

FOUNDATIONS OF
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

**THE
HEART
OF IT ALL**

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INTRODUCTION

Something I find particularly wonderful about Jesus is that His life-transforming gift of salvation is freely given to anyone who simply asks for it with a sincere and believing heart. One's level of understanding of Christian doctrine may be minimal, but if the heart is hungry, if it is seeking a relationship with God, then it will find it—clearly, definitely, and freely—through receiving Jesus as Savior. Salvation is simple; it's a gift. You reach out, receive it, and it's yours.

While receiving salvation is simple, reaching a mature understanding of the Christian faith is another matter altogether. The Christian belief system, theology, and an understanding of the Bible all require a certain level of knowledge. It's important to gain that knowledge, which takes both focus and study. Spiritual growth occurs through the study and application of God's Word.

A *deep* knowledge of Christian doctrine is a good thing to have. And yet, it is not necessary to salvation, nor is it a *guarantee* of a close relationship with God. One can know and love Jesus, their Savior, without understanding all the details of Christian doctrine, because they experience Him. You can believe that Jesus is the Savior, that He is God, that He walked the earth, was crucified, died, and was buried and resurrected from the dead, simply because someone shared these basics with you, giving you enough understanding to receive Him as your Savior, thus bringing you into a personal relationship with Him.

Even if you don't fully understand all the whys and wherefores of doctrine, you can have solid faith in God, knowing that He's there. You speak to Him in prayer; He responds and answers you. You hear His voice, you experience His supply, His healing, His love. You have a personal connection with Him, interaction, a relationship. You know He is there, He is God, He is true, not just because of the accounts recorded for our benefit in the Bible, but because He is a reality in your life, in your personal experience.

Of course, it's very important to progress in your knowledge of God's Word, to learn the doctrines, to grow to spiritual maturity through living what the Word teaches. Experience with God is wonderful, but one's spiritual life is incomplete without the faith that comes through knowing the Word. When we possess a deeper understanding and knowledge of the truths, principles, and precepts that are the foundations for our faith, both our faith and our ability to articulate the reasons for our faith are strengthened. This is especially true in today's environment and makes it possible for you to "give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," which in turn will help you to be a more effective witness (1 Pet. 3:15).

My intention in drafting "The Heart of it All" is to cover the most important tenets of Christianity in a basic manner. This book covers topics of the nature of God, Jesus as God, Jesus as man, and the Trinity, as these are some of the bedrock foundations of Christian faith. Some chapters talk about the early church, the church fathers, and Christianity in the first six centuries. These were the centuries when the articulation of the most important doctrines was worked through. The doctrines of the Trinity, of Jesus' divinity, and of the Incarnation—God the Son becoming man—are all taught within the New Testament, which contains the books of the Bible written within the lifetime of Jesus' apostles. However, later, over the next centuries after the apostles had died, the leaders within the church had to work through the doctrines presented by the apostles in order to refute beliefs that had arisen which contradicted the truths presented in Scripture.

The words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and preached by those who heard those words made explicit statements about God, which were new revelations at the time. The entry of Jesus as God's Son into the world, and the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after His ascension into Heaven, brought about new concepts of God which had not been understood through the Jewish scriptures—known to us today as the Old Testament. Some of these new concepts were alluded to in Jewish scripture, but they

could not be fully understood. However, after Jesus lived and died and was resurrected from the dead, a completely new understanding of God, His plan of salvation, and His interaction with believers came about.

That the Old Testament alluded to certain truths without clearly explaining them, and those truths began to become more clear within the New Testament, and then were more fully developed and articulated by the church fathers, is known as progressive revelation. While the writers of the New Testament articulated these new concepts, it was left to those who followed them in the succeeding centuries to work on the explanations of how these things could be so. Throughout the history of Christianity, doctrine and interpretation of doctrine has played a major role, and often development of doctrine had to do with controversial matters that needed to be decided by the leaders of the church. Within the first decades of Christianity, when Paul and the apostles were alive, the early church leaders had to meet to discuss and settle issues which were bringing division.

” Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. (Acts 15:1–2, 4–6 ESV)

The problem was, at its root, a theological question. Jesus said the Gospel would be preached to the gentiles. He told His disciples, all of whom were Jews from Israel, to go everywhere and make disciples of everyone (Matthew 28:19), which meant preaching to and converting non-Jews

to the faith. Those like Paul, who preached the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, were converting gentiles right and left and weren't requiring them to adhere to Jewish law; whereas some Christians of Jewish descent believed converts had to follow the laws of Moses. There was disagreement as to what should be expected of gentile believers, so elders of the church eventually had to get together to sort out both the practical and doctrinal side of things, which they did. The outcome was favorable to the gentile position. (See [Acts 15](#).)

Similar situations occurred as time went on, when controversies arose regarding Christian beliefs. There was disagreement, so the leaders of the church, initially called bishops and later referred to as the church fathers, got together in councils to discuss, debate, pray about, and decide what was true Christian faith based on Scripture. Many of these men are acknowledged as great men of church history by all Christians, including the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant faiths of today. The conclusions of these church fathers have been held as true since the time they were decided upon in the third to the seventh centuries, because their conclusions were based on Scripture and on truths taught in the Bible.

Not all Christian doctrine or theology is basic and fundamental. That Jesus is God, that He died for our sins, and through His death we are saved, are fundamental doctrines. One needs to believe these doctrines to be Christian. Someone can be a Christian whether they believe in post-Tribulation rapture or pre-Tribulation rapture, but they can't be a Christian if they don't believe that Jesus died for their sins. So there is a difference between essential doctrines and those doctrines that aren't the bedrock foundation of Christianity.

Christian apologist Willian Lane Craig expressed this as follows:

” If we think of our theological system of beliefs like a spider's web, at the core of the web, where the center of the web is, there will be things like belief in the existence of God—that will be absolutely

central to the web of beliefs. A little further out from that would be the deity of Christ and His resurrection from the dead. A little bit further out from that would perhaps be the penal theory of the atonement, His substitutionary death for our sins. . . . Now, what that means is that if one of these central beliefs, like belief in the existence of God or the resurrection of Jesus, goes, if that part of the web is plucked out, the whole web is going to collapse, because you take something out of the center and the rest of the web can't exist. But if you pull one of the strands out that is nearer the periphery, that will cause some reverberation in our web of beliefs, but it's not going to destroy the whole thing.¹

In researching for this book, I compared the teachings of theologians from the major Protestant denominations or schools of thought—Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), Baptist, Wesleyan, Anglican, Charismatic, and Arminian, as well as the Roman Catholic teachings on the subject. In articulating these doctrines I've tried to present what is common belief to all.

Studying these and other aspects of Christian doctrine has helped me more fully appreciate the love and sacrifice of Jesus, and what it cost Him to bring the opportunity of salvation to humankind. It is my hope that this will give you a foundational understanding of the doctrines within the generally understood and accepted tenets of Christianity.

I pray that this study of Christian doctrine will prove informative, interesting, and helpful, and that it will enrich your faith.

1. Craig, William Lane. "What Is Inerrancy?" 2011.

CHAPTER 1

GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO HUMANITY

In this chapter and the ones that follow we will look at what God has told humanity about Himself through His creation and through His Word—the Bible. Studying God's nature and character gives us greater understanding of who God is, what kind of being He is, what He's like, and affirms our faith as to why we can trust Him, and why we love, praise, and obey Him. Knowing about God's nature and character helps us to gain a greater comprehension of His essence—at least as much as we, as finite creatures, *can* comprehend the infinite Creator.

In discussing the attributes of God's nature and character, it's important to remind ourselves that what is said about God is true of each of the Persons of the Trinity, since each is God—three Persons in one God. Much of what has been revealed about God's nature, character, and attributes is taken from Old Testament Scripture. The Old Testament generally spoke of God as one person, not as three persons, since the concept of God being tri-personal wasn't fully revealed until New Testament times. Thus one can get the impression from Old Testament descriptions of the nature and character of God that it is only referring to God the Father, when in fact it refers to the nature and character of all the persons of the Trinity.

GOD THE CREATOR

A good starting point for discussing God's being—His properties, characteristics, attributes, those things which make God God—is the creation of the universe. Our knowledge of God is based on the fact that God created all things: time, the universe, the physical world, all matter, all living things, as well as the spiritual world and its inhabitants. He then revealed Himself to humankind in a *general* way through His creation (known as

general revelation), as well as more specifically through the Bible (known as *special revelation*).

The Bible teaches that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, Latin for *out of nothing*. Before the universe existed, before time existed, before matter existed, God eternally existed. Anything and everything else that exists, whether physical or spiritual, was created by Him.

There is a great deal of discussion and debate surrounding the creation of the universe, the creation of the world, and the creation of living things. This includes the controversy about how life on earth originated and how human beings came into existence. This topic is much studied and discussed within the scientific community, and is debated by atheists and Christians alike, and many Christian theologians, apologists, philosophers, and scientists have varying views based on their interpretation of Scripture and/or the way they believe the creation account in the book of Genesis should be read and understood.

While this book will not deal with creation issues, it is standard Christian doctrine that God always existed, and that God created the universe and all that is in it out of nothing. This basic statement does not address *how* or *when* God created the universe, the world, and all living things, both physical and spiritual; only *that* He did. Following are a few verses that speak about God creating the world.

”

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Gen. 1:1)

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm. (Psa. 33:6, 9)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things

were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

The key to the Christian understanding of God is rooted in the biblical teaching that He is the Creator of all things, as well as understanding His role as Creator and our role as beings who were created by God. In today's world, thinking of ourselves as creatures—created beings—is often unpopular and is even offensive to some. But if God created all things, then everything is a creation of God, and we are therefore creatures. When we explore what we can know about the nature of God more in depth, it will become clearer why this Creator/creature distinction is important.

In learning about God's nature, essence, character, and attributes, we should understand from the beginning that we can never know *all* there is to know about God. We are finite beings, and we are limited in knowledge. God is an infinite being, He is unlimited in knowledge, and the gap between the two can never be bridged. Christian doctrine teaches that God is incomprehensible, meaning that He is “unable to be fully understood.”¹ This doesn't mean that God can't be understood at all; it simply means that He can't be fully or exhaustively understood. (See Rom. 11:33; Isa. 55:9; Job 11:7–9.)

Even though we won't ever be able to comprehend all there is to know about God, we *can* know things about Him that He has revealed to us. Some we know in general terms, through the world around us—His creation. Others we learn more specifically, through the primary vehicle by which He has revealed Himself to humankind—the Bible. Within its pages are things which God has told humanity about Himself, and what He has said about Himself is true. He hasn't told us *everything* about Himself, though, so no one can fully understand all there is to know about Him. Much of what He has shown us is mysterious and thus difficult to fully comprehend.

1. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p.150).

Author and lecturer J. I. Packer says, “A mystery in theology is a divine fact of which you can say that it is with perfect confidence because the Bible tells you so, but you cannot begin to perceive how it is, how it can be.”² Some things about God are mysterious in that manner, but what He has said through His creation and through His Word are in any case the things that He has revealed about Himself to humanity. These revelations tell us a great deal about Him, and what we learn through these causes us to love, praise, and trust Him.

KNOWING GOD

While God has revealed Himself to humankind through both general and special revelation, and it is through His Word that we have come to understand His gift of salvation, as Christians we can build on our understanding of Him and His ways through the personal relationship we have with Him. The Holy Spirit dwells within us (John 14:16–17). We know Jesus and as such we know the Father (John 14:8–9). Because we love Jesus, we are loved by the Father, and Jesus manifests Himself to us (John 8:19). While the Bible has revealed God to us, salvation has made us His children, which brings with it the opportunity to know Him personally (John 1:12).

Some aspects of God's nature, being, and character are things that we, as humans created in God's image, have as well in a limited sense; others we don't. For example, we can also be holy, merciful, and righteous, and we can be loving and kind—all things that God is. However, God is *infinitely* holy, merciful, and loving. He not only *has* these attributes, He *is* these attributes, without any limitations. Because we were created in His image, we can have a modicum of these qualities, but God has them immeasurably. Many theologians state that what God *does*, He *is*. He doesn't just love; He *is* love. He isn't just righteous; He *is* righteousness, wisdom, mercy, etc.

2. Packer, J. I. “Attributes of God: Transcendence and Character,” 2008.

THE LIVING GOD

Some belief systems look at everything as being part of God, and God as being part of everything. The core of such belief systems is what is referred to as pantheism, which is the belief that we're all part of God, or part of the "force" of the universe, or that everything is connected via nature, or that God is energy, nature, or fate—but not a personal being. Other systems, such as deism, believe that God exists, but that once He created the universe He ceased to interact with it, so there is no direct connection or relationship between God and humankind.

God is more than just energy or a force. Rather than having created the universe and turned away from it, He has interaction with His creation. This is seen in the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament accounts and continuing throughout the New Testament; and most notably in Jesus taking human form and living on earth, followed by the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers forever, all of which show the continued interaction between God and His creation.

God lives! While this means that He exists, it means much more than that. He interacts with humanity and especially with those who love and follow Him. "He exists for His people, ready to come to their aid and to act in their defense and to bless them for His name's sake."³

God is called "the Living God" numerous times throughout both the Old and New Testaments. He is described as alive and interactive with His people (2 Cor. 3:3).

” My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psa. 42:2)

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16)

3. Cottrell, Jack (1996. p. 388).

We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things (idols) to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Acts 14:15).

“The Living God” is a term used to sharply contrast God to the idols that were commonly worshipped in ancient times. The Hebrew words used in reference to idols in the Old Testament are words which mean *good for nothing, worthless, vain, devoid, or empty of substance*. Idols are lifeless, mere images made by man, which stand in contrast to the living, interactive God. The Bible makes the difference clear by stating that idols have no breath, which expresses that they have no life (Jer. 10:14; Psa. 135:15–17.)

When challenging the false prophets and their idols, the prophet Isaiah stated the difference between a living God who knows all things—past, present, and future—and the idols, which know nothing.

” Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable. (Isa. 41:22–24 NIV)

The Living God—the Supreme Being who created the universe and all that is in it, including us—deserves our allegiance, worship, praise, and love. From God’s point of view, it’s an insult to worship lifeless, useless idols (Exo. 20:2–5; Deut. 8:19).

GOD IS PERSONAL

The Living God is a personal and active being. His personhood is seen in that He has self-awareness, rational consciousness, self-determination, intelligence, emotions, knowledge, and will, all of which are necessary for

personhood. We, as human beings, are personal and possess personhood. We have personhood because we are made in the image of God. The difference between human beings and all other created things on earth is that we are made in God's image and they are not; we possess personhood and they don't. As William Lane Craig said, "Man is a person because God is personal, and that is what enables us to relate to God."⁴ God being personal and possessing personhood doesn't mean that God is human; rather it means that we as humans share personhood with God.

God personally interacts with humankind, as can be seen throughout the Bible. He enters into relationships with people. He has made agreements or partnerships, called "covenants," with them. He speaks to them throughout the Bible. These are personal acts.

In the Old Testament, God actively involved Himself with His people, Israel, in their times of need—such as by parting the Red Sea and the Jordan River, giving them food and water, providing them with land, and so on. He sent messengers, the prophets, who delivered His words, and He rewarded or punished people in accordance with whether they obeyed or disobeyed those messages. Throughout the Old Testament it is plain that God was personally and actively involved with His people. (See Psalms 78, 105, 106, 136.)

The book of Genesis shows God interacting in a personal way with His creatures in many instances, including in the creation of the world, in His actions and conversations with Adam and Eve, through His entering into personal covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He continued to show Himself as personal through His dealings with Moses and the children of Israel. God's Word ascribes emotions to God: love, hatred, anger, repentance, grief, compassion, indignation, abhorrence, patience, longsuffering, joy, and others. Such emotions are attributed to personhood.⁵

4. Craig, William Lane, "The Doctrine of God, Part 4," 2007.

5. Finney, Charles. "Affections and Emotions of God," 1839.

When Moses asked, God spoke His name—*Yahweh, I AM*. Having a name and giving that name to another is a personal act. He also has titles that depict Him as personal, such as Father (2 Cor. 6:18), Judge (Isa. 33:22), Shepherd (Psa. 23:1), or Husband (Isa. 54:5). Nothing showed that God is personal as clearly as His revelation of Himself in Jesus. Jesus was God walking the earth, and He was personal in every way, in every act, so much so that He personally died so that we could receive salvation.

Authors Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest state that God,

” ... actively creates, sustains, covenants with His people, preserves the Messiah’s line of descent in Israel, commissions prophet after prophet, sends His Son into the world, provides the atoning sacrifices to satisfy His own righteousness, raises Christ from the dead, builds the church and judges all justly. Far from being a passive entity like a building, the God of the Bible is an active architect, builder, freedom fighter, advocate of the poor and oppressed, and empathetic counselor, a suffering servant and a triumphant deliverer.⁶

Our God is not some faraway disinterested being. He is a God who is personal, who has a relationship with His creation. He has made Himself known to us through His Word. He has shown us some of what He’s like. He is interested in us as individuals. He has made a way for us to live with Him forever, through salvation. Through belief in Jesus, God the Son, we become God’s children, which enables us to touch Him personally, to communicate with Him, to hear His voice, to share our hearts with Him. He communes with us, abides in us, and loves us. We commune with Him, abide in Him, and love Him. We have a personal relationship with the Personal God. How incredibly wonderful!

6. Lewis and Demarest (1996, p. 1960).

GOD IS SPIRIT

In John chapter 4, when Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, He told her: “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).⁷

Jesus said God *is spirit*. God is also uncreated, thus He is uncreated spirit. That God is uncreated makes Him different in essence or being from all created things. He’s not made of anything which was created—He’s not made of matter. He’s not just energy, air, or space, all of which are created things. He possesses a different mode of being; He exists in a manner that is distinctly different from all that has been created, including angels and human spirits. Human beings are corporeal beings with spirits, while angels are incorporeal immaterial beings; yet both are created beings, which makes them different from God.

God has eternally existed as spirit. His existence is far superior to anything else that we know, to anything else that exists—“than which nothing greater can be thought.”⁸ It is so much so that through Him all other being was brought into existence. He is the source of all being, of all life. As author Wayne Grudem put it, “We may ask why God’s being is this way. Why is God spirit? All we can say is that this is the greatest, most excellent way to be! This is a form of existence far superior to anything we know. It is amazing to meditate on this fact.”⁹ Because God’s being is so different, so superior to ours, we cannot understand His complete essence or being.

7. Note: The King James Version translated John 4:24 as “God is a Spirit,” as did a number of older translations. Due to many older manuscripts being available for comparison today than there were in 1611 when the King James Bible was published, most translations since the 20th century, both Catholic and Protestant, translate it as “God is Spirit,” including the New King James Version.

8. Anselm of Canterbury (Chapter 2, 1077–1078).

9. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 188).

GOD'S INVISIBILITY

God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). We cannot see Him.

” Who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:16)

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18 NAU)

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:12).

A question which naturally comes up when reading the preceding verses is, “What about the Old Testament accounts of people seeing God?” For example, Moses on Mount Sinai:

” Moses said, “Please show me Your glory.” And He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you My name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

“But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand on the rock, and while My glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” (Exo. 33:18–23)

There were other times when God showed Himself to people in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, the Israelites when they were wandering in the desert, and the elders of Israel.

”

The Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass by Your servant.” (Gen. 18:1–3)

The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exo. 13:21)

Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And He did not lay His hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exo. 24:9–11).

Clearly there were times when God showed Himself to people in a form which they could see. What they saw is what is called a theophany, which is a visible manifestation of God. Seeing a theophany is different from seeing God’s full or true essence and being. Those in the Old Testament who saw God were able to see an outward form or manifestation of God—a theophany. This was not His full being or essence; it was not as though they were seeing *all* that God is, as no one can see that and live (Exo... 33:20).

Of course, Jesus is God, and He walked the earth and was seen by many people, and they lived. They saw God the Son incarnate, which means “enfleshed,” so they were seeing God in human flesh, which isn’t seeing the fullness of God in all His glory. Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain (Matt. 17:1–2), but again that wasn’t God in His fullness, which according to Scripture, no one can see and live. However, even with what they saw, they were overwhelmed (Mark 9:5–6).

ANTHROPOMORPHISMS

Because God is a personal being who loves us and wants us to know and love Him, He has revealed specific things about Himself to humanity through His Word. In order for Him to express to us what He is like, He communicated about Himself in terms which we could understand. Thus, when speaking to those such as Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, He spoke in words they understood, using descriptive language they could relate to.

One means of doing so was through using what are known as anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphism is the act of attributing human characteristics to a nonhuman entity. The word anthropomorphic comes from two Greek words, one meaning “man” and the other meaning “form.” Anthropomorphism, in relation to God, refers to the attribution of human physical and emotional characteristics, as well as human experience, to Him. For example, even though God is spirit and has no physical body, the Bible talks about His face, eyes, hands, ears, mouth, nose, lips and tongue, arms, hands, feet, voice, etc.¹⁰ He is also spoken of in terms of human experience, being described as a shepherd, bridegroom, man of war, judge, king, husband, etc.¹¹

He is said to participate in human actions such as seeing, hearing, sitting, walking, whistling, resting, smelling, as well as knowing, choosing, and disciplining.¹² Emotions that we experience as humans are attributed to Him, in that He is said to love, hate, have pleasure in, laugh, be sorry, be jealous, be angry, rejoice, and more.¹³ There are also analogies relating God

10. See, for example: *Face*: Psa. 11:7; *Eyes*: Psa. 11:4; *Hands*: Psa. 20:6; *Ears*: Isa. 59:1; *Mouth*: Job 23:12; *Nose*: Psa. 18:8; *Lips*: Job 11:5; *Tongue*: Isa. 30:27; *Arms*: Exo. 15:16; *Hands*: Num. 11:23; *Feet*: Isa. 66:1; *Voice*: Deut. 15:5.

11. See: Psa. 23:1; Isa. 62:5; Exo. 15:3; Isa. 33:22; Jer. 10:10; Isa. 54:5.

12. See, for example: *Seeing*: Gen. 1:10; *Hearing*: Exo. 2:24; *Sitting*: Psa. 9:7; *Walking*: Lev. 26:12; *Whistling*: Isa. 7:18; *Resting*: Gen. 2:2; *Smelling*: Gen. 8:21; *Knowing*: Gen. 18:21; *Choosing*: Deut. 7:6; *Disciplining*: Deut. 8:5.

13. See, for example: *Love*: John 3:16; *Hate*: Deut. 16:22; *Pleasure*: Psa. 149:4; *Laugh*: Psa. 59:8; *Sorry*: Gen. 6:6; *Jealous*: Exo. 20:5; *Anger*: Judges 2:14; *Rejoice*: Deut. 30:9 NKJV.

to nonhuman but created things—such as comparing Him to a lion, the sun, a lamb, a rock, a tower, a shield, etc.¹⁴

Anthropomorphisms, as well as analogies, are what God inspired the Biblical writers to use to express concepts of what God is like and how we can relate to Him. While God doesn't literally have hands, feet, ears, and eyes, such wording gives us a foundation for grasping a sense of what God is and how He relates to us. Theologian Jack Cottrell said that this type of language is “considered to be an expression of God's condescending goodness that He would describe Himself for us in human terms so that we might better understand what He is telling us.”¹⁵

J. I. Packer compares the way God speaks to us as a father who has an Einstein-like mind explaining something to his two-year-old child. The language used is simple so the child can understand, while the full explanation may be much more complex.¹⁶ The Bible says, for example, that God is love. We know what love is from our human experience, and therefore we gain a conceptual understanding of something about God. Love originates with God, it's one of His attributes, and we, as His creation made in His image, have the capability to love; however, it's important to understand that God being love goes infinitely beyond what we understand love to be. Expressing something that God is, such as love, in human terms, gives us a reference point, but by no means gives a full explanation of what God being love means. The totality of God's love is beyond any love we could ever conceive of, but the fact that we can relate to love and have some understanding of it helps us to get a sense of what God is like, by means of terms we can comprehend.

