," is good because it is assent to a true proposition, but it is not a saving faith. Even the demons, and by implication the non-elect, may have this kind of "faith," and therefore it fails to distinguish the

kind of faith that saves with a "mere" intellectual agreement to the gospel.

However, this objection ignores the context of the passage. James 2:17 says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." True faith results in behavior that corresponds with the content of one's beliefs. The demons "believe" that there is one God, but they do not act in a way that corresponds with such a belief. Instead of worshiping him as God, they merely shudder and rebel against him.

What James says does not challenge what I have written about faith, but serves to clarify it. He is saying that true faith produces actions that correspond to the assent claimed. Nowhere does he say that the alternative to the "faith" of demons is some sort of "personal trust." Rather, what he says makes it necessary to include in our definition of faith that true assent implies obedience to the necessary implications of the propositions affirmed. For example, assuming that one has correctly defined "God," to believe that "There is one God" (James 2:19) also demands one to worship him, since the word denotes the ultimate being that is inherently worthy of worship. That the demons do not worship "God" implies that they either refuse to acknowledge the full meaning of the word, or they, being fully aware of its implications, refuse to grant it complete assent. A comment by Sinclair Ferguson on faith exhibits the common confusion about assent and trust:

Faith is more than assent, but it is never less than assent. Thomas' faith in the risen Christ was assent to the fact of the resurrection. But it was more. It was a heart which acknowledged, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).38

However, there is no difference between, "A heart which acknowledged," and "A mind which assented."39 He is making a pious-sounding but meaningless distinction. Further, "My Lord and my God!" is not a person but a proposition. Therefore, although Ferguson seems to be unaware of it, he agrees with us that Thomas' faith amounts to "A mind which assented to a proposition," and that faith is not "more" than assent.

All of the above considerations result in a biblical definition of faith. Since the nature of faith is assent to knowledge, and this knowledge denotes a retention and understanding of one or more propositions, faith is voluntary assent to propositions understood, and assent here implies obedience to the demands inherently present in the said propositions. The source of these propositions to which one must give assent is the Bible. While saving faith consists of assent to certain propositions related to the redemptive work of Christ, biblical faith in general continues to abide and develop in the Christian as he assents to these same propositions along with other ones in the Bible, and thus he grows in spiritual maturity.

Instead of using the word "trust" to distinguish true and false faith, we only need to distinguish true assent from false assent, or true faith from false faith. True assent means an intellectual agreement with propositions understood that results in obedience to the full implications of the propositions. On the other hand, a person with false assent to biblical propositions claims that he agrees with the Scripture but does not produce the thoughts, speech, and behavior necessarily implied by such an agreement.

Salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Thus faith cannot be manufactured by man, but it can only be given to him.

This is consistent with what we have said concerning the monergistic nature of salvation thus far, that from election to regeneration, and now to repentance and faith, salvation is solely the work of God and not of man. Therefore, no one may boast even about his acceptance of the gospel.

Without God’s work of regeneration in which he changes the disposition and volition of man, no one can or will truly assent to the biblical propositions about God and Christ. Our definition indicates that faith has a volitional element, in that it is a voluntary assent to the gospel. The will of the unregenerate man cannot assent to the gospel, but one who has been regenerated by God has also been made willing to accept Christ; God has changed his will. Therefore, God does not "compel" a person to faith in the sense of forcing him to believe what he consciously refuses to accept, but God "compels" a change in the person’s will by regeneration so that his assent to the gospel is indeed voluntary. That is, faith is voluntary in the sense that the elect person does decide to accept the gospel, but he only does this because God causes him to so decide; without God’s power to "compel" or change the will, no one would decide to accept the gospel.

Now, Jesus says in John 7:17, "If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." But Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so." Since the sinful mind cannot submit to God, it must mean that the person who "chooses to do God’s will" has already been changed by God, so that his disposition is no longer sinful but righteous. He then willingly chooses to do the will of God, and becomes able to discern that the gospel is true. This again implies that regeneration must precede faith, and that faith itself is a gift from God.

JUSTIFIED

Christians are accustomed to thinking that "salvation" comes by faith, especially in opposition to works. JUSTIFICATION is an act of God by which he declares the elect sinner to be righteous on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. Since justification refers to Christ’s righteousness being legally credited to the elect, and thus precedes many of the other items in the application of redemption, in a sense, one is not in error who says that faith leads to the subsequent items in the order of salvation to which justification is the precondition. For example, Acts 26:18 says that the elect are "sanctified by faith."

Nevertheless, regeneration precedes both faith and justification, and is never said to follow or result from faith, nor is it ever confused with justification. It is regeneration that leads to faith, and it is faith that leads to our justification. In other words, having chosen certain individuals to be saved, God sent Christ to die for them and thus paid for their sins. In due time, God changes their sinful disposition to one that delights in his will and laws. As a result, these individuals respond to the gospel in faith, which in turn leads to a legal declaration by God that they have been made righteous in his sight.

Therefore, faith is our divinely-enabled response to God’s effectual calling, and justification is his response to our faith, which came from him in the first place. Paul writes that all who are predestined by God are also called, and since the call is an effective one, all who are called in this manner also respond in faith, and are therefore justified (Romans 8:30).

Scripture asserts that justification comes by faith, and not works. Examples of passages in support of this include the following:

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:39)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus....For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:20-24; Romans 3:28)

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:4-5)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16) So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24) In light of the biblical emphasis on justification by faith alone, especially in the writings of Paul, some believers are confused by some of the verses in James 2:1-26. For example, James 2:24 says, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." But the difficulty disappears when we note how the term is used and pay attention to the context.

Note that we are discussing how one word is being used by two different biblical writers. Although we may be assured that all writers of Scripture agree in theology, they do not always use the same words to express the same concepts, and they do not always use the same words with exactly the same meaning or emphasis. For example, although John does not use the word "justification," his writings teach that one is saved by faith alone just as strongly as the writings of Paul.40 We will only list several examples here:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29) But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:23-24) But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31) With the understanding that the same word may be used with different meanings by different biblical writers, we may accept the following explanation by Robert Reymond:

Whereas Paul intends by "justified" the actual act on God’s part whereby he pardons and imputes righteousness to the ungodly, James intends by "justified" the verdict God declares when the actually (previously) justified man has demonstrated his actual righteous state by obedience and good works....

Whereas Paul, when he repudiates "works," is referring to "the works of the law," that is, any and every work of whatever kind done for the sake of acquiring merit, James intends by "works" acts of kindness toward those in need performed as the fruit and evidence of the actual justified state and a true and vital faith (James 2:14-17).... And whereas Paul believed with all his heart that men are justified by faith alone, he insists as strongly as James that such faith, if alone, is not true but dead faith: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. [What counts] is faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), which is hardly different in meaning from James’s expression: "faith was working together with [Abraham’s] works, and by works his faith was perfected" (James 2:22). Paul can also speak of the Christian’s "work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). And in the very context where he asserts that we are saved by grace through faith and "not by works," Paul can declare that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). In sum, whereas for James "faith without works in dead," for Paul "faith working through love" is inevitable if it is true faith.41

Paul wanted to show that justification in the sense of the initial legal declaration of righteousness by God comes only by faith in the work of Christ, but James was more concerned with showing that if such faith does not result in a righteous lifestyle, that faith is not true faith in the first place, and the legal declaration of righteousness by God never happened at all. Since one is saved not by good works but for good works (Ephesians 2:10), a person does not need to produce good works to be saved, but if he does not produce good works after he claims to be saved, then he has never been saved.

Thus James did not deny that legal righteousness comes by faith alone that was not his topic but he wanted to challenge his readers to demonstrate that their faith was genuine: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). His emphasis was not in how one attains legal righteousness, but how one who claims to have attained such righteousness should behave: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). The legal nature of justification means that the righteousness credited to the elect is an IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS rather than an INFUSED RIGHTEOUSNESS. God sent Christ to pay for the sins of the elect, then he grants faith to the elect as the means by which to legally credit the positive righteousness of Christ to them. The righteousness bestowed upon the elect is thus not one that they have earned or produced by themselves, but one that has been generated by Christ and given to them as a gift. Therefore, when we affirm that justification is by faith alone, we are in fact affirming that justification is not by our own efforts, which can never attain justification, but that our justification is by Christ alone, who has attained justification for us.

Since justification involves a legal declaration, it is an instantaneous act. One is either justified or unjustified; one does not become justified gradually, but he is declared righteous instantly when he believes the gospel. Therefore, the concept of justification excludes the process by which the believer grows in knowledge and holiness, which is part of sanctification.

Christians who affirm justification by faith alone nevertheless often confuse imputed righteousness and infused righteousness. Justification is imputed righteousness, and sanctification is infused righteousness. Justification is an instant declaration of righteousness, but sanctification refers to a believer's spiritual growth after he has been justified by God.

ADOPTED

Having been declared righteous by God, ADOPTION is an act of God whereby he makes the justified elect into members of his family.

Some people think that every human being is a child of God. Against this misconception, the Bible instead teaches that every non-Christian is a child of the devil: The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. (Matthew 13:38) Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70)

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:10)

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8) This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10) Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:12) On the other hand, those who are saved by Christ have also been made the children of God: For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14-17, NASB)

It is no small matter to be called the children and heirs of God. Perhaps this doctrine has been so diluted and abused in Christian circles and in the world so that we are not as in awe with it as we should be: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1). An important implication of having been adopted into the family of God is that we may now relate to him as our Heavenly Father, and that we may now have fellowship with other Christians as true family members. In fact, the bond between Christians ought to be stronger than that which exists between natural family members. We have been bound together by the will of God, the blood of Christ, and a common faith.

Most people assume that the Bible teaches us to treat others in an impartial way. For example, one should not give special treatment to a rich man just because he is rich (James 2:1-9). However, the Bible does not teach that we must treat all people alike; rather, we are to give certain

people the priority: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). We are to put Christians first when providing assistance to other people.

We must be careful to avoid confusing adoption with other items in the benefits of redemption. For example, regeneration is spiritual resurrection, which enables the individual to respond positively to God, but one does not become a child of God through it. It is possible for a rational creature to be spiritually alive without being a member of God's family in the sense denoted by adoption. Angels may be an example of this class of beings. In addition, adoption is not justification. It would be possible for God to legally declare one to be righteous without also making this person a son through adoption. One who has been regenerated and justified already stands righteous before God, and will never be condemned (Romans 8:33). But the doctrine of adoption further enlightens us as to the extent of God's love toward his elect, that in addition to saving them from sin and hell, he would make them his children and heirs.

Several items in the benefits of redemption have been distorted by some people to denote deification; the doctrines of regeneration and glorification are especially prone to abuse. A proper understanding of adoption should help us in avoiding this error. One preacher said the following:

Peter said it just as plain, he said, "We are partakers of the divine nature." That nature is life eternal in absolute perfection. And that was imparted, injected into your spirit man, and you have that imparted into you by God just the same as you imparted into your child the nature of humanity. That child wasn't born a whale! [It was] born a human. Isn't that true? Well, now, you don't have a human, do you? You are one. You don't have a god in you. You are one.42 This preacher either meant something else and was being misleading, which implies extreme carelessness and utter disregard for the preaching ministry, or he meant what he said, which constitutes blasphemy of the most horrific kind. In other words, if this was just a bad choice of words, then it was a very bad choice of words; if it was a good choice of words, then it was a very blasphemous doctrine. Either error is sufficient to result in his dismissal from the ministry, if not excommunication from the church.

Jesus is God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16; see also John 3:18, 1 John 4:9); he has a unique place before God and a unique relationship with God. We are God's adopted children, and regeneration did not make us part of the Trinity! That Jesus is also referred to as the "firstborn" (Romans 8:29) denotes his preeminence among God's creation and his elect in accordance with the Hebrew mindset, and does not mean that we are God's subsequent children in the same sense and in the same order of God the Son. For example, Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." This does not mean that the universe and the planets are also God's children.

SANCTIFIED The word SANCTIFICATION may be used in two senses. DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION refers to the new believer's instant and decisive break from the dominion of sin when he comes to faith in Christ. God has consecrated and separated him from the world. But in this section, we are interested in PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION, which refers to the believer's gradual growth in knowledge and holiness, so that having received legal righteousness in justification, he may now develop personal righteousness in his thought and behavior.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that the whole of sanctification is like justification in the sense of being an immediate act of God whereby he causes us to achieve perfect holiness in thought and conduct, and thus imply that true Christians would no longer commits sin at all. However, although it has a definite point of beginning at regeneration, the Bible describes sanctification as a growth process, so that one increasingly thinks and behaves in a way that is pleasing to God, and conforms to the likeness of Christ. A number of passages in the Bible may give the impression that one ceases to sin altogether after regeneration. For example, 1 John 3:9 says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." But this verse is only saying that one who is born of God does not continue in sin, and not that he does not sin at all. In fact, earlier he writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). That is, a regenerated person should exhibit a definite transformation in his thought and behavior. Perfection is not in view here, but an unmistakable turn from evil thinking and living toward holy thinking and living. In the same letter, the apostle John writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The atoning work of Christ has effectively paid for not only those sins we had committed before regeneration, but also those subsequent to it. However, John does not write this to grant us the liberty to sin, but instead he says, "I write this to you so that you will not sin." The verse also shows that he does not demand the Christian to have achieved sinless perfection, since he makes provision for one who does sin, saying, "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense."

Hebrews 12:4 presents sanctification as partly a "struggle against sin," but the Bible also tells us it is one that we can win. Paul writes: Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:13-14)

Sin is not our master, so we do not need to obey it. We have been set free from sin so that we may now live righteous lives. As with all the areas of our spiritual life, the way we grow in holiness involves the intellect and volition, or the understanding and the will. Peter writes, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:2-3). We grow in spiritual maturity first through knowledge. It would be impossible to shun wickedness and pursue righteousness without a clear conception of what wickedness and righteousness mean, and what kinds of thoughts and actions come under each. As for our volition, Paul writes, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). As with all the items that this chapter discusses, sanctification is a work of God; however, it is SYNERGISTIC in nature, meaning that in a sense it is also a work of man, and requires his deliberate will and effort in the process. On this subject, Paul writes:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Php 2:12-13)43 The believer is to actively take his part in sanctification, so that he pursues a life of obedience to God "in fear and

trembling."

Nevertheless, the passage continues to explain that even the working out of our salvation is ultimately a work of God: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Our decisions and actions remain under God's control after regeneration and sanctification. Therefore, although one is conscious of his efforts and struggles in sanctification, in the end God gets the glory, and the believer still cannot boast of his own achievements.

PRESERVED

All who goes through one phase of the application of redemption will also experience the next phase. For example, all whom God has predestined, he will summon to salvation in due time. Now, Romans 8:30 says, "Those he justified, he also glorified." This statement necessarily implies that all who experience justification will also experience glorification; no one who is justified will failed to be glorified. Since glorification refers to the consummation of God's saving work in the elect, this means that once an individual has been justified in God's sight, his legal righteousness will never be lost. Since all those who are justified will also be glorified, true Christians will never lose their salvation. This doctrine is often called the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, and also ETERNAL SECURITY in some circles. These terms are accurate, since true believers do consciously persevere in faith and the elect are indeed eternally secure in their salvation. However, many biblical passages dealing with this topic emphasize that it is God who actively preserves the believer from the beginning to the end of his salvation, that Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). This being the case, PRESERVATION is a better term. It reflects the fact that God is ultimately the one who maintains the Christian's salvation, and not the believer himself.

Favoring the perspective of preservation does not deny that the believer must deliberately improve and consciously struggle in order to persevere. It is unbiblical to say that since it is God who ultimately keeps us, that we therefore need not exercise any conscious effort in our spiritual development. "Let go, and let God," a popular phrase that probably came from the Keswick movement, is unbiblical as applied to sanctification. However, the word "preservation" helps to remind us that it is God who grants and causes any improvement and stability in our growth in knowledge and holiness, even if we are painfully aware of the efforts we have exerted toward our spiritual development. There are many biblical passages teaching that God preserves those whom he has elected, regenerated, and justified:

I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. (Jeremiah 32:40)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (John 6:37-39)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:28-29) For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all

creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Php 1:6) May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. (2 Timothy 1:12) The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:1) To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 1:24-25) The doctrine of preservation does not say that anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is then saved and will never be lost, since his profession may be false. Rather, the doctrine teaches that true Christians will never be lost. They will never permanently turn from Christ, although some of them may even fall deeply into sin for a time. A true Christian is one who has given true assent to the gospel, and whose "sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5) becomes evident through a lasting transformation of thoughts, speech, and behavior in conformity to the demands of Scripture. John says that one who is regenerated "cannot go on sinning" (1 John 3:9). On the other hand, a person who produces a profession of Christ out of a false assent to the gospel may last "only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Matthew 13:21).

Sometimes even the elect may fall into serious sin, but such a fall is never permanent. Nevertheless, while a person is living a sinful lifestyle, we have no reason to believe his profession of faith at that moment, and therefore should think of him as an unbeliever. Jesus teaches that a stubborn refusal to repent is sufficient reason for excommunication:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat

him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Since he is considered an unbeliever, he cannot be a candidate for marriage by a Christian, he cannot participate in communion, and he cannot hold any ministerial responsibilities. He may indeed be a true Christian, but there is no way to be certain of this while he remains in sin. Instead, he should be considered and treated as an unbeliever, along with all the implications of such an assumption. "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Those who fall away and never repent have never been truly saved. John says, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19). Judas appeared to have followed Jesus for several years, but Jesus says, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70). John 6:64 explains, "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him." So it was not as if Judas had true faith, and then fell into sin and lost his salvation, but he never had true faith at all. Jesus chose Judas knowing that he would be the traitor: "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled" (John 17:12). This verse presupposes divine election, and explicitly teaches the doctrines of preservation and reprobation. Jesus kept safe the eleven, who were among the elect, but Judas was lost because he had never been saved in the first place; he was among the reprobates, "doomed to destruction." On the other hand, those among the elect who appear to fall from their faith nevertheless retain their salvation, and they will return to Christ according to God’s power to preserve them. For example, even before Peter denied Christ, he was told, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). It is true that if one’s faith is truly lost, then he has also lost his salvation; however, it is God himself who prevents the faith of his elect from failing. And just as Jesus prayed for Peter, he is now praying for all Christians, so that no matter what spiritual problems they appear to be experiencing, in the end their faith will not fail: My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. (John 17:20)

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Jesus made no such prayer for Judas, but he only prays for his elect: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9).

One of the most common objections to this doctrine states that if it is true that the believer cannot lose his salvation, then this constitutes an implicit license to sin. The Christian may sin all he wants, and yet remains secure in Christ. However, the true Christian does not wish to live in sin, although he may occasionally stumble. The true believer detests sin and loves righteousness. One who sins without restraint is not a Christian at all.

There are a number of biblical passages that command Christians to pursue righteousness and shun wickedness. Some of these passages are so strong in expression and contain warnings so ominous that some people misinterpret them as saying that it is possible for a true believer to lose

his salvation. For example, Hebrews 6:4-6 says the following:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

First, whatever the passage means, it does not say that the elect will in fact renounce his faith. Let us assume that the passage is indeed saying that if one falls away from faith after reaching a certain stage of spiritual development he would indeed lose his salvation. This does not challenge the doctrine of preservation in fact, we may heartily agree with it. If the elect sincerely and permanently renounces Christ, then he loses his salvation. However, we have already read a number of verses saying that this will never happen, that the true believer will never sincerely and permanently renounce Christ, and the above passage says nothing to contradict this. John says that those who depart from the faith have never been truly with the faith.

Second, several verses later, the writer explicitly states that what this passage describes will not happen to his readers: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6:9). To paraphrase, he is saying, "Although we are talking this way, I am sure that when it comes to salvation, this will not happen to you."

Third, we must remember that God uses various means by which he accomplishes his ends. For example, although he has unchangeably determined the identities of those who would be saved, he does not save these people without means. Rather, he saves the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel, and by means of the faith in Christ that he places within them. God uses various means to accomplish his ends, and he chooses and controls both the means and the ends.

Accordingly, just because we are told that the elect will persevere in faith does not mean that God does not warn them against apostasy. In fact, these scriptural warnings about the consequences of renouncing the Christian faith is one of the means by which God will prevent his elect from apostasy. The reprobates will ignore these warnings, but the elect will heed them (John 10:27), and so they will continue to work on their sanctification "with fear and trembling" (Php 2:12). Concerning the words of God, Psalms 19:11 says, "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Endnotes:

1. "And who, in this world of death and sin, I do not say merely will, but can, will the good? Is it not forever true that grapes are not gathered from thorns, nor figs from thistles; that it is only the good tree which brings forth good fruit while the evil tree brings forth always and everywhere only evil fruit?...It is useless to talk of salvation being for 'whosoever will' in a world of universal 'won't'"; Benjamin B. Warfield, The Plan of Salvation; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000 (original: 1915); p. 43.

2. Jesus contradicts the common assumption that responsibility presupposes ability that is, the assumption that if one is unable to accept the gospel, then he should not be blamed for rejecting it.

However, Jesus says that all human beings are unable to accept the gospel unless enabled by God, but all who reject the gospel will still be punished for their unbelief. Thus responsibility does not presuppose ability. We will discuss this further in what follows.

3. No one can decide to believe the gospel against his sinful disposition, but faith must be sovereignly granted by God as a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and he does not give faith to all human beings.

4. God continues to direct both our decisions and actions according to his own purpose even after we have become Christians. We are conscious of our spiritual efforts, but such efforts are still only products of the sovereign power of God.

5. God appointed the reprobates "to suffer wrath," but he appointed the elect "to receive salvation."

6. Faith is a necessary condition for justification, but faith is not the reason or cause for election, but rather the product of election. Faith in Christ is the means by which God saves those whom he has chosen.

7. Although election is not corporate, the group of chosen individuals naturally forms a "chosen people."

8. In some instances, the "book of life" refers to natural life (Psalms 69:28; Exodus 32:32; Daniel 12:1), but the term is used of eternal life in later Judaism and in the New Testament (Php 4:3; Revelation 3:5). Thus in some passages where it appears that God may blot out the names of some from his book, it is referring to natural life, while in the New Testament, the emphasis is more on eternal life, and the names written in the book of eternal life will not be blotted out. Revelation 3:5 says that God will not blot out the names of those who overcome, and some people misunderstand this to imply that one may indeed be blotted out after his name has been written in the book. But 1 John 1:4 promises us that "Everyone born of God overcomes the world." Since all true believers will overcome, and those who overcome will never be blotted out, it follows that true believers will never be blotted out. Therefore, instead of allowing the possibility for true believers to lose their salvation, Revelation 3:5 makes it impossible. Now, Revelation 17:8 says that the names of all individuals were either written in or excluded from the book of life "from the creation of the world," so that the identities of the elect and the reprobates have been unchangeably determined. Also, since God elects or rejects individuals by name, election is not corporate in nature. See New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 144-145.

9. Michael Magill, New Testament Transline; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002; p. 540.

10. Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware, ed., Still Sovereign; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000; p. 186.

11. F. B. Huey, Jr., Jeremiah & Lamentations (The New American Commentary); Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993; p. 50.

12. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984; "Foreknowledge," p. 420.

13. Dictionary of Paul and His Letters; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993; "Foreknowledge, Divine," p. 310-311.

14. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982; "Foreknowledge," p. 336-337.

15. Still Sovereign, p. 194-195.

16. F. F. Bruce, The Letter of Paul to the Romans (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Revised Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985; p. 166.

17. Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (The New International Commentary on the New Testament); Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996; p. 532-533.

18. John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, Vol. 1; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997; p. 316-317.

19. Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986; "Foreknowledge."

20. Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, p. 311.

21. Kenneth S. Wuest, The New Testament: An Expanded Translation; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

22. Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2000 (reprint of 1957 edition); p. 80.

23. R. K. McGregor Wright traces the concept of free will to humanistic and anti-Christian systems of philosophy, and notes its historical infiltration into the church. Of course, the human obsession with autonomy was in fact first introduced to Adam and Eve by the devil himself (Genesis 3:1-7). Some translations of the Bible contain the term "freewill" in a number of verses, but these instances do not relate to our topic, since they only refer to "freewill offerings" as opposed to legislated and required offerings. "The point is a distinction in the Law, not a metaphysical statement about whether the faculty of choice is caused or not"; No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong with Freewill Theism; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 157. Likewise, Luther writes, "That is to say, man should realise that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own ’free-will’ though that very ’free-will’ is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure. However, with regard to God, and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, he has no ’free-will’, but is a captive, prisoner and bondslave..." He suggests that the "safest and most Christian thing to do" is to "drop this term altogether" when speaking of man. Luther, The Bondage of the Will; p. 107.

24. Ibid., p. 43-44.

25. Gordon H. Clark, Predestination; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987 (original: 1969); p. 113.

26. The biblical view of divine sovereignty necessarily implies that God is the ultimate and immediate cause of all "motions" or events, whether physical or mental. Since human decisions are not self-caused or uncaused, but caused and determined by God, free will as defined here does not exist.

27. Luther, The Bondage of the Will; p. 105.

28. "One of the standard objections to predestination is that it conflicts with free will. The person who makes this objection is undoubtedly correct on one thing, viz., free will and predestination are contradictory concepts. No one who knows the meanings of the terms can believe both doctrines, unless he is totally insane"; Clark, Predestination; p. 110.

29. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

30. "The error of Arminianism is not that it holds the Biblical doctrine of responsibility, but that it equates this doctrine with an unbiblical doctrine of free will"; Charles H. Spurgeon, "Free Will a Slave." Also see Iain H. Murray, The Forgotten Spurgeon; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988.

31. Corporate election destroys the meaning of divine election by returning to a view of salvation that amounts to self-election, since the sinner must somehow be able to choose Christ without being first chosen and enabled by God. Thus corporate election must face all the problems associated with self-election and human autonomy, which we have refuted. This unbiblical position ignores those biblical passages teaching that God selects individuals for salvation, some of which we have already listed or discussed. John 10:3 says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

32. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion; Edited by John T. McNeill; Translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; p. 949, (III, xxiii, 2).

33. Warfield, The Plan of Salvation; p. 80-81.

34. Sinclair B. Ferguson, The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 (original: 1981); p. 34.

35. It is "radical" in the sense that it affects the very root of a person's personality.

36. There are other possibilities depending on the context of the conversation, but we will settle with these two for our purpose.

37. It is impossible to affirm (2) by itself, since one cannot believe that God is one who rewards those who seek him unless he first believes that God exists unless what is meant is that God would be one who rewards those who seek him if (1) is true, although the person denies it.

38. Ferguson, The Christian Life; p. 66.

39. "Acknowledge" is just another word for "assent," and we have previously established that the heart is the mind or intellect.

40. We can find another example in the doctrine of election. John emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation just as much as Paul, but the two use different words to teach the same doctrine.

41. Reymond, Systematic Theology; p. 750.

42. Kenneth Copeland, "The Force of Love" (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), cassette tape #02- 0028. Cited in John F. MacArthur, Jr., Charismatic Choas; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; p. 331. When Paul Crouch said, "I am a little god!" Copeland responded, "Yes! Yes!" Again, when Crouch said, "I am a little god! Critic, be gone!" Copeland responded, "You are anything that He is." Ibid., p. 332-333.

43. The word "salvation" should not be confused with justification, since Paul is not speaking of attaining legal righteousness before God in this passage. Regeneration, justification, sanctification, and so forth all come under the general term "salvation," and so the reader should pay attention to the context to see in what sense is the term being used. Here Paul admonishes the believers to exert conscious effort in their spiritual growth, or sanctification.

Chapter 28

04.00. Ultimate Questions

Ultimate Questions by Vincent Cheung Copyright © 2004 by Vincent Cheung disclaimer on webpage:

"Under our copyright policy, you are permitted to print, copy, and distribute unlimited copies ofour publications for any ministry purpose, such as for your church, study group, or personal outreach."

04.000. PREFACE

PREFACE TO 2004 EDITION This book brings together three related essays dealing with theology, philosophy, and apologetics. They present the first principles of a biblical system of philosophy, and illustrate how the biblical worldview alone answers all the "ultimate questions," such as those related to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and soteriology. In the first chapter, I show that God has placed an inescapable revelation of himself in the mind of man. This revelation includes enough specific information for each person to recognize that Christianity is the only true religion and philosophy, and to recognize that all non-Christian religions and philosophies are false. To deny this inescapable revelation constitutes an inexcusable suppression of evidence, resulting in an inevitable damnation. From this, we derive a biblical strategy of apologetics that is fortified by invincible argumentation, showing that the Christian worldview is a necessary precondition to all of life and thought. In the second chapter, I provide a basic exposition of the logos doctrine, relating it to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and soteriology. The conclusion is that Scripture provides sufficient and infallible information from which the Christian may construct a comprehensive and coherent worldview. On the other hand, all non-Christian religions and secular philosophies fail to answer any of the ultimate questions.

Then, in the final chapter, I apply the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty, an essential theme of the previous two chapters, to specific aspects of soteriology. I conclude that only God can produce true faith in the mind of man, that only true faith perseveres, and that only those who persevere inherit everlasting life from God. On the other hand, all that God has chosen for salvation receive true faith, and all that receive true faith from God persevere, and inherit everlasting life.

04.01. INESCAPABLE REVELATION

Ultimate Questions 1. INESCAPABLE REVELATION INCOMPREHENSIBLE NONSENSE In his essay, "The Ethics of Belief," W. K. Clifford writes, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." To many people, this often quoted statement appears to express the essence of good sense and rationality; however, in what follows we will show that this statement is in fact naïve and foolish.

First, we must correctly understand Clifford’s assertion by noting its universality. To say that the principle applies "always" and "everywhere" indicates that it transcends cultures and eras, and to say that it applies to "anyone" and "anything" eliminates any exception. Therefore, the proposed principle applies to every belief without exception. The immediate problem is that the principle fails to justify itself. What evidence do we have that, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence"? The principle itself is asserted to be a true belief, and thus must satisfy the requirements that it proposes. Unless we have sufficient evidence to say that we must have sufficient evidence to believe anything, the statement self-destructs. In addition, what does Clifford mean by the word "wrong"? He cannot mean factually wrong, since one may believe in something that is factually correct, even if by accident, without having sufficient evidence for the belief. Since his essay discusses the "ethics of belief," we should understand that by "wrong," he means morally wrong. That is, he is saying that it is always morally wrong to believe anything without sufficient evidence. But if he means that it is morally wrong to believe anything without sufficient evidence, then we must inquire as to the source of his definition of morality, and whether there is sufficient evidence for him to adopt such a definition. Then, unless his definition of morality is absolute and universal, by what authority does he impose this morality on everyone?

What about the word "evidence"? What is Clifford’s definition of evidence, and by what authority does he use and impose such a definition on the rest of humanity? People disagree as to what constitutes evidence to support a belief. During the debate between Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen and atheist Gordon Stein,1 a question from the audience addressed to Stein asked, "What for you personally would constitute adequate evidence for God’s existence?" Dr. Stein replied:

If that podium suddenly rose into the air, five feet, stay there for a minute, and then drop right down again, I would say that that was evidence of the supernatural, because that would violate everything that we know about the laws of physics and chemistry, assuming there wasn’t an engine under there, or a wire attached to it, to make those obvious exclusions. That would be evidence for a supernatural, violation of the laws . . . or maybe we would call it a miracle, right in front of your eyes. That would be evidence I would accept. Any kind of a supernatural being putting in an appearance, and doing miracles that could not be staged magic would also be evidence that I would accept.

Really? Stranger things have happened than the unexplained levitation of physical objects. Atheists do not call them miracles, but consistent with their presuppositions, they assume these to be natural events explainable by natural causes. Even if they cannot immediately discover the natural causes to these events, they continue to assume that future research would uncover them. According to them, what primitive people believed to be supernatural events, scientists can now explain by natural causes - in the atheist's worldview, miracles are ruled out from the start.

Stein's worldview would reject the appearance of a supernatural being as evidence for God or the supernatural, since his presuppositions exclude the existence of such beings; rather, every event is explained on the assumption that there are no such beings. Therefore, all supernatural apparitions are relegated to the hallucinations of the poor deluded victims. Dr. Stein's answer was not only amateurish, but it was a lie. Jesus says, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

What one regards as conclusive proof seems irrelevant to another. On the basis of Clifford's statement, one must have sufficient evidence to show that a given piece of evidence is relevant to the claim under examination. Of course, the evidence that endorses the evidence must also be supported by evidence showing that it is relevant. Furthermore, Clifford says that we must believe nothing based on "insufficient" evidence, so if we ignore the irresolvable infinite regress just mentioned, we still have to define what type or amount of evidence is sufficient, which of course, we must also prove by prior sufficient evidence. But if "sufficient" has not yet been defined, and substantiated by previous sufficient evidence - also undefined and without support from previous and sufficient evidence - on Clifford's principle we cannot accept the evidence that supports his definition of "sufficient" in his principle.

If I prefer to believe that there is a pink unicorn in my backyard, by what authority can Clifford forbid me? By his own authority? By imposing his principle on my epistemology? But I reject his principle. What then can he do? Unless Clifford can justify his principle, I can just as easily say, "It is right always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything without sufficient evidence" - and I indeed would not have sufficient evidence to justify this claim! On the other hand, Jesus says that the word of God is truth (John 17:17). Since God is the ultimate moral authority, he has the exclusive right to define right and wrong, and since he demands that we believe the truth, which is his word, it becomes morally right to believe the Scripture and morally wrong to disbelieve it. Further, he can and he does impose his precepts and commands on everyone, and to resist him is to risk eternal damnation. Thus he has the right to demand belief in the truth, and he has the power to enforce this demand. Christianity is justified by God's authority, and no authority is prior or higher than him. On my worldview, God Almighty enforces the epistemological principle that he prescribes, but Clifford could merely wish that we accept his self-defeating principle.2

What is the nature of relevant and acceptable evidence? Is it rationalistic or empirical? If it is rationalistic, how do we know it is not arbitrary? What evidence do we have that evidence should be rationalistic? And what kind of evidence would be legitimate to show us that evidence should be rationalistic? If evidence is empirical, it is also inductive, and if it is inductive, then for Clifford to prove his principle, he must use it to verify every possible proposition conceivable by an omniscient mind in order for him to assert it without fallacy. But if he has not shown that his principle is correct by his own principle, then how can he verify any proposition by the same

principle? Thus Clifford's principle destroys itself by generating a viciously circular logical loop.

Therefore, even before appealing to biblical authority, we have shown that Clifford's principle fails to be the essence of rationality and sound judgment. Rather, it is meaningless; it is utter nonsense. In contrast, the revelational epistemology of Christianity accepts the propositions infallibly given by the almighty omniscient God. No other religion or philosophy can legitimately make the same claim, not even Islam. Contrary to what some people think, Islam's concept of God is very different from Christianity's concept of God. In fact, Islam's concept of God is such that, if one draws out its necessary implications, would make God unknowable. As one writer notes, "If they think at all deeply, they find themselves absolutely unable to know God . . . Thus Islam leads to Agnosticism."3 Of course, non-Christians do not think deeply. In any case, if Islam's concept of God renders God unknowable, then they could not have any concept of God in the first place, and unless this point is refuted, this alone shows that Islam is self-contradictory, and thus self-destructs.4 Other religions affirm a finite god or gods. Besides pointing out that the polytheistic gods often argue and fight among themselves in the relevant literature, how do these finite gods know what they know? They face the same problem that Clifford fails to answer.

Only the Christian conception of God, as revealed by God himself in Scripture, is consistent with a God that possesses all knowledge, and at the same time makes knowledge possible for man. In God dwells "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Since God has all knowledge, he requires no one greater - there is no one greater - to justify his knowledge. His absolute sovereignty implies that he wills what he knows, that he knows what he wills, and that there can be no error in his knowledge.5 At the same time, "the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever" in the words of Scripture (Deuteronomy 29:29), and so we have knowledge as well. God has all knowledge - his knowledge consists of what he wills - and our knowledge consists of what he wills to reveal. On the other hand, since non-Christian religions and philosophies cannot produce an adequate and defensible - not to say infallible - epistemology, on the basis of non-Christian thought, there can be no knowledge at all. If non-Christian systems of thought cannot provide a foundation for knowledge - if they cannot know anything - then they cannot even begin or produce any content. If they cannot begin or have any content, then they can pose no challenge to Christianity. Without an adequate and defensible - and even infallible - epistemology, it remains that no intelligible proposition can be uttered on the basis of non-Christian worldviews, let alone objections against the Christian faith.

Some people may misconstrue what has been said so far to mean that Christianity rejects the use of evidence, or that Christianity has no evidence to support its claims. But this is not what we mean; instead, what we have shown is that someone like Clifford cannot make an intelligible and coherent challenge against Christianity on the basis of reasoning from evidence. He may fail to defend the principle by which he seeks to guide the use of evidence. He may have a definition for evidence, but fails to defend such a definition. Or, he may fail to define evidence altogether. When a non-Christian says that he rejects Christianity because it has insufficient evidence in its favor, he does not know what he is saying; his objection is unintelligible. Likewise, when he demands evidence for the Christian faith, he does not know what he is asking. On the basis of his worldview, his demand - and indeed, every statement that he makes - is complete nonsense.

Nevertheless, a study of classical or evidential apologetics will show that, even on the basis of non-Christian presuppositions, Christianity is the superior worldview.6 That is, even if we assume the principles of verification assumed by many unbelievers, the Christian faith will still triumph in debate.

Now, since all non-Christian first principles are unjustified and false, when the Christian argues for his faith based on these presuppositions, he is only arguing ad hominem. By ad hominem, we do not refer to the fallacy of irrelevant personal attack. Instead, this form of ad hominem argument takes premises espoused by the opponent, and validly deduces from them conclusions contradictory to his position, or conclusions that would be embarrassing or repulsive to him.7 Using the non-Christian's own premises, the Christian apologist deduces conclusions that favor the biblical worldview and that refute the nonbiblical worldview.

However, since all non-Christian premises are unjustified and false, ad hominem arguments based on these premises do not prove the Christian's case, but only destroy his opponent's position. For example, although I have shown elsewhere that the presuppositions and methodologies of scientific investigations make it impossible to discover anything about reality in the first place,8 there are indeed scientific arguments in favor of the Christian position that serve to silence and refute the unbeliever's objections against the biblical worldview. On the basis of scientific presuppositions, the Christian may successfully argue that it is more rational than not to affirm that the universe was made by an intelligent omnipotent creator. Even so, since science itself is always tentative and fails to discover any truth, on the basis of science, no one can construct a conclusive positive case for Christianity or any other worldview. That is, even if science shows that Christianity is true, there is no way to prove that science itself can discover truth; rather, logical fallacies pervade all scientific procedures, such that science can never discover the truth about anything at all. That is, if scientific plausibility is made the standard of truth, then we can show that Christianity is superior, but scientific plausibility should not be made the standard of truth.

We will consider another example of how the use of evidence vindicates biblical claims, although non-Christian presuppositions cannot even define evidence or make sense of it. Historian C. Behan McCullagh writes that the best explanation to a body of historical facts must satisfy the following six requirements:

1. It must have great explanatory scope.

2. It must have great explanatory power.

3. It must be plausible.

4. It is not ad hoc or contrived.

5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs.

6. It far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting the previous conditions.9

William Lane Craig argues that the proposition, "God raised Jesus from the dead," meets the above conditions.10 The details of his argument are not relevant here. If his argument is successful, it would seem to vindicate biblical claims concerning the resurrection of Christ, and refute the unbeliever's objections. However, we rightly wonder whether these tests are reliable,

and whether an explanation that satisfies these conditions is in fact true. In the first place, by what authority does McCullagh list and impose these tests upon all historical explanations?

Based on these tests, Craig's argument cannot be considered a conclusive proof for the resurrection of Christ, because these tests themselves have not been conclusively justified. However, if Craig's argument indeed successfully argues for the resurrection of Christ relative to these tests, his argument is at least an ad hominem argument that refutes all objections against the resurrection of Christ on the basis of these non-biblical principles. Thus on the basis of the historian's principles, one cannot conclusively prove anything about a historical event, and this includes the resurrection. But at the same time, based on these same principles, there can be no good argument against the resurrection. Nevertheless, if Craig's argument succeeds relative to these tests, then if one adopts these tests to be the standard of truth concerning historical matters, he should come to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

However, since all non-Christian worldviews (including all non-Christian religions and philosophies) are without any ultimate justification,11 there is really nothing to prevent them from collapsing into total skepticism, but one cannot remain a skeptic because skepticism self-destructs - it is self-contradictory to affirm that we know that we cannot know. Only Christianity rescues the intellect from complete skepticism; therefore, rather than depending on a non-Christian foundation to construct a case for the biblical worldview, the Christian adopts the revelational epistemology of biblical infallibility.

It is not that Christians avoid or reject the use of evidence - the problem is that the non-Christian theories of evidence are defective. Since the non-Christian theories of evidence are complete nonsense and render everything complete nonsense, when non-Christians demand evidence from the Christians, they do not know what they are asking. Unless one secures intelligibility by the proper presuppositions, his demand for evidence is nonsensical and cannot be logically understood.

INESCAPABLE REVELATION As I will explain in what follows, the biblical worldview does affirm the use of evidence. In fact, a necessary implication of biblical teaching is that every conceivable proposition is evidence that Christianity is true. In addition, once we adopt a correct theory of evidence, even the extremely tentative disciplines of science and history can lead only to conclusions consistent with the biblical system.

Now, Romans 1:18-20 says: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Some commentators take a more or less empirical interpretation of this passage, so they think it teaches that from observing the universe, man derives a knowledge of God and some of his attributes, and this evidence in creation renders his denial of God inexcusable. But to think that a blank mind can derive this information from observation is false. It is true that man ought to find evidence for the Christian God by observing nature; however, thinking itself is impossible without the preconditions of intelligibility. Since the only preconditions that preserve intelligibility are the

biblical presuppositions, it is untrue that a blank mind can, through empirical methods, derive information about God (or anything at all) from the universe. For empirical data to be intelligible - if empirical data can be intelligible at all - one must presuppose biblical first principles. Paul says that God has built into every human mind such principles, so that one ought to derive Christian conclusions from observing the universe. Man by nature possesses an innate knowledge of God, and it is only when this is presupposed that he may rightly interpret empirical information. This is not to say that reality is subjective, but that it is impossible to gain knowledge of reality in the first place without first adopting the Christian position in full. The point is that man already knows God before he observes the external world; otherwise, no knowledge could be derived from such observation.

Concerning our passage from Romans, Thomas R. Schreiner writes, "God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world."12 This approximates our position; however, we are saying more than this - we are saying that the knowledge of God is present in the mind prior to any experience or observation of creation, so that no empirical data is ever required for one to recognize the innate propositions and thought categories given to him at birth. Charles Hodge, although somewhat of an empiricist, admits, "It is not of a mere external revelation of which the apostle is speaking, but of that evidence of the being and perfections of God which every man has in the constitution of his own nature, and in virtue of which he is competent to apprehend the manifestations of God in his works."13 Accordingly, the NLT translates, "For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts."