God is spirit and He is also personal, along with being the living God. He has the qualities of personhood, such as self-awareness, rational con-

14. See, for example: *Lion*: Isa. 31:4; *Sun*: Psa. 84:11; *Lamb*: Isa. 53:7; *Rock*: Deut. 32:4 NIV; *Tower*: Prov. 18:10; *Shield*: Psa. 3:3.

15. Cottrell, Jack (1996. p. 288).

16. Packer, J. I. “*Attributes of God: Creation, Evolution and Problems*,” 2010.

sciousness, self-determination, intelligence, knowledge, and will. And since human beings, who are made in the image of God, also have personhood, one of the most relatable ways for us to conceptualize God is through anthropomorphic language. In order to express His nature and character, God used a linguistic form which reveals His personhood and helps us to relate to Him in a way that is familiar to us.

” The writers of scripture know full well that God has no literal body, but they also attest that God is fully personal: He beholds human persons, He reaches out to them, and He counsels them; in these ways He has “eyes” and “hands” and “feet.” To avoid anthropomorphisms would be to fail to depict God in His living and personal reality.¹⁷

God chose to reveal Himself to humanity through the words He spoke to and through the biblical writers. In doing so, He spoke in the language and manner which they, and we who would follow them, would understand. He revealed Himself as the Living God who is personal, spirit, and invisible.

17. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 51).

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S HOLINESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND GRACIOUSNESS

God possesses a different mode of being than all other beings. Only He is uncreated and infinite; everything else is created and finite, so He is different from all created things.¹ The theological word for this is God's *transcendence*, which means He exists apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe. Transcendence expresses that His being is of a higher quality than ours, which is what you would expect of a Creator as compared to His creation.² The *biblical* term for this difference, for the "otherness" of God, is *holy*.

THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

The Hebrew word *qodesh* (pronounced kah desh), which is translated as "holy," and the linguistic family of words from the same origin, such as *qadas* and *qados*, all imply apartness, sacredness, separateness, holiness. To say that God is holy is to say that He is set apart, distinct, and "wholly other" than everything else.

God's holiness, in relation to His essential being, stands for everything in God that makes Him different and greater than we are. It represents God's divinity. God's holiness is the essential difference between God and man. God alone is God; there is none like Him. He is sacred. He is the Creator, man is the creature. He is superior to man in every way. He is divine. As one author says, "holiness is the *Godness* of God."³

Holiness is also seen as a *moral attribute* of God. Morally, God is perfect, which also sets Him completely apart from sinful man. Although the ho-

1. Cottrell, Jack (1996. p. 211).

2. Packer, J. I. "Attributes of God: Transcendence and Character," 2008.

3. Cottrell, Jack (1996. p. 216).

liness of God sets Him apart from humanity both essentially and morally, holiness is an attribute that, like some of the other attributes of God, we can share in to a small degree. Any holiness which we may have, either in being set apart by God and consecrated to Him or in our acting morally, is only a wisp of a shadow of the holiness of God. God's holiness is infinitely superior. The difference is that we may *do* holy acts, but God *is* Holiness (Hosea 11:9; Rev. 15:4).

God's holiness denotes His supreme majesty, His awesomeness, that He is supremely exalted over all creatures (Exo. 15:11; Isa. 57:15). In Isaiah's vision of God in the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah, he spoke of the holiness of God:

” I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa. 6:1–3)

As you probably noticed in that verse, God is said to be “Holy, holy, holy.” Christian minister and lecturer Timothy Keller commented that in the Old Testament Hebrew, *magnitude* is conveyed through the repetition of a word. For example, in Genesis 14:10 (KJV), it says: “The vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.” *Was full of slimepits* is a translation of “slimepit, slimepit.” In the original Hebrew, the usage of the double slimepit was meant to show magnitude—that there were many slimepits.

The same double wording is used to describe the purity of the vessels of gold, as shown in the King James Version of 2 Kings 25:15: “The firepans, and the bowls, and such things as were of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away.” In Hebrew, the term used was “gold gold,” showing its superior quality. Those are some examples of how

the magnitude, or the superlative quality of something, is sometimes expressed within the Old Testament by the doubling of words.

In this case, when it comes to God's holiness, the word is trebled. Nowhere else in the Old Testament Hebrew is there any *quality* which has a triple repetition. Here God is depicted as so holy that it is repeated three times. He is in a category beyond all categories.⁴

GOD'S INCOMPARABLE NATURE

God's holiness is infinitely holy. There is no other holiness like it. This is not only true of God's holiness, but of *all* the attributes of God. God's love is love of the highest degree. His wisdom, knowledge, power—every quality of God—is superlative. There is nothing that compares with it. While we, as humans, can have a modicum of some of these qualities, since we are made in God's image, ours can never compare to the magnitude or the infinity of God's qualities. He is pure love, pure power. He alone is holy, holy, holy. "There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides You; there is no rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2).

Throughout the Bible, other things besides God are called holy, meaning that they are "set apart," or taken out of their ordinary place—dedicated and sanctified and used in service to God. For example, holy ground was holy because of God's presence (Exo. 3:3–5). The temple was holy because it was used for God's worship (Psa. 65:4). Inside the temple there was the Holy Place, which only the priests were allowed to enter, and only after they had washed their hands and feet. Separated from the Holy Place by a thick veil was the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place, which only the high priest could enter, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Exo. 26:33–34; Heb. 9:2–3). The Sabbath day was holy, as it was set aside as a day of rest in remembrance of God (Exo. 20:8–10).

4. Keller, Timothy (2005).

The children of Israel were called a “holy nation,” as God had separated them from others by His covenant with them. People were called holy as well, both in the Old and New Testaments (Num. 16:5; 2 Tim. 2:21; Titus 1:7–8). In the New Testament the Greek word for holy was *hagios*, which is defined as *most holy thing*, a saint.

GOD'S GOODNESS AND PURITY

In addition to the way God is “wholly other” in His essence and being (ontologically), He is also separate and distinct in His *ethical* and *moral* nature. He transcends all that He has made in His uprightness. God is morally perfect in character and action. He is pure and righteous; He has no evil desires, motives, thoughts, words, or acts. He is eternally and unchangeably holy.⁵ He has divine purity with no taint of anything impure. As such, God is set apart from humankind's sinfulness.

In the Old Testament the Israelites, both the priests and the people, were instructed to follow many rites and ceremonies of purification. Anything that defiled a person—making them impure or unclean either outwardly or inwardly—kept them from approaching God and His dwelling place, the tabernacle or temple. Thus God told them to perform these ceremonies to cleanse themselves. This was a demonstration that the Holy One was separated from all that is not holy.

Because God is pure holiness itself, He is separate from all moral evil and sin. He can have no communion with sin. It is an offense to His very nature.

”

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You cannot tolerate wrong.
(Hab. 1:13 NIV)

You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. (Psa. 5:4 NAU)

5. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 1, p. 233).

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempts no one. (James 1:13)

Because of God’s inherent holiness, He cannot abide sin; yet all humans sin. As a result of God’s perfect righteousness and justice, there is, and must be, retribution and punishment for sin. However, because God is also supremely loving and merciful, He designed the plan of redemption which required Jesus’ incarnation, His sinless life, and the sacrifice of His life on the cross for the sins of humankind—all of which satisfies the righteousness and justice of God, as will be further explained in later chapters, and brings reconciliation between God and those who receive Jesus. God did this out of love for us, His creation (John 3:16).

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

An attribute of God which is closely connected to His holiness is His righteousness—which means uprightness, goodness, virtue, and moral rightness. God’s righteousness includes His justice. In English the words righteousness and justice are two different words. However, in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, there is only one word group which refers to both; they are basically seen as the same thing from a biblical perspective. God’s righteousness and justice can be seen as the same attribute, or at least as very interconnected.

The righteousness of God means that His being, His nature and character, is always righteous—good, right, and just; He Himself is the ultimate standard as to what is right. In Him there is no wrongdoing. Because He *is* the standard of righteousness, without fail He *does* what is right. He *is* total integrity, goodness, and uprightness (Isa. 45:19; Deut. 32:4; Zeph. 3:5).

Because God is righteous in His nature, He is fair and equitable in all His ways, including in His interaction with humanity. Because God is holy, He can’t abide sin, and because He is righteous, it is necessary for Him to treat

people according to what they deserve. God rewards the upright, those who live in alignment with God's will, Word, and ways (1 Cor. 2:9; Matt. 25:34). By the same token, when one sins, there is punishment. If there were no rewards and punishment, then God would be unfair, and thus unrighteous—which He can't be, as that would go against His nature and essence (Rom. 2:5–11).

There is a difference in God's perspective toward and treatment of those who patiently and persistently obey the truth, and those who reject truth and follow evil. For the first, there is reward; for the second, wrath and anger. Of course, all humans sin, but God makes a difference between someone who repents and is sorry for their sins and someone who has willfully chosen to follow evil.

”

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

The person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him. (Num. 15:30–31 NAU)

It's difficult for many of us to think of God's judgment on sinners as something that is good and right. We like to think of God as the God of love, and He most definitely is that. He loves us unconditionally, even when we sin. He even loves those who sin defiantly. Because His love is also His nature and character, He loves us inherently. However, He doesn't love our sin. Our sin separates us from Him. Because He is supremely holy, He can't accept sin; and because He is righteous, sin must be punished or atoned for. But then, because He loves us, He made the way for our sins to be atoned for through Jesus' death and resurrection, so that we are spared from having to be separated from God or punished for our sins.

Every human being sins, and thus offends God's holiness—His very nature. As He is righteous and just, He must give everyone what they deserve; and what we all deserve, as sinners, is punishment for sin. Since God's holiness requires His separation from sin, because of our sin we deserve permanent separation from Him. Some Christian thinkers believe that that's what hell is—a permanent separation from God, living apart from God with no sense of His presence, an abandonment so that He is not present to communicate with or help in any way. Some see hell as the culmination and a continuation of the choices people have made to remove God from their lives in their present life, which then continues on, even more acutely, in the afterlife.

God is the supremely righteous and just Judge (Psa. 7:11). He alone is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. He alone can know and understand the fullness of one's action, motive, and purpose, and therefore is the only one who can always accurately judge (Heb. 4:12). As humans, we often judge by appearances or according to how we understand the situation. However, God knows the heart of the matter.

God's righteousness and justice can seem frightening in some ways. To know that He hates sin, that He feels indignation every day, and that sin must be punished, can be fearsome. At the same time, this is why salvation is so beautiful and important. God loves us and sent His Son to save us from the punishment that we, as sinners, deserve. "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 NIV).

Jesus suffered for us, He carried our sins to the cross, He was punished for our wrongdoing. This is the magnificence of God's love for us. We don't have to live in fear of judgment. He made the way for us to be connected to Him, to be His children rather than be condemned to separation from Him. We have this wonderful assurance, and this also impresses upon us the importance of sharing salvation with others through witnessing to them.

Understanding that God is just and righteous should also help us to trust Him, to know that we can count on Him to always do what is right concerning us, even if we don't understand it at the time. God has complete understanding of all things, and He loves us; therefore we can safely rely on Him in all situations.

PATIENCE, MERCY, AND GRACE

Besides being holy, righteous, and just, God is also by nature and character patient, merciful, and gracious. In the Old Testament these three attributes are often spoken of together. It was on Mount Sinai during the time when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments that God specifically revealed that He was merciful and gracious, as well as patient or slow to anger. This passage is often quoted or referred to throughout the Old Testament.⁶

When Moses had to ascend Mount Sinai a second time, having broken the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments after he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, God interacted with him as follows:

” The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...” (Exo. 34:5–7)

The Lord states that He is merciful, patient, loving, and faithful; that He forgives sin—meaning He forgives those who are repentant. Those who aren't repentant, who embrace evil, who remain guilty because of their unrepentance, He doesn't forgive or clear of their guilt.

6. Other Old Testament instances where this passage is quoted or referred to are: Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Psa. 86:15, 145:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2.

The Hebrew word for God's patience is translated into English as longsuffering, slow to anger, patient in spirit, and forbearing. God's patience can be seen in His not immediately giving the punishment due to those who sin. For example, when God saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), and He was "sorry that He had made man on the earth" (Gen. 6:6), a period of 120 years transpired while Noah built the Ark in their presence, before God brought the flood upon the earth.

Noah was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), so one can consider that he likely preached the judgment of the coming flood or that, at least, the Ark stood as a witness to what was coming. In either case, fair warning seems to have been given. However, the people carried on in their wickedness, and He in time brought the judgment which was due them.

God who is holy and abhors sin, who is righteous and judges sin, is also patient, and therefore doesn't pass immediate judgment. His patience shows His love as He gives people time to change, to repent, to come to Him. His love, kindness, and patience help lead us to repentance.

” The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)

God loves the world, He loves humanity, and doesn't want anyone to perish, and so He patiently waits, giving people the opportunity to change, to repent. His patience doesn't contradict His righteousness or justice. Because He is longsuffering, He may grant a reprieve for a time, but a reprieve isn't necessarily a pardon for those who are unrepentant. Due to God's righteousness, judgment will eventually come.

”

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. (Nahum 1:3)

The attributes of God's righteousness and judgment inherently mean that He must be fair to all and must judge and punish those who sin. His mercy and patience, along with His graciousness and love, mean that He gives time for people to repent, that He doesn't immediately judge the crime and hand out the punishment. He wants people to repent, and He gives them time to do so. Also, through Jesus' death, His taking our sins upon Himself, we are granted forgiveness of sin and therefore we will not be punished for our sins, as the unrepentant will. God's grace and mercy has made it possible for people to be forgiven.

GOD'S GRACIOUSNESS

Though the personal and living God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have perfect fellowship among themselves according to their divine nature, God also enters into fellowship with His creation and shows them His love. We have no *right* to demand His attention, blessings, etc. In fact, had God not revealed Himself to humankind, we would not even know He exists. But He did reveal Himself, and not only that, He also entered into fellowship with those who believe in Him.

As sinners whose sin separates us from God, as creatures created by our Creator, there is nothing we can do to merit His love, His fellowship, His blessings; yet He has condescended to bestow these things upon us. This unmerited favor is known as His grace. He has chosen to freely give His favor and love to us, though we are unworthy of it, have no claim to it, and can in no way earn it. He gives it even though it's unwarranted, even when it's unwanted, and even when it is opposed. He has chosen to bestow His love upon us because He is, in nature and being, gracious. His grace is an undeserved gift from a loving and gracious God.



Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. (Psa. 116:5)

In Your great mercies You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and merciful God. (Neh. 9:31)

The foremost example of God's grace is salvation in Jesus. No one can earn or merit salvation. Because of sin we are destined for punishment, but through God's love, through Jesus' willingness to take on human form and to die for our sins, God has given us the gift of salvation. We are saved by grace. We don't earn it and aren't worthy of it; it's given to us by the gracious God who loves us and gave His Son for the redemption of all.

God's nature and character is gracious, and He bestows grace as a gift to humankind. How wonderfully generous He is!

GOD'S MERCY

God's mercy can be understood as God's love and goodness toward those in misery and distress, those in need—even if they don't deserve it. Because human beings are sinful and will bear the consequences of sin, we are in a pitiful state and in need of God's help. God pities those in need. He is compassionate and shows us mercy.

Theologian James Leo Garrett wrote: "The biblical terms for divine mercy or compassion convey the warmth and emotion of God's very nature in the forgiving, healing, and restoration of sinful human beings."⁷ Louis Berkhof expressed God's mercy as "the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress irrespective of their deserts [what they deserve]."⁸

7. Garrett, James Leo (2000, p. 285).

8. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 73).

The word most commonly used in the Old Testament for mercy was *cheeced*, which is translated throughout the Old Testament as mercy, kindness, lovingkindness. Some modern English translations use *steadfast love* and *abounding in love*. Another Old Testament word which conveys mercy and compassion is *racham*, which means to have mercy, to be compassionate, to have tender affection or tender mercies, to pity. It was used to show divine compassion and mercy.

In the New Testament the Greek word most commonly used for mercy, *eleos*, is defined as: kindness or good will toward the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them; of God toward men: in general providence; the mercy and clemency of God in providing and offering to men salvation by Christ.⁹ This word expresses God's divine mercy—His mercy in bringing salvation to humanity, as well as pity and compassion—being moved with compassion toward, or having compassion on, someone.

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, mercy, compassion, and pity are often spoken about in situations where people are in distress, misery, or need.

” He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. (Psa. 72:13)

Moved with pity, He stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” (Mark 1:41)

When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matt. 9:36)

God's mercy is abundant and endures forever: “You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You”

9. Lexicon/Concordance, BlueletterBible.org

(Psa. 86:5 NKJ). God's mercy is shown to them who love Him: "Know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut. 7:9 NKJ).

His mercy is also extended to those who don't love Him: "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35–36).

GOD'S MERCY IN THE INCARNATION

The greatest example of God's mercy toward humanity is the Incarnation. Jesus coming in human flesh to die for our sins, to take our rightful punishment upon Himself, is the fullest manifestation of God's love and mercy. In His divine love and mercy, He chose to make this sacrifice in order to reconcile us with Himself.

In his lectures on the attributes of God, J. I. Packer said:

” Divine wisdom appeared in the way of salvation through the cross resolving a problem which man would have found insoluble. How can a person who in himself is sinful and ungodly be right with God? The answer of course is through substitutionary atonement. But man would have never dreamed that such a thing was possible. God has devised it, God has revealed it, God has done it, God is to be praised for it. Christ is the wisdom of God, wisdom which appeared supremely in that way of salvation.¹⁰

God, in His love and mercy, has made a way that we, who are sinners, can be redeemed. His holiness and righteousness, along with His grace and mercy—all part of God's nature and character, part of His very being—

10. Packer, J. I. "Attributes of God: God's Praiseworthiness," 2010.

work together in His divine love to do what is impossible for man to do: to atone for our sins, to take away the separation from God which sin brings, so that we can live eternally with Him.

” You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:1–8)

God, who is holy, righteous, and just—and patient, merciful, and gracious—does not want to see anyone perish in sin, to pay the wages of sin, which is death (2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 18:23; Rom. 6:23). The following quotes from theologian Karl Barth beautifully express how God's love, mercy, and grace emanate from His nature and being.

” The mercy of God lies in His readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing... God's love and grace are not just mathematical or mechanical relations, but have their true seat and origin in the movement of the heart of God.

There is no higher divine being than that of the gracious God, there is no higher divine holiness than that which He shows in be-

ing merciful and forgiving sins. For in this action He interposes no less and no other than Himself for us. With His good will He takes up our cause and responsibility for us in spite of our bad will. In this action He is manifested in the whole majesty of His being. As we sin against God Himself, God Himself takes action to reconcile us by being gracious to us. If we find and recognize and receive His grace, we find and recognize and receive no less and no other than Himself. Thus there takes place by grace the only thing that is effective against sin.¹¹

Not wanting any to perish, God provided the means of salvation through Jesus, so that through faith in Him we are delivered from death, from punishment for our sin, from separation from God. This is the precious gift of our patient, gracious, and merciful God.

11. Barth, Karl (2010, pp. 369-70, 350).

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S WRATH AND GOD'S LOVE

God's wrath is best understood in connection with God's holiness, righteousness, justice, patience, mercy, love, and grace, which we covered in the previous chapters on the nature and character of God. God's wrath or anger against evil and sin is also an integral part of His nature. Because God is holy, He delights in holiness and goodness, and His very nature stands in opposition to sin. Because God loves those things which are holy and good and right, He has to abhor those things which aren't. Simply put, God hates sin (Prov. 6:16–19; Psa. 5:4–6).

WHAT GOD'S WRATH IS, AND ISN'T

God hates evil. He hates what it does to humanity. He hates the damage it does to those whom He loves, which is everyone. He loves us deeply and is opposed to and abhors those things which hurt and destroy us. His anger isn't rage or temper that is out of control; it's not that God loses His temper and flies off the handle and destroys people or things. He is holy, and His anger is what happens when His holiness and righteousness encounter sin.

Authors Lewis and Demarest put it this way:

” Concerned for the well being of His creatures, God can only be repulsed by the injustice, unrighteousness and corruption that destroys their health physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. The Bible frequently speaks of God's righteous anger with the evil that would destroy His people and their work in the world. Righteous indignation is anger aroused, not by being overcome by emotions irrationally or selfishly, but by an altruistic concern for people who are suffering from injustice, selfishness, greed, lust, envy, jealousy, and lack of

self-control in any respect. In a way such as this God detests evil.¹

Theologian John Theodore Mueller wrote: “He [God] is the Author of all holiness and stands in direct opposition to sin.”² Theologian Wayne Grudem succinctly states that “God’s wrath means that He intensely hates all sin.”³

Because of God’s nature, there is no other option than for Him to despise sin. Anything else would be denying His nature. If God didn’t hate sin, what would that mean? That He accepts and tolerates it? That He doesn’t like it but doesn’t mind it so much? That He’s indifferent to it? For Him to have any attitude other than hatred of and separation from sin would mean that He is not intrinsically holy or righteous or just, and thus He wouldn’t be God.

” A holy love of the ethically good and a holy hatred of the ethically evil are intrinsic to the divine agency ... We can’t think of them apart. To separate them in thought would require us to think God apathetically indifferent as between righteousness and sin.⁴

While wrath sometimes expresses utter *destruction* in Scripture, it is more often used to express God’s righteous *anger* toward sin. Most of the times when the word wrath is used in the Old Testament, it doesn’t mean physical destruction and punishment, but rather God’s anger toward sin. There have been times when God’s wrath at sin resulted in destruction, due to the total depravity and unrepentant nature of the people of the time, as in the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

1. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 1, p. 236).

2. Mueller, John (1934, p. 172).

3. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 206).

4. Miley, John (1892, p. 201).

An example of God's hatred of sin in connection to His wrath was His reaction to the children of Israel's sin in setting up, sacrificing to, and worshipping the golden calf when Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights.

” The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” (Exo. 32:9–10)

After Moses earnestly begged the Lord to turn from His burning anger, the Lord had mercy: “The Lord relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people” (Exo. 32:14).

Besides showing God's wrathful anger at sin, these passages also express some of His other attributes—His love, mercy, and patience. Examples of His patience, love, and mercy are evident throughout the Old Testament. He showed Himself to be loving and kind through forgiving His people when they would repent of their sins. He was patient with Israel for generation after generation, in spite of their idol worship and turning their back on Him numerous times. God's mercy to the undeserving, and His willingness to lovingly give people time to repent, is seen throughout the Old Testament from beginning to end.

While God's wrath is spoken of more often in the Old Testament, it is also addressed in the New Testament.

” 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 NIV)

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Rom. 1:18)

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Rom. 2:6–8)

God's necessary response to sin and His punishment of it—His wrath—exists; and because no one is righteous, and every person has sinned, if it were not for God's mercy and longsuffering and His plan of salvation and redemption, all of humanity in its natural state would be destined for punishment for our sins, destined for His wrath. "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'" (Rom. 3:10, 23).

God is holy, and mankind is sinful, and thus mankind is separated from God. However, while God by nature abhors sin, His nature is also love, mercy, and grace, which are manifest in His going to the ultimate in His love for humankind to make forgiveness of sin possible. The Logos, God the Son, became incarnate, lived a sinless life, and died a horrible death, out of deep love—to make it possible for humanity to be reconciled to God. He suffered the punishment of God's wrath for our sins in our place.

God's wrath is a sobering and fearful thing. However, the depth of God's love for every single human being, as evidenced by His sacrifice, should leave us with no doubt as to His goodness, love, and mercy. He doesn't wish for any to perish. He wants all to reach repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). He has made it possible to avoid His anger and wrath through Jesus taking it upon Himself.

Lewis and Demarest express it this way:

” Because of the propitiatory provision of Christ's death, God can look upon believers without displeasure and believers can be reconciled to God. “God presented Him [Christ] as a sacrifice of

atonement through faith in His blood.” (Rom. 3:25) ... God's love turned His own wrath to peace by Christ's atonement.⁵

When writing of Jesus taking our punishment, Theologian J. Rodman Williams states:

” All the wrath of God Almighty was poured out upon Him ... The weight of the divine fury directed against sin at the cross is humanly inconceivable. This was God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, enduring our condemnation and punishment, dying for the sins of all mankind. Christ bore our punishment! Our wholly deserved judgment and death He has fully borne. This is vicarious punishment—beyond all human measure. Christ experienced the full consequences of our sinful condition.⁶

Because of God's love, because of Jesus taking the punishment for humanity's sins upon Himself, all those who accept Jesus are delivered from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9).

The present natural state of man is separation from God because of sin. This results in being condemned to punishment in the afterlife. Those who believe in Jesus aren't condemned, because He has taken their punishment. Those who refuse to accept the salvation He offers carry on in the condemnation and separation from God that they already have. Salvation offers a change from the status quo of condemnation. Jesus didn't come to earth to condemn people, but rather to save them from the condemnation they already have due to the inherently sinful and fallen nature of humankind. If they accept Him, they won't perish. If they choose not to accept Him, they carry on in the condemnation that is humanity's natural condition.

5. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 2, p. 406; vol. 3, p. 154).

6. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 359).

Jesus explained it to Nicodemus this way:

” God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:17–18)

God is true to all of His nature and character. In His holy, righteous, just, loving, merciful, and gracious nature, He has brought about a means for reconciliation between Him and His creation. Jesus’ sacrifice, His death on the cross, has made it possible for people to not have to suffer God’s righteous judgment for their sins, and thus to avoid experiencing His wrath. This is truly the love of God toward humanity. Of course, for people to be aware of and understand God’s offer of reconciliation, they need to hear about it. Those of us who are freed from the wrath of God, who are already reconciled with Him through Jesus, are called by Him to share this wonderful good news with the world.

” All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:18–20)

GOD’S LOVE

One of the best-loved Bible verses is 1 John 4:8, which states that “God is love.” And He is. This fact is seen over and over again throughout Scripture, and is clearly manifest to those who know and love Him. His love is seen in many ways in our personal lives so that we can, from our experience, say that God is love. Of course, love is not *all* that God is. God is each of those attributes that are His nature and character.

God's love is seen in the triune nature of God. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are love, and they love one another. Jesus spoke of the Father's love for Him and His love for the Father.

” Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

A voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:17)

As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. (John 15:9)

While there are no specific verses referring to the Father and Son loving the Holy Spirit, it can be inferred. Scripture does speak of the “love of the Spirit”: “I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf” (Rom. 15:30).

When commenting on the love which exists within the Trinity, Ravi Zacharias offers the following insight:

” If God ever says He loves, who was He loving before the creation? If God says He speaks, who was He speaking to before the creation? So communication and affection, or love, is contained in the Godhead right from the beginning ... You see the love expressed within the concept of the Trinity, and Jesus' prayer is that you and I would be one, even as He and the Father are one.⁷

7. Zacharias, Ravi (2005).

God's love extends to every human. Ever since He created human beings, He has loved them. No matter where they stand relationally with Him, He loves them. They may not believe He exists; they may believe He exists but hate Him; they may want nothing to do with Him; but nevertheless, He loves them. His love, kindness, and care are given to them by virtue of their being part of humanity. Human beings were created in God's image. He loves every single one of us, and His love for us translates into loving action on His part—His care and blessings given to humankind.

” You visit the earth and water it; You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with Your bounty; Your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy. (Psa. 65:9–13)

When Jesus told His disciples to love their enemies, He said that in doing so they would be imitating God's love, for God shows love to and is kind to all, even the ungrateful and the evil. He makes His sun rise and the rain to fall on everyone. God's love and His loving actions are extended to all people, no matter what their moral standard.

” You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:43–45)

Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the

Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36)

Jesus also expressed God's love toward everyone when He made the point that if God takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the field, certainly He will care for people, as they have more value than the birds.

” Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matt. 6:26–30)

Paul, when speaking to the Greeks, made the point this way:

” In past generations He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:16–17)

GOD'S LOVE MANIFEST THROUGH SALVATION

God's love for all humankind is most clearly seen in His answer to humanity's need for salvation. Every human is a sinner and in need of redemption in order to be reconciled to God. God, because of His love for each human being, brought forth the plan of salvation by which God the Son came to earth, lived a sinless life, and died, taking our sins upon Himself, thus making atonement for us. This means that humans can now be reconciled to God, no matter who they are or what sins they've committed. Jesus

sacrificed His life for everyone, so salvation is available for all who accept it. He did this because of His love for all people, for the whole world.

” For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 4:10, 2:2)

We can see from the above that God loves and cares for all of humanity, He has concern for us, and He takes action to care for us physically through His provision as well as spiritually through salvation. He has borne the full weight of our punishment, even though we all are sinners. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, we can see that God’s love is self-giving love. It is God’s nature to give of Himself in order to bring about blessing or good for others.

There can be some difficulty understanding God’s love for all of humanity in relation to God’s wrath or righteous judgment of sin and evil-doing. God’s love can be seen in His patience with humanity, in His being slow to anger, in His longing for people to receive His gift of salvation and giving them time to do so. God postpones deserved judgment as a result of His love. He patiently restrains His wrath because of His deep love for those He created in His image. Theologian Jack Cottrell puts it this way:

” If God determined to give us what we deserve as soon as we deserve it, we would all have perished long ago. It is His loving patience that puts the punishment “on hold” until it is either set aside (with regard to the one who deserves it) or ultimately applied.⁸

8. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 358).

The reason for God's patient delay in bringing judgment for sin is to give people time to repent, to receive salvation, and by doing so avoid God's judgment or wrath. It is God's nature to give people time to choose redemption. He doesn't wish for anyone to perish, and His patience gives people time to receive His redemptive love through Jesus Christ.

” Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. Count the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Pet. 3:9, 15)

God in His love has made a way that people can avoid the just punishment for sin and be reconciled to Him in a loving relationship. He sent a substitute, His Son, to take that punishment for humanity. He doesn't pour out His judgment and wrath on the sinner because He has taken it upon Himself in Jesus. All that is left is for individuals to believe it, and if they do, their sins are forgiven, atoned for. That's God's love, His gift to humankind. He makes forgiveness of sins possible through His self-giving love. He laid down His life so that people could be reconciled with Him. He doesn't force them to accept His gift, because He has given them free will, but in His love He patiently waits, longing for all to accept it.

Those of us who have received salvation feel God's love in additional ways. We have become His children. We will live with Him forever. The relationship we have with Him after salvation is different, more personal, than what we had before. We commune with Him, we grow closer to Him, we get to know Him better. His Spirit abides in us. We feel His love in ways that only those who know and love Him can. As His children, our job is to share the good news of His love with as many as we can, to invite them to become His children and the heirs of His blessings along with us.

”

You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:15–17)

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S SELF-EXISTENCE, ETERNALITY, AND UNCHANGEABLENESS

The first verse of the Bible, along with others, teaches that before the creation of the heavens and the earth, God existed. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God” (Psa. 90:2).

Everything that exists within the universe, as well as all heavenly beings, was created by God. Before the universe was created, God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existed as the Trinity. Each played a role in the creation.¹

” In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:2)

The fact that God created the universe and all that is in it means that everything that exists owes its existence to God. Not only does it owe its coming into being to God, but also its present and future existence. “By Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17).

1. For more on the Trinity and Creation, see [Chapter 14](#), in particular the section on “Concept of the Trinity in the Old Testament.”

GOD NECESSARY, CREATION CONTINGENT

All that exists depends on God's sustaining power. All created things are *contingent*, meaning that they do not exist in and of themselves, but rather their existence depends upon some other being. It wasn't necessary for all of creation to exist; it was possible for it to not exist. God could have chosen *not* to create the universe. Had that been the case, God would still have existed, since He existed before He created it. Thus God exists *necessarily*, which means His existence depends on nothing other than Himself; while all of creation exists *contingently*, as it needs God in order to exist.

As a non-contingent being, God's being does not depend on anything else. No one created God. He is self-existent. He has always been and will always be. He is completely independent and self-sufficient. Theologian Jack Cottrell expressed it this way: "He is not dependent on anything for His origin or continued existence. As opposed to a contingent existence, which the creation has, His existence is necessary, He exists necessarily, it's impossible for Him not to exist."²

William Lane Craig explains:

” God alone exists necessarily through Himself; everything else exists contingently in dependence upon God. So within the realm of reality, within the realm of being, there is a radical dichotomy between necessary being and contingent being, and necessary being belongs to God alone; everything else has merely contingent being. Therefore it is not true that if God is a being that He is just one among others, because He is radically different than all the other beings that exist. They are all contingent beings; they have existence from another, namely from God. They are radically dependent in their being upon another,

2. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 247).

whereas God, and God alone, exists necessarily and through His own self.³

In God's self-revelation to Moses, when Moses asked His name, God said: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exo. 3:14). I AM WHO I AM implies that His existence is not determined by or dependent upon anything else. Theologian Wayne Grudem states:

” This means that God's being has always been and will be exactly what it is. God is not dependent upon any part of creation for His existence or His nature. Without creation, God would still be infinitely loving, infinitely just, eternal, omniscient, Trinitarian and so forth.⁴

The church fathers said God's existence was *a se*, Latin for *from oneself* or *by itself*. The term in English is *aseity*. Other similar terms are immortal, independent, indestructible, and self-sufficient. God's aseity means His existence does not depend on anything outside of Himself—that He has life in Himself and is the source of all life.

” The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything ... for “In Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:24–25, 28).

THE INFINITY OF GOD

God is unique in His aseity; all other things exist *ab alio* (through another).⁵ He is infinite in His being; everything else is finite. Being infinite

3. Craig, William Lane. "The Doctrine of God, Part 1," 2007.

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 162).

5. Moreland and Craig (2003, p. 504).

means He is not limited by anything outside of Himself. Louis Berkhof explains it this way:

” The infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations. In ascribing it to God we deny that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes. It implies that He is in no way limited by the universe, by this time-space world, or confined to the universe.⁶

The following verses express, in different ways, God’s infinity:

” Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure. (Psa. 147:5)

Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. If He passes through and imprisons and summons the court, who can turn Him back? (Job 11:7–10)

God’s infinity can be further understood in learning about His omniscience (unlimited knowledge), omnipotence (unlimited power and sovereignty), omnipresence (transcending of space), eternity (transcending of time), and immutability (unchangeableness)— which are covered in the following chapter.

While God is infinite in His being, He has placed some limitations on Himself through His own choosing. When He created angels and humans

6. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 59).

with free will, capable of choosing to do good or evil, He limited Himself to allow them to make choices which even result in things that He doesn't desire to happen. Such limitations don't impinge on God's infinity, because He has freely placed these limitations on Himself. Jack Cottrell wrote:

” God is not limited by nature, but by choice. He did not have to create at all, nor did the creation have to include free-will beings. (Creation is a free act.) Since it's a matter of God's own choice, and since there are no limitations imposed on God from without, the fact of creation does not in any way contradict the essential infinity of God; it is in no way an infringement upon His complete sovereignty over what He has made. Self-limitation is consistent with infinity: indeed, the fact that God is free to limit Himself as He chooses is the supreme indication of His infinity.⁷

God's infinity means that everything God is, He is *infinitely*. He is infinitely loving, merciful, gracious, holy, wise, powerful, knowledgeable, etc.

GOD'S INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM

As the self-existent Creator of the universe, there is no higher power or being than God. God is free to do as He wills (Psa. 115:3). He has complete self-determination. He answers to no authority other than Himself. No limits are placed on Him (Job 41:11). Nothing can hinder God from doing His will. Nothing outside of Himself constrains Him (Rom. 11:35–36).

” All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Dan. 4:35)

7. Cottrell, Jack (1983, pp. 243–44).

Who gave Him charge over the earth, and who laid on Him the whole world? If He should set His heart to it and gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust. (Job 34:13–15)

While God is the giver of life, is infinite, and has ultimate freedom, authority, and power, all that He does is consistent with His divine nature and character. Because He is holy, loving, righteous, just, merciful, patient, and gracious, all that He does is holy, loving, righteous, just, merciful, patient, gracious. God does not act contrary to His nature. Knowing this helps give us faith to trust Him completely.

GOD'S ETERNALITY

God's eternity is another aspect of His essential nature. God is eternal; He existed before the creation of the universe, and thus before time was created. God is without beginning and without end. As creatures who live in a world of time in which one event follows the next in succession, it's impossible for us to fully comprehend existence without time. But God, being the Creator, existed before He created time and therefore isn't limited by time.

There are numerous verses which express God's timelessness in language that creatures of time can use to express God's "originless, unending duration."⁸ His existence is beyond being forever; He is *forever and ever* (Psa. 10:16).

”

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God. (Psa. 90:2)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)

8. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 252).

When God revealed His name to Moses by saying “I AM WHO I AM,” the implication is a constant present, that God constantly is. Jesus used similar language when He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” He was understood by those listening to Him to be saying that He was eternal, and thus was God, and that understanding is seen in the hearers’ response, as they picked up stones to throw at Him (John 8:56–59).

Theologian Wayne Grudem gives the following explanation to show God’s eternal existence.

” The study of physics tells us that matter and time and space must all occur together: if there is no matter, there can be no space or time either. Thus before God created the universe, there was not “time,” at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another. Therefore when God created the universe He also created time. When God began to create the universe, time began, and there began to be a succession of moments and events one after another. But before there was a universe and before there was time, God always existed, without beginning, and without being influenced by time. And time, therefore, does not have existence in itself, but, like the rest of creation, depends on God’s eternal being and power to keep it existing.⁹

TRANSCENDING TIME

God is the creator of time and is above, or transcends, time. In His being, God is not limited by time’s constraints. He doesn’t live in a continual succession of moments as we do. Time has no effect on Him. He doesn’t grow in knowledge as time passes, as humans do; He knows everything there is to know, and always has. In His being He doesn’t change with time. “Our life is divided into a past, present and future,

9. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p.169).

but there is no such division in the life of God. He is the eternal “I am.”¹⁰

God’s being, His mode of existence, is different than ours, and part of that difference is His transcendence of time or His being unaffected by the flow of time. While we exist in time—with right now being the present moment, which then moves into the past, and with moments to come being the future—to God the past, present, and future are all seen at once. Jack Cottrell expresses it this way:

” To say that God is not limited by time means that He stands outside its flow, that His experience and His consciousness are not restricted to a single present moment as distinguished from past and future. He stands in a sense above time, so that His consciousness embraces the whole of time in a single act of knowing. His knowledge of the past and the future is as real and infallible as His knowledge of the present.¹¹

God’s timelessness is expressed in the book of Isaiah. His ability to tell future events was used to challenge the false gods and idols, as it was understood that the only way to accurately predict the future was to already know the future.

” The former things I declared of old; they went out from My mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. . . . I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, “My idol did them, my carved image and my metal image commanded them.” You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forth I announce to you new things, hidden things that you have not known. (Isa. 48:3–6)

10. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 60).

11. Cottrell, Jack (1983, pp. 255–56).

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH US IN TIME

God living outside the flow of time, and not being affected by time, doesn't mean that God doesn't see events in time or act in time. He acts within time when He interacts with the world. Once He created the world, and thus time, His interactions with the world were actions connected to time. That is different than time affecting God's being or God being limited to time.

While God is conscious of the past, present, and future all at once, He chooses to act within time, as the following verse shows: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4–5). James Leo Garret expresses God's interaction with time in this manner: "God transcends and is not limited by time, but God relates to the temporal order in creation, sustenance and redemption."¹²

How the eternal and timeless God transcends time and interacts in time is not something that we can fully comprehend, as we have no experience in timelessness. God's Word says that He is eternal, that He existed before the world was created, that He inhabits eternity. He is timeless and above time. It also says that He interacts with time, makes predictions of how He is going to act, and then at a later point in time acts in that manner. God entered time in the Person of Jesus, God the Son, who became incarnate and lived for decades in time on this earth. While we may not fully understand the concept of God's timelessness, He has revealed this part of His nature through His Word.

Even though those who receive Jesus as their Savior will live forever, the Bible indicates that we won't take on the timeless attribute of God. He is an infinite being while we are finite creatures, and as such we won't transcend time as He does.

12. Garrett, James Leo (2000, p. 248).

When speaking of heaven in the book of Revelation, John related events that require movement and change; events which necessarily have to occur through a succession of moments, one after another, such as the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the heavenly city (Rev. 21:24–26), the trees in the city yielding fruit each month, and nations being healed (Rev. 22:2). For these things to happen there must be time.

Revelation 10:6 has often been quoted as showing that there will be no time in heaven. The King James Version translates the verse this way: “And swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.” However, most of the newer translations of the Bible translate the last phrase to mean that there should be no more delay.¹³

While we will still experience time, in the sense of a succession of moments one after another, we will live eternally. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

In reference to our living in time in heaven, Wayne Grudem says:

” We will experience eternal life not in an exact duplication of God’s attribute of eternity, but rather in a duration of time that will never end: we, as God’s people, will experience fullness of joy in God’s presence for all eternity—not in the sense that we will no longer experience time, but in the sense that our lives with Him will go on forever.¹⁴

13. The English Standard Version renders the verse as “that there would be no more delay.” Other major versions translate the last phrase as “that there will be a delay no longer” (NAS); “there will be no more delay” (NIV); “that there should be delay no longer” (NKJV); “there will be no more delay” (NRS).

14. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 173).

GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

The immutability of God—or His unchangeableness or constancy, as some theologians call it—is part of His divine nature. It means that God doesn't change in His Being, His perfections, His purposes, and promises. He doesn't change in His nature or character.

The universe and all that is in it changes. There is transition, movement from one state to the next. People, for example, age; and as they do, they change. They grow or diminish in size, as well as intellectually and emotionally. Someone can also change morally, going from being a bad person to a good one, or vice versa. Someone can study and practice a skill and in the course of doing so learn and eventually become proficient in what they have studied. These are all examples of change, which is part of life within creation.

However, God transcends creation. He doesn't change. If He did, He would become either better or worse. He'd either grow in His intelligence and knowledge or diminish in it. He'd become more loving or less loving, more holy or less holy. But as God, He is *infinite* in all of these things. He therefore doesn't improve or deteriorate in them. If He did, He wouldn't be God.

All of creation is “becoming”—it's becoming something different than what it presently is. God, in contrast to this, is “being.” He is. Always. He doesn't change.

”

For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. (Mal. 3:6)

Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but You are the same, and Your years have no end. (Psa. 102:25–27)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

God's character, His attributes or perfections, don't change. He is always good, loving, just, righteous, holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, etc. There is never any varying in these things. He is constant.

If God's character varied, then we couldn't be certain that the God we know to be good and loving would remain that way. If God was subject to change, then at some point He could start thinking that sin isn't so bad after all; He could eventually degenerate to the point where He would begin to do evil things Himself, and even eventually become an all-powerful evil being. But His character and attributes do not and cannot change; they are constant, there is no variation. Old Testament writers expressed His unchangeableness, and their resultant confidence in Him, by using the term *Rock*.

” “I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.” (Deut. 32:3–4)

God doesn't change in His purpose, His will, and His plan. Once He has decided that He will bring something about, He does it. His plan of salvation is something that He determined before the foundations of the world, and He carried out His plan as promised (Eph. 3:9–11). Prophecies, predictions, and judgments throughout the Old Testament were fulfilled. His purposes of saving people through Jesus, of Jesus' return, of eternal life for believers, of judgment, of heaven, don't change; they remain firm (Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17).

” The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations. (Psa. 33:11)

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose," calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isa. 46:9–11).

God doesn't change in regard to His Word and His promises. If He stopped honoring His promises, if He acted contrary to His Word, then He couldn't be trusted. The promise of salvation, of eternal life, and His willingness to answer prayer, would all be in question. If God could change, then these bedrock foundations of our faith could change. But His promises and Word remain forever.

” Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. (Psa. 119:89 NIV)

God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it? (Num. 23:19)

DOES GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?

When God's unchangeableness is presented, the question often arises about the times God seems to have changed His mind, such as when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to announce that in forty days the city would be destroyed.

” Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for

a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3:3–10)

Another example was when He gave the ailing king Hezekiah fifteen more years of life, after having told him he was going to die.

” Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, and said, “Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.” (Isa. 38:1–5)

When considering these examples, we must remember that God is a personal being who interacts with humanity. Within this interaction, God responds to man’s choices and decisions. When someone is doing evil, God is displeased with that person’s actions, but if the person repents and changes, then God’s relationship with that person changes. His overall love

for the person never changes, but there is a response from God depending on the choices made by the person or people.

In the case of Nineveh, because they were wicked, God's response was that He rightly was going to destroy them. He told Jonah to tell them so. When Jonah did, the people repented, and God's response to their repentance was mercy. With Hezekiah, God declared he was going to die, yet when Hezekiah prayed and wept, God responded to his prayer and healed him.

In these cases, God was responding in mercy and love to changes made and prayers prayed by the people involved. In neither example did God change His character or nature, nor His overall purpose and plan. God didn't change, but the people changed, and God responded in accordance with His divine nature. Author and theologian Wayne Grudem explains it this way:

” These instances should all be understood as true expressions of God's present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at that moment. If the situation changes, then of course God's attitude or expression of intention will also change. This is just saying that God responds differently to different situations. The example of Jonah preaching to Nineveh is helpful here. God sees the wickedness of Nineveh and sends Jonah to proclaim, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” The possibility that God would withhold judgment if the people repented is not explicitly mentioned in Jonah's proclamation as recorded in Scripture, but it is of course implicit in that warning: the purpose for proclaiming a warning is to bring about repentance. Once the people repented, the situation was different, and God responded differently to that changed situation.¹⁵

Regarding Hezekiah, Grudem says: “Here prayer itself was part of the new situation and was in fact what changed the situation. God responded to

15. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 165).

that changed situation by answering the prayer and withholding the judgment.”¹⁶ Authors Lewis and Demarest explain:

” We can always count on God’s concern for human righteousness and well-being. God changelessly answers prayer in accord with His desires and purposes of holy love. From the standpoint of human experience, it appears (in the phenomenological language of Scripture) that God repents, but in reality it is the ungodly who have changed their minds in respect to sin. When the people of Nineveh repented, God “relented” and in compassion did not bring on them the destruction He had “threatened.” God’s basic purposes toward the unrepentant and the repentant in Nineveh remained unchanged; only God’s activity changed in accord with the changes in the spiritual attitudes of the Ninevites.¹⁷

Another factor to keep in mind regarding the scenarios above is that the Bible uses anthropomorphic descriptions of God, such as the mention of God having “*relented*” in the story of Jonah. These are best understood as descriptive language within human comprehension. On this matter of anthropomorphic language, William Lane Craig says:

” It’s vital that we understand the literary genre, or type, of most of these biblical stories. The Bible is in the form of narratives—they’re stories about God told from the human point of view. So a good storyteller will tell his story with all of the vivacity and color that he wants, to enhance his narratives. And so you’ll find stories in the Bible about God told from a human perspective, where God not only lacks knowledge of the future, but even lacks knowledge of what is going on presently.

16. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 165).

17. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 1, p. 200).

God comes down to Abraham and says, “I’ve heard the outcry in Sodom and Gomorrah. I’m going to go see if what I’ve heard is really happening there” (Gen. 18:20–33). That would deny not only God’s foreknowledge but His knowledge of the present... These are anthropomorphisms. They are literary devices that are part of the storyteller’s art and shouldn’t be read like a philosophy of religion or systematic theology textbook.¹⁸

In each of these situations, God didn’t change in His nature, character, purpose, or promises. In fact, He was constant in all of these by being just, loving, righteous, and personal, and acting within His overall purpose.

God’s immutability—His constancy and unchangeableness—is central to our faith in Him. If He was inconsistent, if His nature or character was regularly changing, if He improved or deteriorated, then we couldn’t trust Him. We couldn’t trust His Word or His promises. But God doesn’t change in His Being, nature, character, purposes, promises or plan. He can be counted on, for He is faithful and true. He is the rock that we can build on, the one we can trust in this ever-changing world, because He is the unchangeable God.