Even if grammatical arguments surrounding verse 19 are inconclusive,14 Romans 2:14-15 dispels all doubt that God has endowed man with innate knowledge about himself:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law,15 they are a law for themselves,16 even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

These two verses teach that man’s innate knowledge is specific. It is not only a general sense of the divine, or an instinctive propensity to worship; rather, this innate knowledge includes at least the basic moral code of the Christian Bible. Robert Haldane comments, "This natural light of the understanding is called the law written in the heart, because it is imprinted on the mind by the Author of creation, and is God’s work as much as the writing on the tables of stone."17 Therefore, although we may be unable to enumerate every proposition included in this innate knowledge, we know that it is detailed and specific enough to exclude all non-Christian worldviews and religions; only Christianity is compatible with it.

Romans 2:15 mentions "conscience" - contrary to some, we should make clear that it is not a part of the human being distinct from the mind or intellect. Anthropological trichotomy and popular preaching teach that the conscience is the voice of a non-intellectual "spirit" or "heart"; however, "spirit" and "heart" in Scripture are intellectual terms, and are very often synonymous with "mind." The verse says that the people’s consciences are at work when their thoughts are accusing or defending them. Therefore, conscience is a function of the mind, and not a separate and non-intellectual part of man.

J. I. Packer defines conscience as "the built-in power of our minds to pass moral judgments on ourselves, approving or disapproving our attitudes, actions, reactions, thoughts and plans, and telling us, if it disapproves of what we have done, that we ought to suffer for it."18 However, contrary to what some people teach, it is not true that one will always do the right thing if he listens to his conscience. This is because the conscience is merely a moral function of the mind, and not an infallible moral standard - Scripture is the only infallible moral standard. Paul writes that some people's "consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). The conscience "may be misinformed, or conditioned to regard evil as good," and "may lead a person to view as sinful an action that God's Word declares is not sinful."19

What the conscience approves is not necessarily good, and although it is not safe to violate one's conscience, what it disapproves is not necessarily evil (Romans 14:1-2; Romans 14:23). Only God's moral precepts as revealed in Scripture carry final authority for making moral judgments, and not a subjective evaluation based on this innate function of the mind. Nevertheless, as a person's conscience is more informed and trained by the words of Scripture, it will become increasingly reliable in making moral decisions.

John Calvin mentions the innate knowledge of God in the mind of man in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Although the following comes from the translation by Battles, I also cite Beveridge's translation in the footnotes where his rendering is helpful or preferred:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops.20 Since, therefore, when one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will. . .So deeply does the common conception occupy the minds of all, so tenaciously does it inhere in the hearts of all!21

. . .Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraved upon men's minds. . .For the world. . .tries as far as it is able to cast away all knowledge of God, and by every means to corrupt the worship of him. I only say that though the stupid hardness in their minds, which the impious eagerly conjure up to reject God, wastes away, yet the sense of divinity, which they greatly wished to have extinguished, thrives and presently burgeons. From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.22 (I, iii, 1 and 3)23 The mind of man is not born a tabula rasa - it is not a blank slate that is without any a priori information. Instead, every human being is born with an innate knowledge and awareness of God. The prerequisites for language acquisition, rational thought, and theological contemplation are inherent in the mind of man. Therefore, no one can think or speak without assuming and using biblical premises that provide the precondition of intelligibility, so that even objections against any aspect of Christianity must first presuppose the entire Christian worldview to be meaningful. But once we presuppose the entire Christian worldview, the force and substance of all objections vanish. No one can make sense of even false religions like Buddhism and Islam without first adopting the biblical presuppositions that allow logic, language, and ethics to be meaningful. It is necessary to

presuppose Christianity, but since Christianity rules out other religions from the start, once we presuppose it, other worldviews cannot also be true. Without presupposing Christian premises, we cannot arrive at any truth or any knowledge, but then we cannot know that we can know nothing, and it cannot be true that nothing is true. Thus Christianity is a necessary precondition of intelligibility and knowledge; the whole Bible is true by necessity. This is the basis for the previously stated assertion that every conceivable proposition is evidence, not only for the existence of God, but for the truth of the whole Christian worldview. "Murder is wrong" is a proposition that lacks any authoritative justification unless an omniscient and almighty person has verbally expressed his forbiddance of such an act to creatures who bear his image of a rational mind, and then enforces such a command with a punishment that he considers appropriate, such as everlasting condemnation. Atheism and Mormonism have no basis from which to declare murder as morally reprehensible. On their presuppositions, they cannot even make the word wrong universally applicable. They cannot authoritatively define murder, nor can they authoritatively enforce any rules against the practice.

"Murder is wrong" finds rational justification only within the Christian worldview. Although many non-Christians also think that murder is wrong, if their non-Christian worldviews cannot lead to the conclusion that murder is wrong, and if only Christianity can produce such a conclusion, it can only mean that these non-Christians have presupposed Christianity in arriving at their conclusion. In addition, although "Murder is right" is false according to biblical presuppositions, the proposition itself is intelligible only within the biblical system, because outside of the Christian worldview it is impossible to define or justify the concepts of right and wrong, and any definition of murder. Of course, we are using murder only as an example, and the above really applies to every proposition, so that unbelievers in fact employ biblical presuppositions in every proposition they utter and in every action they perform. Therefore, contrary to the objection that there is insufficient evidence for the existence of God or the truth of Christianity, the revelation of God is inescapable, because God has made the truth plain and specific (Romans 1:19).

However, unbelievers refuse to acknowledge or thank God, who has provided every human being with the precondition of intelligibility and knowledge. Paul condemns unbelievers for this when he writes: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. . .For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. . .they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. (Romans 1:18; Romans 1:21; Romans 1:28) The problem has never been a lack of evidence, but the problem is that the unbelievers "suppress the truth" by their wickedness. They already know about God; the knowledge is so much a part of them that they cannot escape from it. However, because of their foolishness and wickedness, they refuse to admit that they have this knowledge. But although unbelievers vehemently deny God, they remain creatures made in his image, and therefore they must employ biblical premises in whatever they think or say. For the Christian, this fact provides the basis of an invincible strategy of argumentation, which we will further explore later. The evidence is present, but suppressed. Acts 14:17 says, "Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." What appear to be natural and ordinary events such as rain and harvest ought to remind man of what he knows about

God, indelibly imprinted on his mind.

Although this knowledge about God is implicit in whatever he says and does, sometimes it more clearly breaks forth. Paul says to the Athenians that even the Greek poets wrote, "For in him we live and move and have our being," and "We are his offspring" (Acts 17:28). But if we are his creation, then how can we justify the worship of idols - that is, serving objects inferior than we? Accordingly, Paul says, "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill" (v. 29).

Non-Christian worship is incompatible with the innate knowledge of God. What man knows in his mind is substantial and specific enough that it excludes all non-Christian forms of worship. Thus this innate knowledge does not only exclude atheism, but also Buddhism, Islam, and all other non-Christian religions and philosophies. The writings of these false religions and philosophies betray an innate knowledge of Christian presuppositions, but then they refuse to live up to what they know to be true. As Paul says: For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:21-23)

What then is the verdict? Since God's revelation to man is inescapable, man's suppression of this revelation is thus inexcusable: "Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so these people have no excuse" (Romans 1:20, NJB). The Greek says that these people have no apologia - no apologetic; their non-Christian positions are indefensible. One aspect of defending our faith involves demonstrating that the unbelievers have absolutely no defense for their own beliefs. Rather, we have caught them red-handed - they deny the Christian faith while continuing to use Christian presuppositions. This inexcusable suppression of truth and evidence leads to their inevitable damnation: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18). God's wrath is being poured out against the reprobates even in this life, as God gives them over to a depraved mind: "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done" (Romans 1:28). Their wickedness becomes worse and worse, and their sins become increasingly grotesque and unnatural. As examples, Paul mentions homosexuality and idolatry:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:24-27) Paul also mentions other sins for which God will punish them with everlasting torment in hell:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are

senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:29-31)

Unbelievers do not do these things in absolute ignorance, but Paul again emphasizes their innate knowledge of God in Romans 1:32 : "Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." They know what God requires, but refuse to acquiesce; moreover, they approve of those who rebel against him. This describes the unbelievers of our generation just as much as any other generation - not only do they defy God’s commands themselves, but they approve of others who do the same, so that they even support and encourage atheists, idolaters, homosexuals, abortionists, and all kinds of detestable and wicked people. In their hearts, they know about God and his commands. Just as God’s revelation to them is inescapable, their damnation is inevitable.

INVINCIBLE ARGUMENTATION

Before outlining a strategy of argumentation against all non-Christian systems of thought, we will first summarize what we have established so far. Although we have already repeated the basis themes several times, much of the above is new to many readers, and it would be helpful to provide additional repetitions and paraphrases before moving forward. So we will again summarize the Christian position.

God created man in his own image. This image consists not in his body or a nonintellectual "spirit," as the term is often mistakenly used; rather, the image of God refers to our rational mind, which is very limited compared to the mind of God, but it is nevertheless similarly structured. This not only separates man from the animals, but it also makes possible meaningful and even extensive verbal communication between God and man. A dog cannot understand the Ten Commandments or the doctrine of predestination.

Man’s mind is not born blank, to be filled with information gained from experience. Without a priori forms and categories already present in the mind, no empirical data can furnish knowledge to man.24 In any case, the Scripture teaches that man is born with an innate knowledge of God, so that apart from any experience, man knows something about God and something about the moral code that God has imposed upon all of humanity. This knowledge is specific and detailed enough to contradict and exclude all non-Christian systems of thought, and to demand the adoption of the complete Christian revelation.

Now, empirical investigations cannot teach man what he does not already know,25 but only the divine logos can convey information to man’s mind, in addition to the innate knowledge he possesses. However, although it is impossible to gain any knowledge by empirical means, man’s observation of nature can remind him about what he already knows about God. Therefore, observation of the universe does not add information to man’s mind; rather, it provides the occasion for one or both of two things to occur. First, observation stimulates the mind to recall what God has already placed into it. Second, observation stimulates the mind to intuit what the logos immediately conveys to it on the occasion of the observation, often about what the person is observing. In both cases, no information comes from the act of observation itself.

Although the innate knowledge in man is specific and detailed enough to exclude all non-Christian systems of thought, and to demand complete adherence to Christianity, it does not contain the

entire biblical revelation. That is, it does not contain all the propositions in the Bible. It is enough to render sinful man culpable, but any information that God has placed in man's mind and in creation is not a saving knowledge.26 This means that this knowledge is sufficient to condemn everyone, but not sufficient to save anyone. It is fully compatible and only compatible with the Christian faith, but it does not contain all the biblical propositions. As the Westminster Larger Catechism says, "The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; but His Word and Spirit only do sufficiently and effectually reveal Him unto men for their salvation."27 The "light of nature in man" here refers to the intellectual illumination or knowledge about God that he has placed in man's mind.

Since the innate knowledge in man is insufficient for salvation, the doctrine of the necessity of Scripture naturally emerges. But a verbal revelation is necessary also because of the noetic effects of sin, that is, sin's destructive effects on the mind. As Paul says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Man remains the image of God after Adam's fall; otherwise, he would no longer be human. Thus man still knows about God, but because his mind has been "darkened," he refuses to acknowledge and worship God.

Although it is inescapable that unbelievers implicitly acknowledge God and depend on scriptural premises in their speech and conduct, because of their foolish and wicked thinking, they refuse to explicitly glorify God and affirm Scripture; instead, they give credit to someone or something else. This provokes God to wrath, who then gives them up to increasing filthiness and darkness of mind, resulting in even greater sinfulness in them. Of course, in all of this, God exercises precise control over the mind of every individual, so that their rejection of Christianity has really been decreed by God: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18). On this theological basis, we will now construct a strategy for Christian argumentation.

Everyone has a worldview. A worldview consists of a network of interrelated propositions the sum of which forms "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world."28 A given worldview may be called a "religion" or a "philosophy" because of its specific content, but it is nevertheless a worldview. Thus by worldview, we are referring to any religion, philosophy, or system of thought. Every worldview has a starting point or first principle from which the rest of the system is derived. Some people claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without a first principle. However, this is impossible, because such a conception of a worldview in itself requires an epistemological justification in the first place, which would probably be its starting point. If this starting point lacks justification, then every proposition in the web lacks justification. The claim that they depend on one another would not help at all, but it only means that all of them would fall together. In a web of propositions, some propositions would be more central to the web, the destruction of which would destroy the propositions farther from the center. But even the most central claims require justification, and a worldview in which the propositions depend on one another in a way that lacks a first principle is in the final analysis exposed as having no justification at all. The claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without the need of a first principle is really an attempt at hiding the fact that all of the propositions in such a web lack justification.

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

It is also impossible to begin a worldview with a self-contradictory first principle. This is because contradictions are unintelligible and meaningless. The law of contradiction states that "A is not non-A," or that something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. One must assume this law even in the attempt to reject it; otherwise, he cannot even legitimately distinguish between accepting and rejecting this law. But once he assumes it, he can no longer reject it, since he has already assumed it. If we say that truth can be contradictory, then we can also say that truth cannot be contradictory, since we have just abandoned the distinction between can and cannot. If we do not affirm the law of contradiction, then dogs are cats, elephants are rats, "See Jane run" can mean "I am married," and "I reject the law of contradiction" can mean "I affirm the law of contradiction," or even "I am a moron." If it is not true that "A is not non-A," anything can mean anything and nothing at the same time, and nothing is intelligible.

Since no legitimate first principle can contradict itself, we must reject epistemological skepticism, because it is self-contradictory. When used in the philosophical sense, a "skeptic" refers to one who maintains that "no knowledge is possible. . .or that there is not sufficient or adequate evidence to tell if any knowledge is possible."29 Both of these expressions of skepticism are self-contradictory - one claims to know that one can know nothing, and the other claims to know that there is inadequate evidence to know anything. If a person claims that one cannot know whether one can know anything, then he is still claiming to know that one cannot know whether one can know anything, and thus contradicts himself.

Self-contradictory first principles are untenable, and total skepticism is self-contradictory, and thus untenable. This means that an adequate first principle must guarantee the possibility of knowledge. But in addition to making knowledge merely possible, it must also yield an adequate amount of knowledge. For example, "My name is Vincent," may be a true statement, but it does not tell me anything about the origin of the universe, or whether stealing is immoral. It does not even give me the concept of "origin" or "morality." In addition, although it may be a true statement, how do I know that it is true in the first place? The proposition, "My name is Vincent," does not prove that my name is really Vincent; it does not justify itself. Therefore, a first principle is inadequate if it fails to provide information concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, and if it fails to justify itself. For at least the above reasons, a first principle cannot be based on induction, in which the premises do not inevitably lead to the conclusion, such as reasoning from particulars to universals. For example, no amount of empirical investigation can justify the proposition, "Every human being has a brain." To establish a general proposition like this by empirical means, a person must examine every human being who has ever lived, who is now

living, and since this is a proposition about human beings, he must also examine every human being who will live in the future. Also, while he is examining the human beings in one part of the world, he must somehow ensure that the nature of man has not changed in those parts of the world whose human beings he has already studied. In addition, how does he prove that he knows a given human being has a brain just because he thinks he is looking at it? He must provide justification for the claim that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it. But it would be viciously circular to say that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it, because what he thinks he is looking at is really there, and he knows that it is really there because he thinks he is looking at it. Adding to the now already impossible situation, to prove this general proposition about human beings by empiricism and induction, he must also examine his own brain. On the basis of induction, it would be impossible to define a human being in the first place, since the concept of a human being is also a universal. In fact, on the basis of induction, one can never establish any proposition, let alone a universal proposition like, "All men are mortal."

Some people try to rescue induction by saying that, although it cannot conclusively establish any proposition, at least it can establish a proposition as probable. But this is both misleading and false. Probability refers to "the ratio of the number of outcomes in an exhaustive set of equally likely outcomes that produce a given event to the total number of possible outcomes."30 Even if we grant that empirical and inductive methods can discover the numerator of the fraction (although I deny that they can do even this), to determine the denominator requires knowledge of a universal, and omniscience is often necessary to establish this.

Since probability consists of a numerator and a denominator, since the denominator is a universal, and since empirical and inductive methods cannot know universals, then to say that induction can arrive at "probable" knowledge is nonsense. Even apart from other insoluble problems inherent in empiricism itself, an epistemology that is based on an empirical principle cannot succeed, since empiricism necessarily depends on induction, and induction is always a formal fallacy. On the other hand, deduction produces conclusions that are guaranteed to be true if the premises are true and if the process of reasoning is valid. Although rationalism is less popular, it is a tremendous improvement over empiricism because it reasons using deduction instead of using empirical and inductive methods. But still, non-Christian rationalism cannot succeed in establishing a true and coherent worldview, and we will briefly examine some of its problems.

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

One main problem with non-revelational rationalism has to do with how it selects a first principle.31 If the proposed first principle is self-contradictory, then of course it must be rejected. But even if the proposed principle is not self-contradictory, it must also be self-justifying to avoid the charge of being arbitrary. Although I would say that only the biblical first principle is self-justifying, even if a proposed non-biblical first principle is self-consistent and self-justifying, it must be broad enough to make knowledge possible. It must contain enough content so that one may deduce an adequate worldview from it. Thus to posit the proposition, "My name is Vincent," as the first principle in a rationalistic worldview would result in the failures mentioned earlier.

Still another problem with non-revelational rationalism is that there are various schools of rationalistic systems, and their starting points are all different and incompatible. Which one is correct? A rationalistic worldview with an arbitrary first principle cannot succeed. Although the deductive rationalistic approach is far superior to the inductive empirical approach, it also results in failure. Since any time a person uses either approach, he inevitably introduces the problems of that approach into his worldview, a mixture of rationalism and empiricism would achieve nothing more than combining the fatal flaws of both methods. In addition, the propositions within a worldview must not contradict one another. For example, the first principle of a worldview must not produce a proposition in ethics that contradicts another proposition in science. By this point, having examined the conditions for an adequate first principle, the problems of empiricism and induction, and the problems of non-biblical rationalism, we have already effectively destroyed all existing and possible non-Christian systems. They simply cannot satisfy all the requirements that we have listed. This includes Islam, Mormonism, and other non-Christian religions that claim to be founded on revelation, since upon examination, one will see that their alleged revelations cannot meet the relevant conditions. Our strategy for biblical apologetics begins with the recognition that Christianity is the only deductive system with a self-consistent and self-justifying first principle that has been infallibly revealed by an all-powerful and all-knowing God, and that is broad enough to yield a sufficient number of propositions to construct a comprehensive and self-consistent worldview. Christianity is the only true worldview, and it alone makes knowledge possible. All other systems of thought collapse into philosophical skepticism, but since skepticism is self-contradictory, one cannot remain in such a position, and Christianity is the only way out of the epistemological abyss.

Since knowledge is impossible on the basis of non-Christian principles, but that it is possible only when we presuppose biblical infallibility as the first principle, this means that unbelievers are implicitly presupposing biblical premises whenever they affirm true propositions. Moreover, since biblical infallibility is not only the precondition of knowledge, but also the precondition of intelligibility, in reality the unbelievers are implicitly presupposing biblical premises even when they affirm false propositions. Otherwise, these propositions would be unintelligible, whether true or false, and it would be impossible to affirm any of them.

Even those unbelievers who have never learned the contents of Scripture can and do employ Christian presuppositions because God has implanted a minimal number of them in every person. All unbelievers implicitly presuppose biblical premises whenever they think or speak; however, they refuse to admit this even to themselves. Thus although they cannot escape their implicit knowledge about God, they deny this knowledge in their explicit philosophy.

Among other things, a biblical strategy of apologetics challenges the non-Christians to be consistent with their own worldviews and explicit presuppositions, demanding that they cease using biblical presuppositions in constructing their systems. Since they cannot do this, their intellectual edifices thus collapse into self-contradictory skepticism. The only way out is to repent of their foolishness and sinfulness, and be converted. This strategy of argumentation will succeed not only against secular philosophies, but also against all non-Christian religious worldviews. The question of how it is possible for a person to know anything is sufficient to demolish any non-Christian worldview. Unless a person affirms a comprehensive set of biblical doctrines covering every aspect of life and thought - that is, unless he affirms a complete biblical worldview -

his beliefs can be easily exposed as unjustified, arbitrary, and inconsistent. The non-Christian may not even know what is the first principle or ultimate authority of his worldview, but the Christian apologist can search for it by asking the right questions. This will probably involve asking questions that are directly related to the topic under discussion, whatever that may be, and questions related to what the non-Christian thinks about the ultimate issues (such as metaphysics and epistemology), which will include questions about how the non-Christian attempts to justify his beliefs. The Christian who presses the non-Christian to satisfy all the necessary conditions of thought that we have listed earlier will discover that the non-Christian cannot even begin to answer any of the questions posed. On the other hand, the Christian who understands and affirms the complete biblical worldview will find that he can easily answer similar challenges in any field of inquiry. For example, science assumes that nature is uniform and stable, that experiments are repeatable, that physics and chemistry will be the same next year as they are today. But on what basis does science believe that? Empirical observation can never justify such a bold assumption. This is because even if one can gain knowledge by observation, which I deny, it remains that whenever one considers whether nature will remain the same in the future (whether the next day or the next year), it is always true that he has not yet observed the future.

Again, I deny that one can gain any knowledge by observation or experience, but even if we ignore this for now, it is futile to respond that we can affirm that nature is uniform and stable because the future has always been like the past in our previous experience. This is because the "future" in this reply is already in the past, and it is "future" only relative to something further in the past. Nothing in this reply addresses our future; however, the question about the uniformity of nature pertains to the future of our experience relative to our present, not yet observed by any human being.