18. Craig, William Lane. “Can God Change?” 2011.

CHAPTER 5

GOD'S OMNISCIENCE AND OMNIPRESENCE

Because God is the infinite and supreme Being, His knowledge is unlimited. He knows absolutely everything. The common theological terminology for this is *omniscience*, which comes from the Latin *omni*, meaning all, and *sciens*, meaning knowledge. Scripture tells us that God's knowledge is perfect knowledge (Job 37:16); He knows everything (1 John 3:20).

God is different in being than we are, and as such, the nature of His knowledge is different from ours. He inherently knows everything. His knowledge isn't learned; it doesn't come from outside sources or from observation or experience, or through the process of reasoning. God doesn't learn, because He knows everything. The Bible asks if anyone will teach God (Job 21:22), or if He has need of a counselor (Rom. 11:34). It's a rhetorical question, and the implicit answer is that He doesn't need counselors or teachers. His knowledge is infinite (Psa. 147:5).

Unlike God, we gain knowledge by learning—we take information in from outside of ourselves, one thing after another, and this information is added to our knowledge base. We know much more than we are conscious of at any given time, as most of what we know lies in our subconscious, and when we need it, we mentally access it and it comes back to mind. God's knowledge is different in that His knowledge is always before Him. He doesn't have to recall it. God knows all things and is always conscious of all He knows, so He doesn't have to call up information from His subconscious. His is perfect knowledge. His knowledge and ways of thinking completely transcend ours (Isa. 55:8–9; Rom. 11:33).

Theologian Kenneth Keathley states:

” Since God is omniscient, He innately knows all things—this means He does not go through the mental processes that finite beings do of “figuring things out.” God never “learns” or has things “occur” to Him. He already knows all truths. The fact that God is omniscient does not merely mean that God is infinitely more knowledgeable than us, but that His knowledge is of a different type and quality.¹

Theologians Lewis and Demarest express God's omniscience as follows: “Transcendent to all else, God's intellectual capacities are unlimited by space, time, energy, laws, things, or persons.”²

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF HIMSELF AND HIS CREATIONS

God isn't only a repository of knowledge, like a giant computer which contains all the information of the universe but has no knowledge of itself and thus can't knowledgeably act on the information it has. He's far more than that. God knows all things about Himself, as Paul implied: “The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10–11).

He also knows all things outside of Himself, all about the universe and His creation, as expressed in His knowledge of the death of every sparrow and the number of the hairs of everyone's head (Matt. 10:29–30). Nothing created is hidden from Him (Heb. 4:13). He knows everything that exists and everything that happens (Job 28:24).

He knows everything about everyone—past, present, and future:

” O Lord, You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You

1. Keathley, Kenneth (2010, p. 16).

2. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 1, p. 231).

search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1–6).

The preceding passage expresses that He knows what we are going to say before we say it. Even before a person is born, God knows all about his or her life, including how long each person will live.

” You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:13–16 NAU)

God knows our every action and deed:

” The Lord looks down from heaven; He sees all the children of man; from where He sits enthroned He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. (Psa. 33:13–15)

His eyes are on the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps. (Job 34:21)

Besides knowing our actions, God also knows our intents. His knowledge of us isn’t limited to our outward actions. He knows the reasons we do what we do. He knows the deepest thoughts of our hearts.

” The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7)

Hear in heaven Your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart You know, according to all his ways (for You, You only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind). (1 Kings 8:39).

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

God's infinite knowledge includes knowledge about every person, both what is in their heart and what they do. This knowledge makes God's judgment of people true and accurate. Nothing is hidden from Him. Individuals may be able to fool others (or even themselves) as to their deeds or their intentions, but before God all is laid bare. He judges righteously because He has perfect knowledge both of people's actions and intentions, of the good and of the evil.

Lewis and Demarest express God's infinite knowledge in this manner:

” God knows all of nature's energy—matter, laws, animals, and finite spirits. God also knows living people. He knows not only their physical characteristics, but also their inner thoughts, struggles, motives, volitional decisions, and expressions of those determinations in words, acts, events and happenings. God knows all things.³

God knows not just the past and the present, He also knows the future. The book of Isaiah expresses that one of the characteristics of the true God is His complete knowledge of the future and being able to make future events known.

” I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose.” (Isa. 46:9–10)

3. Lewis and Demarest (1996, vol. 1, p. 231).

The Incarnate Jesus also told of things to come when He told His disciples that He was going to be delivered into the hands of those who would kill Him and that He would rise again (Mark 9:31); when He told Peter to go to the sea and catch a fish in order to pay the tax (Matt. 17:27); when He stated that Judas would betray Him (Mark 14:18–20), and that the disciples would be thrown out of the synagogues and be persecuted and killed (John 16:2).

HYPOTHETICAL OR “MIDDLE” KNOWLEDGE

The theological term for God knowing all things that happen—past, present, and future—and the thoughts and intents of the hearts of human beings is knowing *all things actual*. God knows all things actual. God also knows *all things possible*, meaning that He knows things that would or could happen in certain circumstances, but don't—things that are conditionally possible. Some refer to this as hypothetical knowledge.

One example is when David was on the run from Saul. At one point he was told that the Philistines were fighting against Keilah, so he inquired of the Lord and He told David to fight the Philistines and save Keilah. He and his men did so and saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

Saul eventually heard that David was in Keilah and said, “God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars” (1 Sam. 23:7). So Saul summoned his people to war in order to besiege David and his men. When David heard this he prayed:

” “O Lord, the God of Israel, Your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell Your servant.” (1 Sam. 23:10–13)

God knew, and revealed to David, what would happen if David and his men remained in Keilah. He knew that in that situation, the men of

Keilah would give David over to Saul. It didn't happen, because David left Keilah; but had he not, then he would have been handed over.

Another example of God knowing all things possible was when Jesus denounced the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, because they did not repent after He had done so many mighty works there. He said that if the miracles performed by Him had been performed in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, they would have repented, and Sodom would still be standing (Matt. 11:21–23).

These examples show that God not only knows what happens and will happen, but also what *would* happen in situations had other factors been in play. He knows all things *actual* and all things *possible*. He has *hypothetical knowledge*, which is also known as *middle knowledge*. Wayne Grudem states:

” The fact that God knows all things possible can also be deduced from God's full knowledge of Himself. If God fully knows Himself, He knows everything He is able to do, which includes all things that are possible. This fact is indeed amazing. God has made an incredibly complex and varied universe. But there are thousands upon thousands of other variations or kinds of things that God could have created but did not. God's infinite knowledge includes detailed knowledge of what each of those other possible creations would have been like and what would have happened in each of them.⁴

William Lane Craig gives a helpful illustration of hypothetical, or middle, knowledge.

” I think one of the greatest illustrations of this is Charles Dickens' story, *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge is confronted with the

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 191–192).

spirit of Christmas yet to come. The spirit shows Scrooge all of these horrible things—Tiny Tim’s death, Scrooge’s own grave. Scrooge is so shaken by these visions, these shadows, he falls at the spirit’s feet and says, “Tell me, spirit, are these shadows of things that will be or are these shadows of things that might be only?”

What the spirit was showing Scrooge was not shadows of things that will be. We know from the end of the story that Tiny Tim does not die, that Scrooge repents. . . . What the spirit was showing Scrooge was hypothetical knowledge of what would happen if Scrooge were not to repent. That’s what he was giving him. He wasn’t giving him foreknowledge of the future; rather the spirit was imparting this hypothetical knowledge of what would happen if Scrooge were not to repent.⁵

God’s omniscience, like other attributes of God, isn’t completely comprehensible to our human understanding. His thoughts are higher than ours, as would be expected since He is the infinite Being, the one who created the world and all that is in it, who dwells in eternity, who knows the past, present, and future.

GOD’S OMNISCIENCE AND MAN’S FREE WILL

Does the fact that God knows the choices we each will make in the future mean that we *must* make those choices? Does God’s omniscience do away with man’s free will? Theologians throughout history have agreed that God is omniscient, knowing past, present, and future, in accordance with what Scripture says. They also agree that, according to Scripture, humans can make free choices—that they have what is commonly called free will, which allows them to freely choose their actions.

5. Craig, William Lane. “The Doctrine of God, Lecture 7,” 2007.

The question, however, arises: If God has foreknowledge of what choices humans will make in the future, does His foreknowledge make the choices *certain* and therefore not really *free* choices? Christian denominations today have, in general terms, two different ways of looking at this question. I say “in general terms” because there is some divergence of opinion among believers even within the same denominations.

Generally speaking, there are those who believe that God knows the future and everything everyone will do, but that His foreknowledge does not mean that He is determining what they will do; rather, He simply knows in advance what free choice they are going to make, because He knows the future. His knowledge of what they are going to do in no way interferes with or affects their choices. Thus man has free will. The common term for this point of view is *Arminianism*, or the Arminian point of view, named after Jacob Arminius (1560–1609).

The second general point of view is that God knows what is going to happen in the future because He has, since before the world was created, ordained or decreed everything that is going to happen in each person's life. Thus, God has foreknowledge because of His foreordination of all events. This belief holds that even though God has foreordained the choices individuals make, humans freely choose what God has foreordained them to do. According to this position, humans make willing choices and aren't aware of any restraints by God on their decision making, even though those restraints exist. The name of this point of view is *Calvinism*, named after John Calvin (1509–1564), one of the most influential Protestant reformers. It is also called the *Reformed* position.

These two differing views have much more to do with God's providence and whether God predetermines who is going to get saved and who isn't. Both the Calvinist/Reformed position and the Arminian position use the Bible to back up their beliefs, and both have full theological explanations for why they believe as they do. However, in spite of their disagreements, both positions believe in salvation by grace, that Jesus

is the only way to salvation, as well as all of the other major Christian doctrines.

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL

God knows the future not because He foreordained or decreed all that is to happen, but because He's infinite. All of time is present before God. He sees it all at once, and therefore knows all future events before they occur. William Lane Craig expresses it this way:

” I think it's better to say that God knows in advance what choices people will freely make and that the free decisions of human beings determine what foreknowledge God has of them, rather than the reverse. The foreknowledge doesn't determine the free decisions; rather the free decisions, in effect, determine the foreknowledge.

One way to think about this is that God's foreknowledge is like an infallible barometer of the weather. Whatever the barometer says, because it's infallible, you know what the weather will be like. But the barometer doesn't determine the weather, the weather determines the barometer. God's foreknowledge is like an infallible barometer of the future. It lets you know what the future is going to be, but it doesn't in any way constrain the future. The future can happen however free agents want it to happen, but you just can't escape this infallible barometer, God's foreknowledge, tracking whatever direction the future will take.⁶

Just because God knows what choices people will make doesn't mean that He is causing the choices—He simply knows ahead of time the choices they will freely make. Because God knows the future, He knows what choices you will freely make; but His knowing what you are going to do in

6. Craig, William Lane. "The Doctrine of God, Lecture 7," 2007.

no way influences your decision. Humans have free will. Their actions are neither decreed nor foreordained.

God has unlimited intellectual capacities—they are greater than all things created, including space or time, things or persons. He knows all things actual and all things possible. He knows our thoughts and intents as well as our actions. He knows everything.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

God's omniscience has implications for humanity. One implication is in regard to God's blessings, such as protection, comfort, supply, and care.

” The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him. (2 Chron. 16:9)

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love, that He may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. (Psa. 33:18–19)

Another implication is regarding God's knowledge of our sins and the evil deeds and intents of the wicked. All men sin, and God knows every sin. For believers, those sins are forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and God says He won't remember them. This is best understood as His not remembering them *against us* any longer (Heb. 8:12), because they are forgiven and therefore we won't be punished in the next life for them.

There are evil people who think that they are free to do what they want with no consequences, and who think there is no God who will judge them (Isa. 47:10, 29:15). But God sees their actions and knows their hearts, and in the Day of Judgment they will understand that He has seen and remembered all they have done, even if they felt it was hidden when they did it (Job 34:21–22; Jer. 16:17).

”

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (Rev. 20:12–13)

When the time comes for God to judge all people, His judgment will be true and right. There will be no need for interpreting actions or intentions, because the omniscient God perfectly understands both, as He knows everything.

GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

When God created the universe and the world within it, He created matter, energy, time, and space. The world we live in is a three-dimensional material world, and we are limited by its physical laws. In this world, a material object or body can only exist in one space at one time, can only occupy its space at one time, and to get from one place to the next must pass through the intervening space.⁷ God is different. He is an infinite Being who is not limited by anything, including the world's physical laws of space. He is a non-spatial Being, and thus transcends any spatial limits. He can't be spatially contained by any space, no matter how large (1... Kings 8:27).

Besides not being limited by space, the Bible also speaks of God as being present everywhere, which means that He is present in all space at all times. This attribute of God is called omnipresence. It is expressed in various ways throughout the Bible, including examples such as God “filling heaven and earth” (Jer. 23:24), or David's expressions in the Psalms of God being with him no matter where in the universe he might be (Psa. 139:7–10). “He is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In Him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:27–28).

7. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 264).

In stating that God is omnipresent, that His presence is everywhere, that is not to say that He is bigger than everything, or that He is so immense that He's stretched throughout the universe, so that His foot is in one location and His head is billions of light years away. To put it in those terms would be to say that God is spatial, which He isn't; and that He is the biggest thing that exists, when actually location, distance, and size don't apply to Him. It would be better to avoid thinking of God as having size or being spatial and to instead think of Him as being present everywhere in His full being.

Wayne Grudem gives some helpful insight:

” Before God created the universe, there was no matter or material, so there was no space either. Yet God still existed. Where was God? He was not in a place that we could call a “where,” for there was no “where” or space. But God still was! This fact makes us realize that God relates to space in a far different way than we do or than any created thing does. He exists as a kind of being that is far different and far greater than we can imagine.⁸

When the Samaritan woman spoke to Jesus about the right place to worship, Jesus' answer expressed the notion that God isn't confined to one space, but rather is spirit, non-spatial, and can be worshiped wherever one is. Other verses describe God's omniscient presence in a similar manner.

” The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23–24)

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.
(Acts 17:24)

8. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 175).

While there aren't Bible verses which explicitly state that God is present *in His fullness* in every point in space, there are many verses (some quoted throughout this chapter) that express that God is present everywhere. Throughout history theologians have agreed that it's not as if a part of God is in one place and a different part is somewhere else, like His fingernail is in Europe and His ear is on Mars. The inference from Scripture is that God is present in His fullness everywhere. Theologians across the spectrum of Christian belief agree upon and teach this.

God's presence is also spoken of in Scripture as *sustaining* all things, keeping the universe functioning as He intends it to on a continual basis.

” He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
(Col. 1:17)

[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. (Heb. 1:3)

Besides creating the physical world, God also created a spiritual dimension in which spiritual beings—angels and demons—dwell. These spiritual beings are creations of God, and thus are spatial beings as well. Though the spiritual dimension is different from the material dimension in which we exist, it nevertheless has spatial limitations. The inhabitants of the spiritual dimension have limitations, unlike God, who is unlimited. An example of an angel's spatial limitations is seen when the angel sent to help Daniel spent twenty-one days fighting to get there. The angel obviously couldn't be in more than one place at a time. (See [Dan. 10:12–13](#).)

We've been talking about God's omnipresence, and specifically focusing on His presence in connection with His creation—that He is fully present in every point of creation. While God Himself is omnipresent, His presence has been manifested in certain specific ways and times. He has appeared in some instances in what are called theophanies, where He has taken on a

physical form that is visible. Some examples are when He showed Himself as a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night (Exo. 13:21), or when He descended on Mount Sinai (Exo. 19:16–19). He was also present in God Incarnate, Jesus (John 1:14). The fact that He has appeared through theophanies, and that God the Son became Incarnate, doesn't mean that God was not present everywhere at those times, for as shown in Scripture, God is unlimited by space.

Though not necessarily connected to God's omnipresence, God's presence is spoken of in another sense throughout the Bible to express His favor or displeasure by His being *near* or *far*. In this context, God being near or far isn't speaking of spatial distance, as in being physically close or distant, but it's speaking relationally. When Scripture says that God is far from evildoers, it doesn't mean that somehow His presence is not with them as it is everywhere else in creation, or that His presence is somehow more with believers than it is with all of the rest of creation. God is always everywhere. The distance spoken of in connection with God's favor or displeasure isn't physical. Instead it is spoken of figuratively, expressing that God is pleased or displeased, that the evildoer is relationally separated or far from God, and that those who love God are relationally close to Him.

Jack Cottrell expresses this point in this way:

” God's ontological presence, His omnipresence, is constant and does not change. But depending on our own attitude toward Him, His presence takes on different meanings for us. To those who arouse His anger, His presence is as barren as His absence; to those who seek Him aright, His presence becomes a fountain of blessing.⁹

God is said to be far, and to hide His face, from those who are wicked and who sin against Him.

9. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 258).

”

The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous. (Prov. 15:29)

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. (Isa. 59:2)

I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid My face from them. (Ezek. 39:24)

God speaks of the nearness of His presence as an expression of His pleasure with those who love Him, who seek Him, and who do good.

”

The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. (Psa. 145:18)

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:13)

God is present in times of need. His Spirit dwells within us, and He is with us always. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). God’s omnipresence, one of His many amazing attributes, can be meaningful to each of us in our relationship with Him. It helps us see that we love, worship, and serve a wonderfully powerful God, one who is always everywhere in the universe, and who always dwells within us as well.

CHAPTER 6

GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE AND CONSISTENCY

God, who created all things out of nothing, known as creation *ex nihilo*, is all-powerful. The traditional word for God's infinite power is *omnipotence*, which comes from two Latin words: *omni*, which means *all*, and *potens*, which means *power*. God has the power to do anything He wills to do.

In the Old Testament, when God entered into a covenant with Abraham, He said He was *el Shaddai*, which in Old Testament Hebrew means God Almighty, God the most powerful. *El Shaddai* is used six times in Genesis and Exodus and once in Ezekiel. *Shaddai*, meaning Almighty, is used 36 times throughout the Old Testament in reference to God. In the New Testament the Greek word for Almighty, *pantokratōr*, is used ten times, mostly in the book of Revelation.

The name God called Himself when He spoke with Abraham described His omnipotence.

” When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.” (Gen. 17:1)

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty. (Exo. 6:3)

Scripture expresses that God has the ability and the absolute power to bring about whatever is His will.

” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26)

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for Me? (Jer. 32:27)

I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2)

The awesome power of God is manifested in His creating the universe. The Bible teaches that God created the universe and all that is in it, including our world, out of nothing (Gen. 1). It says He *spoke* it into being.

” He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm. (Psa. 33:9)

God ... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom. 4:17)

Theologian Thomas F. Torrance describes the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* in this way:

” The creation of the universe out of nothing does not mean the creation of the universe out of something that is nothing, but out of nothing at all. It is not created out of anything—it came into being through the absolute fiat of God’s Word in such a way that whereas previously there was nothing, the whole universe came into being.¹

It’s hard to imagine a greater display of power than creating the world out of nothing! Jeremiah sees creation as being proof that nothing is too hard for God: “It is You who have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You” (Jer. 32:17). The apostle Paul spoke about creation being one way to perceive God’s power and nature:

1. Torrance, Thomas (1996, p. 207).

” What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:19–20)

Considering the intricacy and complexity of the universe and of our world, having the power to create it is incredible power. Jack Cottrell expressed this well:

” In addition to the bare fact of creation from nothing, the omnipotence of God is magnified even more when we consider the size and nature of the universe so created. Its size is so vast that we cannot even comprehend it ... Our galaxy of about 100 billion stars is about 100,000 light years in width, and there are probably close to 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe.

Many of these galaxies are visible only through a 200-inch telescope whose lens took ten months to cool and eleven years to polish. Yet God spoke the whole universe into existence with a word! The amount of matter originated in that creative moment could not even be imagined. According to one calculation, our own sun loses nearly five million tons of its matter per second; yet at this rate it will still last for many billions of years.²

In creating the universe, God also created the active and latent power within created things. From the atom to stars and to galaxies, there is power within God's creation. God has created the universe with natural power that has come from the All-Powerful (Psa. 62:11). The natural power of created things is seen in the ordinary working of the world. The sun gives light and heat, plants grow, water evaporates and turns into rain, the planets rotate around the sun, and so forth.

2. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 303).

God's power is also sometimes seen when He operates outside the ordinary working of nature by performing miracles. He separated a sea so His people could walk through on dry ground (Exo. 14:21–22); He sent fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38–39); He caused a virgin to conceive a child through the Holy Spirit, who was to be God Incarnate (Luke 1:26–35); when that child grew up, He healed the sick and raised people from the dead (John 11:41–44); after He was crucified, God raised Him from the dead and brought Him bodily to heaven (Acts 5:30–31). These miracles are also evidence of God's omnipotence.

God's power is infinite, meaning that it is without any limits, immeasurable. As such, He not only has the power to do those things He *has* done, but also the power to do things He *could do* but hasn't done. Some examples of such things mentioned in the Bible are raising up children of Abraham from stones (Matt. 3:9) or sending legions of angels to deliver Jesus (Matt. 26:53). While He has unlimited power and thus the ability to do these things, He didn't do them.

While Scripture affirms that God can do all things, it also states there are some things God cannot do. He can't deny Himself by going against His nature and character (2 Tim. 2:13). He can't lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). He can't be tempted with evil or tempt others with evil (James 1:13). He can't do wickedly or pervert justice. He won't violate His righteousness.

When the Bible says God is Almighty and can do anything, it should be understood that God can do *anything which is consistent with His nature and character*. Theologian J. Rodman Williams explains it this way:

”

This is not omnipotence in the sense of sheer power. For the God who is Almighty is the God whose character is holiness, love, and truth. Therefore, He does, and will do, only those things that are in harmony with who He is. To say it is impossible for God to do wrong or evil does not limit His omnipotence any more than, for example, to say it is impossible for God to will His own nonexis-

tence. These are moral and logical contradictions to the very being and nature of Almighty God. In the scripture, over and over, God's omnipotence is associated with His character.³

Jack Cottrell wrote:

” Is God's “inability” to do these things an expression of weakness on His part? Hardly! In fact, the opposite is true. If He could do these things, it would be an expression of weakness. These are negative acts, not positive ones; to do them would imply a lack of strength. That He cannot do them is not a limitation but rather an affirmation of His power. Another approach to these “cannots” is that they are contrary to the very nature of God, and obviously omnipotence does not include the requirement that God must be able to contradict His own nature. God could not sin or annihilate Himself, for these are impossibilities by the very nature of things, or more specifically, by the very nature of God.⁴

Wayne Grudem says: “Although God's power is infinite, His use of that power is qualified by His other attributes (just as all God's attributes qualify all His actions).”⁵ Besides not going against His nature and character, God can't do things that are logical impossibilities. For example, God can't make a square circle. He can't make 5 plus 5 equal 11. These are logically impossible.

When explaining God's omnipotence in relation to logical impossibilities, William Lane Craig says:

” Can God do things that are logically impossible? For example, could God make a square circle? Could God make a married bachelor? Could God bring it about that Jesus both came and died on the cross, and that He did not come and die on the cross?

3. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 71).

4. Cottrell, Jack (1983, p. 300).

5. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 217).

Could God make a round triangle? These sorts of things are usually exempted from God's omnipotence.

The vast majority of Christian theologians have not understood God's omnipotence to mean that God can do things which are logically impossible. Indeed, when you think about it, these really aren't things at all. There isn't any such thing as a married bachelor. There's no such thing as a round triangle. These are just combinations of words which when put together are incoherent combinations. They are just logical contradictions. Therefore to say that God cannot do logical contradictions is not to say there is something that God can't do, because these aren't really things at all, and thus to say that God can't bring about a logical contradiction is not really to inhibit God's omnipotence at all.⁶

God's omnipotence is an important factor that builds our faith in Him, as He is not someone who makes claims and promises which He does not have the power to perform. God has the power to deliver on what He has promised. He promised that through Abraham the whole world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3); that David's seed and line would be eternal (2 Sam. 7:12-13,16); that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), would suffer and die for the sins of mankind (Isa. 53:3-6); He delivered. He prophesied events centuries in advance; they came true.⁷

6. Craig, William Lane. "The Doctrine of God, Lecture 9," 2007.

7. Some examples of events prophesied far in advance, and that we know from history occurred include:

- * The Jewish people in exile in Babylon would return from their Babylonian exile and rebuild Jerusalem. Afterwards the Messiah would appear, be rejected, and Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed (Dan. 9:24-26). Given: About 530 BC. Fulfilled: By 70 AD.
- * Israel would be destroyed (Deut. 28:49-52). This was fulfilled by the destruction of Israel by the Roman army. Given: Around 1400 BC. Fulfilled: 70 AD.
- * The Messiah would be a descendant of King David (Jer. 23:5). Given: between 626-586 BC. Fulfilled: At Jesus' birth, around 4 BC.
- * Four world kingdoms shown to Daniel in a dream: The Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires (Dan. 2:31-40). Given: About 530 BC. Fulfilled: From 530 BC until 100 AD.

When we read His promises to us, we can put our weight down on what He has said, as He is the all-powerful Creator and sustainer of the universe and all that is in it. He who is infinite power is our Father, and we are His children. We are safe within His arms.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES: EQUAL AND CONSISTENT

When looking at God's nature and character, we can see that God has many attributes, and these attributes are who He is. It's not as if God is *partly* righteous and *partly* merciful, or that sometimes He's patient and at other times He's wrathful. God's attributes are God's essence. He's not divided into parts. He is all of His attributes all of the time. What He *is* determines what He *does*, and His actions are based on His essence. He is infinitely whole and perfect in each of His attributes, and these perfect attributes are in complete harmony one with another. Everything God does is consistent with *all* of His attributes.

There are times in Scripture when some attribute of God is emphasized more than another. Certainly God's holiness, justice, and wrath are more prominently displayed in the Old Testament, though His love, mercy, patience, omniscience, and power are clearly evident as well. Love and grace are in the forefront throughout the New Testament, but there is no hiding the wrath that it also contains.

The God of the Old Testament and the New Testament is the same God—infinately just, holy, loving, and merciful in both time periods, and all that He did is completely consistent with all of His attributes. Old Testament believers lived within the covenant that God made with Israel, in which the Law, given through Moses, was predominant. New Testament believers live under a new covenant since the death and resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers. They are different covenants with the same God, and while certain aspects of God's nature may have been emphasized in Scripture at different times, this doesn't negate the other parts of His nature. Both the old and new covenants, and

God's actions in both eras, were based on the fullness of God's Being. Holiness, righteousness, love, mercy, grace, patience, wrath, aseity, eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and all of God's attributes are woven throughout both Testaments because God's actions are based on God's Being; and His Being, the essence of who God is, is found in His attributes.

There are some theologians who have argued that love is the most important, or dominant, attribute of God, and that all others are based on God's love. Others have argued that His holiness, righteousness, or some other attribute is the most important part of God's Being. These positions are not held by the majority of theologians. The implication of one attribute being more important or dominant leads to the possibility that some of God's actions could be inconsistent with His divine nature.—That He would possibly set aside one attribute in favor of another, and would act contrary to one of His attributes. This would then mean that God could change in His nature, that He could act in an unrighteous manner, and could be unloving or unholy, which as we see from Scripture is not possible.

While the Bible specifically tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8,16), it doesn't state that God is *only* love. Scripture also specifically states that God is spirit (John 4:24), is light (1 John 1:5), and is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Again, it does not state that God is *only* any of these things.

When God told Moses about Himself, He said He was merciful, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving, just, and righteous.

” The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.” (Exo. 34:6–7)

God's being is a unity of *all* of His attributes. None are separate from another, or more important than another. They all make up the essence of God.

LEARNING, UNDERSTANDING, WORSHIPPING

Learning about God's nature and character helps us to have a better understanding of God. It is of course not possible to know *all* there is about God, but we can know what He has revealed about Himself through Scripture. What He has revealed shows that He is worthy of all honor, respect, praise, and worship (Psa. 99:3–5). He is the awesome God of Scripture (Neh. 1:5).

The Creator of all things, who has the power to speak creation into being, who knows all there is to know, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is infinite in all of His Being, is not some faraway entity who pays no attention to the world and all that is in it. The opposite is true. God is personal. God being personal means that He enters relationships with us. He loves and interacts with us. He listens to us, cares for us, and answers our prayers. He entered our world and died for us so that we can live with Him forever.

He is concerned about His creatures, humans in particular. He made them in His image, He has entered into covenants with them, and He establishes relationships with them. He loves them and cares about them, does good for them, and finds pleasure in them. Though His image-bearing creations sinned by turning away from His will, God didn't abandon them and cast them out. His self-giving love made a way for humans to be forgiven for their sins and to become reconciled to Him. Jesus suffered and died specifically for our sins. The personal, merciful, loving, and gracious God, in an act of deep love for those He created, brought forth the plan of redemption.

God's holiness, righteousness, justice, and constancy are those attributes that give a foundation for our faith and trust in God. He is unchanging, the Rock, the strong tower in which we are safe. He is infinitely holy, so we can know that He will never do anything toward us which is unholy. He is infinitely righteous and just, so we can know He will always treat us fairly. Because He is constant in His nature and character, we know He will always act lovingly toward us, and will always be merciful and patient.

His omniscience and omnipotence help to engender faith that what God has said in His Word will happen, as He has the power to make it happen. When we pray for ourselves or others, when we lay hands on the sick, when we ask Him for anything, we can pray in faith, knowing that the all-powerful One can do all things which are according to His will and purpose.

Being aware of the unity of His attributes, the harmony between them, can help us to have a more trusting attitude when we can't make sense of some of what happens in the world around us. Knowing that God is holy and just, that He hates evil, and that He will judge those who do evil, but that He is also patient, can help us to know that the injustice in the world will be dealt with, that vengeance belongs to God. When we consider His attributes in balance, it helps to guide us in our lives, decisions, and interactions with others. We too should hate evil, sin, and injustice, but we should also be loving, kind, merciful, and patient with others.

Knowing that God is uncreated Spirit, that His Being is unique and different from all other being, that He made all things, knows all things, and can do all things, can help us to accept that there are some things about God that are beyond our knowledge and understanding. We don't know all His thoughts and ways, and we can't always have answers to every question we have about Him. We can, however, know that because God is true to His nature, we can trust that He will act in accordance with His nature. Even if we may not understand everything about Him or why He does what He does, He has revealed to us His essence, His nature and character,

His attributes, His power and abilities, and we know that these are what God is and always will be. Knowing this can help us have faith to trust in Him, even if we don't have complete understanding of Him or His actions.

Knowing more about God's nature and character, about His awesomeness, can and should cause us to love, praise, and worship Him. He's the One who created the universe, who made the beautiful world in which we live. He loves and cares about us, so much so that He wants us to live with Him for eternity—which He has made possible through His ultimate love gift, the free gift of salvation.

God is wonderful! He loves us so deeply. He cares about every person. He cares about you personally. It's a wonderful thing to know that He has made it possible for us to be with Him for eternity and that He has commissioned us to help others to learn about Him, His love, and the wonderful salvation that is available to all.

CHAPTER 7

WHO IS JESUS? THE GOD-MAN

The heart of our faith as Christians rests on the answer to one simple but extremely crucial question: *Who is Jesus?* In order to understand our faith, to understand the story of Jesus and what His life was about—His teachings, the reason for His coming—it's necessary to understand who He is.

Jesus is God. He is the second person of the Trinity, which includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (For more on the Trinity, see chapters 14 and 15.) The beauty of this truth is that His being God means that every person from every age who has invited Jesus into their life has received forgiveness for their sins as well as everlasting life.

Because we as humans sin, and those sins are an offense against God, there is a need for us to be forgiven by God and reconciled to Him; and the only way for that to happen was for Jesus, who is God, to become human, to live a life without sin, to die for our sins, and to rise from the dead. And this is exactly what happened. Christ's death for the sins of the world is the basis and plan of salvation for humankind. Jesus fulfilled all the necessary requirements in order for humans to be forgiven for their sins by God.

THE LOGOS

Jesus, being God the Son has all the attributes of God. God is the creator of all things. God is eternal and existed before anything else was in existence. This being the case, for *Jesus* to be God, then He must be eternal, and He must have also existed before anything else existed. He must have had a part in creating all that is created. According to Scripture, all those things are true of Jesus.

The first three verses of the Gospel of John make the point well: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”

When John was speaking of God the Son before He was born on earth, he referred to Him as *the Word*, not as *Jesus*. These verses show that the Word/Jesus had a hand in creation, as “all things were made by Him.” The word John used, translated into English as *Word*, was *Logos* in the original Greek. The term *Logos* was first used in the 6th century BC by a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus to designate the *divine reason* or plan which coordinates a changing universe. As such, to a Greek speaker at the time, *Logos* meant *reason*, so they would have understood the verses as “in the beginning was the *reason* or mind of God.” They would understand that before creation the *Logos* existed with God eternally.

Therefore the *Logos*, the Word, God the Son, was in existence before any created thing—including time, space, or energy—existed. As one of the early church fathers, Athanasius, wrote, “There was never a time when He (the *Logos*) was not.”¹ He is eternal. The *Logos*, God the Son, was with God the Father, and was God.

John 1:14 goes on to say: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John states clearly that the *Logos*, God the Son, became flesh and lived on earth for a time as a human being. It means that He, an eternal immaterial being, entered into His creation in time and space. This could only happen if God became incarnate, if He became man, which is exactly what happened when Jesus of Nazareth was born. He became the God-man, God in human flesh who dwelt amongst us.

1. Cary, Phillip (2008, Lecture 10).

JESUS' CLAIMS TO DEITY

It's important to note that according to the Laws of Moses, anyone who claims to be God commits blasphemy, and the punishment for blasphemy is death. On more than one occasion the Jews took up stones to kill Jesus, and at His trial before the Jewish religious leaders, they condemned Him to death for His claims to be God. Clearly the Jews of His day understood He was making claims of deity.

One of His direct claims is recorded in John chapter 8, which says:

” “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. (John 8:56–59 NIV)

What Jesus said in this passage is significant in two ways. First, though He wasn't even fifty years old, He was claiming that He was alive before Abraham—who had lived and died two thousand years earlier. Only God has eternal existence, which is what Jesus was claiming. Second, in saying “before Abraham was born, I am,” Jesus was assigning Himself the name of God.

In Exodus 3:14, God reveals to Moses that He is “I am who I am,” and then tells Moses to tell the people of Israel that I AM has sent me to you. God's name, I AM, is the name YHWH, or Yahweh, from the Old Testament. It is so sacred that from before the time of Jesus until today, devout Jews have avoided saying it. (Since religious Jews don't say the name YHWH, they instead use the word Adonai, which is translated as “Lord.”) But Jesus used this name of God in reference to Himself. The Jews He was speaking to clearly understood His claim and picked up stones to kill Him for it.

Another occasion on which the Jews understood Jesus to be claiming deity was described in John chapter 10:

” So the Jews gathered around Him and said to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name bear witness about Me, but you do not believe because you are not part of My flock. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God.”

“If I am not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father.” Again they sought to arrest Him, but He escaped from their hands. (John 10:24–33, 37–39).

In these passages Jesus refers to the miracles He has performed, saying the Jews should believe the works He’s done because they show that “the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father.”

Jesus made a number of *I am* statements which are indirect claims to His deity. He performed miracles which substantiated the statements He made. For example, the day after feeding 5,000 people with fish and bread multiplied from two fish and five barley loaves, Jesus said:

” “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst... I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” (John 6:35, 51 NASB)

In John chapter 9 Jesus makes another *I am* statement followed by a corresponding miracle. As Jesus was leaving the temple, He saw a man who had been blind from birth and said:

” “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.” When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing. (John 9:5–7 NASB)

When the Pharisees interrogated this man and asked how he was healed from his blindness, he explained that Jesus had healed him. The man was then put out of the temple. The chapter continues with:

” Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.” And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him. (John 9:35–38 NASB)

Another *I am* statement followed by an affirming miracle is related in John chapter 11, when Jesus’ friend Lazarus died. Four days later Jesus traveled to Bethany, where Lazarus was buried. His sister Martha said that if Jesus had been there, her brother wouldn’t have died.

” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and

believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” (John 11:25–27 NASB)

Jesus then raised Lazarus from the dead, which caused many to believe on Him. The response from the chief priests and the Pharisees was to convene a council, and “from that day on they planned together to kill Him” (John 11:53 NASB).

Other *I am* statements made by Jesus include:

” “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9 NASB)

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” (John 14:6–7 NASB)

Again the high priest asked Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need? You have heard His blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned Him as deserving death. (Mark 14:61–64)

His use of both *I am* and *Son of Man* was understood by the Pharisees as Jesus claiming deity, and they deemed it blasphemy and said He deserved death as punishment.

SON OF MAN

Jesus uses the term *Son of Man* throughout the Gospels in reference to Himself. It harks back to Daniel 7:13–14, which describes the Son of Man being given authority, glory, sovereign power, and a kingdom that will be everlasting. This passage clearly speaks of someone already existing in heaven who is given eternal rule over the world. The Jews of Jesus' day were familiar with this passage in Daniel and knew what Jesus was referring to when He used this term.

A few other important verses where Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man are:

” But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. (Matt. 9:6)

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done. (Matt. 16:27)

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. (John 3:14–15)

Besides the *I am* statements and the *Son of Man* statements, Jesus also made inferences to His being in existence with God before He came to earth:

” I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father. (John 16:28 NASB)

I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with

Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:4–5 NASB)

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

In addition to the direct claims Jesus made, He did and said things which implied His deity through indirect means. In these instances, He wasn't saying "I am God" but was making statements or performing acts that could only be attributed to God. One example is that He forgave sins. While individuals can forgive someone who sins against them, Jesus forgave the sins of those who had sinned against others.

C. S. Lewis put it this way:

” We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offenses. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.”²

In the following passages Jesus forgives sins, and when He does, it brings up questions in the minds of the Jewish leaders, as they understood the implications.

2. Lewis, C. S. (2009, p. 51–52).

”

And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:3–12)

Jesus forgave the man’s sins, and then, to add credence to his divine authority, He performed a miracle.

The setting of the second example was when Jesus was visiting the house of a Pharisee named Simon, and while He was there, a woman who was a known sinner came in. Weeping, she wet His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment.

”

Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you,

her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:44–50)

Time and again, the things Jesus said and did which directly or indirectly expressed His claims to deity were clearly understood by the Jewish teachers and leaders as such, and were thus considered blasphemy.

JUDGMENT OF MEN

Another indirect claim Jesus made was that He would judge men in the afterlife, which the Jews knew was strictly reserved for God, according to their scriptures.

” “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’”... “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matt. 25:31–34, 41)

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” (John 5:22–23)

RELATIONSHIP TO THE FATHER

Jesus also claimed to have a special and unique relationship with the Father.

” “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.” (John 5:19–20 NASB)

“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matt. 11:27 NASB)

John Stott, an Anglican clergyman, a noted leader of the evangelical movement and renowned author, expressed Jesus’ unique relationship to the Father this way:

” So close was His identification with God that it was natural for Him [Jesus] to equate a man’s attitude to Himself with his [a man’s] attitude to God. Thus,

- to know Him was to know God;
- to see Him was to see God;
- to believe in Him was to believe in God;
- to receive Him was to receive God;
- to hate Him was to hate God;
- to honor Him was to honor God.³

3. Stott, John (2006, p.34).

Jesus having made such *claims* doesn't necessarily *prove* that He is God, but the claims show that He had a self-understanding that He was God. Of course, a lunatic might believe that he is God as well, but that doesn't make it so. There is a famous argument put forth by C. S. Lewis called Lewis' trilemma, is often referred to as "Lord, Liar, or Lunatic." In *Mere Christianity* Lewis wrote:

” I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁴

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli in their book *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* add to Lewis' "Lord, Liar, or Lunatic" argument by including two other possibilities—"Guru" or "Myth." They successfully argue that Jesus wasn't a liar, lunatic, guru, or myth, but was in fact exactly what He said He was, God the Son. Jesus' direct claims of His deity, when added together with His miracles, His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, as well as the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about Him, make it very clear that Jesus is God.

4. Lewis, C. S. (2009, p.53).

THE PERSPECTIVE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

Jesus' followers were all Jews and therefore knew the Jewish Scripture intimately. They were keenly aware that, according to the Scripture, there was only one God and that worshiping another god was a sin punishable by death. These men didn't know Jesus was God when He called them to follow Him. They came to believe that He was the promised Messiah—the Christ. But the Jews generally were not expecting that the Messiah would be God.

The Messiah was understood by the Jews of Jesus' day to be the “anointed one”—like the kings of Israel were anointed ones—who was going to deliver Israel from the oppression of Rome. The disciples thought Jesus was going to be an earthly king, anointed by God. They did not expect their Messiah to *be* God Himself. Over time the disciples began to understand that Jesus was *more* than the Messiah, that He was God, but they didn't *fully* understand it until after His death and resurrection.

Even on the night of Jesus' arrest, though He had forewarned them of it, they didn't seem to fully comprehend what was happening and the events that were to come upon them. Earlier in the week they had heard their countrymen cheering Jesus with “blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” and “hosanna in the highest” (Matt. 21:9). Days later they heard the crowds crying out, “Crucify Him!” (Mark 15:13).

They saw Him preach to crowds of thousands and minister to individuals. They witnessed His miracles—they knew there had been only five loaves and two fish to start with, yet they gathered basketfuls when the meal was over. They saw Him walk on water, give sight to the blind, heal the lepers, and raise the dead. They saw Him arrested, whipped, and nailed to a cross. They saw Him die and be placed in a tomb. They despaired and hid in fear after His death. And then they saw Him alive again. They spoke with Him, they ate with Him, and forty days later they saw Him ascend into the clouds of heaven.

The events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection convinced these men—and many others who followed Him—that Jesus was not only the Messiah, but He was God. His disciples believed it so deeply that they preached it for the rest of their lives, even when doing so resulted in persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. Tradition has it that nearly all of the apostles were martyred for their faith, with only John dying a natural death.

Before His crucifixion, the disciples may not have fully understood who Jesus was and the significance of His death for the sins of the world. But after His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus expounded on the scriptures which gave them a fuller understanding of the scripture and His role.

” “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44–47, 27 NASB)

THE JEWISH FAITH AND BLASPHEMY

All the first disciples and apostles were Jews. Paul, who wrote many of the Epistles that comprise the New Testament, wasn't a believer in Jesus until a few years after Jesus ascended into heaven. Nevertheless, he is considered an apostle as well, and played a pivotal role in the development of the early Christian church and doctrine. He was not just a Jew but, as he put it, was a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6).

For a Jew in those days, and especially someone as ardent as Paul, the Scriptures—the Law and the Prophets—were an integral part of their lives. They obeyed the Law, both the moral and the ceremonial law. It governed their lives. Their context, culture, and worldview were totally immersed in the Scriptures and the traditions that developed around them. What Scripture said was wrong *was* universally understood to be wrong. If they disobeyed Scripture, they were in jeopardy of punishment for such disobedience, not just spiritually but physically as well. In their day, the woman who was taken in adultery would be stoned to death. Stephen, one of the early disciples, was stoned for what was considered blaspheming. Such were the laws that the Jewish people were governed by and going against those laws resulted in consequences.

At the core of the Jewish faith, supported by Jewish law, was allegiance to God. Worship of the God of Israel was paramount. Faithfulness to Him and Him alone was at the center of their faith (Deut. 6:4–5, 13–15).

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, after He had walked on the water, the Bible says His disciples worshiped Him, and made their declaration, "truly, You are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). But after witnessing Jesus' death and then seeing Him alive again, the disciples consistently worshiped Him as God. To do this was unthinkable according to Jewish law, custom, and culture. Yet the disciples were so convinced of Jesus' deity that they crossed that barrier.

” Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshiped Him. (Matt. 28:16–17)

And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:52)

TESTIMONIALS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS

The authors of the New Testament books, a number of whom were apostles, state explicitly that Jesus is God:

” In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14)

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1 NASB)

Thomas answered [Jesus], “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)⁵

This last example of Thomas calling Jesus *Lord* and *God* is one of the most powerful references, because Thomas describes Jesus with two words which both mean God. Thomas is making a strong statement that Jesus is both YHWH and Elohiym, both Jewish names for God, by stating “my Lord (Kyrios-YHWH) and my God (Theos-Elohiym).”

DIVINE POWERS

Besides calling Jesus God and worshiping Him as such, the New Testament authors wrote that Jesus did, or can do, things that only God can do—beginning with the creation of all things. “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). (See also Heb. 1:1–2; Col. 1:16–17.)

The judgment of men in the afterlife, a divine prerogative which Jesus claimed, was also stated by the New Testament writers. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive

5. See also Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20.

what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). Forgiveness of sin, another prerogative of God claimed by Jesus, is preached by the apostles. “God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). (See also Gal. 1:3-4; Rev. 1:5).

THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

The heart of Christianity is that Jesus is God. Believing this is what makes one a Christian. If He isn’t God, then the heart of our faith doesn’t exist and our faith is unfounded. Jesus claimed to be God. His disciples believed it, preached it, and began the Christian movement that has lasted for over 2,000 years, a movement which presently consists of over two billion people who believe this one fundamental truth.

The New Testament proclaims that Jesus existed before anything else, that all things were made by Him, that He entered into His creation by becoming man, that He forgives sins, that through His death and resurrection He has brought salvation and victory over death. His miracles all point to His deity, as does His unique relationship with the Father. His teachings point to it and the claims of His judging mankind attest to it.

One of the major turning points of Jesus’ ministry was when His followers began to understand who He was:

” Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:13-17)

Like Peter, we can make the same statement of faith—that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Not only that, we know that He *is* God. This is standard Christian teaching which all true Christians believe. Because He is God, He is the Water of Life, the Light of the World, the Bread come down from Heaven, the Resurrection and the Life, He who forgives our sins and grants everlasting life to all who receive Him. The result of His life, death, and resurrection is the precious gift of God, our salvation.

CHAPTER 8

THE INCARNATION

According to God’s plan of salvation, Jesus’ humanity is as important as His deity, because our salvation depends on Jesus being both fully God and fully man. Because He is one of the persons of the Trinity—God the Son—salvation is possible. Only one who is God can bear the weight of the sins of the world. Only one who is eternally God can bring a sacrifice of infinite value and render perfect obedience to the law of God, bear the wrath of God redemptively, and so free others from the judgment of the law.¹

By the same token, only one who shares in humanity can make salvation possible. Because the first man, Adam, sinned and brought condemnation to all men, it was necessary that another human bear the punishment and receive God’s judgment upon himself—for only a human being can vicariously represent mankind. “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21–22). It was therefore necessary for Jesus, who is the second person of the Trinity, to become incarnate, to take on full humanity, to be both fully God and fully man, to make salvation possible.

While the apostles and early Christians understood that Jesus was God as well as human, the actual doctrine of the Incarnation came later. The word *incarnation* is a technical word in Christian theology that comes from the Latin word *carnem*, meaning flesh. The Incarnation means that *Jesus is God in human flesh*. Jesus’ incarnation was the only time in history when God became human—God incarnate, God in flesh.²

1. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 319).

2. Cary, Phillip (2008, Lecture 11).

Chronologically, the Incarnation was formally expressed as a doctrine after the doctrine of the Trinity was developed. The Trinity explained who *God* is and the Incarnation expresses that Jesus is both God *and* human. As with articulating the doctrine of the Trinity, it took some time and some controversy, to hammer out the concept and the wording to express that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Often people focus on the deity of Jesus and push His humanity into the background. But while Jesus was God living on earth in human flesh, He was just as human as you and me. He had the same physical needs and weaknesses that we have. He had the same physical and mental limitations. He had the same emotions. He was tempted to sin and had internal spiritual suffering, just as we do. He was a man, and He was born, lived, and died just like any man. He had human nature, meaning both a material body and a rational soul, or mind.