Thus on what basis can empirical science guarantee that the future will be like the past? If it cannot make this guarantee, then the theories that scientists so diligently formulate and confidently employ in their calculations really have no direct and necessary contact with reality. Rather than having anything to do with reality, scientific theories are only principles that appear to be true relative to the scientist’s unjustified assumptions.

It may seem silly to question something like the uniformity of nature, but this is only because we have assumed it without justification all along. If it is so obviously true that nature is uniform and stable, and that it will stay the same way the next day or the next year, then why is it so difficult for scientists and philosophers to demonstrate this? The truth is that it is not obvious to them, and that by the principles of their worldviews, it is in fact impossible to prove. Yet they continue to illegitimately assume the uniformity of nature, among many other things, and then turn around to accuse Christians of being irrational. The problem is not that Christians are irrational, but that non-Christians are stupid and hypocritical. In any case, there is no conclusive argument for any of the many assumptions of science. At this point, some people may abandon certainty and respond that although by nonbiblical premises it is impossible to know that nature is uniform and stable, it is at least very probable that this is so. However, we have already discussed the problems with such a claim, that knowledge of probability requires conclusive knowledge of a universal, something that science, empiricism, or any non-biblical premise can never obtain. On the other hand, the Christian worldview alone provides the basis for affirming that nature is uniform and stable. As Genesis 8:22 says, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." Of course, our opponent will then demand justification

for this claim, and this eventually, if not immediately, pushes the discussion back to our first principle or ultimate authority. This is not a problem for us at all, since we have already been talking about how to argue for biblical infallibility as the only adequate first principle. Proceeding from the basis that the whole content of Scripture is our infallible first principle, God tells us through Scripture that the operations of nature will remain uniform and stable. Since scientists and adherents of various non-biblical worldviews cannot justify their belief in the uniformity of nature, this means that when they affirm the uniformity of nature anyway, they are in fact presupposing a Christian premise, while refusing to admit it or give thanks to God for it.

If man is a product of evolution instead of creation, then on what basis does the non-Christian oppose genocide or infanticide? But Exodus 20:13 says, "You shall not murder." If morality is founded on mere human convention or the majority's consent, instead of on divine authority and revelation, then on what basis does the non-Christian approve of a moral reformer? But Acts 5:29 says, "We must obey God rather than men!" Unless evolution can prove (and not just assume) that all of humanity has evolved from one common source, then on what basis does the non-Christian affirm the unity of mankind and the immorality of racism? But Acts 17:26 says, "From one man he made every nation of men."

If the unbeliever rejects our biblical premises, then on what basis does he assert ethical principles similar to ours? And by what authority does he assert principles that differ? If non-Christian presuppositions cannot justify even their most basic beliefs on pivotal subjects such as science and ethics, then their non-Christian worldviews are completely worthless. We have not even asked them about other important things like politics, education, music, and history.

Scripture itself claims that the authority behind every biblical proposition is the authority of God, who demands that everyone believes and obeys all that he says; therefore, once a person uses any biblical premise, he logically commits himself to adopt the entire Christian system. That is, unless a person accepts the infallibility and inerrancy of the whole Bible, he has no right to use any biblical proposition. By what authority does he judge some biblical propositions as true and others false?

If he uses or claims to use a prior non-biblical authority or principle by which he evaluates each biblical proposition, then he is in fact submitting to this authority or principle in his epistemology instead of the Bible, and it is from this authority or principle that he should derive the rest of his system. If he cannot derive a needed or necessary proposition from this authority or principle, and this needed or necessary proposition is only found or justified in Scripture, then this person's non-biblical worldview fails.

If he has adopted a non-biblical authority or principle by which he should derive the rest of his system, and this authority or principle does not yield the needed or necessary proposition, but that this proposition is only found or justified in Scripture, then he has no rational right to adopt this needed or necessary proposition from Scripture, because that would involve an irrational and illegitimate leap from what is deducible from his authority or principle to a biblical proposition.

Therefore, one who assumes an empirical first principle is consistent with himself when he evaluates Scripture with empirical methods, but he must also produce an account of ethics on this same empirical basis, without borrowing any biblical premises. But of course, he cannot justify his

empirical principle in the first place, so that his empirical evaluation of Scripture and anything that he derives from this principle are completely worthless.

Every biblical proposition presupposes the infallibility of Scripture. If one uses any biblical premise, he must accept the self-attesting authority behind that premise, or be left without justification for using it. Since he has no justification for using the biblical premise, the Christian has the rational right to take it away from him in the course of discussion and debate. But if this biblical premise is necessary to maintain our opponent's worldview, and if he does not have justification to retain it, then his worldview collapses.

Some Christians can confidently argue against atheism, but find it difficult to challenge other religions, especially those that claim to have revelational epistemologies. However, claiming to have a divine revelation is futile unless the revelation is real, and it is the Christian's contention that all revelations alleged by non-Christian systems are false. Since religious systems of thought are worldviews just as much as secular philosophies, we can argue against non-Christian religions just like we argue against any non-Christian worldview.

Even if a worldview claims to have a revelational epistemology, unless it is a complete and biblical Christian system, it cannot answer the questions and satisfy the requirements that we have discussed. The questions and challenges that we launch against these non-Christian religions are the same in kind as when we argue against other non-Christian worldviews, although the words may differ depending on the content of the opposing system and the context of the debate. Based on the ultimate authority of this non-Christian religion, is any knowledge possible? Are there self-contradictions inherent in the first principle or subsidiary propositions of this religion? Does it borrow biblical premises? If the religion claims to acknowledge or follow the Old and New Testaments, does its content nevertheless contradict them?

Some religions claim to borrow from or add to Christianity, but since their beliefs contradict Christianity, and since Christianity claims to be the only truth, this means that they are in fact non-Christian religions, so that we can argue against them as such. Christianity itself claims to be the final revelation, so that it does not allow for supplements, revisions, or updates. Therefore, if a religion claims to supplement, revise, or update Christianity, it contradicts Christianity and becomes a non-Christian religion.

Sometimes the "prophets" of these religions claim to be the new or final messengers of God after Christ, even revising and updating the teachings of Christ. However, since Christ is God, no prophet can replace or contradict him - there cannot be a superior or more authoritative prophet than Christ. Although God can certainly complete his own revelation, he does not contradict what he has said before with new revelations. The Old Testament predicted the new covenant, and Christ came to institute and confirm it. Then, he directly commissioned his apostles to complete God's divine revelation to us, and after that the New Testament disallows any additional revelation (Jude 1:3). Since the Scripture is complete, all non-Christian religions have no right to claim biblical support.

Many people who are ignorant about religions think that most or all religions are very similar. Of course, some of them should know better, but because they are stupid and evil (Romans 1:1-32), they refuse to see the clear differences between Christianity and other religions. For example, they

may think that Christianity and Islam are very similar, but in fact these two systems of thought contradict each other at the most fundamental level. Christianity affirms the Trinity, but Islam rejects it. What Christianity affirms about God allows for knowledge about God, but what Islam affirms about God makes him an unknowable deity.

After pointing out the major and essential differences, one may proceed to perform an internal critique of this religion. Islam has a hamartiology, or doctrine of sin, so it is relevant to discuss its soteriology, or doctrine of salvation. Does Islam have an adequate and coherent soteriology? Or, does it fail like Catholicism, Mormonism, Buddhism, and Arminianism? Does its soteriology satisfy and answer its hamartiology? Is its hamartiology coherent with its anthropology, or its doctrine of man? Does its anthropology follow from its theology proper, or its view about God? The Christian will soon discover that Islam fails at every point in its system, including the all-important starting point of epistemology. Under examination, it easily collapses just like all non-Christian worldviews, whether secular or religious. In this chapter, I have outlined a strategy of biblical apologetics in which one can use every conceivable proposition and event as evidence for the truth of Christianity and to demolish any non-Christian worldview. Many people will need additional guidance and reflection before they learn to quickly and effectively defeat all non-Christians in debate.32 Nevertheless, this method of argumentation, having been derived from the content and authority of Scripture, allows even a child who has been taught Christian theology to utterly humiliate the greatest non-Christian scientists and philosophers.

Scripture calls all non-Christians stupid and evil, and indeed we were also like this before we were converted by God’s sovereign grace. But even now that we have been enlightened by God, we do not defeat our opponents in argumentation by human wisdom or eloquence, but it is the genuinely superior content of the Christian faith that triumphs over all non-Christian worldviews. As Paul says, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?…For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength" (1 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Corinthians 1:25). When we follow the biblical strategy for apologetics, we will be confronting the non-Christians with God’s wisdom rather than mere human wisdom, and our victory is certain. Thus the failure of secular philosophies is total; the defeat of non-Christian religions is complete.

Endnotes:

1. Held at the University of California (Irvine); Covenant Media Foundation, 1985.

2. Of course, Clifford tries to justify his principle in the essay, but my point is that he nevertheless fails to answer the questions and objections that I pose here.

3. Norman L. Geisler, Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999; p. 371.

4. Of course, if our specific purpose is to expose the absurdity of Islam, then we should argue in greater detail, citing the relevant sources.

5. That is, God’s will determines everything, and since he perfectly knows all that he has determined, he also knows everything.

6. See Vincent Cheung, Evidential Apologetics.

7. That is, a reductio ad absurdum.

8. See Vincent Cheung, Presuppositional Confrontations.

9. C. Behan McCullagh, Justifying Historical Descriptions; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; p. 19.

10. William Lane Craig, God, Are You There?; Norcross, Georgia: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 1999; p. 48.

11. Several points in my presentation require me to make certain assertions that I will more adequately support elsewhere. For example, I will further argue for the present point in the rest of this chapter and in the next chapter. Thus if you are perplexed or unsure about a certain point, a later part of the chapter or the book will probably make it clear.

12. Thomas R. Schreiner, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998; p. 86.

13. Charles Hodge, A Commentary on Romans; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 (original: 1835); p. 36.

14. Leon Morris, The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Romans; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988; p. 78-80.

15. The NJB uses the term "innate sense."

16. This just means that although the Gentiles lacked the explicit revelation of Scripture, their innate knowledge of God's moral law is sufficient to condemn them (2:12). That is, "They show that in their hearts they know right from wrong. They demonstrate that God's law is written within them" (NLT).

17. Robert Haldane, Commentary on Romans; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1996 (original: 1853); p. 99.

18. J. I. Packer, Concise Theology; Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993; p. 96.

19. Ibid., p. 97.

20. Henry Beveridge's translation reads, ". . .the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges. . ." (I, iii, 1); John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998; Vol. 1, p. 43.

21. Beveridge: ". . .so thoroughly has this common conviction possessed the mind, so firmly is it stamped on the breasts of all men"; Ibid., p. 43.

22. Beveridge: "For the world. . .labours as much as it can to shake off all knowledge of God, and corrupts his worship in innumerable ways. I only say, that, when the stupid hardness of heart, which the wicked eagerly court as a means to despising God, becomes enfeebled, the sense of Deity, which of all things they wished most to be extinguished, is still in vigour, and now and then breaks forth. Whence we infer, that this is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no

individual to forget, though many, with all their might, strive to do so"; Ibid., p. 45.

23. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion; Edited by John T. McNeill; Translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; p. 43-46.

24. Even with these mental forms and categories, knowledge still cannot come from sensation. See my writings about the problems with empiricism.

25. See Augustine, De Magistro.

26. Those who have never heard the gospel are nevertheless condemned for rejecting what they already know by their innate knowledge of God. Besides the information required for salvation, a number of other biblical doctrines are absent from this innate knowledge, such as biblical teachings about church government and the second coming. Even what is part of this innate knowledge, clear enough to render a person culpable, is often obscured and distorted by the noetic effects of sin. Therefore, although man indeed possesses specific and detailed innate knowledge about God, the Scripture is necessary.

27. The Book of Confessions; Louisville, Kentucky: Presbyterian Church, USA, 1999; p. 195.

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

29. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, "Skeptics," p. 850.

30. Merriam-Webster, "probability."

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

32. For more on biblical apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, Presuppositional Confrontations.

04.02. ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

Ultimate Questions 2. ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

PHILOSOPHY

While preparing for the publication of his book, Fred Heeren had arranged to meet with several marketing executives who were experts in the area of religious publishing. He relates his experience as follows:

"People don't care about life's ultimate questions," said one seasoned old marketer. "People care about money. They care about their personal appearance. They care about getting more leisure time, more physical comforts. . ."

. . .Another executive told me he personally wasn't interested in the content. "I don't think about life's ultimate questions," he said. . ."Your book's got no appeal to me. No one's going to buy your books unless you appeal to some universal self-interest, some basic want. And what do people want?"

"Truth?" I ventured, just to be perverse.

"No, no - people want to dominate others. They want to emulate the admired, to be admired. They want more power, more popularity, more self-confidence," and he continued with another list, concluding: "You need to tell people how this will make them richer, happier, more fulfilled, how it will give them a spiritual high."

These were not words to be taken lightly. The men before me had successfully packaged many books for some of the largest religious publishers. One executive boasted that his company routinely packaged books even before they were written, relegating the content to a mere afterthought.1

After recovering from the nausea, not so much caused by the business practice described, but by the truth of what the executives said about the reading audience, we realize that here we have the formula for popular contemporary preaching. That is, people want to hear a message that "appeal to some universal self-interest." Truth is unimportant as long as we "give them a spiritual high." Such a false gospel has generated an entire niche of spiritual readership consisting of those who consider themselves Christians but are not, and it is to these false converts that the businesses market their attractively packaged products.

However, our subject is not the astounding number of false believers in our midst; rather, we must consider the observation, "People don't care about life's ultimate questions." By ultimate questions, we refer to issues regarding the controlling premises and assumptions in every area of thought and life. Going beyond the superficial, we are focusing on the fundamental ideas from which we derive our worldview. For example, in the area of science, instead of performing scientific experiments to test a particular hypothesis, we are interested in theories that prescribe

the place and limitations of science.

Some people say that they will contemplate the ultimate questions when they become older, when they get rich, or when they retire. This intent may make them slightly better than those who decide never to consider any issue deeper than the basest animalistic needs, but the effect is not any better. To delay obtaining answers to the ultimate questions, one must make the dangerous assumption that he does not require these answers in the meantime. Determining to achieve financial success first already assumes a given purpose to life, and a set of priorities. To wait until retirement assumes that answers to ultimate questions are irrelevant for daily living. However, if the answers to the ultimate questions govern all subsidiary propositions within a person's worldview, then on what principles do these people operate until they are ready to think about them? One may plan to think about God, sin, and salvation later, probably after retirement, but if there is a God who holds men accountable, and punishes adultery and theft, this person should stop cheating on his wife and embezzling funds now and not later. No one can live a day without presupposing answers to the ultimate questions. For people to delay a serious contemplation of these issues is equivalent to deciding that even if their presuppositions are false, they will still abide by them for most of their lives, and then they will consider if these presuppositions need to be changed. But until then, on what basis do they suppose that life is even worth living? Christians have an answer to this, but a naturalistic worldview has no defense against an invitation to commit suicide. Why is life worth living on the basis of evolutionary principles? To propagate the species? But why must the human species continue to exist? On account of humanistic theories, humanity would eventually become extinct. Even if this will not happen for many years, on their principles each individual lives for only so long, and afterward ceases to exist. Why should he concern himself with what happens to humanity? But Genesis 1:28 says, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Christianity teaches us about an afterlife and a final judgment.

Then, some people say that one should suspend judgment over the ultimate questions, since one cannot determine the answers to them in this life. However, if they believe that there is no afterlife, which is already an assumption concerning an ultimate issue, they will have only this life to answer those questions. On the other hand, if they believe the opposite and affirm that there is an afterlife, then the next question is whether or not they need to prepare for it, and if so, how they should prepare for it. Those who claim to be agnostic about ultimate issues nevertheless assume very definite answers about them, thus contradicting their agnosticism.

Another example comes from ethics. When we face a situation in which we must decide whether to tell a lie, how do we decide? If we decide that the expected positive effect justifies the lie, then we have assumed a teleological ethical principle that says the end justifies the means. But by what principle do we determine that the projected effect is positive in the first place? If teleological ethics is untenable, then we need some other authority or principle to justify lying. But perhaps lying is never justified. How do we know? In any case, we must know, because our ultimate presuppositions about ethics determine our decisions everyday. But once we wonder how we can know something, then we are already talking about our ultimate presuppositions about knowledge, or epistemology. And since knowledge has to do with what there is to know, what can be known, and how we know, then we are already talking about our ultimate presuppositions about reality, or

metaphysics. In fact, if we think deeply enough, we will realize that every single proposition we speak or action we perform presupposes a set of interrelated ultimate principles by which we perceive and respond to reality. This is our worldview.

Ultimate questions are unavoidable, and those people who have never deliberately and seriously considered them nevertheless necessarily make numerous assumptions about them, and then derive their positions about various subsidiary issues based on their assumptions about the ultimate questions. To operate by false or unjustified ultimate assumptions for most or all of one's life is to risk living it in vain. Therefore, not only must everyone settle these questions in his mind, but he should make it his top priority and immediately begin thinking about them. He must not postpone this until he has lived out his life and carried out many futile plans founded upon unjustified presuppositions.

Among other things, the ultimate issues include metaphysics, epistemology, theology, anthropology, and ethics.2 In what follows, we will discuss all of these topics from a Christian perspective, mainly through a partial exposition of the prologue of John's Gospel. The study of these ultimate questions will amount to an introduction on philosophy. They are appropriately called ultimate questions since they are basic to any system of thought, and our answers to them affect our view of every issue in life. Whereas a looser conception of "ultimate" may include discussions about the broader principles of politics and education, we cannot divorce politics from ethics, or divorce education from anthropology. When it comes to science, any position that we take assumes something about metaphysics and epistemology.

LOGOS

We will begin with John 1:1 : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This verse is a source of controversies, but the controversies are there not so much because the verse is especially difficult, but mostly because some people just do not want to affirm what it means. John 1:1-18 tell us the identity of "the Word." For example, John 1:17 identifies it with "Jesus Christ." Thus the prologue of John gives us much information for a biblical christology. The "Word" in Greek is logos, and we must not pass by John 1:1 without some mention of the logos doctrine. In one of my other books,3 I complain that modern preaching tends to hide the minister's theological education from his congregation. His homiletic theory demands that he separates into two distinct categories the class lecture he attended and the sermons he preaches. In opposition to one who does not hide his theological training when he preaches, The Elements of Preaching says:

Fresh out of school, he is so enamored of his notes that he tries to transform them into sermon outlines, and his congregation is subjected to terms such as logos, hypostatic union, parousia, and so on. We know of one church, located near a seminary, which always knew what the new student pastor would preach about in his first sermon - the logos doctrine in John 1:1-51. Why? Because that was one of the first lectures given in the Greek class each year.4

Anyone interested enough to read this book is probably also interested in knowing about the doctrines of the "hypostatic union" and the "parousia." Of course, even those Christians not in the ministry should talk about the return of Christ, but many people suggest that we should avoid using technical terms when addressing the general audience. Indeed it may not be absolutely necessary

to use the word parousia to talk about the return of Christ, but if the theologians find it helpful to use a technical term, then it will probably be helpful for other believers also - at least they should know the term well enough to understand the relevant theological literature.

Technical terms are useful in summarizing concepts that may otherwise take several sentences or even paragraphs to express, and therefore I favor the use of technical terms. However, I would add that these terms should be carefully defined, whether we are addressing professional theologians or the general audience. In any case, it is most irresponsible to "protect" the general audience from being exposed to technical terms. Even the word "Trinity" is a technical term, but it has been so much discussed and used that most believers know something about it. But Christians need to know about the hypostatic union as well as the Trinity. Therefore, instead of hiding our theological education from other believers, we should share it with them by teaching them what we have learned. The same chapter in The Elements of Preaching ends with the admonition, "Digest your material first, then prepare messages that meet human needs and glorify Jesus Christ." In other words, seminary lectures do not meet human needs and do not glorify Jesus Christ. Are these Christian seminaries? With this attitude toward seminary lectures, it is no wonder why Christians have a poor grasp of even the fundamentals of the biblical system of thought - it is because ministers hide theological information from them.

Contrary to such anti-intellectual recommendations, the church should teach academic theology to all believers, including the technical terms that make it convenient to express theological concepts. Paul did not hesitate "to preach anything that would be helpful" (Acts 20:20) to his hearers. Of course, the minister should begin by teaching his hearers biblical doctrines on a basic level before proceeding to the advanced materials, but to deliberately hide theological knowledge from Christians - allegedly for their own good - robs and insults them, and should disqualify a person from the ministry altogether.

Now, Heraclitus of Ephesus (530-470 BC) argued that nature is constantly changing. His famous illustration contends that a man cannot step into the same river twice, since the water and the bed of the river are constantly moving and changing. In addition, the man himself is also constantly changing, so that when he steps into the river the second time, he is already different from the man that he was when he stepped into the river the first time. But if everything constantly changes, then nothing really "exists." Imagine if a sculptor works a piece of clay into the appearance of a dog, but before you can say its name or even decide what it is in your mind, the object changes into a car, then a building, and then a pot. In fact, the appearance of the object constantly changes so that it is never one definite and recognizable thing at any point in time. If this is true, then you can at least still call it clay; however, what if the substance of the object also constantly changes? The clay changes into bronze, then to iron, then to ice, and then to gold. It constantly changes so that it is not one definite substance at any point in time. That is, the object is not any one "thing" at any point in time. But if something is not anything, then it is nothing, and if it is nothing, then it cannot be known. Therefore, knowledge depends on immutability. Thus Heraclitus said that there is a logos, a law or principle, that does not change. It is "a rational and good agent whose activity appears as the order of Nature."5 Without it all would be chaos, and nature would be unintelligible.