Let's take a look at the verses that show Jesus' humanity by category.

HUMAN ELEMENTS—MATERIAL BODY AND RATIONAL SOUL

Jesus had both of the major elements of human nature—a material body and a rational soul. He spoke of His body and of His soul/spirit (in some instances soul and spirit are used interchangeably). He spoke of His flesh and bones. The book of Hebrews speaks of His having flesh and blood. In other verses He spoke of having a soul or spirit.

” “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”
(Luke 24:39)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things. (Heb. 2:14)

Then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.” (Matt. 26:38)

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” (Luke 23:46)

These verses show that Jesus had the necessary elements for being human.

Jesus called Himself a man and others attested to His being a man:

” You seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. (John 8:40)

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst...” (Acts 2:22)

As with all humans, Jesus was ruled by the natural laws of human growth and development. He was born (Luke 2:7), He grew physically from childhood to manhood (Luke 2:40). He went through the normal learning process a child does. He grew in knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and responsibility like any other human does as he grows older (Luke 2:52). He grew strong in spirit over time, most likely by learning lessons, such as obedience to His parents, through suffering, and other experiences (Heb. 5:8). While there is no scriptural mention of His being sick, it can be assumed that He may have been ill from time to time.

HUMAN NEEDS, WEAKNESSES, AND EMOTIONS

Jesus had the physical weaknesses and needs that we have as humans. He got hungry, thirsty, tired (Matt. 4:2). He became physically weak. He became weary (John 4:6-7). Once He was so tired that He slept soundly in a fishing boat in the midst of a violent storm (Matt. 8:24).

Jesus experienced emotions as we do. He felt compassion for people. He pitied those in need. Jesus wept (John 11:35). He marveled, was deeply moved, got angry (Matt. 8:10; Mark 3:5). He grieved. He prayed in desperation, was sorrowful, was in psychological agony (Luke 22:44). He was sometimes troubled, meaning anxious or suddenly surprised by danger (John 13:21, 12:27). He had friends and He loved them (John 11:5).

” When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matt. 9:36)

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. (John 11:33)

Then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.” (Matt. 26:38)

Like every human being, Jesus died. His body ceased to have life.

” When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished,” and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” And having said this He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)

The people whom Jesus grew up with and lived among until the start of His public ministry all seemed to consider Him a normal human, which is seen by their reaction to Him once He began His ministry. After He had been doing miracles and preaching in Galilee and large crowds followed Him, He visited His hometown of Nazareth and was rejected by His former neighbors and townspeople.

”

And when Jesus had finished these parables, He went away from there, and coming to His hometown He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And are not His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all His sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” And He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. (Matt. 13:53–58)

Even His brothers didn’t believe in Him (John 7:5), though some of them eventually became known as believers and church leaders—James and Jude, and perhaps His other brothers as well. If those who lived with and around Him for most of His life wondered where He got the wisdom and knowledge to speak and preach so authoritatively, and were astonished, then it’s fairly clear that they looked at Him as a normal person; not God, not even a great teacher, but just a normal human being. Martin Luther expressed the reality of Jesus’ full humanity when he said: “He ate, drank, slept and waked; was weary, sad, joyous; wept, laughed; was hungry, thirsty, cold; sweated, talked, worked, prayed.”³

The preceding verses show that Jesus was fully human. He was the same as you or me in regard to our humanity and human nature. He experienced life as we do, with the same physical and mental strengths and weaknesses. He was human in every sense except sin. That’s the one difference. Jesus didn’t sin, ever.

3. Garrett, James Leo Jr. (2000, p. 612).

SINLESS BUT TEMPTED

The following verses speak of Jesus' sinlessness.

” God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV)

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. (1 Pet. 2:22)

You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. (1 John 3:5)

Because Jesus didn't sin, it wasn't necessary for Him to die for His own sins, but He could instead die for the sins of mankind. You may wonder if Jesus *could* sin. The answer based on Scripture seems to be no, He couldn't. If you look at Scripture, it tells us the following:

- 1) Jesus didn't sin, as shown in the verses above.
- 2) Jesus was tempted in every respect that we are, and as such we know He was truly tempted to sin. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).
- 3) Jesus is God, and God cannot be tempted with evil. “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one” (James 1:13).

One of the attributes of God is His holiness, which means He is separated from sin. God can't sin; if He did, He would not be God. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was fully God and was fully man. It also tells us that Jesus was tempted and that God can't be tempted.

If Jesus' human nature existed independently from His divine nature, then He would have been similar to Adam and Eve when they were first created, in that He would have been free of sin but theoretically able to sin. But Jesus' human nature never existed apart from His divine nature, as both natures existed in one Person. An act of sin would have been a moral act, which seems as if it would have involved the whole person of Christ, both His divine and human natures. If that had happened, then the divine nature of Jesus would have sinned, meaning God had sinned, and that means He would not be God. But that's not possible, because it would mean God going against His own nature, something that God doesn't do. As such, it can be seen that the union of Jesus' human and divine natures in one person prevented Him from being able to sin. However, exactly *how* that happened we can't know. It's one of those mysteries that we face in Christianity, which is understandable considering that Jesus is the only one who has ever had two natures—the nature of God and the nature of man—so it's not unreasonable that it's difficult, if not impossible, for us to know how such things worked within Him.

Every theologian whose works I have read concurs on this point, that Jesus could not have sinned; at the same time, each agrees that the temptation to sin was just as real to Jesus as it is to us, for He was human and tempted in all things as we are, with the same intensity of temptation. While we don't fully understand *how* it can work to be tempted yet be unable to sin, we know from Scripture that Jesus was genuinely tempted and yet never yielded to the temptation to sin.

All of us are tempted to sin, which can bring about a deep internal struggle not to. Imagine yourself in a situation where you are in dire straits financially—bills are due, you don't have the funds to pay them, and you may lose your house over it. It could mean being homeless, and if not that, you'll at least have to move, which will affect the school your children can go to, and thus their education. As it is, you are having a hard time putting decent food on the table. Along comes an opportunity for you to make a large amount of money, which will take care of your present and future

financial needs. However, the opportunity requires that you sin through deception. Most of us can probably imagine the struggle of weighing up the benefits of taking the opportunity against the difficulty of making the right moral and ethical choice, and facing the possible consequences of doing so. Still in that scenario, imagine that you decide not to take the “opportunity” and do not sin.

Even though you chose not to sin, and so in this instance were “sinless,” the temptation was still real. It was intense and required an immense amount of faith, grace, and spiritual fortitude to resist. This example may offer some understanding of Jesus’ experience in temptation.

He was fully tempted in all things just as we are, yet in every instance He resisted the temptation and therefore didn’t sin. He had to fight through every temptation in order to resist sin. The appeal to sin that He experienced is the exact same appeal that we experience. The difference is that Jesus didn’t ever yield to temptation, so He didn’t sin.

Christian philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig put it this way:

” So how are we to understand the temptation of Christ? Well, very simply, you don’t have to be able to do something in order to be tempted to do it. ... Suppose you’re in a mad scientist’s lab and you really believe that he has a time-traveling DeLorean. He leaves you to guard the lab with strict instructions, “Do not take the DeLorean out on a spin through time!” Now you might be sorely tempted to take a journey through time during his absence—after all, you could come back as soon as you left so that no one would be the wiser! You might have to really struggle to resist that temptation. Little did you know that the scientist was a quack and there was no possibility of your taking a jaunt through time! But you did your duty; you resisted temptation and might even deserve to be commended for it and might have been strengthened in your moral life by this exercise of your will.

Or to take a more realistic example, suppose you're dieting and are tempted to go to the fridge to get the chocolate cake that your wife left there last night. You courageously resist, never knowing that she had already eaten the cake during a midnight raid and the refrigerator was empty! Examples like these show very convincingly, I think, that in order to be tempted to do something, we needn't be actually able to do the thing we're tempted to do."⁴

The fact that an army cannot be defeated in battle doesn't make the battle any less intense. The soldiers still have to fight and suffer in order to win. That Jesus couldn't sin doesn't mean the battle over the temptation to sin was not intense. He still had to fight against it. He obeyed His Father in all things and thus didn't sin, but it didn't come easy. The Bible says that "He learned obedience from the things which He suffered," and the verse before that speaks of His praying with loud cries and tears (Heb. 5:7-9).

In the garden of Gethsemane, shortly before being arrested and only hours away from being torturously whipped and then crucified, when praying to His Father, He was obviously struggling with the decision to do His Father's will, fighting the temptation to not "drink the cup." He prayed in agony. Jesus was sorely tempted. He *learned* obedience. He prayed desperately to do His Father's will. He didn't rely on His divine nature to make it easier for Him to obey; instead, He had to fight in His human nature as He faced and overcame all temptations.

When we consider that God the Son chose to humble Himself by taking on human nature, human flesh, and all that being human entails so that each of us would have the opportunity to be forgiven for our sins and live forever, it can't help but make us love and thank Him for doing so. He laid down His life for us—His physical life as a human, but also in a way His heavenly life as well, as He had to leave it to spend those years on earth as a man. If a comparison could be made, it would be like a human agreeing

4. Craig, William Lane. "Temptations of Christ," 2008.

to being born an earthworm and living as a worm for a certain number of years. It's a thought that might give a fresh outlook on His love for us.

” Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us. (1 John 3:16 KJV)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9)

Jesus was without sin. He was holy in all His thoughts and actions, in His feelings, always acting in perfect love toward God and man. He always sought to do the will of His Father, and He succeeded. *How* He was able to do this is a mystery of faith, but we know from Scripture that it is so.

CHAPTER 9

THE TWO NATURES OF JESUS

The quest to theologically define the person of Jesus and His human and divine natures mainly occurred in two time periods: first, in the fourth and fifth centuries, and then second in the nineteenth and twentieth. Once the doctrine of the Trinity was developed and officially settled on, the next theological focus was on the two natures of Christ: (1) As God, He had a divine nature, and (2) in being born as a man, He also had a human nature. In 325 AD, the first ecumenical council in Nicaea (in present-day Turkey) concluded in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is truly God and truly man. The questions which arose from this were regarding how the person of Jesus of Nazareth could have both natures and how those natures related to each other. Was one nature dominant? Did the divine nature take over the human? Did the two natures combine into one? How did it work?

In the fourth and fifth centuries, a number of bishops and other church leaders put forth models of how they felt it worked. These models were inadequate in that they all failed to keep the divine and human natures separate and intact and/or they concluded that there were two persons in Jesus. I'll touch briefly on the main inadequate models. It's beneficial to know this information as it's part of the historical development of Christianity, and it helps us gain a deeper understanding of our faith. The first two, Docetism and Ebionism, arose very early in Christianity, in the first and second centuries. The others arose in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Docetism denied that Jesus was human. Docetists felt the good God couldn't be joined to evil flesh. They considered that Jesus' life, birth, suffering and death were all an illusion, a mirage, and not real. Thus they denied the reality of Jesus' humanity.

Docetism was refuted by the Apostle John in 1 John 4:2–3: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has

come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” Also, 2 John 7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

Ebionism stemmed from a form of Christianity that was based on Judaism. Because they couldn't reconcile Jesus being God with the monotheism of Judaism, Ebionists upheld Jesus' humanity but denied His deity. They said that He was a man who, because of His strict obedience to the law, *became* the Messiah and Son of God at the time of His baptism by John the Baptist.

Arianism: Arius, a bishop in Alexandria, Egypt around 313 AD, saw the Son of God, as a creation of God and therefore not God; thus he denied the deity of Jesus.

Apollinarianism: Apollinarias, a bishop in Laodicea around AD 361, taught that the person of Christ had a human body and a human (animal) soul, but not a human *rational* soul or mind. Rather, the rational soul or mind that functioned within Him was that of God the Son. If this were the case, then Jesus wasn't fully human, as He didn't have a human mind, only a human body. As was stated in the previous chapter, Jesus had to be fully human to be the instrument of salvation to redeem man. In salvation, not only does the human body need to be represented by Jesus, but the human mind/spirit as well.

Nestorianism: Nestorius was the bishop of Constantinople in AD 428. The teaching attached to his name is that Christ was virtually two persons in one body, instead of one person. He argued that there was no true union of the Logos and the man, rather that it was some sort of indwelling. But this isn't consistent with how the New Testament portrays Jesus. It doesn't show His human nature as being separate from His divine nature. The

writers of the Gospels didn't say Jesus' human nature did this or His divine nature did that. Jesus is always portrayed as one person, not two.

Monophysitism (also known as Eutychianism): Teaching against Nestorianism, Eutyches (circa AD 378–454) taught that Jesus' human nature was merged into His divine nature and therefore He only had one nature. The result was that the nature of Jesus was a combination of human and divine natures, meaning that this combination was a third kind of nature that is neither human nor divine. This was considered a confusing or confounding of the natures.

REALITY OF THE NATURES OF JESUS

It's important to understand that Jesus had two natures: divine and human. But one didn't absorb the other, and there can be no confusing the natures; although there were two natures in Jesus, there was only one person. The natures didn't exist side by side within Jesus, as that would have made Jesus two people in one body, but rather everything flowed from one personal center. The two natures came together in unity in Jesus, so that He was not God *and* man, but the God-man, one person.¹

William Lane Craig gave this brief explanation on this point, "What exactly does it mean to say Christ subsists in two natures? It means that Christ is essentially a divine person who assumed in the incarnation a rational soul and body such as are essential to human beings. He is all that one needs to be to be God and all that one needs to be to be a man."²

As much as one tries to fully understand how the two natures function within Jesus, it's impossible to know. We can know and understand the concept, as we do that of the Trinity, but not the reality of how it works. Jesus was the only person ever who was the Incarnate God, the God-man.

1. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, pp. 343–44).

2. Craig, William Lane. "Fictionalism and the Two Natures of Christ," 2007.

Thus there is nothing within our human experience to compare it to, so there is no way to fully comprehend it.

Jesus' conception played a role in God becoming "enfleshed." Mary, His mother, conceived without any male involvement. She was a virgin, betrothed but not yet married to Joseph. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary was to become pregnant (Luke 1:35).

Jesus was the only man ever conceived without a human father, so it's not surprising that He would be unique in the sense of being fully man and fully God, with both divine and human natures. His virgin conception was a sign of His deity as well as His incarnation as a man. Mary is called "the mother of God," from the Greek word *Theotokos*. She was called this to make it clear that from the moment of conception Christ was God. However, this did not mean that she mothered God the Son, because the Son eternally existed before He was conceived in Mary's womb. Therefore, Mary was the mother of God according to His human nature.

As William Lane Craig explains,

” The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation states that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Jesus was thus truly God as well as truly man. He was born of the virgin Mary; that is to say, Jesus had a *supernatural* conception but a perfectly *natural* birth. Since Jesus was God in the flesh, his mother Mary is therefore called in the early Christian creeds 'the Mother of God,' or the 'God-bearer.' This isn't because God somehow came into existence as a result of Mary's conceiving or that Mary somehow procreated God. Rather Mary could be called the God-bearer because the person she bore in her womb and gave birth to was divine. Thus, Jesus' birth in this sense was the birth of God.³

3. Craig, William Lane. "The Birth of God," 2012.

CHALCEDONIAN COUNCIL SETTLES THE ISSUE

In AD 451 an ecumenical council was convened by the emperor Marcian in Chalcedon (in present-day Turkey) to settle the issue regarding Jesus' divine and human natures. Over 500 bishops gathered for the council that decided the matter. The council set down parameters under which theological speculation on the question of Jesus' two natures must operate. The council did not attempt to solve the problem of how the incarnation worked, or how it is possible, but only what can and can't be said by setting the boundaries within which one could wrestle with the problem.

The council affirmed that:

- Christ has two natures, one human and one divine, each one complete.
- He has both a rational soul and a body.
- He is perfect in manhood and perfect in deity.
- There is only one person in Christ.
- The union of the divine nature and human nature are without confusion, without change, without separation, and without division.

In brief, you must not confuse the natures or divide the person. There are two natures but only one person in Christ.

The council did not publish a new creed (there were no more creeds after the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed), but rather published a definition of the faith, which rejected Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism. The Chalcedonian definition reads (words in brackets are mine for explanation):

” We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood [*against Apollinarianism*]; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [*ratio-*

nal) soul and body; consubstantial [*having the same substance*] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us [*fully human*], without sin;

begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead [*eternally existent in divinity*], and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood [*showing that she is not the mother of the divinity but of the humanity*]; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union [*against Monophysitism*], but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons [*against Nestorianism*], but one and the same Son, and only begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

In the third Council of Constantinople in AD 681, the church leaders determined that there were two wills in Christ. The wills belong to the two distinct natures of Christ, not to the person. The doctrine of the two wills has been held generally, but not universally, within the church. This was the final debate of the ancient church on the subject. After this period, debates regarding the Incarnation of Christ largely ceased for over a thousand years.

THE SHIFT FROM ECUMENICAL COUNCILS TO A DIVIDED CHURCH

As Christianity developed and spread during its first five hundred years, theological centers developed, the earliest two being Antioch (in pres-

ent-day Turkey) and Alexandria (in Egypt), both situated in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In time Rome, situated in the western part of the empire, became a center as well. Different schools of theological thought developed in these centers, which were often in opposition to one another. As we've seen, in order to determine which theological position was true, councils were convened. When representatives from the eastern church and the western church gathered together in such a council, these were considered ecumenical councils, meaning bishops of the whole Christian church were gathered together, rather than just bishops within a region.

While there were some differences in understanding and interpreting scripture between the church in the eastern and western parts of the empire during this early period, the church was generally united as one. There were some offshoots which still exist, but on the whole the church in the east and west was united. Later, over the centuries, for a variety of reasons, the eastern and western parts of the church began to grow apart in their outlook and application of theology, and eventually, in AD 1054, there was a formal split in the church resulting in two distinct churches—the Eastern Orthodox Church, with its head in Constantinople, and the Roman Catholic Church, with its head in Rome. Both the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches continued to hold to the doctrines determined in the first seven ecumenical councils and therefore fully agree on the core doctrines of Christianity.

THE REFORMATION AND BIRTH OF PROTESTANTISM

In AD 1517 a major new factor exploded on the scene of Christianity. Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest in Germany, presented an interpretation of scripture that fundamentally differed from the view the Roman Catholic church had developed by this time. This started the period of history known as the Reformation. It had a profound effect on Christianity. Luther's views differed from the Roman Catholic beliefs in two fundamental ways. He believed that scripture taught that salvation

was attained through faith alone, as opposed to the Roman Catholic view that it was received through faith and through works. He also taught that scripture alone was the final arbiter of doctrine and belief, as opposed to the Roman Catholic belief that, besides the scripture, the teachings of the church and especially those declared as true by the pope were on equal footing and thus equal in authority. Luther's views earned him excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

During the same time period, other reformers, such as Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin in Geneva, also split away from the Catholic Church and began to develop theology and thus beliefs that differed from Roman Catholic doctrine. The general category of "Protestants" encompasses all Christians who believe in salvation by faith alone.

It's important to know, however, that the reformers all agreed with the fundamental doctrines hammered out in the seven ecumenical councils. Protestants today have disagreements among themselves on some issues, but in general they agree on the doctrine of the Incarnation. While Protestants of yesterday and today have theological differences with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, they agree on the basics of the Trinity and the Incarnation—that Jesus was fully God and fully man, as expressed in the early councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon.

One difference between the church before the Reformation and the post-Reformation church is that there is no longer any united definitive body of people who can convene to determine which new teachings are true and which are false, as was possible in the first six centuries of the church. In the past, when teachings were wrong, they were officially refuted and condemned as being false by the ecumenical councils, and these rulings were accepted by the majority of Christians at that time. Since the Reformation there has not been a universally accepted body which can make such judgments. (Roman Catholics have continued to hold ecumenical councils, but these councils only include Protestants and Orthodox participants as observers, with no right to vote on the issues decided, and

therefore the decisions and declarations are not upheld by Protestant and Orthodox churches.)

LIBERAL THEOLOGY

A number of teachings and speculations regarding the Incarnation of Christ arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Within the time period between the Reformation and the late eighteenth century, often referred to historically as the Age of Enlightenment, the Western world radically changed. The New World was discovered, new forms of government were tested, great strides were made in mathematics, science, astronomy, agriculture, economics, and philosophy. Generally speaking, the Western world accumulated a lot of new knowledge which did away with or modified the knowledge of the past thousands of years. Throughout this period, Christianity and the churches were not held in the same high esteem that they had been in the past. People became much more skeptical of faith in God.

In the late eighteenth century, and more so in the nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Incarnation once again came to the fore theologically. With the new knowledge available in many areas of thought and discovery, many theologians looked for better ways to explain the doctrine, ways that would be more in line with modern thinking, though some turned out to be variations of those condemned in the first six centuries. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, most notably in the work of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), there was a move away from looking at the person of Christ from a theological perspective of being the God-man with two natures, and toward more of a historical perspective, focusing on Jesus' humanity—leading to a Jesus that is a divine man, but not God. He was a man who had a unique “God consciousness,” a perfect and unbroken sense of union with the divine. The Incarnation was seen as the oneness of God and man.⁴

4. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 309)

Schleiermacher's influence carried over into the mid-nineteenth century in the teaching of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), another German theologian. He taught that Jesus was a mere man, but due to the work He accomplished and the service He rendered to mankind, He can rightly be looked at as God. He ruled out Jesus being the pre-incarnate Logos, the Incarnation, and the virgin birth. Jesus made the purpose of God His own, and redeems man by His teaching, example, and unique influence, and is therefore worthy to be called God.⁵

Several German theologians between 1860 and 1880, and several from England from around 1890–1910, championed a view of the Incarnation that was new in the history of the church. It was called kenotic theology. Kenosis was based on something the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians:

” Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5–7 NASB).

Kenotic theology claims that Christ emptied himself of some of His divine attributes—for example, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence—while living on earth. This theory is based on the Greek word *kenoō*, which means “to empty,” which in this case is translated as “emptied Himself.”

Theologian Wayne Grudem explained the argument against kenosis quite well when he wrote:

” But does Philippians 2:7 teach that Christ emptied Himself of some of His divine attributes, and does the rest of the New Testament confirm this? The evidence of Scripture points to a negative answer to both questions. We must first realize that no recognized

5. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 310)

teacher in the first 1,800 years of church history, including those who were native speakers of Greek, thought that “emptied Himself” in Philippians 2:7 meant that the Son of God gave up some of His divine attributes. Second, we must recognize that the text does not say that Christ “emptied Himself of some powers” or “emptied Himself of divine attributes” or anything like that. Third, the text does describe what Jesus did in this “emptying”: He did not do it by giving up any of His attributes but rather by taking “the form of a servant,” that is, by coming to live as a man and “being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross” (Philippians 2:8).⁶

Kenosis denies the Incarnation, because if Christ had given up some of His divine attributes, He would have ceased being God. In Philippians 2, Paul is speaking to the Christians in Philippi, exhorting them to humility, and uses Jesus’ example of not grasping or holding on to His heavenly glory, but rather His humbly taking on the form of a servant. He left the glory of heaven; He gave up His heavenly status. Instead of being an emptying of His divine attributes, it was a voluntary act of love and compassion. There is no scriptural evidence that Jesus gave up any of His divine attributes.

Isaak August Dorner (1809–1884), a German Lutheran, taught that Jesus was God incarnate, but put forth the theory of *progressive incarnation*. His theory stated that “the incarnation is not indeed to be conceived as finished from the beginning, but as gradually developing.”⁷ He taught that at the beginning of Jesus’ life He was not the God-man. Rather, as Jesus yielded to the Father in all things, the Logos gradually penetrated His humanity. The final stage of this progressive penetration was at the resurrection. This turned out to be a form of Nestorianism, yielding two persons in Christ.

6. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 550).