Later, the logos is taken over by Stoicism, a school of thought founded by Zeno of Citium (about 300 BC). The Stoics were more ideologically diverse than their contemporary Epicureans, and

Paul confronted both groups when he was in Athens (Acts 17:18). In any case, Stoicism regarded logos as a principle of divine reason, and the logoi spermatikoi, like seeds and sparks of divine fire, govern the development of every object in nature.

Philo (20 BC - AD 40) was a contemporary of Christ. This Jewish Hellenistic philosopher from Alexandria had a rather developed logos doctrine that appeared to make the Word "nothing else than the faculty of reason in God."6 However, several points of inconsistency makes it difficult to specify the exact nature of Philo's logos. Although it is variously represented in his writings, interpreters understand that its primary purpose is to "bridge the gulf between the transcendent deity and the lower world and to serve as the unifying law of the universe, the ground of its order and rationality."7 By the time the apostle John wrote his Gospel, the word logos had been invested with much philosophical background and meaning. Although there are some similarities between John and the Greek philosophers in how they used the term, to suggest that John's logos has "any connection amounting to doctrinal dependence"8 on the philosophers would betray a misunderstanding of both the apostle and the philosophers. For example, Heraclitus was like the Milesian philosophers in many ways, and the Stoics held to a materialistic physics; their views of the logos fit into their own systems, which are incompatible with the biblical worldview.

Philo's logos is also incompatible with John's christology. When John refers to the Word, or logos, he is thinking of a personal divine being who defines and exhibits rationality, and not a non-personal metaphysical principle that defines and exhibits rationality. On the other hand, when Philo refers to his logos in personal terms, he does so in a metaphorical sense. The Greek philosophers never conceived of this principle of rationality as having taken upon himself human attributes, as the biblical doctrine of incarnation affirms: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). An epistemological and soteriological mediator who is both fully God and fully man (1 Timothy 2:5) was far from their thinking. Therefore, Kittel concludes that, "From the very first the New Testament logos is alien to Greek thought."9

Nevertheless, John chooses a word that his readers could recognize, and his intended meaning does have some resemblance to non-biblical usage. Indeed, the biblical logos has much to do with logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The biblical logos doctrine addresses these and other ultimate questions, but in contrast with non-biblical views of the logos, the biblical doctrine is based on divine revelation and not human speculation. John's teaching on the divine logos supplies the structure and content of a complete biblical worldview.

Again, John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Although word is one acceptable translation for logos, proposition, sentence, speech, argument, discourse, logic, and several other words are also satisfactory. However, if we take into account the theological and philosophical background of logos, the best translations may be a capitalized Word, Wisdom, or Reason.

Attributing such a high place to "Word" or "Reason" is repugnant to anti-intellectualistic thinking. The German romanticist Goethe writes in Faust:

'Tis writ, "In the beginning was the Word."

I pause, to wonder what is here inferred. The Word I cannot set supremely high: A new translation I will try.

I read, if by the spirit I am taught, This sense: "In the beginning was the Thought." This opening I need to weigh again, Or sense may suffer from a hasty pen. Does Thought create, and work, and rule the hour?

'Twere best: "In the beginning was the Power."

Yet, while the pen is urged with willing fingers, A sense of doubt and hesitancy lingers. The spirit comes to guide me in my need, I write, "In the beginning was the Deed."10

Without tracing the philosophical influences implicit in the passage, we may note that it is not really a translation of the biblical verse, but an expression of prejudice against the Christian view of the universe. Goethe has little concern as to what the verse actually says, but he seeks to oppose John's intellectualism. If in the beginning there was the Word or the Thought, as the most straightforward translations would indicate, then it is this divine and personal principle of reason that created and even now governs the universe, and theology must be thoroughly intellectual and rational As mentioned, "Reason," "Wisdom," and "Word" are all acceptable translations for logos. However, whereas the first two are self-explanatory, the third demands an explanation. The main point is that "Word" implies the self-expression of a person, especially intellectual self-expression. This fits well with the christology of the New Testament, which says that Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and that, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). If we keep in mind that this "Word" is a person, then this translation preserves the personification of the logos, as well as the meaning of reason and wisdom inherent in it. The expression, "In the beginning," is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1, indicating that the Word had a role in creation. We will see what this role is in Genesis 1:3. Then, the expression, "The Word was with God," conveys an important piece of information that, together with the next phrase in verse 1, begins to reveal a picture of the Trinity. The word translated "with" is pros. That the Word, or Christ, is with God indicates that he is distinguishable from God. Some examples of pros include the following: "Aren't his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3); "Every day I was with you" (Mark 14:49); "I would have liked to keep him with me" (Philemon 1:13); "We proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us" (1 John 1:2). The final example refers to Christ and again implies that he is not identical with the Father, but at the same time has a definite relationship with the Father. With some exceptions, the word "God" (or theos in Greek) refers to the Father in the New Testament, and therefore Christ is not identical to "God" the Father. However, that Christ is not identical to the Father does not mean that Christ is not deity. John writes, "He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:2), which already implies his deity. But more explicit is the third clause in verse 1, which says, "the Word was God." This clause in John 1:1 has been the source of much dispute and controversy. It is a phrase that "ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Wishing to deny the deity of Christ or the Trinity, some people have observed that the theos in theos en ho logos lacks the definite article (as in "the" God), and thus merely indicates that Christ has the quality of being divine, and not that he is deity. That is, they say that Christ is like God, but he is not God himself. But this is a misinterpretation.

Since the article (Greek: ho) precedes logos, it makes the "Word" the subject. That "theos" immediately follows after the conjunction "and" (kai) shows that it receives the emphasis. Had an article preceded both theos and logos, the phrase would have completely identified the "Word" with "God" (theos), which is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity that John and other New Testament writers affirmed. That is, if John is here affirming the doctrine of the Trinity, then to have an article before theos would make John say something that he does not wish to say. The grammatical structure of the clause demands the translation, "The Word was God." The REB accurately translates its meaning, saying, "What God was, the Word was." Therefore, the clause as it is written affirms the deity of Christ, and at the same time preserves the doctrine of the Trinity. The expression, "In the beginning was the Word," teaches the pre-existence of Christ. Then, the expression, "The Word was with God," implies an intimate relationship between Christ and God, without identifying the two. After that, the expression, "The Word was God," shows us that although Christ is not identical to "God" (the Father), he is equal to the Father, and this is consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, anti-Trinitarian cults and heretics may not use this verse to argue against the biblical doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's deity, since the verse is precisely as it should be if John affirms both of these doctrines.

METAPHYSICS

We are interested in understanding how the prologue of John's Gospel answers the ultimate questions. John 1:1 tells us that there is at the beginning a principle of reason and order, but unlike that of the philosophers, this logos is a divine person. In one set of translations, John 1:3 continues, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." The NASB is preferable: "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." In a second set of translations, John 1:3-4 are punctuated in a different way, so that John 1:3 reads as follows: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (NRSV); "Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him" (NJB); "Everything came about through him, and without him not one thing came about" (Lattimore).11 Some commentators find it difficult to make sense of John 1:4 when the passage is punctuated in this second way, for then John 1:4 would say, "What has come into being in him was life…" (NRSV). Nevertheless, the symmetry of John 1:3 has become more evident. D. A. Carson suggests an alternate translation of John 1:3 that says, "All things were made by him, and what was made was in no way made without him."12 My primary concern is to prevent the words, "without him nothing was made that has been made," from being misunderstood to imply that some things were not created. The biblical view is that only God is eternal, so that it opposes any concept of creation in which God merely rearranges pre-existing chaotic matter into definite form. That is, Christianity teaches creation ex nihilo - out of nothing. There was no pre-existing matter or material for God to work with or rearrange at creation. God created both the matter and the form or arrangement of the universe. The second version of John 1:3 eliminates the potential misunderstanding: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." But if this rendering is impossible because of various considerations, then Carson's translation is perhaps helpful in avoiding the problem. In any case, the first half of the verse in itself makes the biblical view of creation clear in any translation: "All things came into being through him." Acknowledging this part of the verse prevents the possibility of misunderstanding the second half of the verse. Both

portions of the verse say the same thing - the first half affirms that all things were made by the Word, and the second half denies that anything exists apart from his creative power. There was no matter at all before creation - by agency of the Word, God made everything.

Here is the foundation of Christian metaphysics. John 1:1 tells us about the Creator, and John 1:3 tells us about the creation. Contrary to some of the other systems of thought, John denies that creation was merely an act of rearrangement of pre-existing matter; rather, there was no matter at all before God created it. Creation was by divine fiat. Since "Reason" (Word, Wisdom, Logic) is eternal and preceded creation, the laws of logic were not created. They are true not only for human beings, and they operate not only by cultural convention. Instead, they are necessary laws of thought that had eternally existed in the mind of God - logic is the way God thinks.

Therefore, contrary to contemporary Christian irrationalism, what is a genuine contradiction to man is also a contradiction to God, and what is non-contradictory to God is never a genuine contradiction to man. However, because of sin's effects on the mind (the noetic effects of sin), man often makes mistakes in his reasoning, so that what appears to him as a contradiction may not be a genuine contradiction. Nevertheless, the point remains that the laws of logic are the same with God as they are with man. This implies that when a man thinks with perfect rationality, his mind finitely mirrors God's mind, and his thinking is valid. However, because of sin's effects on the mind, man is often irrational - he does not always think with logical validity. Now, the laws of logic are rules of valid reasoning, so that given the correct information and premises, a valid reasoning process enables a person to draw true inferences and conclusions. However, if man cannot discover any knowledge or information by himself, and if he cannot overcome sin's effects on the mind by himself, then he requires God's verbal revelation in Scripture to overcome the human mind's failure to grasp truth and gain knowledge. That is, man needs Scripture to give him the necessary premises to truly know and to correctly reason about God and reality. The foundation of Christian sanctification consists of knowing the propositions in the Bible, and reasoning correctly with them.

Many Christians have been hindered in their spiritual progress by an erroneous understanding and outrageous application of Isaiah 55:8-9. These verses say, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" Some people teach that this means man can never think or understand God's thoughts. But if this is true, then no one can understand Isaiah 55:8-9 itself! It is precisely because our thoughts do not correspond to God's thoughts that we need to renew our thinking to match his thinking. Since our thoughts are not his thoughts, we must read the Scripture to know about God's thoughts, so that we may change our minds to conform to them.

Colossians 1:16 says, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." The thrust here is that "by him all things were created"; the rest of the verse emphasizes that nothing at all has been made apart from him. So far this repeats what we have read from John. The next verse continues to say that, not only did he create all that exists, but even now he sustains the creation by his power: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Hebrews 1:1-14 echoes this teaching, and says that by agency of the Son, God

"made the universe" (Hebrews 1:2), and that he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3).

Therefore, the biblical view of metaphysics is as follows. The metaphysical starting point is God the Trinity. By agency of the Son - that is, the logos, Reason, Wisdom, or Word - the Godhead created the universe, which includes both the "visible and invisible" (Colossians 1:16), the spiritual and the material realms. God made everything that exists; nothing exists that he has not created. God is the only uncreated being.

God continues to exercise his power after creation, since even now he sustains and facilitates all the operations of the universe. In addition to sustaining the continual existence of creation, he is also the cause of all that occurs. He may often use secondary causes or means to cause something to occur, but he is also the cause of these secondary causes or means. Therefore, it is correct to say that he alone is the cause of all things; his hand is seen in every event. Just as nothing could have come into being apart from him, nothing can happen in creation apart from his will and power: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29). This biblical view of metaphysics is pivotal to Christian epistemology, ethics, and soteriology. In theological terms, having a biblical conception of the sovereign God is necessary for a sound Christian theology. A compromise in theology proper (the doctrine of God) creates a rippling effect that destroys the integrity of all other biblical doctrines. Once we accept a false view of God, the rest of the system cannot be Christian. For example, a sovereign God precludes the humanistic doctrine of free will when it comes to salvation. Divine sovereignty eliminates human autonomy - Scripture denies that man has free will. Likewise, one who insists on Arminianism - that man accepts Christ by his own free will rather than by God’s sovereign choice - cannot at the same time affirm a sovereign God.

Some theologians perceive this dilemma, and so they choose to believe that God is limited in power and knowledge. Rather than admitting their own limitations, they prefer to imagine that God is the limited one. But then they can no longer claim to worship the God of the Bible, so that the logical consequence of Arminianism is paganism. The Christian system requires an affirmation of God’s absolute sovereignty. This view of metaphysics solves the mind-body problem, which philosophers consider very difficult. This is the question of how an immaterial mind can manipulate a physical body. How can the incorporeal contact the physical? Our answer is that since God facilitates all mental and physical operations, his omnipotence makes this possible. In other words, without the absolutely sovereign God to facilitate the relationship between the mind and the body, it would be impossible for a person to even roll his eyeballs at this doctrine. God causes our thoughts by his sovereign will, and at the moment the thought occurs, he also causes the corresponding physical motion. Man has no power of existence or causation within himself.

EPISTEMOLOGY This view of metaphysics produces a necessary implication for epistemology. If God alone controls and facilitates all operations in the universe, it necessarily follows that he alone controls and facilitates all operations relating to thought and knowledge. If the continual existence and operation of the universe depend on God, and man is not autonomous or independent in this respect, then all knowledge acquisitions and intellectual activities also depend on God (since these are only specific items within the broader category), and man is also not autonomous or independent in this area.

Just as man cannot exist or function without God, man can know nothing without him. God not only sustains and facilitates all things, but he sovereignly sustains and facilitates all things. That is, he can bring to life or put to death, cause to move or cause to stop, and create or destroy, all at his will and pleasure. The mind of man is then just one aspect of God's total control over the universe; therefore, God also sovereignly controls all aspects of human knowledge. Christian epistemology is consistent with and necessarily follows from Christian metaphysics. When we reject empiricism because of its own fatal flaws and also as a necessary consequence of biblical teaching, and when we affirm a revelational epistemology founded on the infallibility of Scripture, empiricists often challenge, "But don't you have to read your Bible?" Of course, the empiricists defend the reliability of sensation, and those who are more extreme claim that knowledge comes only from the senses. In contrast, I insist that no knowledge at all comes from sensation. In any case, their challenge is futile. If they cannot answer the arguments against empiricism, then their challenge by itself does not rescue empiricism, whether or not we are able to answer the challenge. That is, even if they are able to refute our non-empirical epistemology, this does not automatically prove their empirical epistemology. All the anti-empirical arguments remain in force until they refute them.

Nevertheless, we are indeed able to answer their challenge using what we have already stated about biblical metaphysics and epistemology. Consistent with Christian metaphysics, Christian epistemology affirms that all knowledge must be immediately - that is, without mediation - granted and conveyed to the human mind by God. Thus on the occasion that you look at the words of the Bible, God directly communicates what is written to your mind, without going through the senses themselves. That is, your sensations provide the occasions upon which God directly conveys information to your mind apart from the sensations themselves. Therefore, although we do read the Bible, knowledge never comes from sensation. This again solves the mind-body problem, but this time illustrated in the reverse direction. Whereas in metaphysics, God facilitates physical motions in correspondence to the thoughts of the mind, in epistemology, God grants knowledge to the mind on the occasions of the sensations, but apart from the sensations themselves. Therefore, sensations do nothing more than to stimulate intellectual intuition, providing the occasions upon which the mind obtains knowledge from the divine logos.

Otherwise, the empiricist must explain how physical sensations convey knowledge to the incorporeal mind. Of course, some non-Christian empiricists do not believe in an incorporeal mind, but they believe that knowledge reside only in a physical brain. Although we can easily defeat them on this point, even if we do not, they still need to prove by valid and sound arguments how physical sensations can convey any information to the physical brain. No one can do this.

Even if we ignore the mind-body problem for now, empiricists mistakenly think that they can make inferences from the many sensations presented to the mind at any given moment to produce knowledge. However, I challenge any empiricist to write out the process in syllogistic form to show the logical validity of such inferences. Even if he can do this, he will see that all inferences from sensations are unavoidably fallacious; no inference from sensation can achieve formal syllogistic validity. For example, if you are looking at a red car, by what valid process of syllogistic reasoning can you infer from this sensation the conclusion or the thought that you are looking at a red car? It is utterly impossible. However, if every inference from sensation is fallacious, then this means that every inference is an unnecessary or even arbitrary conclusion from premises that are doubtful in

the first place. But an empirical worldview is precisely one that constructs some, most, or even all of the propositions within that worldview on these fallacious inferences. Needless to say, such a worldview is completely worthless, but this is the kind of worldview embraced by many people, from students to scientists. On the basis of empiricism, if you were to see an apple on a table, it would be impossible for you to tell that there are two objects - an apple and a table. Based on sensation alone, you would be unable to tell where one object ends and the other one begins. At any given moment, you are bombarded by many sensations, and if you were to know the objects you are seeing by an empirical epistemology, then this means that your mind must organize and combine these sensations to group together the ones that belong to their corresponding objects.13

However, this requires your mind to know the attributes and appearances of these objects before you observe them,14 but empiricism teaches that you learn their attributes and appearances precisely by observing them. If you must know them before you observe them, and if you can know them only by observing them, then this means that you can never know anything that you do not already know. And if you follow some empiricists in affirming that man is born with a blank mind, then on the basis of empiricism, your mind will remain blank forever. Knowledge acquisition is impossible on the basis of empiricism. When it comes to language acquisition, which really falls within the broader category of knowledge acquisition, it is impossible for a person to learn the meaning of a word by sensation. A father may try to teach his child what the word "car" means by pointing at a car. In the first place, on the basis of empiricism, the child cannot even see or know the father, the car, and the act of pointing, but we will ignore this for now. The child must still make an inference from the father's act of pointing. If the father tries to teach his child the meaning of the word "car" by pointing at a car, then to the child, the word "car" may mean the act of pointing, the finger used to do the pointing, the color of the car, any part of the car, the car together with the road and the background, any large object, the meaning of "go away" or "leave," and an infinite number of other possible meanings. The point is that the act of pointing at a car does not produce the necessary inference that "car" means what we mean by the word. If one attempts to overcome the problem by pointing to many cars, then the meaning of the word may at best becomes "transportation," which may be an elephant or camel in some parts of the world. But even the concept of transportation is not a necessary inference from the act of pointing at many cars.

Besides, to teach someone the meaning of a word by repeatedly pointing to its corresponding object together with the mention of the word is a method that depends on a limited instances of pointing with the intention to produce a definition of a universal (such as "car") in the mind of another person. But induction is always a formal fallacy. Even if we greatly limit the possible false inferences from observing the repeated acts of pointing, how does the observer know what type of cars is meant by the person who does the pointing - only those cars made within the past two or three decades? If the person wants to include older cars, then he must find them, and point to them as well. It is an invalid inference to think that the word "car" can refer to any car in history just because someone has pointed to several cars. In addition, the one who does the pointing must shake his hand or his head at every object that the word cannot designate, including items that have not yet been made; otherwise, nothing prevents the observer from inferring that "car" can refer to objects that are really excluded by the word. Therefore, to validly define a word by mere pointing, the person must point at every past, present, and future object meant by the word, and shake his hand or head at every past, present, and future object excluded by it. But in the first

place, how does the observer know what the pointing and the shaking mean? If he does not already know, then how can we teach him? If we try to teach him the meaning of these gestures by an empirical epistemology, then we face all of the above problems all over again, and many others that I have not mentioned.

If one person asks another person what "walking" means, the second person may stand up and begin walking in the attempt to show the first person what walking means. But then, the first person must make inferences from what he observes, and as we have mentioned, all such inferences are unavoidably fallacious. From this example, one may infer that "walking" means standing, leaving, standing and leaving, standing and walking, and a large number of other things. In the first place, how does the observer know that this person is trying to answer his question by showing him what "walking" means? If the second person tells the first person that he is about to show him what "walking" means by actually walking, then we can ask how they learned the words to communicate this in the first place. As we have shown, they could not have learned the words by empirical means. If the two people are already walking together, the one being asked the question may walk faster to emphasize the act of walking, but then how can the observer distinguish between walking, hurrying, jogging, or running? Even more perplexing is how a person can learn the words "God," "faith," "is," and "justice" on the basis of empiricism.

If a person tries to answer the question of what "walking" means by giving a verbal definition, then he must use words. But how did this person learn the words that he is about to use? Also, to understand the definition, the hearer must also know the words that make up the definition, but how is this possible on the basis of empiricism? Moreover, even if both of them think that they understand the words in the definition, how can they know that their understanding of the words are the same? If they try to make sure that they have the same definitions for the words used in the definition of the word in question by discussing what they think the words mean, then they need to use words again, so that all the previous problems occur again.

Even if we assume that the senses can perceive the sounds of the words, the above shows that the mind must already know the meanings of the words before it can understand the sounds conveyed to the mind by the person’s hearing or sensation. But we have also shown that the mind can never learn the meanings of the words by sensation. Therefore, knowledge cannot come from the outside, but if it is possible at all, it must come within. In Christian epistemology, some of this knowledge is innate, so that "Christ enlightens every man ever born by having created him with an intellectual and moral endowment…This knowledge is a part of the image of God in which God created Adam."15

Although we will not here summarize the detailed arguments of Augustine’s De Magistro, we will reproduce his conclusion: By means of words, therefore, we learn only words or rather the sound and vibration of words. For if those things which are not signs cannot be words, even though I have heard a word, I do not know that it is a word until I know what it signifies. So when things are known the cognition of the words is also accomplished, but by means of hearing words they are not learned. For we do not learn the words which we know, nor can we say that we learn those which we do not know unless their signification has been perceived; and this happens not by means of hearing words which are pronounced, but by means of a cognition of the things which are signified. For it is the truest reasoning and most correctly said that when words are uttered we

either know already what they signify or we do not know. If we know, then we remember rather than learn, but if we do not know, then we do not even remember . . .