7. Dorner, Isaak (1880–82, p. 340).

Liberal theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generally considered the Incarnation a myth, teaching that Jesus was merely a man with a special connection with God. Such belief denies the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

IN CONCLUSION

We can see from Scripture that Jesus is God and also became man, God incarnate. And yet, no one can fully know *how* the Incarnation and the union of the two natures worked internally within the person of Christ; it's beyond the realm of human understanding. Standard orthodox Christian belief adheres to the Chalcedon definition, which sets the limits but doesn't explain how it worked. As Christians, it seems safe to stick within those parameters. Those parameters are:

- Christ has two natures, one human and one divine, each one complete.
- He has both a rational soul and a body.
- He is perfect in manhood and perfect in deity.
- There is only one person in Christ.
- The union of the divine nature and human nature are without confusion, without change, without separation, and without division.

The doctrine of the deity of Christ and the Incarnation of Christ are important parts of the bedrock foundation of Christianity. May our wonderful and amazing Lord and Savior, our loving Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, the eternally pre-existent Logos, the Word of God, the one who loves us so deeply, who cares for us in every way, who chose to suffer and die for our salvation, abundantly bless you each and every day!

” Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)

CHAPTER 10

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

In the Old Testament, the concept of three persons in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—had not yet been revealed. It only started to become revealed during and after Jesus’ ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. While the writers of the Old Testament didn’t understand the concept of the Trinity or see the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinity, they did write about “the Spirit of the Lord” and “the Spirit of God” (1 Sam. 10:10, 16:13). In this sense they saw the Spirit as a part of God, as His power or action.

The Old Testament speaks of God’s Spirit in a possessive manner, as “My Spirit,” “Your Spirit,” “Your Holy Spirit,” “His Holy Spirit,” again showing that the Old Testament writers saw God’s Spirit as a part of God.

” Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. (Psa. 51:11)

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit ... Where is He who put in the midst of them His Holy Spirit? (Isa. 63:10–11)

Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? (Psa. 139:7)

The Spirit of God is spoken of as being involved in the creation of the world and the giving of life to living beings.

” The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:2)

By His Spirit He adorned the heavens. (Job 26:13 NKJV)

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)

Besides taking part in creation, God's Spirit is seen at work throughout the Old Testament. When Moses was leading the children of Israel during their 40 years in the desert, God's Spirit was upon him. When the burden of leading the people was too much for him, God put His Spirit upon seventy elders of the people (Num. 11:16–17). Joshua was said to have the Spirit within him (Num. 27:16–19). Others, called judges, who were to later lead the people after Joshua died, also had the Spirit of God come upon them.¹ In these instances, the Spirit of the Lord came upon people at certain times but didn't dwell within them permanently.

ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT ON ISRAEL'S KINGS

After the time of the judges, the line of the kings of Israel began. The Bible notes that the Spirit came upon the first two kings, Saul and David. When Samuel first anointed Saul to be king over Israel, he told Saul a number of things that would happen, and said that once those things came to pass, God's Spirit would come upon him (1 Sam. 11:6). These things happened as Samuel said they would, and God's Spirit fell upon Saul at that time, and at other times as well.

” When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. (1 Sam. 10:10 NAU)

In Saul's case, because of his disobedience, God's Spirit was later withdrawn from him (1 Sam. 16:14).

1. See Judges 3:9-10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:24-25, 14:6.

The Spirit was given to David years before he was made king: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:13 NKJV).

The Spirit of God was also mentioned in relation to prophecy within the Old Testament.

” Now these are the last words of David... “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; His word is on my tongue.” (2 Sam. 23:1–2)

The Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him [Moses], and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. (Num. 11:25)

“As soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.” (1 Sam. 10:5–6)

OTHERS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

When giving Moses instructions for building the ark of the covenant, and for the tabernacle (the tent which housed the ark of the covenant), as well as the altar, the priestly vestments, and the many vessels needed in the tabernacle and during the sacrifices, God told him of specific workmen that He had filled with His Spirit, ability, intelligence, knowledge and craftsmanship (Exo. 31:1–6).

The Spirit of the Lord also came upon the Old Testament prophets (Ezek. 11:5; Zech. 7:12; Micah 3:8). In 2 Peter, referring to prophecy within

Scripture (referring to the Old Testament), it says that the prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit.

” Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pet. 1:20–21)

Within the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was clearly active in a variety of ways. When the Spirit came upon or empowered people, it seems to have been for a specific instance or for a limited duration. Author J. Rodman Williams expressed it this way: “The Spirit could ‘clothe’ someone but, like clothing, was not a permanent vestment. Thus the endowment of the Spirit was largely transitory: for an occasion, for a task, or for an utterance. It was not an abiding reality.”²

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND PENTECOST

God did, however, speak of a time in the future (which we now know was at Pentecost) when His Spirit would dwell within His people, and not just a few of them but all of them—including women, as well as servants, which for that time and in that culture was a strong way to make the point that it was for everybody.

” It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit. (Joel 2:28–29)

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.
And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a

2. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, vol. 2, p. 160).

heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

During the 400-year period between the last writings of the Old Testament and the time just prior to Jesus' birth, there is little evidence of the movement of God's Spirit, especially in the realm of prophecy or guidance given directly from the Lord. The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* says: "The Talmud illustrates this opinion: 'When Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the latter prophets, were dead, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.'"³

However, at the dawning of New Testament times, the Holy Spirit is seen once again moving and acting among God's people in relation to the birth of Jesus. Elizabeth and Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist, were filled with the Spirit. Their son, John, was filled while still in his mother's womb. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and overshadowed her so that she conceived Jesus.

” When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1:41–42)

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied... (Luke 1:67)

You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his [John the Baptist's] birth, for he will be great before the Lord. ... He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. (Luke 1:14–15)

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The

3. Green and McKnight (1992, p. 637).

Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:31, 34–35)

In summary, we have seen how the Spirit of the Lord was manifested in the Old Testament. God’s Spirit moved in the lives of specific individuals, empowering them, causing them to prophesy, and anointing them with other abilities. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord generally came upon or interacted only with specific individuals and only on a temporary basis. It was prophesied, however, that a time would come when God would pour out His Spirit in abundance upon all His people (Joel 2:28–29).

While the Spirit of God is seen as being manifested all throughout the Old Testament writings, it is in the life and ministry of Jesus, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that we see the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit poured forth in an expanded and widespread manner.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MESSIAH

The Old Testament also includes prophecies about the Messiah who was to come, who would be powerfully filled with the Spirit of God and would do great things in God’s name. While the Jewish people did not think that this Messiah would be the Son of God, as they had no concept that God was a Trinity, they understood that the Messiah, an anointed king, would be greatly empowered by God’s Spirit. The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* states: “A major strand of Judaism anticipated a Messiah mightily endowed with the Spirit, as both the Spirit of prophecy (affording unique wisdom and knowledge of the Lord as the basis of dynamic righteousness) and the Spirit of power.”⁴

Referring to the Messiah, the book of Isaiah says: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall

4. Green and McKnight (1992, p. 342).

bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:1–2). This prophecy tells us that the Messiah would descend from the lineage of David, the son of Jesse, and that God’s Spirit would *rest* upon Him, meaning that the Spirit would *remain* on Him. He would be endowed with wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, and the fear of God. Isaiah prophesied further about the Messiah, declaring again that God’s Spirit would be upon Him.

” Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations ... He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth. (Isa. 42:1,4)

Later it was again prophesied in the book of Isaiah that God’s Spirit would be mightily upon the Messiah and that He would be anointed and do His work with the power of the Spirit of the Lord.

” The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. (Isa. 61:1–3)

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

These prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus, the promised Messiah. All four Gospels speak of Jesus being filled with the Spirit at the beginning

of His ministry, when He was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11).

” Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:21–22)

John [the Baptist] bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32–34)

Later, when asked about Jesus, John the Baptist said: “He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:34–35). On the advent of Jesus’ ministry, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him without measure and remained on Him permanently. Immediately after this, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, where the Devil tried to defeat Him, to no avail (Luke 4:1–2). After overcoming the temptations, Jesus began ministering to others in the power of the Spirit. He gained popularity and was highly praised by all.

” Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. (Luke 4:14–15)

When Jesus returned to Nazareth, the village where He grew up, He was chosen to read from the Scriptures in the synagogue. The passage He read was from Isaiah, about the ministry of the Messiah, and at

the end of the reading, Jesus made it clear that it was speaking about Him—that He was the Messiah upon whom the Spirit of the Lord had fallen.

” The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17–21)

Jesus was stating that His ministry had begun, that He would proclaim the good news, bringing liberty to the captives, healing and freeing those who were oppressed, with God’s Spirit upon Him. The apostle Peter later stated that Jesus did these very things through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

” You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. (Acts 10:37–39)

THE “PROMISE OF THE FATHER”

The Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus, played a major role in His ministry—leading, guiding, and empowering Him. Right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples that He would send the “prom-

ise of the Father,” which was the Holy Spirit, the power of God, and that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they received this power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5). The Holy Spirit which led, guided, and empowered Jesus was going to do the same things for His disciples. Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure, saying that in order for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, He had to leave, but that once He was gone the Spirit would come to them.

” It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. (John 16:7)

Jesus said it was necessary that He ascend to heaven, to return to the Father and be glorified, before the Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Helper—could come. This was exactly what happened, as the apostle Peter testified to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, right after being filled with the Spirit.

” On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37–39)

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, [Jesus] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:33)

Jesus had been with His disciples for about three and a half years. They had traveled with Him, lived with Him, learned from Him, heard Him preach to and teach the crowds. They had seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead,

and cast out demons. They had private instruction from Him and watched how He interacted with others—the rich, the poor, the outcasts, the religious. They saw Him get arrested and crucified. They knew He was dead, yet He stood before them in the upper room alive again. Then came the time for Him to go. He had been many things to them, and now He was going to depart. He had told them He would ask the Father to send them *another* Comforter or Helper (John 14:16).

THE PARACLETE

The word *Helper* or *Comforter* used in this verse is translated from the Greek word *paraklētos*, which is defined as called to one's side, to one's aid, a helper, assistant; as well as one who pleads another's cause before a judge, counsel for defense, an advocate. Jesus is saying the Father will give the disciples *another* Comforter, which infers they presently have one. Jesus, the Helper, Comforter, Counselor, and Advocate they presently have is going to depart and in His place the Father is sending the Holy Spirit, the "Paraclete." (The word Paraclete is used in many modern Christian writings in the place of Helper, Comforter, etc.)

What Jesus had been to the disciples, and what the Holy Spirit was going to be to them, were very similar.

- Both "come forth"/"are sent" from the Father into the world (John 5:43, 15:26, 16:13, 28).
- Both are called "Holy" and are characterized by "the truth" (John 6:69, 14:6, 16–17, 26).
- Both teach (John 13:13, 14:26).
- Jesus bears witness of God and reveals things about Himself and the Father (John 1:18, 3:34). The Holy Spirit bears witness of and reveals God the Son (John 15:26, 16:13–15).

- Jesus came to convince and to convict the world, though many did not receive Him (John 1:11–12), as is also the case with the Holy Spirit (John 14:17, 16:7–11).⁵

While Jesus was Helper and Comforter to the disciples, as well as teacher and truth-teller, and a witness, He said that after He departed, He and the Father would send another Comforter who would do these things as well. This Comforter would mightily anoint the disciples in their mission. That was exactly what happened, as we'll see in the next chapter.

5. The first and last bulleted points are from Green and McKnight (1992, p. 349).

CHAPTER 11

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND BEYOND

In the Old Testament accounts, the Spirit of God generally didn't dwell permanently with individuals. With Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, this dramatically changed. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit entered into the lives of individual believers, empowered them, and remained within them.

PENTECOST

The Gospel of Luke explains that Jesus had told His disciples He was going to send the promise of the Father to them. In the book of Acts, Luke states that this promise was the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that they would receive power when the Spirit came upon them.

” Behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

While staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, “you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ... “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–5, 8)

This astounding event happened ten days later on the Jewish Festival of Weeks, known to the Hebraic Jews as Shavu'ot and to the Hellenistic (or Greek) Jews as Pentecost. It is called Pentecost because it falls on the 50th day after Passover. Shavu'ot celebrates the time of year when the first fruits

were harvested and brought to the Temple and also commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Jesus' crucifixion took place right before the Passover, and the Holy Spirit was poured out 50 days later on the day of Pentecost. Because this was one of the major Jewish festivals, Jews and converts to Judaism from all over the known world were gathered in Jerusalem. The book of Acts relates what happened at this momentous event:

” When the day of Pentecost arrived, they [the disciples] were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1–4)

As promised, God's Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, which immediately resulted in their receiving power which ignited their mission of reaching the world with the Gospel.

” Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” (Act 2:5–11)

People from much of the Roman Empire heard the message on that day. In today's geography, the list of countries given tells us that people from Libya, Egypt, Arabia, a number of cities in Turkey, Italy, Iran, Iraq, and the island of Crete, came together—due to either the sound of the mighty rushing of the wind or hearing the disciples speaking the various languages—and heard Peter preach about what had happened and proclaim salvation through Jesus.

ACCOUNTS OF HOLY SPIRIT INFILLING

There are five other accounts of the Holy Spirit filling believers in the book of Acts. Some of these accounts are of an initial infilling and others are of a subsequent filling of those who had already received the Holy Spirit. When Peter and John were going to the temple and they healed a lame man, a large crowd gathered and Peter preached, resulting in 5,000 converts. Peter and John were arrested, questioned, and threatened by the high priest and his father-in-law and others. Afterwards they met with other believers and told them what happened, and these believers rejoiced in prayer with them. When praying together, they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 4:1–31).

” When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

Here we see believers who are saved, and who have previously received the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Spirit *again*, giving them additional power to continue witnessing with boldness. Another account of the Spirit being given to believers took place after Stephen had been martyred. The believers in Jerusalem faced strong persecution at that time, including from Saul the Pharisee, who later became Paul the apostle. Philip, one of those who was chosen to be a deacon earlier, left Jerusalem at this time and went to Samaria (Acts 6:5). He preached the Gospel, cast out unclean spirits, and healed people who were paralyzed and lame. This resulted in much joy and men and women being baptized (Acts 8:5–6, 12).

The Jews did not consider the Samaritans to be Jewish, as they were descendants of the ten tribes of Israel who had been defeated and forcibly relocated to other lands by the Assyrians 700 years earlier. The Assyrians brought other people to populate the land, who intermarried with the remnant of Jews left in Samaria. As such, Samaritans were not considered to be pure Jews. When the apostles heard that Samaritans were becoming believers, they sent Peter and John to check out the situation. During that visitation, the newly saved Samaritans received the Holy Spirit.

” [Peter and John] prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:15–17)

In this instance, non-Jews who were saved had not yet received the Holy Spirit but did so when the apostles laid hands on them. The next example of the Holy Spirit being given was after Saul, the persecutor of the early church, was confronted by light from heaven. Jesus spoke to Saul, asking why he was persecuting Him. Saul lost his sight, and following Jesus' instructions spent three days in Damascus (Acts 9:1–9).

The Lord spoke to a disciple named Ananias, telling him to go to the house of Judas on the street called Straight, where he would find Saul. Ananias expressed concern, as he knew that Saul was persecuting Christians, but was told that Saul was a chosen instrument who would carry the name of Jesus to the Gentiles (Gentiles refers to any non-Jewish people), kings, and the children of Israel. Ananias did as he was instructed.

” So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately

something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:10–20)

In this instance, an enemy of the Christians is converted and then filled with the Holy Spirit when a disciple lays hands upon him and prays for him. Acts chapter 10, verses 1–16, tells of Peter having the same vision three times, in which he sees animals, reptiles, and birds, which according to the Laws of Moses are unclean and shouldn’t be eaten. He hears a voice instructing him to “kill and eat” the creatures. Peter objects, but the voice says, “What God has made clean, do not call common (unclean or unholy).”

Immediately following these visions, some men—sent by Cornelius, a God-fearing Roman centurion—arrived and asked Peter to come to Cornelius’ home. If a Jew entered the home of a non-Jew, he became ritually unclean, so it would be unlawful for Peter to go into Cornelius’ home. However, due to the vision, Peter understood that God had revealed to him that he should go, that the “unclean” were to be looked upon as clean. So he went, entered Cornelius’ home, and shared the good news that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were available to all within the household, who received the message.

” While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:44–48)

Cornelius and the others—all Gentiles—believed the message Peter shared with them and consequently they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this situation, Gentiles received the Spirit at the moment they believed in Jesus.

The fifth recorded instance of people receiving the Holy Spirit involves twelve disciples of John in Ephesus.

When the apostle Paul came to Ephesus, he found some disciples of John the Baptist. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, to which they replied that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul told them about Jesus and they believed. “On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all” (Acts 19:1–7).

THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR ALL BELIEVERS

These accounts in the book of Acts portray the Spirit arriving in a variety of situations upon different people, both Jews and Gentiles, old and young, male and female, masters and servants. Certainly within the household of Cornelius, within the group of believers Peter and John prayed with, within the 120 in the upper room, there were men and women, servants, and people of all ages, just as was predicted by the prophet Joel.

” It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit. (Joel 2:28–29)

The outpouring of God’s Spirit upon ordinary people wasn’t something that was limited to the early church. Since that time, God’s Spirit has dwelt in countless believers over the centuries. In contrast with the Spirit’s

presence within only a few persons in the Old Testament, since the day of Pentecost the Spirit has been, and continues to be, poured out upon all believers, as we receive the beautiful “promise of the Father.”

Throughout the book of Acts the Holy Spirit empowers the believers to witness (Acts 1:8), anoints them to speak and preach boldly (Acts 4:8,31; 6:10), gives direction and instruction (Acts 8:29; 10:19–20), and bestows the gifts of tongues and prophecy (Acts 2:4; 11:28). In the Epistles, more is said about the Holy Spirit, not giving examples of people receiving or being baptized in the Spirit but describing the functions and gifts of the Spirit.

HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

Virtually all Christians believe that the Holy Spirit worked mightily during the era of the primitive church. Miracles and other manifestations of the Spirit are evident throughout Christian history. Among other things, miracles of healings caused many pagans to become Christians throughout the first few centuries AD. Various church fathers mentioned healings, speaking in tongues, and casting out demons in their writings up until the seventh century.

At some point, however, the church began to distance itself from manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The belief over time within the Roman Catholic Church, and later within some of the Protestant churches, became that at the end of the apostolic era, around 100 AD, the works of the Spirit—specifically miracles, healings, and prophecy—discontinued and were no longer active. The majority of the church came to believe that since the preaching of the Gospel had taken hold in the world, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, as they had served their purpose as a means of authenticating the apostles’ preaching of the Gospel. This position was evident in the late second century when a movement known as Montanism arose, which was heavily focused on speaking in tongues and prophecy. One author explains:

”

[The Montanists] represented a revival of the prophets who were prominent in the first few decades of the church ... At his baptism Montanus [the leader of the movement] “spoke with tongues” and began prophesying ... Two women, his disciples, were also believed to be prophets, mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit. The Montanist movement spread widely. It prized the records of the teachings of Christ and His apostles, but it believed, although not contradicting what had been said there, that the Holy Spirit continued to speak through prophets, and among these it included women ... The Montanists, with their assertion that Spirit-inspired prophets continued to arise in the Christian community, were a challenge to the administrative regularity represented by the bishops ... Certainly prophets, accorded a place in the early church next to the apostles, were no longer granted recognition by the Catholic Church. Inspiration through prophets was supposed to have ceased with the apostolic age.¹

The Montanist movement carried on into the fifth century, although it was persecuted by the official church. In time, it faded from history. However, various church fathers continued to mention healings, speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and prophesying in their writings through the sixth century. As time went on, the church became more organized, rigid, and political, and the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s power became less evident. Throughout the centuries, movements that did not accept Roman Catholic doctrine were persecuted, and in some cases, destroyed. There is evidence that some of these movements exhibited the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. After the Reformation in the 1500s, some movements also exhibited the gifts of speaking in tongues, healings, casting out demons, etc. These movements were not generally located within the major accepted branches of Protestantism.

1. Latourette, Kenneth Scott (1975, pp. 128–29, 134).

In the 1800s, there was a bit more emphasis put on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians, especially in the Holiness movement² and others. Since the early 1900s, there has been a resurgence or a revival of charismatic/miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was at this time that modern-day Pentecostalism began, and throughout the century it became the fastest-growing branch of Christianity. Today there are about 560 million Pentecostal/Charismatic/Neocharismatic Christians worldwide. There are many branches of Christianity that believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as listed within the New Testament. Some of these Christians believe that while many of the gifts are available, the *miraculous* gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healing are not, and that those claiming they *are* available today are misguided.

WAVES OF REVIVAL

There have been what some refer to as three “waves” or renewals of the move of the Spirit within the past century. The first was the Pentecostal revival, which began in the United States in 1901 and gave birth to the Pentecostal churches. Pentecostals believe that baptism in the Holy Spirit is usually a separate event that happens apart from conversion or salvation. They hold that the gift of speaking in tongues is the primary sign or evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and that all of the gifts of the Spirit should be used today. Pentecostal churches usually have their own denominational structure. One of the largest Pentecostal denominations is the Assemblies of God.³

The second wave was the Charismatic movement, which traces its beginning to the 1960s and ‘70s. Charismatic believers don’t generally have a separate denominational structure, rather they see themselves as Protestants or Catholics who are filled with the Holy Spirit and who remain in

2. The holiness movement refers to a set of beliefs and practices emerging from 19th-century Methodism.

3. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 763).

their traditional churches. Charismatic believers are found in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, and other mainline churches. They seek to practice all the spiritual gifts, including prophecy, healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation and discernment of spirits, and believe these gifts function within Christianity today. Unlike the Pentecostals, they allow for differing viewpoints on whether baptism in the Holy Spirit happens at conversion or is subsequent to conversion, and also on whether tongues are the main sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁴

The third wave is a movement known as Neocharismatic. It emerged on the heels of the Charismatic movement, in the 1960s, with its full impact being felt in the 1970s. This movement embraces many of the doctrines and practices found within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; however, they are not specifically aligned with either movement. The Neocharismatic movement encourages the equipping of all believers to use the New Testament spiritual gifts today, and those embracing it believe that the preaching of the Gospel should be accompanied by “signs, wonders, and miracles,” which some call “power evangelism.” They generally teach that baptism in the Holy Spirit happens to all Christians at conversion and subsequent experiences are called *being filled with* or *the filling of* the Holy Spirit, rather than calling the event being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Vineyard churches are an example of a Neocharismatic church.⁵

A RANGE OF BELIEFS AS TO WHEN THE SPIRIT IS RECEIVED

Within these movements, there is a range of beliefs regarding the receiving of the Holy Spirit, with Pentecostals claiming that the baptism of the Spirit is a secondary event subsequent to salvation; with some Charismatic believers believing the same, and others being open to or believing that the Holy Spirit is given at the time of salvation; and Neocharismatic believers considering that generally it occurs at conversion. Charismatic Christians

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 763).

5. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 763-4).

who believe the Spirit is given at salvation believe that there are times when believers receive an extra boost or filling of the Spirit, and that this can happen more than once. Denominations which are neither Pentecostal nor Charismatic generally believe that receiving the Holy Spirit happens at the time of salvation. Some of these denominations, such as the Baptists, are cessationist—meaning they believe that the charismatic or supernatural gifts of the Spirit are no longer functional in today’s church. Other non-Charismatic churches believe that the gifts of the Spirit still function within the church, and that God continues to give such gifts, though they don’t put emphasis on the miraculous gifts as the Pentecostals do, and neither do they see the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent experience to salvation.

The biblical evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is involved in the lives of Christians, and according to the book of Acts, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit came powerfully upon the believers—some when they first received salvation and others at some time after that. Because some believers received the Holy Spirit upon salvation, it seems that the belief that the Spirit is received in the believer at the moment of salvation is valid.