But, referring now to all things which we understand, we consult, not the speaker who utters words, but the guardian truth within the mind itself, because we have perhaps been reminded by words to do so. Moreover, he who is consulted teaches; for he who is said to reside in the interior man is Christ, that is, the unchangeable excellence of God and his everlasting wisdom, which every rational soul does indeed consult. But there is revealed to each one as much as he can apprehend through his will according as it is more perfect or less perfect. And if sometimes one is deceived, this is not due to a defect of external light, for the eyes of the body are often deceived. . .16

Truth is necessarily propositional, since only a proposition can be described as true or false. But by means of sensations, it is impossible to communicate any proposition from one human mind to another; rather, only the logos can facilitate such communication. Therefore, Christian epistemology, even when it relates to sensations, does not depend on sensations, so that it is not plagued by the insuperable difficulties of empiricism. The only role of sensations in Christian epistemology is to provide the occasions for intellectual intuition; that is, sensations provide the occasions upon which the logos communicates information to the human mind, apart from the sensations themselves. Zero knowledge is acquired from the sensations themselves. Of course we "read" the Bible, but even this activity does not depend on sensation, but on God’s sovereign will and power. Man depends on God for his continual existence and intellectual operations; he is not autonomous or independent in any sphere of life. By God’s sovereign power and absolute control, unbelievers refuse to acknowledge him and to give thanks for his goodness, and thus he turns them over to a depraved mind, to the end that they would store up divine wrath for their future condemnation. In contrast, Christians are those who have repented of their sinful thinking because of God’s sovereign grace, and they worship and thank God for his sustenance.

Some people agree that the prologue of John’s Gospel at least hints at the above epistemology. As Ronald Nash writes:

After John describes Jesus as the cosmological Logos, he presents Him as the epistemological Logos. John declares that Christ was "the true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9). In other words, the epistemological Logos is not only the mediator of divine special revelation (John 1:14), He is also the ground of all human knowledge.17

Several of the early church fathers also taught this view: "On the basis of John 1:9, Justin Martyr argued that every apprehension of truth (whether by believer or unbeliever) is made possible because men are related to the Logos."18 Everyone depends on Christ to know anything. Believers admit it; unbelievers do not.

Although I affirm this understanding of the prologue, even if you disagree on this particular point, it does not undermine the epistemology that I presented. First, nothing in the prologue contradicts the epistemology that I presented. Second, the epistemology that I presented is a necessary consequence of the biblical metaphysics that I introduced earlier. The Bible certainly asserts that God created and controls all things, and all things must necessarily include all human intellectual activities. Third, more than several biblical verses teach that God is the one who sovereignly

grants understanding and knowledge. To summarize, God acts directly on the mind and conveys information directly to it on the occasions when one is experiencing physical sensations, but God acts on the mind and conveys this information always apart from the sensations themselves. Even the act of reading the Scripture depends on Christ the divine logos, and not our senses. This tells us what happens when we experience sensations, but because of the inherent fatal flaws of empiricism, it is still impossible to construct a true and coherent worldview on the basis of sensations or to gain any knowledge from sensations. Rather, Scripture is the first principle of the Christian worldview, so that true knowledge consists of only what is directly stated in Scripture and what is validly deducible from Scripture; all other propositions amount to unjustified opinion at best. This biblical epistemology necessarily follows from biblical metaphysics. Any other epistemology is indefensible, and unavoidably collapses into self-contradictory skepticism.

ETHICS

Just as biblical epistemology necessarily follows from biblical metaphysics, biblical soteriology necessarily follows from biblical metaphysics and epistemology. But since biblical soteriology presupposes biblical hamartiology, and biblical hamartiology presupposes biblical ethics, we should first discuss biblical ethics.

Since God controls all of reality, and all of reality depends on God, and since man is part of God’s creation and part of this reality, this means that biblical anthropology must address the relationship between God and man. Since God is sovereign over all of his creation, including man, then God is also the one who defines the proper relationship between God and man. This is the foundation of biblical ethics.

John 1:10-11 of John’s prologue say, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." F. F. Bruce translates John 1:11, "He came to his own place, and his own people did not receive him."19 John 1:10 refers to a more general rejection of Christ, and John 1:11 deals with the historical situation in Israel; for our purpose, in what follows we will ignore John 1:11.

Saying that "the world was made through him" (John 1:10) reinforces the doctrine of creation, which is one aspect of biblical metaphysics, as introduced by John 1:1-3. The Word became a historical person "in the world," but the world "did not recognize him." Instead of receiving the worship he deserved as the creator, he was ignored and rejected, and finally crucified by those whom he had made. Such is the nature of sin, and that of sinful men, that although they owed obedience to their maker, they instead scorned his commandments and persecuted those who would follow him. If the creator dared invade their territory in the form of a man, then they were determined to kill him. The Christian view of metaphysics demands obedience to the creator’s commands in the area of ethics. John 1:10 implies that the world ought to have known Christ because "the world was made through him." He was their creator, and he was in the world, but he did not receive the welcome he deserved. If they were aware that "the world was made through him," they surely did not act like it - the sinful mind is blind, ungrateful, and irrational. In any case, the verse shows that man’s relation to God has been damaged through sin.

Through the influence of secular philosophy and psychology, many people have a distorted concept of sin, and some people have told me that they had never sinned at all. However, this

must be false because 1 John 1:8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Even before we give the biblical definition of sin, on the basis of this verse alone we must affirm that everyone has sinned. Nevertheless, we will proceed to give the biblical definition. Scripture defines sin as a transgression of God's law, and it is God's law that defines right and wrong. Romans 3:20 says, "Through the law we become conscious of sin," and John writes, "In fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). To break God's command is to do wrong, that is, to sin.

Some people think that the gospel has abolished the moral law, but this is a gross misunderstanding of the message of the gospel and the work of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "Where there is no law there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). If the moral law has been abolished in the sense that there is no longer a moral law, then there can be no sin. However, even after Christ has accomplished his redemptive work, the New Testament continues to teach that everyone has sinned, and that even the Christian sins at times. But since there must be law for there to be sin, this means that the moral law is still in force.

Another doctrinal perversion asserts that the command to love has replaced the moral law, such as the Ten Commandments. However, Romans 13:9 says, "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" The command to love is a summary of God's moral commands; it is not a replacement. In fact, love remains undefined until God's specific moral commands give it meaning. Murder and theft are still sins, and to love my neighbor means not to murder him or steal from him, because this is how God's moral commands define love.

Rather than relaxing the definition of sin, Jesus reinforces the strictness of God's moral commands, and dispels the human traditions that excuse the people from obeying them (Mark 7:13). Again the unscriptural religious traditions of his day, he brings to light the full meaning of God's commands, and insists that a person violates the moral law even by thinking evil thoughts, and not only by overt actions. He says:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell….You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 5:27-28)

Some people mistakenly think that Jesus is here revising the commandments, but he is in fact expounding on their original and intended meaning in opposition to the interpretations and distortions of human traditions. God has always counted evil thoughts as sinful: The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5)

Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:7) Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction

mark their ways. (Isaiah 59:7) O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts? (Jeremiah 4:14)

One must obey God in his motives, thoughts, and actions. It is sinful even to worry about food and clothing, since Jesus says that this is to commit the sins of unbelief and idolatry (Matthew 6:24-25; Matthew 6:30). Thus except Jesus Christ, nobody is sinless (Hebrews 4:15). In addition, James writes, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker" (James 2:10-11). If you obey God on one point but disobey him on another point, you are still a lawbreaker. The point is not only that you have committed murder, adultery, or whatever the sin may be, but that by committing the sin, you have defied the one who issued the commandments. The Westminster Larger Catechism offers an excellent definition of sin. Question 24 - "What is sin?" - invokes the reply, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature." Any transgression or deviation from the moral law by a rational creature is sin. Now, God's law does not only prohibit evil, but it often demands positive good from us: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3:17); "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). Add Matthew 5:48 to all of this, and the high moral standard required by God becomes evident: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

SOTERIOLOGY

There seems to be a big problem. The moral standard described is more than very high - it appears to be impossible and unattainable. It is no light matter to defy and offend a holy and omnipotent God - one evil thought or action is sufficient to damn a person forever. Therefore, because it is impossible to satisfy its demands, the law of God drives us to despair: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Galatians 3:10).

Since it is impossible to be justified before God by the law, this means that for anyone to be justified before God, he must be justified apart from the law (Romans 3:28). Galatians 3:24 says, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." The law sets an impossible standard that renders all men guilty, thus driving those to Christ who have despaired of their own efforts. With this background, we should be able to understand Romans 3:21-24 : But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. No one is guiltless, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." As Psalms 130:3 says, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" However, the psalm continues, "But with you there is forgiveness" (Psalms 130:4). We are "justified by his grace," and so we have "the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). We are not saved by our own goodness, because we have none, but we are saved by God's sovereign mercy. To understand the nature of God's work in salvation, we must first understand the extent of the damage of sin in man. That is, understanding the problem will help us understand the solution that corresponds to the problem. So what is the effect of sin in

man? Can man contribute or cooperate in his salvation? Without determinative divine influence, can man decide to accept God’s gift?20 Using metaphorical language, is man spiritually sick or blind, or is he something worse?

Jesus says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). The sinner is as one who is sick when it comes to spiritual things. This metaphor suggests that he is at least crippled in his ability to deal with spiritual things. The sinner is also blind: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn - and I would heal them" (John 12:40). This metaphor gives us another specific piece of information about the sinner. The verse implies that the blindness of his eyes is like the deadness of his heart, and both mean that the sinner cannot grasp spiritual things. Spiritual blindness is not different from intellectual blindness; rather, spiritual blindness is a subset of intellectual blindness, only that we are referring to an intellectual inaptitude about spiritual topics. Paul says that the unbelievers are "darkened in their understanding" (Ephesians 4:18). The sinner is spiritually sick and blind, but more than that, he is also spiritually dead. Writing to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:1-2). Paul uses this metaphor not as a casual rhetorical device, but he intends it to be theologically decisive, so that he assumes its truth as he continues, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). To the Christians, Paul says that God has "raised us up with Christ" (Ephesians 2:6). This brings us from the problem to the solution, from hamartiology to soteriology, and back to the prologue of John’s Gospel.

Having established the sinful condition of man implied by John 1:10-11, we now proceed to John 1:12-13 : "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God." Although all human beings are creatures of God, not all are his children; non-Christians are children of the devil (John 8:44). In the writings of John the believer becomes a "child" (teknon) of God, and only Jesus is the "son" (huios) of God, and with Paul both Christ and the believers are said to be sons, but the latter only by adoption. Thus both apostles make a distinction between the sonship of Christ and the sonship of a Christian, so that one never becomes the son of God in the same sense that Christ is the son of God.

We have seen two metaphors for conversion - resurrection and the new birth. To repeat Ephesians, Paul writes to the elect that God has "made us alive with Christ," and that he has "raised us up with Christ." Here in the prologue, those who believe in Christ goes through the new birth to become the children of God. As Jesus says in John 3:3, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Ezekiel 36:25-27 gives an excellent summary of what happens at conversion:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you

to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Whereas it is impossible to obey God’s moral laws before conversion, when God converts a person, he enables this person to obey them by the Holy Spirit.

There is now enough information to produce a statement on soteriology, and to relate it to biblical metaphysics and epistemology. The sinner is spiritually dead in sin. He is in a condition such that conversion requires a radical21 reconstruction in intellect and personality amounting to a spiritual resurrection. Now, one who is merely sick and blind may perhaps do something to help himself, or at least receive a gift that is offered to him. However, one who is dead can do or decide nothing for himself; therefore, before this radical reconstruction or spiritual resurrection, a man cannot contribute to or cooperate in his own salvation, nor is he willing to do so. Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so."

Therefore, it depends solely on God to decide and carry out a person’s spiritual regeneration. Romans 8:12 of the prologue says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," and so faith in Christ is indeed the means by which God effects a person’s justification and adoption. However, whether a person has faith in Christ does not depend on the person, since if it does, then the person will never have faith, being dead in sin. Rather, whether a person has faith in Christ depends only on God’s decision, since faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). A spiritually dead person cannot produce or exercise faith, and God must first regenerate him, but God regenerates only those whom he has chosen. Therefore, the biblical order of what happens when God saves a person is regeneration, faith, justification, and adoption.

Paul writes, "What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: ’God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day'" (Romans 11:7-8). The false gospel of Arminianism says that it is man who chooses whether he will accept Christ, but Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last" (John 15:16). Deceived by the false gospel of "free will," many people have been persuaded to go through the motions of receiving Christ; however, unless they have been chosen by God to be saved, their choice is false and futile. They have not been saved, and they will not bear true and lasting spiritual fruit.

Faith in Christ is the mind’s true assent to the gospel of Christ, and this means that soteriology presupposes epistemology. That is, salvation presupposes knowledge. Thus the question becomes how one comes to know, understand, and accept the gospel? When Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replies, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-17). Peter did not observe the particular words and works of Christ, and then by a process of induction infer that he must be the Christ. Instead, God sovereignly illuminated his mind to know the truth about Christ. Again, this shows that a person cannot just decide to be saved, since he cannot even know or understand the gospel unless God sovereignly decides to reveal it to him.

Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).

However, his observation failed to produce the knowledge necessary for salvation. By observing the same works of Christ, the Pharisees inferred, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons" (Matthew 9:34). Knowledge can never come by the empirical method, since any inference from sensation is bound to be an unnecessary inference, and thus invalid. This is also true when it comes to the knowledge necessary for salvation; that is, biblical soteriology cannot rest on a non-biblical epistemology, but it rests on a biblical epistemology that emphasizes the sovereign God and the infallible Scripture. The knowledge necessary for salvation comes by the immediate operation of the logos on the mind by means of the Scripture or the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, "faith comes from hearing the message" (Romans 10:17), but at the same time it is a sovereign gift from God (Ephesians 2:8), so that not all who hear the gospel receive faith, but only those to whom God sovereignly grants assent to the gospel.

Another important passage is 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 : The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. The preaching of the gospel in itself does not save, because for the light of the gospel to penetrate, it is necessary for God to directly act on the human mind to produce faith. It is God who "made his light shine in our hearts," so that "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:7). This is consistent with the biblical epistemology explained earlier, that sensation - in this case, the hearing of the gospel - at most provides an occasion for the mind to intuit the truth from the mind of God. But if God does not grant it, then the man cannot understand (in a manner or extent necessary for salvation) or believe the gospel. We may add that knowledge often comes even apart from the stimulation of sensation, since God can convey to the mind any thought that he wishes, so that sensation is never necessary in obtaining any kind of knowledge.

Just as biblical epistemology depends on biblical metaphysics - that is, knowledge is made possible only by the power of God - since biblical metaphysics covers the whole of reality, biblical soteriology also depends on biblical metaphysics. That is, since God controls every detail of the whole of reality, this means that he also controls every detail of each person's salvation. "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18), so that God alone dispenses his salvation to whomever he wishes. To those whom he has chosen, he issues an irresistible summon to accept Christ; to those whom he has rejected, he hardens their hearts against the gospel. As Psalms 65:4 says, "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (KJV).

Thus we have arrived at the core of the Christian worldview - we depend on God for existence, for knowledge, and for salvation. As Paul writes, "You were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Whereas non-Christian religions and philosophies fail at every point in answering the ultimate questions, the biblical system provides true and coherent answers to all of them. From logic to metaphysics, from metaphysics to epistemology, from epistemology to ethics, from ethics to soteriology, the one and only sovereign God reasons, creates, sustains, reveals,

commands, judges, and saves.

Endnotes:

1. Fred Heeren, Show Me God; Wheeling, Illinois: Day Star Productions, Inc., 2000; p. xx-xxi.

2. Ronald H. Nash, Life's Ultimate Questions; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.

3. Vincent Cheung, Preach the Word, Chapters 2 and 3.

4. Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe, The Elements of Preaching; Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986; p. 85.

5. Gordon H. Clark, Ancient Philosophy; The Trinity Foundation, 1997 (original: 1941); p. 37.

6. Gordon H. Clark, Thales to Dewey; The Trinity Foundation, 2000 (original 1957); p. 165.

7. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999; "Philo Judaeus."

8. Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theologica, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. V; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981 (original: 1867-1887); p. 492.

9. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 (original: 1967); p. 91.

10. Great Books of the Western World, Vol. 45; Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1996; p. 12.

11. Richmond Lattimore, The New Testament; North Point Press, 1996; p. 195.

12. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991; p. 118.

13. As Gordon Clark writes, one may "on one occasion combine the ruddy color and the juicy taste to make an apple, if he wishes; but may he not on another occasion combine that color with the smell of hydrogen sulfide and the sound of B-flat to make a boogum?" Thales to Dewy; The Trinity Foundation, 2000 (original: 1957); p. 307-308.

14. Otherwise, you would not know how to organize and combine the sensations. In addition, on the basis of empiricism, it is impossible for you to tell the distance between two objects. Space itself is not observable to the senses; no one has ever seen or touched "space."

15. Gordon H. Clark, The Johannine Logos; The Trinity Foundation, 1989 (original: 1972); p. 27.

16. Augustine, De Magistro; Prentice-Hall Publishing Company, 1938. Here we have come upon the subject of linguistics and its relationship to epistemology and metaphysics, but we will not spend time developing it here.

17. Ronald H. Nash, The Word of God and the Mind of Man; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1982; p. 67.

18. Ibid., p. 67.

19. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel of John; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983; p. 37.

20. Another question is whether God extends his grace for salvation to every person in the first place. Scripture denies that God extends his grace to every person, but teaches that God chooses whom he will save: "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Romans 9:15).

21. By that I mean "fundamental" or "at the root."

04.03. CHOSEN FOR SALVATION

Ultimate Questions 3. CHOSEN FOR SALVATION

ELECTED

Writing to the Thessalonian converts, Paul says, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you" (1 Thessalonians 1:4). Just as the sovereignty of God is foundational to Christian theology in general, the doctrine of election is foundational to Christian soteriology in particular. The doctrine maintains that in eternity, before the universe was made, God had selected an unchangeable number of specific individuals for salvation in Christ, and he did so without basing his decision on the faith and works, or any other condition, in the individuals so selected. Rather than choosing an individual because of any foreseen faith, the elect individual receives faith precisely because God has already chosen him.

Against the Calvinists,1 the Arminians oppose this biblical doctrine; instead, they turn divine election into God's reaction to what we choose, so that our choosing Christ is logically prior to God's choosing us, with the result that mere human beings determine the will of God in salvation. Against this humanistic heresy, Paul declares, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you." It is God who sovereignly chooses the elect, so that Paul says, "He has chosen you," and not "He has approved of your choice." If God does little more than accept our choice, then he does not choose us in any real sense of the term. But Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Therefore, Arminianism is false. In a disappointing paragraph on 1 Thessalonians, David J. Williams writes:

Election becomes ours only when we are "in Christ". . .Thus the element of human choice enters into the process. If we choose to be in Christ, we have been chosen by God. There is nothing arbitrary, therefore, about election. Our choice makes us his elect. At the same time it makes us "somebodies" who in the eyes of the world may be "nobodies." Election gives us a value that otherwise we would not have, for God chose us, not because of what we were, but despite our being sinners and simply because he is the kind of God he is. . .Our election is entirely an expression of God's love.2

It is confusing, if not contradictory, to say that election "becomes ours" only when we are in Christ. Is God's choice of a person an object that can be given or taken away? It is based on this nonsensical statement that "the element of human choice enters into the process."

Williams continues, "If we choose to be in Christ, we have been chosen by God." Depending on how one understands it, on the surface this statement can accommodate either Calvinism or Arminianism. If Williams intends to affirm Calvinism with this statement, then he is saying that one who chooses to be in Christ discovers that he chooses Christ precisely because God has already chosen him, so that God's choice is prior to and the cause of the man's choice. That is, God first chose the person, and in due time causes him to choose Christ.3

However, the next statement implies that Williams does not intend to affirm Calvinism: "There is nothing arbitrary, therefore, about election." He is saying that election is not arbitrary only because "the element of human choice enters into the process." If election is completely up to God without reference to any condition found in the person, then God's decision would be arbitrary. Therefore, to prevent a decision from being arbitrary, God must base his decision on man's decision. To Williams, an absolutely sovereign God is also an arbitrary God.

Both Calvinists and Arminians are often very careless with the word "arbitrary." If by arbitrary we mean "existing or coming about seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will,"4 then of course the Calvinist would deny that election is arbitrary. Both Calvinists and Arminians often use the word in this sense, but this is the last definition in Merriam-Webster. The previous definitions include: "depending on individual discretion (as of a judge) and not fixed by law…not restrained or limited in the exercise of power: ruling by absolute authority."5 If we use these definitions, then the Calvinist can readily affirm that election is "arbitrary," since God indeed rules "by absolute authority," and election is indeed based on his "individual discretion." Paul writes, "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18), and therefore election is "arbitrary," but not in the pejorative sense.

Williams is clearly using the word "arbitrary" in the pejorative sense - that is, "existing or coming about seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will." Then, to paraphrase his position, he is saying that election does not exist or come about "seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will" only because "the element of human choice enters into the process." If election is completely up to God without reference to any condition found in the person, then God's decision would be "existing or coming about seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will."

Therefore, to prevent a decision from being "seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will," God must base his decision on man's decision. To Williams, an absolutely sovereign God is also a random, capricious, and unreasonable God. To Williams, if God does something with you without first "asking" you, then he is random, capricious, and unreasonable. One term to describe this position is blasphemy. Perhaps Williams forgot that he was writing a Christian commentary. In contrast, Scripture teaches that God is indeed "arbitrary" in the best sense of the term - that is, he "rules by absolute authority" and he does all things by his "individual discretion." He does not have to ask for your permission to do anything with you that he wishes.

Williams' next statement makes his position even clearer: "Our choice makes us his elect."6 Assuming he understands that the elect refers to "the chosen," this means that he is saying, "Our choice makes us his chosen," or "Our choosing God makes us chosen by God." Notice the word makes - our choice is the cause or reason for God's choice. But if this is the case, how does election make us "somebodies"? God has not in fact chosen us, but we have chosen him. All he does is respond to our choice. God does not make us special; we make ourselves special.

After this, Williams has the gall to write, "God chose us, not because of what we were. . .simply because he is the kind of God he is." This cannot be true given his position. He has just said that, "Our choice makes us his elect." His position necessarily implies that God chose us precisely

"because of what we were" - we are those who have chosen him first. Then, he dares to write that our election is "entirely an expression of God's love"! But if God chooses us only because we choose him first, then his choosing us cannot be entirely an expression of his love. Thus within several sentences, Williams manages to contradict Scripture, contradict himself, and blaspheme God. The corollary of election is reprobation. The doctrine of reprobation teaches that, just as God has chosen those individuals who would be saved, he has also individually and deliberately decreed the damnation of all others. Many of those who affirm the doctrine of election nevertheless reject the doctrine of reprobation. However, just as election is a necessary conclusion from the sovereignty of God, reprobation is also true if by nothing else other than logical necessity. But many people are proud to reject this biblical doctrine "however logical it may appear to be."7 They reject the doctrine on the basis of irrational prejudice instead of biblical argument or logical inference.

Commenting on 1 Thessalonians 1:4, William MacDonald writes, "The doctrine of election teaches that God chose certain people in Christ before the foundation of the world,"8 and he cites Ephesians 1:4 as support. It seems that he accepts some form of divine election when he writes, "In His sovereignty, God has elected or chosen certain individuals to belong to Himself."9 This broadly agrees with the biblical doctrine of election. But then he continues, "These two doctrines, election and freedom of choice, create an irreconcilable conflict in the human mind."10 I agree that divine sovereignty contradicts human freedom, but where does the Scripture teach human freedom? I deny that humans are free in the sense of being free from God; that is, I affirm with Scripture that God possesses and exercises absolute and constant control over the human will. If MacDonald affirms human freedom, then he must prove it by Scripture. In another place, MacDonald writes: But the same Bible that teaches God's sovereign election also teaches human responsibility. . .How can we reconcile these two truths? The fact is that we cannot. To the human mind they are in conflict. But the Bible teaches both doctrines, and so we should believe them, content to know that the difficulty lies in our minds and not in God's.11

First, we must distinguish between human freedom and human responsibility - they are two different things. Many people assume that human responsibility depends on human freedom - that is, they think that humans are responsible because they are free, and that if they are not free, then they cannot be responsible. But by what biblical, theological, or philosophical argument do they establish this? It is almost always assumed without argument, but I reject this unjustified premise. Instead, I affirm that although divine sovereignty contradicts human freedom, and that Scripture never teaches human freedom, divine sovereignty does not contradict human responsibility, and that Scripture indeed teaches human responsibility.

Second, MacDonald fails to understand the nature of a contradiction. He says that if the Bible affirms two contradictory doctrines, then we must affirm both of them. According to MacDonald, the Bible affirms divine sovereignty, and then it also affirms what seems to him the contradictory doctrine of human responsibility. Since the Bible affirms both, we must also affirm both. What he does not realize is that if these doctrines are really contradictory, then to affirm one is to deny the other, so that it is impossible to affirm both at the same time.

If these two doctrines contradict each other, then when you read about divine sovereignty in the Bible, you are not reading only an affirmation of divine sovereignty, but also a denial of human

responsibility. Likewise, a biblical affirmation of human responsibility is tantamount to a denial of divine sovereignty. Therefore, if the two doctrines contradict, it will be just as easy to say that the Bible denies both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. To say that these two doctrines only appear to be contradictory to the human mind is irrelevant, because even if it is true that they only appear to contradict each other, it remains that no human mind can affirm both doctrines, even if God can affirm both of them.

Unless MacDonald charges the Bible with error, he must either deny one of the two doctrines as unbiblical, or he must admit that they do not contradict. The real problem is that many commentators refuse to admit that they do not have the subtlety of thought or the intelligence to harmonize the two doctrines - that is, if they need to be harmonized in the first place. Instead, it is as if they think that if they cannot harmonize the two doctrines, then surely no human mind can! On other hand, I affirm that the Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and I affirm that the two doctrines do not contradict - there is not even an apparent contradiction.

MacDonald and many others like him think that there is a contradiction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility because they assume that human responsibility requires man to have freedom of choice, or free will; however, if God has absolute control, then man is not free, and therefore divine sovereignty and human responsibility contradict each other. But this process of reasoning is fatally flawed. A large part of the problem results from an imprecise definition of "responsibility." What does it mean for a person to be "responsible" for his actions? The first definition for "responsible" in Webster’s New World College Dictionary is, "expected or obliged to account (for something, to someone); answerable; accountable."12 Regardless of whether or not man is free, is man "expected or obliged to account" for his actions to God? Yes, because Scripture says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked; therefore, man is responsible. What seems to so many as an "irreconcilable conflict" is hereby resolved.

Man is responsible precisely because God is sovereign, since to be responsible means nothing more than being held accountable to one’s actions, that one will be rewarded or punished according to a given standard of right and wrong. It has everything to do with whether God has decreed a final judgment, and whether he has the power and authority to enforce such a decree, but it does not depend on any "free will" in man. In fact, since human responsibility depends on divine sovereignty, and since divine sovereignty indeed contradicts human freedom (not human responsibility), this means that man is responsible precisely because man is not free. The Bible teaches that God controls all human decisions and actions. Autonomy is an illusion. Man is responsible because God will reward obedience and punish rebellion, but this does not mean that man is free to obey or rebel. Romans 8:7 explains, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so." The Bible never teaches that man is responsible for his sins because he is free. That is, man is responsible for his sins not because he is free to do otherwise; this verse says that he is not free. Whether man is responsible has to do with whether God decides to hold him accountable; it has nothing to do with whether man is free. Man is responsible because God has decided to judge him for his sins. Therefore, the doctrine of human responsibility does not depend on the unbiblical teaching of free will, but on the absolute sovereignty of God.

Right away the question becomes one of justice, or whether it is just for God to punish those whom he has predestined to damnation. Paul anticipates this question in Romans 9:19, and writes, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" He replies, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:20). This amounts to saying that God is "arbitrary" - he rules by absolute authority; no one can halt his plans, and no one has the right to question him. This is true because God is the creator of all things, and he has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:21). The next two verses say, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath - prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory. . ." (Romans 9:22-23). Paul is still answering the question in Romans 9:19 : "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" He is saying that since God is sovereign, he can do whatever he wishes, and this includes creating some vessels destined for glory, and some destined for destruction. Peter says regarding those who reject Christ: "They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:8). Whereas the elect rejoice in this doctrine, the non-elect detest it, but either way, this is the way it is and there is nothing that anyone can do about it.

It is because of poor reasoning that the issue of justice is even brought up against the doctrine of reprobation. In its various forms, the objection amounts to the following:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.

2. The doctrine of reprobation is unjust.

3. Therefore, the Bible does not teach the doctrine of reprobation.

However, premise (2) has been assumed without warrant. By what standard of justice does a person judge whether the doctrine of reprobation is just or unjust? In contrast to the above, the Christian reasons as follows:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.

2. The Bible teaches the doctrine of reprobation.

3. Therefore, the doctrine of reprobation is just. The pivotal point is whether the Bible affirms the doctrine; one must not assume whether it is just or unjust beforehand. Since God is the sole standard of justice, and since the Bible affirms the doctrine of reprobation, this means that the doctrine of reprobation is just by definition. Calvin notes: For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found. Let men's rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist.13

Scripture does not teach that God has made salvation actually possible for every human being - it denies it - rather, it teaches that salvation has been made available to "every nation, tribe,

language and people" (Revelation 14:6). Joel's prophecy is that God would pour out his Spirit upon "all flesh" (Acts 2:17, KJV) in the sense of making salvation available to every ethnic group. One idiot of a preacher said that this means "all Muslim flesh, Buddhist flesh," and so on, but this is not what this means. On the day of Pentecost was present "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), and the Book of Acts chronicles the progress of the gospel to the Gentiles. That is, "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). This is the good news and the surprising message, that the elect company is not restricted to Abraham's blood descendants, but God has chosen individuals from all ethnic groups, so that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29). In another place, Paul writes:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) - remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-13) In several passages related to our topic, the Westminster Confession of Faith says the following: By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Where they who are elected being fallen in Adam are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. (Ephesians 3:3-7) In connection with God's providence, the Confession states that his control extends itself "to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them" (Ephesians 2:4). Just as the elect comes to Christ by an irresistible summon, and "it is God who works in [him] to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13), the reprobate is by no means autonomous - not even in his sins. God directs a person's thoughts "like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Proverbs 21:1), and there is no free will.

It is futile to repeat the silly objection that God permits some actions but does not will them, for as Calvin says, "Why shall we say ’permission’ unless it is because God so wills?"14 Since God controls and sustains all things, what does it mean for him to permit something except to say that he wills and causes it? That is, to say that God "permits" something is nothing more than an ambiguous way of saying that God "permits" himself to cause something. There is no distinction between causation and permission with God; unless he wills an event, it can never happen (Matthew 10:29). The Confession says that the election and reprobation of individuals belong to the "secret counsel" of God, so that the members of either group are not listed for public examination. If this is true, then on what basis does Paul say, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you" (1 Thessalonians 1:4)? Despite his very foolish comments elsewhere, MacDonald gives a correct explanation here: "The apostle was assured that these saints had been chosen by God before the foundation of the world. But how did he know? Did he have some supernatural insight? No, he knew they were among the elect by the way they received the gospel."15 Paul lists the indications that his readers were chosen by God for salvation in the next several verses.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 begins, "Our gospel came to you not simply with words." Because of the pervasive influence of secular philosophy, even the professing Christians in our day are often very anti-intellectualistic. Thus it is unacceptable to present the gospel with "just a sermon"; rather, they place great emphasis on music, drama, fellowship, and mystical experience. With such a disposition, at least some of them will distort "not simply with words" into an endorsement to this type of thinking, so that they may even see the expression as a direct deprecation of plain preaching.

Even the less anti-intellectualistic commentators stumble over the phrase. Leon Morris writes, "Words alone are empty rhetoric, and more than that is required if people’s souls are to be saved."16 But just because "more than that is required if people’s souls are to be saved," does not mean that "words alone are empty rhetoric." Morris is unclear in the first place. If by rhetoric he means, "the art of speaking or writing effectively," "skill in the effective use of speech," or "verbal communication,"17 then what he says almost amounts to saying, "Words are words," which is an irrelevant tautology.

However, the meaning Morris has in mind probably resembles, "artificial eloquence; language that is showy and elaborate but largely empty of clear ideas."18 A fuller quotation from 1 Thessalonians 1:5 says, "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." Now, if Paul’s preaching had been stripped of the other elements, such as the power of the Spirit, it still does not follow that his words would have been "artificial eloquence" or "language that is showy and elaborate but largely empty of clear ideas." Morris’ statement is equivalent to saying that the gospel by itself is nothing more than showy language void of substance and clear ideas.

Morris betrays his confusion when he writes in the next paragraph of his commentary, "The gospel is power. . .whenever the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, there is power."19 But if "the gospel is power," then one can never preach the gospel as empty rhetoric. It is fashionable to repeat such anti-intellectual phrases as, "Words alone are empty rhetoric," but words are always rhetorical, and rhetoric always deals with words. Whether a presentation is empty rhetoric depends on the

content of the speech. The proposition, "Jesus is Lord," consists of words alone, and no one will acknowledge its truth unless by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3), but whether one believes it or not, it is not empty rhetoric.

Any interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:5 that deprecates the role of words or of preaching cannot be true. The entire Bible consists of words without a single picture or musical note; it uses words to convey intellectual information. Paul says, "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). We inherit the blessings of the gospel and grow in the spiritual life by means of the words of God.

Again, the verse says, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only" (NASB). There are two ways to understand the word "only," as the following examples illustrate:

1. The Godhead does not consist of only God the Father, but also Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. His wealth does not consist of only this broken bicycle, but also five cars and two houses. In the first statement, the word "only" does not belittle God the Father, but merely indicates that he is not the sole member of the Godhead. However, in the second statement the same word suggests that one's wealth would indeed be meager if it consists of nothing more than a broken bicycle. That is, the word can simply mean that there are additional items in the list without implying anything negative.

Since the Scripture emphasizes the importance of words in many places, the word "only" (or "simply") in verse 5 cannot be understood in the second sense. That is, Paul has no intention of belittling words or preaching when he says that his gospel did not come "in word only," but he merely desires to indicate that other things besides his verbal presentation had happened, and these things suggested to him that his converts were in fact among God's elect.

Misconceptions in this area are common. Robert Thomas begins well his explanation of 1 Corinthians 1:5, saying, "Words are basic to intelligent communication. But the gospel's coming was not 'simply' in word; speaking was only a part of the whole picture."20 But then he stumbles over the same point as Morris and writes, "Their preaching was not mere hollow rhetoric but contained three other ingredients essential to the outworking of God's elective purpose."21 However, Galatians 1:11-12 eliminates the possibility that the content of Paul's preaching is ever "mere hollow rhetoric."22

What Thomas says amounts to saying that if the Spirit does not accompany your reading of the Bible, then the Bible is mere rhetoric. Many unthinking people would agree with Thomas, but I call this blasphemy. As God's verbal revelation, the Bible is never mere rhetoric - that the Spirit does not act powerfully when you read only means that you may not be affected by what you read, but the content of the Bible, being the mind of God, does not suddenly become hollow.

Morris and Thomas do not seem to know what the word rhetoric means. Paul says he knew that God had chosen the Thessalonian converts because his preaching came "with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." But then, this means that his preaching did not always include these things, and that God did not always make his preaching effective; otherwise, all who

hear Paul preach would have been saved. Now, at those times when these things were not present, did the content of Paul's preaching suddenly become empty rhetoric, or did the content of the gospel remain the same - that is, the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24)? If Paul preached the same thing, then whether the Spirit came with power to produce faith in the hearers, the gospel was still the power and wisdom of God.

Against the anti-intellectualistic interpretations of Scripture, we must maintain that words can be meaningful by themselves, and whether a presentation consists of empty rhetoric depends on the content of the speech. Since the gospel provides true and coherent content, it is never empty rhetoric. Paul never put down the importance and effectiveness of preaching, since he writes, "God. . .at his appointed season. . .brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior" (Titus 1:2-3). It is true that besides the words that we preach, God must exercise his power to convert the sinner, but it is through our preaching that he exercises this power. Paul came to know that some of the Thessalonians were among God's elect because of the effects accompanying his preaching that he could not have produced as a human being. But in trying to affirm the necessity of God's power to convert the sinner, we must be careful not to belittle words or preaching, lest we blaspheme Scripture and the gospel.

SUMMONED

Now we will consider what it means for the gospel to come "with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul mentions two things that happened as he preached the gospel among the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10); he was aware that God had chosen the Thessalonians for salvation because of his consciousness of divine involvement when he preached, and because of the converts' genuine reception of the gospel. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 refers to the first of the two.

Preaching is the means by which God summons the elect to salvation. God's power regenerates the elect who come under gospel preaching, and gives them faith in Christ, so that they become justified. Because not all who hear the gospel are among the elect, God's power might not operate in a saving manner every time the gospel is preached, and it might not operate in a saving manner toward everyone in any particular audience.

It is not that the gospel is ever void of power, since "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16), but only those whom God has called to salvation will receive a change of mind, so that he may recognize Christ as the power and wisdom of God. Paul explains, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Therefore, the "power" in our verse refers to the Holy Spirit's divine influence at work through the apostles' preaching to effect a subjective change in the minds of the hearers. Common consensus rejects the notion that the apostle has in mind the power to work miracles. Lenski writes, "Power has no connection with the miracles wrought in Thessalonica,"23 and Robertson notes, "Paul does not refer to miracles by dunamis." Then, Vincent: "Power of spiritual persuasion and conviction: not power as displayed in miracles."24 One reason for asserting this is that the word is in the

singular, and should not be confused with the plural, as in 1 Corinthians 12:10 - "miraculous powers"; nevertheless, the singular by itself does not exclude the miraculous. Vine adds, "No miracles are recorded in connection with the preaching of the gospel at Thessalonica,"25 Of course miracles can accompany preaching - there are no alternate interpretations to passages like Romans 15:18-33 and Hebrews 2:3-18 than to say that miracles can be an integral part of evangelism, although not necessarily in every instance of evangelism. However, this does not mean that the New Testament writers have miracles in mind whenever they mention "power," even when they are talking about preaching or evangelism. Rather, by "power," they often have in view the subjective influence of the Holy Spirit, as in his divine power to convert sinners. In fact, some scholars think that this is more often the case than not: "Paul rarely alludes to his power of working miracles."28

If we may thus declare the cessationists innocent of theological bias in their understanding of 1 Thessalonians 1:5, we will find some charismatics guilty of misreading it. Donald Stamps says that the power of 1 Thessalonians 1:5 "resulted in conviction of sin, deliverance from satanic bondage, and the performing of miracles and healings."29 Another writer asserts that the verse "probably suggests that miraculous manifestations are in view." At this point, I wish only to establish that one does not need to be a cessationist to reject this interpretation; that is, even a non-cessationist should not see every instance of "power" in the Bible as a reference to miracles.

Since 1 Corinthians 2:4 parallels 1 Thessalonians 1:5, we should study it to better understand both verses. Now, the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 has been distorted by many anti-intellectualistic and charismatic commentators. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." It is ludicrous, as some popular charismatic preachers assert, that this means Paul had decided to suppress his tremendous theological knowledge as he was preaching. The expression, "Jesus Christ and him crucified," designates a central theme of the gospel message, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). It does not restrict the content of Paul’s preaching to the crucifixion. As 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 indicates, Paul had told the Corinthians about Christ’s resurrection when he preached to them, so that he did not restrict himself to talking only about Christ’s crucifixion. "Jesus Christ and him crucified," "the message of the cross," and other such phrases are general designations of the Christian message and worldview. Of course, several particular aspects of Christianity may receive emphasis at the beginning, but Paul did not preach only a simple message with little regard for the comprehensive set of doctrines forming the Christian faith. Rather, he says that he preached "the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27) to his hearers.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 also contradicts many preachers’ anti-intellectual agenda: "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." Throughout 1 Corinthians 1:1-31; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, Paul does not say that the Christian message is somehow less intellectual, or that the gospel has no claim to intellectual respectability, but his emphasis is that the gospel’s content differs from non-Christian philosophy. He is saying that the content of the gospel is different from and superior to the product of human speculation.30

Christianity is more intellectually rigorous than secular philosophy, not less. There is no trace of anti-intellectualism in 2 Corinthians 11:6: "I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way." Paul claims to possess "surpassingly great revelations" (2 Corinthians 12:7) and "insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). He says that love must abound "in knowledge and depth of insight" (Php 1:9). He prays for his readers for "God to fill [them] with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9). According to Peter, God has given Paul such great wisdom that "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, it is impossible for 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 to contain any anti-intellectual meaning. The Christian system is thoroughly intellectual. Those who disagree with this often confuse the Bible's denunciation of human speculation as a denunciation of the intellect or intellectualism. Scripture repudiates the false intellectual content of secular philosophy, and not the exercise of the intellect itself. However, many preachers distort Paul's statement, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), so as to excuse their disobedience to 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (NASB). Most preachers are not really qualified to be preachers, being especially weak in theological knowledge; thus to belittle knowledge and intellectualism is a convenient way to hide their deficiencies. Our purpose for coming to 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 in the first place compels us to focus on 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 : "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Much stronger than they do with 1 Thessalonians 1:5, the charismatics assert that 1 Corinthians 2:4 must be referring to the power to perform miracles; however, the verse has the same emphasis as 1 Thessalonians 1:5 - that is, the Holy Spirit's subjective influence to convert sinners through preaching. The Greeks had tremendous admiration for oratory eloquence, so much so that at times it caused them to ignore the substance of what was said. The "wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22) they so respected "often degenerated into meaningless sophistries."31 The sophists, scorned by Plato, were those who would argue for whatever position the situation demanded. Their blatant disregard for truth allowed them to be debaters for hire, that is, to argue for whatever position that one may have paid them to defend. Many people compare them with present-day lawyers. That they were professional debaters does not mean that the sophists always offered sound arguments. As Plato pointed out, their arguments were often fallacious and deceptive. The Greeks did not help to stem the situation, for they "tended to judge the value of a discourse more by its external exhibition than by its inward power."32 Their philosophical arguments were based on dubious human speculation. Thus as he defends his apostleship, Paul writes, "I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way" (2 Corinthians 11:6). The gospel is not based on speculative philosophy, but divine revelation.

Greek "wisdom" despised the message of the cross, which appeared to the people as a message of defeat and not triumph. But there is salvation in no other message, and so Paul writes, "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Therefore, the statement, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), is written in contrast to secular thinking, and does not at all imply an anti-intellectualistic strategy of evangelism. Paul is noting that he preached to the

people a message that was contrary to their cultural and spiritual disposition, and since the message was not founded on mere human speculation in the first place, he did not speak as the sophists did, but instead relied on God's power to convince and convict his hearers. This is the meaning of 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 : "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Paul deliberately slips into philosophical terms in 1 Corinthians 2:4, asserting that his preaching was shown true, not by speculative and fallacious arguments, but by the "demonstration" of the Spirit. Some charismatic preachers assume that this word is similar to "manifestation" in 1 Corinthians 12:7, but this is a mistake. Rather than the idea of exhibition, the word indicates a logical proof, such as in philosophy and geometry. The English translation is therefore appropriate, since "demonstration" denotes a "logical proof in which a certain conclusion is shown to follow from certain premises."33 Morris adds, "The word translated demonstration (apodeixis) means the most rigorous proof. Some proofs indicate no more than that the conclusion follows from the premises, but with apodeixis the premises are known to be true, and therefore the conclusion is not only logical, but certainly true."34

Thus Vine writes that "demonstration" here "has the force of a proof, not an exhibition, but that which carries conviction, and that by the operation of the Holy Spirit (not here the human spirit) and the power thereby imparted to the speaker (not here referring to accompanying miracles or signs, which would require the plural)."35 Many charismatics may think that the verse speaks of miracles as proofs of the gospel, but the more scholarly ones often do not insist on such an interpretation. Even with his Pentecostal background, Gordon Fee nevertheless writes:

It is possible, for example, and is often argued for or simply assumed, that in keeping with Romans 15:19 this refers to the "signs and wonders" of 2 Corinthians 12:12. But that would seem to play directly into the Corinthians' hands, to build up the very issue he is trying to demolish (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10). More likely, therefore, especially in the context of personal "weakness" and in keeping with 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6, it refers to their actual conversion. . .

Therefore, with the concluding purpose clause of 1 Corinthians 1:5 the argument that began in 1 Corinthians 1:18 comes full circle. The message of the cross, which is folly to the "wise," is the saving power of God to the believing. The goal of all the divine activity, both in the cross and in choosing them, and now in Paul's preaching which brought the cross and them together, has been to disarm the wise and powerful so that those who believe must trust God alone and completely. Thus 1 Corinthians 1:5 concludes the paragraph: "so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." In another context this might suggest that faith rests on evidences; but that would scarcely apply here. The power of God throughout this passage has the cross as its paradigm. The true alternative to wisdom humanly conceived is not "signs," but the gospel, which the Spirit brings to bear on people's lives in powerful ways.36

Most commentators agree that the verse does not focus on the power to work miracles, and that Paul is not belittling the use of intellectual arguments. Rather, his point is that when he approached the Corinthians, he insisted on presenting a message that was based on divine revelation instead of one that was based on human speculation. Gordon Fee writes:

He deliberately avoided the very thing that now fascinates them, "the persuasion of wisdom." But his preaching did not thereby lack "persuasion." What it lacked was the kind of persuasion found

among the sophists and rhetoricians, where the power lay in the person and his delivery. . .What he is rejecting is not preaching, not even persuasive preaching; rather, it is the real danger in all preaching - self-reliance.37 As Bullinger observes, "Here, it denotes the powerful gift of divine wisdom, in contrast with the weakness of human wisdom."38 This is the issue at hand. Paul's preaching differs from the orators both in method and content, but his arguments are nevertheless logical and persuasive, instead of hollow and deceptive. Unlike the fallacious "proof" of the sophists, the apostle provides sound "proof" for his message that is powerful to effect conversion in his hearers. This parallels our earlier explanation of 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

We should have a precise understanding of Christianity's relationship with philosophy. In connection with this, one part of Vine's definition on the word "demonstration" is problematic. It says, "a 'showing' or demonstrating by argument, [apodeixis] is found in 1 Corinthians 2:4, where the apostle speaks of a proof, a 'showing' forth or display, by the operation of the Spirit of God in him, as affecting the hearts and lives of his hearers, in contrast to the attempted methods of proof by rhetorical arts and philosophic arguments."39 It is correct that apodeixis means "demonstrating by argument," and it is true that the "showing forth" is not a visible "manifestation" as in 1 Corinthians 12:7, but it is the operation of the Spirit's power "as affecting the hearts and lives of his hearers." It is also true that Paul contrasts his approach against "the attempted methods of proof by rhetorical arts." In this case, rhetoric indeed denotes, "artificial eloquence; language that is showy and elaborate but largely empty of clear ideas."40 Any speech is rhetoric in the sense that it is verbal communication or discourse, and as such Paul engages in it, but unlike the philosophers, his arguments are free from sophism.41 The definition is acceptable to this point. Paul's approach differs from those who employed "mere rhetoric," since he preaches a message with true and coherent content without using fallacious arguments to deceive his hearers into agreeing with him.

However, Vine then contrasts Paul's speech against "philosophic arguments." Now, this can be misleading. If "philosophy" is the "theory or logical analysis of the principles underlying conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe,"42 then Christianity is certainly a philosophy. Scriptural teachings indeed produce a Weltanschauung - a worldview, or "a comprehensive. . .philosophy or conception of the world and of human life."43 Unless Vine means "sophistic" when he says "philosophic," his contrast between Paul's demonstrations and "philosophic" arguments is false. That is, Scripture (and Paul) indeed addresses "philosophic" issues, using sound "philosophic" arguments, but unlike human philosophy, these arguments are not fallacious or "sophistic." We should contrast Christianity against sophistry, and not philosophy as such.

Contrasting Christianity against philosophy as such discourages Christians from thinking deeply about the ultimate questions. Some people cite Colossians 2:8, which says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." They assume this means that the believer should shun philosophy altogether. But if we turn away from an "analysis of the principles underlying conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe," we must also stop studying the Bible, since the Bible constantly discusses "conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe" - that is, ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics.

Paul never says to shun philosophy as such, but he warns against being taken captive by "hollow and deceptive philosophy." The Bible repeatedly warns against false doctrines, but this does not

mean that we should avoid all doctrines. In fact, an essential step in guarding against falsehood is to thoroughly know the truth. According to Paul, false philosophy "depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world" - it begins from erroneous first principles. At the same time, he has just as good as called Christianity a philosophy when he implies that true philosophy would be based "on Christ" - it has Christ as its first principle. Paul never tells us to stop thinking or contemplating the ultimate questions, which is the task of philosophy, but he says to stop thinking like the unbelievers.

Although the word is very difficult to define, many people are willing to categorize Christianity as a "religion," and to affirm that Christianity is the only true religion among many false ones. This means that just because we must reject false religions does not mean that Christianity itself is not a religion. But religion is perhaps very properly seen as a subset of philosophy. A religion is only a particular way of answering the philosophical questions, and as in philosophy, these answers combine to form a worldview. Again, not all worldviews are true, and the Christian will affirm that only the biblical worldview is true; nevertheless, they are all worldviews. So there is no legitimate reason for denying that Christianity is a philosophy. As one theologian wrote, Christian philosophy is only Christian theology expressed in different vocabularies, so that there is really no problem in calling Christianity a philosophy. Often people say something like, "Christianity is not a religion (or philosophy), it is a life." This may sound clever and pious to some people, but it is false. Rather, Christianity is indeed a religion and a philosophy, but it is one that demands and produces a particular kind of life; nevertheless, it is first a religion and a philosophy. Recognizing the fact that Christianity is a philosophy sets it up to directly confront all other worldviews; that is, we are making it clear that Christianity is a comprehensive system of thought, and it is one that contradicts all non-Christian systems of thought on every major and minor topic. If Christianity is true, then no non-Christian system can be true.

One problem may be that people often associate philosophy with futile speculation, but this is an unnecessary assumption, since the dictionary defines philosophy as the "theory or logical analysis of the principles underlying conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe." That is, not all philosophy is necessary bad philosophy. Whereas non-Christian philosophy indeed consists of mere speculation in the sense of conjecture and guesswork, Christianity, or Christian philosophy, is founded on the indubitable premises revealed by God. The ESV has Paul saying that his preaching was not "in plausible words of wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:4). Now, plausible can mean "appearing worthy of belief,"44 and as such Christianity is of course not implausible. However, the first and second definitions in Merriam-Webster are "superficially fair, reasonable, or valuable but often specious;45 superficially pleasing or persuasive." When these meanings are intended, as seems to be the case in the ESV, then we must affirm that Christianity is more than plausible, since it is not true merely on the surface, but also in its substance.

Non-Christian philosophy may sometimes appear reasonable or persuasive on the surface (although not to me), so as to deceive many people, but under analysis it turns out to be mere sophistry, or an intellectual "sleight of hand." In contrast, Christianity is supported by the "demonstration of the Spirit," and as pointed out earlier, "with apodeixis [or demonstration] the premises are known to be true, and therefore the conclusion is not only logical, but certainly true."46

Therefore, the ESV brings to light Paul’s position, namely, non-Christian philosophy is never too intellectual or logical, but it is precisely the opposite, since it depends on unjustified and unjustifiable premises. Non-Christian thought is not intellectual or logical enough; it convinces people not by sound arguments, but by tricks and fallacies that nevertheless appear compelling to those unable to see through the deception. On the other hand, Christian philosophy draws necessary conclusions from true premises.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he preached the way he did "so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power" (1 Corinthians 2:5). Fee remarks, "In another context this might seem to suggest that faith rests on evidences;47 but that would scarcely make sense here."48 As with 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "The main point is that the whole is God’s work. The Corinthians were made Christians by divine power."49 Since the power in both places refer to "the powerful operation of the Spirit, bearing witness with and by the truth in our hearts,"50 "men’s wisdom" and "God’s power" do not necessarily refer to the object of faith - that which the person believes - but rather the means by which faith has been generated. We may understand the verse to say, "with the result that your faith should not exist by the wisdom of men, but by the power of God."51 This fulfills our purpose for dealing with 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 and takes us back to 1 Thessalonians 1:5, which says, "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." Using theological terms, we may paraphrase, "We know that God has chosen you for salvation, because when we preached to you, you did not receive only the external call of the gospel from us, but God issued the inward summon of the Spirit in your minds and produced in you faith in Christ."52

We mentioned earlier that two things happened in connection to Paul’s preaching at Thessalonica, leading Paul to believe that his converts were truly among the elect. The first indication to Paul that God had chosen some of his hearers for salvation was his awareness of active divine power in his preaching. He mentions this again in his second letter to the Thessalonians: "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Romans 8:30 says, "Those he predestined, he also called." It was God who had called or summoned the converts to himself by irresistible power, although he does this through and by means of the preaching of the gospel.

PRESERVED This leads us to the second thing that happened when Paul preached. Corresponding to the first, it was the positive reception of the gospel by the Thessalonians. Paul describes this in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 :

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Paul was confident that at least some of his hearers were ordained to salvation because he was conscious of God’s power in his preaching. However, anybody can pretend to agree with the gospel, thus for one to acknowledge the converts as genuine believers, they must exhibit some indications of regeneration and faith. As Jesus says, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:18-20; see also Matthew 7:21-27.

Since regeneration is a radical reconstruction of the intellect and personality of the individual, the true convert should exhibit in his outward speech and conduct the changes that correspond to such a drastic inward transformation. From the transformation that had taken place in the Thessalonians, Paul inferred that they were truly born again, and that their faith in Christ was real. For example, Paul says, "In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." Jesus explains in the parable of the sower that not everyone who appears to receive the word of God with joy is truly saved: "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Matthew 13:20-21). However, Paul is not referring to the superficial and temporary kind of joy coming from a heart in which the word of God has not taken root. Rather, the joy of the Thessalonians in accepting the gospel message was "given by the Holy Spirit," who had changed the very roots of their intellect and personality, for such is the nature of regeneration. The Spirit performs this work of regeneration only in the minds of the elect. Jesus says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). A doctrine of salvation that teaches free will cannot make sense of this verse, but the biblical doctrine of salvation affirms that, as "the wind blows wherever it pleases," so the Spirit of God regenerates those - and only those - who have been chosen to be saved by God. Scripture says, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). A person believes in Christ because he has been chosen. God did not choose us because he had foreseen our faith, but we have faith because God has chosen us without regard for any condition that would be found in us. God, being absolutely sovereign, would be the ultimate cause for any condition found in us in the first place. Since it was the Holy Spirit who gave Paul’s converts such joy in receiving the gospel message, it means that God had performed a work in their minds on his own initiative, because of his own sovereign decision. And since God does not so affect the heart of those whom he has not chosen, Paul infers that the Thessalonians were among the elect.

Jesus says that the false convert falls away "when trouble or persecution comes because of the word." In contrast, the joy of the Thessalonians endured "in spite of severe suffering." Although many of our countries are unjust toward Christianity, most of them stop short of making persecuting Christians their official agenda. Under this relatively comfortable atmosphere, false converts that have been gathered by unbiblical preaching are not sifted out of the church. Contributing nothing but costing much, they continue to be a vexing but unacknowledged problem for the church. The solution is not to hope for severe persecution, but a return to the biblical gospel.

More than a few writers have expressed concern over the alarming rate with which professing Christians are converting to other religions - Islam, Mormonism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and other

non-Christian groups and cults. However, the unceasing influx of false converts is even more alarming. By God’s providence, non-Christian religions and philosophies actually help remove some of the false converts from the church, lest we become overwhelmed by them. That is, many reprobates - destined for destruction - join themselves to Christian churches because they have heard and affirmed a false gospel, such as Arminianism, and non-Christian religions and philosophies at times attract these reprobates away from the church. On the other hand, true Christians belong to Christ forever, so that "no one can snatch them out of [his] hand" (John 10:28). It is better for a kingdom to have many easily marked enemies than to have many foreign spies within its own domain, wrecking havoc and draining its resources from within. Add to this the fact that many false converts have even become ministers, and it is clear that it is better for them to leave the church than to remain in it.

Since there are many false converts in our churches, there is a great need to evangelize our own congregations; let the gospel either convert them or drive them away. In John 6:1-71, Jesus gives his followers a "hard teaching" (John 6:60) after which "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66). But even this did not remove Judas, who being "doomed to destruction," was not lost until later, "so that Scripture would be fulfilled" (John 17:12). He betrayed Christ as predicted (John 6:70-71), and afterward committed suicide. On the other hand, Peter denied Christ three times, but recovered to become a great apostle. What was the difference? Jesus had prayed for Peter so that his "faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). He also prayed for the rest of his elect, but not for the reprobates: "I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9; also Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25). The truth is that "no one can come to [Christ] unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:65). Peter was enabled; Judas was not.

Genuine faith embraces the true gospel message without regard to the practical consequences that may occur. If Paul knew that the Thessalonians were true converts because of their joy and endurance in the face of severe suffering, he would no doubt denounce those who compromise their faith because of financial disadvantages, political threats, or pressures from relatives and friends. On the other hand, "No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life" (Luke 18:29-30).

Thus perseverance in hostile circumstances indicates the presence of genuine faith, which in turn implies that God has chosen the person for salvation, and sovereignly changed his heart. Peter writes:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

God has "given us new birth" because of his "great mercy," and we persevere in the Christian walk because he preserves us through the faith that he has given to us.

Contrary to Arminianism, God does not preserve us as a reaction to our enduring faith; rather, our faith endures because God causes it to endure. Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus both "the author and perfecter of our faith." Faith does not come from our own wills; it is a gift from God. Neither does faith endure by our own power, but "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Php 1:6). Salvation depends on God’s sovereign will and mercy from the beginning to the end. Therefore, it is by his immutable decree in election and not human free will (which we do not really have) that all "those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:30). Those who fail to persevere until their glorification, have never received justification.

Genuine faith does not only endure, but it is active and growing. Paul continues saying to the Thessalonians: And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. (1 Corinthians 1:7-9)

Peter says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). One who shows no interest in studying theology is perhaps temporarily ill in spirit, but it is more likely that he has never received the impartation of spiritual life from the Holy Spirit. By feeding on spiritual milk, the believer grows up in his faith, but one who "lives on milk" is still a spiritual infant, and "is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13). Anti-intellectualism has prevented generations of Christians from growing up in the faith. Spiritual growth has to do with an intellectual understanding of God’s word and not mystical experiences. Maturity has to do with how one speaks and reasons: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11). The writer of Hebrews reprimands his readers, saying, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" (Hebrews 5:12). Now, how many Christians understand the letter to the Hebrews? Many people consider the materials to be quite advanced, but the letter was directed to those who were "slow to learn" (Hebrews 5:11), and those who still "need milk, not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). However, the anti-intellectuals are unabashed, because they reject the biblical standard of growth and make Christianity a matter of feeling and experience. But let us heed the apostle Paul instead, and begin to grow in knowledge and character, based on an intellectual understanding of Scripture, so that we can begin to speak and think as spiritual adults instead of spiritual infants.

Bearing spiritual fruit is another metaphorical way of indicating spiritual maturity. Jesus teaches, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Bible contradicts the notion that the mere profession of faith guarantees salvation.53 Although it is true that a genuine profession of faith saves a person without regard to his works, one who has made a profession of faith but afterward bears no fruit produces no evidence that he has ever been a believer at all. John 15:8 says that one shows that he is a true disciple by producing spiritual fruit: "This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." The Thessalonian believers appeared to have passed this test. Their faith endured and grew such that they became models for other believers to imitate. As Paul instructs Timothy, "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Other Christians readily recognized the

powerful effect the Holy Spirit produced in the Thessalonian converts, so that wherever Paul went, he had no need to tell others about them. Believers everywhere already knew how they had "turned to God from idols" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

True conversion results from a drastic and permanent transformation at the deepest level of one's intellect and personality. God changes the individual's most basic commitments, so that he denounces the abominable objects he once served, and turns to offer true worship to God. This change in a person's first principle of thought and conduct generates a rippling effect that transforms the entire spectrum of his worldview and lifestyle. Thus conversion produces not only a negative change, in which one turns from idols, but Paul states that they also turned "to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Moreover, a biblical system of thought replaces the former unbiblical philosophy. This new worldview is one in which we "wait for [God's] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Salvation does not come from turning to a generic "God," as if there is such a thing as a generic "God," but in true conversion, one must explicitly affirm the biblical system of thought. In connection with this, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is of course not exhaustive, but at least it includes the resurrection and return of Jesus Christ, the coming wrath of God against the unsaved, and it carries a partial reference to the Trinity, since Paul distinguishes between the Father and the Son. The Christian worldview offers a teleology that ties together the whole of human history. Turning from idols to serve the true and living God, the believer now looks forward to the culmination of the ages in the return of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, our biblical passage assumes the apostle's soteriology from election to glorification. God has chosen those who would be saved through Christ by an immutable decree in eternity. In due time, he regenerates them and produces faith in their minds by means of preaching. Genuine faith then perseveres and grows into maturity. This transformation of the inward man results in a glorious hope, through which the believer yearns for and expects the return of Jesus Christ and the consummation of his salvation.

Endnotes:

1. Of course, we do not affirm "Calvinism" just because John Calvin taught it, but because it is biblical, and we oppose "Arminianism" because it is unbiblical. We are using these terms only for the sake of convenience.

2. David J. Williams, New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1992; p. 28.

3. We will soon discover that this is not what he means.

4. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001.

5. Ibid.

6. By this, he shows what he means by his earlier statement, "If we choose to be in Christ, we have been chosen by God." That is, he intends to assert Arminianism.

7. Peter E. Cousins, "1 Thessalonians"; F. F. Bruce, ed., New International Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979; p. 1461.

8. William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 1995 (original: 1989); p. 2024.

9. Ibid., p. 1714.

10. Ibid., p. 2024.

11. Ibid., p. 1714-1715.

12. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition; Foster City, California: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.

13. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion; Edited by John T. McNeill; Translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; p. 949, (III, xxiii, 2).

14. Calvin, Institutes; p. 956, (III, xxiii, 8).

15. MacDonald, p. 2024.

16. Leon Morris, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, Revised Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991; p. 46.

17. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.

18. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

19. Morris, Thessalonians; p. 46.

20. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 11; Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978; p. 244.

21. Ibid., p. 244.

22. "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

23. R. C. H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon; Peabody, Masschusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001 (original: 1937); p. 226.

24. Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 4; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 17.

25. The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Vol. 3; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996; p. 22.

26. "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and

miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."

27. "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

28. Vincent, Word Studies, Vol. 4; p. 17.

29. Full Life Study Bible: New International Version; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; p. 1860.

30. To speculate may mean "to think about various aspects of a given subject," or to "meditate" and "ponder." However, my use of this word carries the meaning of "conjecture" or "guesswork." See Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

31. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 (original: 1958); p. 45.

32. The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Vol. 2; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996; p. 10.

33. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

34. Morris, 1 Corinthians; p. 51.

35. Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Vol. 2; p. 17.

36. Gordon D. Fee, God's Empowerful Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994; p. 92-93.

37. Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987; p. 94-96.

38. E. W. Bullinger, Word Studies on the Holy Spirit; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1979; p. 120.

39. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 1985; New Testament section, "demonstration," p. 158.

40. Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

41. "A clever and plausible but fallacious argument or form of reasoning, whether or not intended to deceive," Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.

45. Specious means, "having a false look of truth or genuineness; sophistic," Ibid.

46. Morris, 1 Corinthians; p. 51.

47. That is, it might seem that for faith to rest on "God’s power" is a reference to miracles, but we have already explained that Paul is referring to something else, namely, the divine influence of the Spirit.

48. Fee, Corinthians; p. 96.

49. Gordon H. Clark, First Corinthians; The Trinity Foundation, 1991 (original: 1975); p. 34.

50. Charles Hodge, 1 & 2 Corinthians; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000 (original: 1857); p. 32.

51. Clark, p. 34.

52. See my Systematic Theology, 2001; chapter 6: "Salvation," see calling.

53. That is, a false profession, since a profession energized by the Spirit indicates sincere faith, through which we are saved.

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net