Jesus spoke of being born of the Spirit (John 3:5–8). Paul said that those who do not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them do not belong to God (Rom. 8:9). Peter said to repent and be baptized—in other words, to believe in Jesus—and you will receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). These verses indicate that individuals receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation, at least in some measure. However, many Christians experience a filling or empowering of the Holy Spirit at a subsequent time, which cannot be ignored.

Some theologians suggest that individuals who have a second experience when they pray to receive the Holy Spirit were actually unsaved, and when they prayed for the gift or baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is when they experienced salvation, which is why they feel so empowered by the Spirit. While in some cases this could be true, it seems highly unlikely that the

hundreds of millions of people who have had a spiritual experience subsequent to salvation, when praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, were in fact unsaved at the time.

A BALANCED INTERPRETATION

A better understanding seems to be that individuals receive the Holy Spirit in some measure at the time of salvation. The presence of the Spirit within salvation begins to bring about spiritual change and regeneration in the person. Receiving the Spirit at salvation can be looked at as a glass being full of water. Christians who pray and ask for the infilling or gifts of the Holy Spirit later could be looked at as the full glass having more water poured into it, until it overflows. Rather than seeing it as the *only* time one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, it would be seen as a further outpouring of the Spirit, causing an overflowing of God's Spirit within the individual. This infilling can happen more than once.

Most likely those who don't believe in asking for the infilling of the Holy Spirit will not manifest certain gifts and manifestations of the Spirit, such as prophecy, miracles, healings, tongues and interpretation of tongues, as their interpretation of Scripture would constrain them from manifesting these gifts in their lives. This doesn't mean that they wouldn't have *any* gifts of the Spirit, as they would most likely manifest the many other types of gifts that are not manifested in supernatural ways, such as wisdom, teaching, knowledge, faith, discernment, service, exhortation, generosity, leading, and acts of mercy.

” Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:6–8)

Jesus specifically spoke about asking the Father to give the Holy Spirit when He said:

” I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:9–13)

While there is some disagreement between Christian denominations regarding whether all Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the time of their conversion, or if the Spirit is only given after salvation, the most important point to remember is that Scripture tells us that the Father will give the Spirit to those who ask. Therefore, no matter when or under what circumstances one may believe the Holy Spirit is given, as Christians we can ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that we can be overflowing with God’s love and power, enabling us to share the message of Jesus with others.

As can be seen by the different interpretations of how and when the Holy Spirit is received, scripture sometimes appears to support differing positions. In many instances, these differences don’t affect the fundamental point being made. No matter which interpretation one believes in regard to when and how the Spirit is given, both sides believe that the Holy Spirit *is* given. It seems wisest to remain somewhat open about the details of when and how.

Sadly, the difference in beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit has caused some oppositional attitudes between different schools of thought. Some of those who believe that being baptized in the Holy Spirit is an event subsequent

to salvation categorize those who haven't specifically prayed for the Holy Spirit as carnal or weak Christians, while they see themselves as more spiritual or stronger Christians. Some of those who don't believe in a subsequent receiving of the Holy Spirit claim that those who do are often more focused on the experiential side of faith with less focus on being grounded in God's Word. Christian apologist Matt Slick offers the following observation:

” The danger of this phenomena [baptism of the Holy Spirit] is the potential division of the body of Christ into two categories: those who are “regular” Christians and those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This, of course, would be an incorrect way of looking at Christians, and this is why. If you were to step outside into a soft mist, it would take a long time to get completely wet. On the other hand, if you were to step into a torrential rain, you'd be drenched quickly.

Those who have not experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (meaning a sudden and powerful experience) are not second-class citizens by any means. They are the ones in the gentle mist who experience the Lord over a long period of time and get just as blessed as those who suddenly step into the torrent of the Spirit's presence.⁶

Within the book of Acts, the manifestation of the filling or baptism in the Holy Spirit came upon some at the moment of conversion and others some time afterwards, but in both scenarios, the Spirit was within them. Throughout the New Testament there are references to the Holy Spirit's involvement in the lives of Christians, as we are led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18), receive gifts and manifestations of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-7), are washed and sanctified by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11), have received God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12), are taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13), are helped in

6. Slick, Matt. "What is Baptism in the Holy Spirit?" (n.d.)

our weakness by the Spirit (Rom. 8:26), preach the Gospel by the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:12), and have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us (2 Tim. 1:14).

It seems that the Christlike attitude would be to accept that though there may be differences in certain specific beliefs regarding when and how the Holy Spirit comes to believers, all believers are part of the body of Christ, all receive the Holy Spirit, and as Christians we should show respect and love toward our fellow believers. As the apostle Paul stated after writing about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, “I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31), followed by his beautiful exhortation regarding love being more important than manifesting the gifts of the Spirit. “The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

CHAPTER 12

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN OUR LIVES

Since the day of Pentecost, God's Spirit has dwelt in those who have entered the kingdom of God through acceptance of Jesus as their Savior. To enter that kingdom, individuals must become new creations—they must be born again, born anew, born of the Spirit.

” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:3–8)

God's presence on earth within the Old Testament was seen in the pillar of fire and cloud, in the thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai, in the burning bush, and other theophanies. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, was God's presence on earth during His lifetime. Since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, has dwelt in those who have been born of the Spirit. God's Spirit dwelling in believers has been the main manifestation of God's presence on earth since the time of Jesus' ascension to heaven.¹

1. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 636).

The Holy Spirit is present in believers and influences our lives in a number of ways. Our telling others about Jesus and God's gift of salvation is empowered by the Spirit. Our interaction with other Christians in fellowship, worship, and working together in outreach, church, or ministry, is enhanced through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit plays an important role in our personal walk with the Lord, our spiritual growth, and the manner in which we live our lives in conjunction with God's will and ways. God's Spirit guides, directs, and leads us as individuals. The Spirit teaches us and gives us understanding. Through the Spirit we receive assurance that we are God's children, that we abide in Him and He abides in us.

THE SPIRIT'S ROLE IN WITNESSING

Right before ascending to heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to go back to Jerusalem and "wait for the promise of the Father," letting them know that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

” While staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, “you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4–5)

He then explained that when the Spirit came upon them, they would receive power to witness. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came upon the disciples, and over time they became witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and throughout the known world. There are numerous accounts of the apostles and disciples witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God who worked through the early church to reach others, who performed miracles through them, who caused them to bravely proclaim the message even in the face

of opposition and martyrdom, dwells in Christians today. The commission given to the first disciples, as well as all disciples since that time, is to share the Gospel with others—and the Holy Spirit gives us power and anointing to do so.

One author wrote that the Holy Spirit is a “missionary Spirit.” When Christians are willing to share the Gospel with others, God’s Spirit can and will charge people with power to move beyond themselves and become a witness.² As with other aspects of the Holy Spirit in our lives, much depends on our willingness to yield to God’s leading when it comes to witnessing. Jesus calls us to share the Gospel, and when we respond to that call, we are empowered by the Spirit in our witness. However, if we choose to not speak to others, and thereby “quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19), then the Holy Spirit isn’t able to work through us to bring the message to those in need.

The commission to witness is clear, the power to witness is present in the Holy Spirit, and when we do our part, when we choose to share the Gospel with others, we are empowered and anointed by the Spirit to deliver the message to the lost and needy. Through your witness, others hear the voice of God’s Spirit calling them to salvation, to become God’s children, to live with Him forever.

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Besides empowering us in our witness, the Holy Spirit gives us gifts to equip us for ministering to others, both those we witness to and other Christians we are in service and fellowship with. The gifts of the Spirit are spoken of and named in six different passages in the Epistles.³ These listings name a variety of gifts, as well as some offices or callings such as apostle or evangelist, and state that these are gifts which are given by the

2. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 249).

3. See 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:11.

Holy Spirit for the common good, and that it's determined by the Spirit which gifts are given to each individual.

” Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit ... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills. (1 Cor. 12:4,7,11).

The gifts listed are the callings of apostles, prophets, teachers, as well as miracles, healings, helps, administration, tongues, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, distinguishing of spirits, interpretation of tongues, evangelist, pastor, encouraging, contributing, leadership, mercy, marriage, celibacy, speaking, and rendering service. The last two, which are mentioned in 1 Peter, can be seen as encompassing the gifts in general terms.

” As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 4:10–11)

All of these gifts can be used in our ministry of reaching others with the Gospel and in service to the Lord and one another. They are gifts which are used for the common good of the church, to enhance the body of Christ, of those you work and fellowship in the Lord with. They are also beneficial in your service to the Lord as you minister to others through your witnessing.

These gifts are a manifestation of God's presence in the world today, as well as His presence in your life. Some of the gifts are called “supernatural” or “miraculous” gifts, such as miracles, healings, prophecy, tongues, and casting out demons.⁴ Other gifts are seen as “nonmiraculous” gifts, such as

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1027).

serving, teaching, leadership, acts of mercy, etc. There is no specific distinction in Scripture between miraculous and nonmiraculous gifts; these are simply categorizations that theologians have given them. Each is a gift the Holy Spirit gives to individuals. They are all gifts from the hand of God and have great value in our lives and service to others.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Another aspect of the Holy Spirit's presence and manifestation in our lives is in regard to our spiritual growth, our becoming more Christlike. The theological term for this is *sanctification*. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives brings about a progressive growth toward godliness. God is holy, and His Spirit moves us to live our lives in a manner that emulates His nature and character. We grow in our faith, in applying God's Word in our daily living, in making choices and decisions that are in alignment with God's will, Word, and character. As we do, we grow in holiness and "are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18 NIV)

The fruit, or effect, of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is that we become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and we have more self-control. In short, we become more godly or holy. With our increased self-control, we are better able to resist becoming angry with others, as well as impatient, unkind, unloving, and hateful. We are less likely to act in ways that hurt others, or ourselves, through negative and ungodly actions and attitudes. We are better able to rise above our inherent human sinful nature.

We face a constant struggle between acting in our own best interests and behaving in the likeness of God, which is what God's Spirit directs us toward.

” For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Gal. 5:17 NIV)

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Rom. 8:12–14)

As we yield to the Spirit's guidance in our daily lives, as we make the right moral choices by applying the principles of God's Word, we progressively grow in our walk with the Lord. The Holy Spirit works within us to help us make the right choices by empowering us to resist sin, to choose to act in a more godly manner. Sin, and the temptation to sin, is never eradicated from our lives; but as we grow spiritually, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are better able to stand firm against it, to not yield to it.

THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

Within the New Testament, the Holy Spirit's presence was manifested in a variety of ways. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River Jordan, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the Holy Spirit's presence was seen as a dove descending and remaining upon Him ([John 1:32](#)). On Pentecost, the Spirit was manifested in tongues of fire and the sound of a mighty wind, and in the disciples speaking in foreign tongues ([Acts 2:2–4](#)). Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit came upon believers, and it was clear that they were filled with the Spirit.

”

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 11:15–16)

The Spirit's presence in this day and age continues to manifest itself in the lives of believers in a variety of ways. This manifestation is seen in the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit (see list above) and in miracles, signs, and wonders. "God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various

miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will” (Heb. 2:4).

Internally we see the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives through the witness the Spirit bears within us that we are God’s children and He is our Father; that we abide in God and He abides in us; and through the guarantee or down payment on the promise of eternity with the Father.

” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom. 8:16)

Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (1 John 3:24)

It is God who ... has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Cor. 1:21–22)

GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION

Within Scripture there are numerous instances in which the Holy Spirit directs and guides individuals. After His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasted for forty days and was tempted by Satan.

” Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days. (Luke 4:1–2)

A further example is of the Spirit guiding Philip, who was one of seven deacons chosen to help manage the food distribution in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5). After the stoning of Stephen, Philip left Jerusalem to bring the Gospel to Samaria. Being directed by an angel to leave Samaria and to go on the road to Gaza, he went, and while on the road the Holy Spirit gave him specific direction.

There was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” (Acts 8:27–29)

Other examples of direct guidance from the Spirit include the instructions to the Antioch church to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey, the Spirit forbidding Paul to speak the word in Asia and instructing him to not go to Bithynia, and Peter being told to go with the three men to Cornelius’ house.

” While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2–4)

[Paul and Timothy] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. (Acts 16:6–7)

While Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” (Acts 10:19–20)

These are some biblical examples of the Spirit giving guidance. When looking at the list of the gifts of the Spirit, we see specific ways in which the Holy Spirit leads and guides. The gifts of prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge are means to find the guidance of the Spirit. Guidance can also be

given through the teaching and exhortation of men and women who have these gifts of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can also teach us, speak to us, and give guidance as we read God's Word.

KEEPING THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

A beautiful quote from author Wayne Grudem says:

” To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the immediate presence of God Himself, and it therefore will result in feeling what God feels, desiring what God desires, doing what God wants, speaking by God's power, praying and ministering in God's strength, and knowing with the knowledge which God Himself gives.⁵

As Christians, we have the privilege of the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within us. We've been given the honor of our body being a temple of the Holy Spirit, of having God's presence in our lives. It's truly something to value.

While God's Spirit is present in our lives, the degree of the manifestation of the Spirit's presence depends on us as individuals, on how much we open ourselves up to the Spirit's influence. In the Old Testament, there are examples of some who had the Holy Spirit's presence and influence in their lives, but whose sins caused the Spirit to depart, such as Samson and Saul. In the New Testament we are told to not grieve the Holy Spirit or quench the Spirit. The Greek word that is used for *quench* in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians is *sbennymi*, which means to extinguish, suppress, or stifle, which Paul cautioned them not to do in relation to the workings of the Holy Spirit both within and through them.

” Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

5. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 649).

If we grieve or quench the Spirit, then the help we are able to receive, the comfort and peace we have, the guidance and direction given, are diminished. The Spirit of God is not forced upon us; however, the influence of the Spirit can be diminished by our lack of receptivity—through deliberate sin, lack of interest, disobedience, or unbelief.

The benefits of the Holy Spirit's active involvement in our lives are many. The Holy Spirit influences our lives for good; helps us to be more effective witnesses and to better minister to others through the spiritual gifts bestowed upon us; causes us to be more godly and to resist evil and sin; and makes us tabernacles, or dwelling places, for God, so that others can see Him in us and thus be drawn to Him. This "gift of the Father" which has been bestowed upon us is the priceless gift of the presence of God in our lives. What an honor.⁶

6. The overall concept of this chapter was based on "The Work of the Holy Spirit," from Grudem's *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

CHAPTER 13

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Throughout the Gospels we read about Jesus' life and ministry being empowered by the Holy Spirit. It was after His baptism in the Jordan River by John, when the heavens opened and the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove ([Matt. 3:16](#)) that His ministry began. After Jesus left the Jordan River, the Spirit led Him to the wilderness, where He fasted for 40 days and was tempted by the Devil. When those days were over, He returned to Galilee empowered by the Spirit. At that point He began to preach about the kingdom of God and to do miraculous works which manifested God's power, astonishing many. The powerful works Jesus did, as well as the authority of His words and teachings, proclaimed that the kingdom of God was breaking through.

” Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all ... and they were astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed authority. ... And they were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!” And reports about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region. ([Luke 4:14–15, 32, 36–37](#))

On Pentecost, ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, His disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit ([Luke 24:49](#)). From that point on, they too healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Through the empowerment of the Spirit, they preached the message, won new converts, and over time spread the faith throughout the world.

As the decades passed and Christianity spread throughout the known world, other aspects of the Holy Spirit's power were seen in the manifestation of various gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit's power was manifested not

only in the preaching of the Gospel and in healings and other miracles, but also in prophecy, teaching, administration, and many other ways. The Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, were given to believers both for the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 1:8) and for the edification, strengthening, and building up of the church, the body of believers (1 Cor. 14:12).

Paul wrote about the gifts of the Spirit in five different places;¹ Peter mentions them once (1 Pet. 4:11). The various lists by Paul differ somewhat from each other, with some listings including gifts that other lists don't mention. This would seem to indicate that Paul didn't intend to give comprehensive lists to the various churches he was writing, but rather was listing some examples of the gifts of the Spirit when mentioning them in his letters to the individual churches he was writing at the time.²

A combined list of the gifts noted in Paul's and Peter's writings include:

- Word of wisdom
- Word of knowledge
- Faith
- Gifts of healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between spirits
- Tongues
- Interpretation of tongues
- Administration
- Helping
- Serving
- Contributing
- Leadership
- Mercy

1. See 1 Cor. 7:7, 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28, Rom. 12:6–8, Eph. 4:11.

2. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1020).

- Teacher/Teaching
- Evangelist/Evangelism

Some of the gifts are listed as a title or ministry rather than a gift, such as evangelist and teacher. The listings within the Epistles aren't complete in the sense that they cover every aspect of each gift. For example, someone with the gift of helping might have a particular gift for a certain type of help—perhaps caring for the elderly, or children, or the sick. The gift of leadership might be manifested in different ways or with different types of people; for example, someone might be a gifted leader of young people, or of outreach teams, or of a men's or woman's group, or of an overall work.

There are also some aspects or attributes of the gifts listed above which could be considered subsets of the gifts, or which might be seen as being gifts in their own right—for example, musical gifts and intercessory prayer.³ In the following sections, a brief description of each of the various gifts spoken of by Paul and Peter will be covered.

WORD OF WISDOM AND OF KNOWLEDGE

These two gifts are mentioned only once within Scripture, and there is no explanation given as to exactly what they are. There are two general interpretations of what these gifts are: 1) The ability to receive a revelation from the Holy Spirit which allows one to know and share wisdom regarding a specific situation, or to have specific knowledge of a situation which was previously unknown to the person with this gift; 2) The ability to speak words of wisdom, or the ability to speak with knowledge, in various situations.

The first interpretation speaks of those who receive a direct revelation given by the Spirit. They are shown, for example, where there is someone present who has a certain ailment or disease, or who is planning to or has just left

3. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1022).

their husband or wife, etc. The person with the gift has no prior knowledge of the situation, but speaks words of wisdom or knowledge in order to provide help to the person who is experiencing these difficulties—such as to encourage them that God is aware of their situation, or to open the door for the person to ask for help or prayer. The second interpretation refers more to someone having wisdom which they have gained through life experience, or knowledge they have acquired through study or experience, and in whom those natural abilities have clearly been Spirit-enhanced. Some biblical examples of this type of knowledge or wisdom would be the appointment of deacons in Acts chapter 6, or the decision of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

FAITH

The gift of faith is referring to extraordinary faith beyond that of everyday Christian life, a special impartation of faith by the Spirit in certain situations. Some who have gifts of healings or miracles, for example, likely also have this gift of faith. This gift could be understood as being the “mountain-moving” faith that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 13. “If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2).

This reference to “all faith” would indicate that the gift of faith listed in the chapter before this (1 Corinthians 12) would be a faith which brings about results which could only come from God’s power—faith for something which could not be accomplished unless God’s hand moves to bring it about, faith that moves obstacles which are impossible to overcome in any other way.

” Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.” (Mark 11:22–23)

The gift of faith may also be manifested when someone is able to strengthen another's faith during desperate situations, such as when the apostle Paul comforted all his shipmates in the storm at sea (Acts 27:23–26). Someone with the gift of faith can bolster the wavering faith of another through the words he or she speaks.⁴

GIFTS OF HEALING

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes about the gifts of healing. When referring to the other gifts of the Spirit, the Greek word used is *charisma*, which is singular (gift); but with healing he uses *charismata*, which is plural. In the case of healing it reads: the *gifts* of healing. This indicates that a person doesn't receive a gift of being able to heal people, but rather that they, in a sense, are transferring gifts of God's healing to others. The person with the gifts of healing can be seen as dispensing God's gifts of healing to those in need—whether they need to be cured from pain, cancer, or any illness or disorder.

There are examples in Scripture showing different methods used in healings. Sometimes the person laid their hands on the one in need of healing; there is reference to anointing the person with oil; there were other times when the person with the gifts of healing simply spoke, with no touch, and the healing occurred. There isn't one specific method that must be followed when using the gifts of healing. The key to the healing is that it is a work of God, not of man; the focus is on the power of God to heal. The individual used as the conduit is a channel for the healing, but the power lies in the Lord giving the healing to the person in need.

MIRACLES

Many of the miracles within the New Testament were healing miracles, but since the gifts of healing are listed separately, this is most likely speaking of

4. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, pp. 358–60).

other kinds of miracles. The Greek word Paul used when writing about the gift of miracles is *dynamis*, which within the Epistles is translated 77 times as *power*, 11 times as *might*, and 7 times as *miracle*. There is no definition given by Paul which explains exactly what the gift of miracles covers, but it can be seen as any kind of activity where God's mighty power is evident. This could include deliverance from danger, deliverance from injury, such as when Paul was bitten by a viper (Acts 28:3–6), the casting out of demons, miracles of supply, or any working of the power of God to further His purpose in a situation.⁵

PROPHECY

The gift of prophecy is the gift that is mentioned most often in Paul's letters.⁶ The manner in which Paul wrote about it makes it clear that it was a normal experience in the churches that he planted. It is also clear that both men and women prophesied (Acts 21:8–9). The purpose of prophecy within the body of believers is for edification or building up, exhortation, and consolation. Prophecies are edifying messages which strengthen people's faith and help them in their walk with the Lord. At times a prophecy might include an admonition to change or to move in a more positive direction. Prophecy may also at times give revelation, such as Agabus prophesying about the coming famine and about Paul being imprisoned in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28, 21:10–11).

Prophecy in the New Testament differs from prophecy given in the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament there were specific individuals who were called by God as prophets who spoke God's messages to Israel and others. God's Spirit spoke through these prophets alone, as the Holy Spirit wasn't present in all believers in those days. It was only after Jesus had ascended that the Spirit fell upon all those who believed, and the gift of prophecy became available to all.

5. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1062).

6. See: 1 Thess. 5:20; 1 Cor. 14:1–6, 39–40; Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Tim. 1:18–19.

”

In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17–18)

The Old Testament prophets spoke God’s words unilaterally to the nation of Israel and were the mouthpieces of God during that time. The Old Testament prophets exercised an important role of spiritual authority to the nation, a role that New Testament prophets do not have. While in New Testament times there were some people who were called prophets and seemed to have a prophetic ministry,⁷ the implication of 1 Corinthians 14:30–31 is that the gift is available, at least potentially, to all, as opposed to only specific individuals who have a prophetic ministry.⁸

”

If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. (1 Cor. 14:30–31)

Prophecy within the New Testament is not given the same authority as in the Old Testament, but rather is to be discerned and judged by the community. Paul taught that after two or three prophecies are given, others should weigh what is given (1 Cor. 14:29). The weighing of prophecies given within a community or church is both to determine that what is said is from the Lord and to discern the significance and relevance of the prophecy. True prophecy will be harmonious with Scripture; it will not speak contrary to Scripture. It will build up and edify the faith of the community. It will glorify the Lord, not the one giving the prophecy.

7. See Acts 11:27–28, 13:1–2, 15:32 and 21:10.

8. Hawthorne and Martin (1993, p. 346).

Prophecies received, either in community with others or in personal prophecy, should be seen as God speaking through imperfect human channels, and thus allowance must be made for human error. Prophecy is subject to our fallible spirits and should not be seen as perfect or inerrant; nevertheless, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit intended to help us in our lives as Christians, in our fellowship and prayer together, in our ministries, and as a means of hearing God's words of comfort, edification, and exhortation.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS

Distinguishing between spirits is a gift of the Spirit which is mentioned only once in the New Testament. This gift is the ability to recognize the presence or influence of the Holy Spirit, or of a demonic spirit, in a person's life.⁹ In 1 John we are told to test the spirits to see if they are from God or not: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:10).

Besides distinguishing between good and evil spirits, this gift can also be used to distinguish between types of evil spirits. Biblical examples include spirits of disability (Luke 13:10–12), divination (Acts 16:16–18), deafness and muteness (Mark 9:25), and of error.

TONGUES AND INTERPRETATION

The gift of tongues was first manifested on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles—all Jews, and mostly Galileans—were filled with the Spirit and spoke in other tongues. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). There is no scriptural evidence that speaking in tongues occurred before the day of Pentecost.

9. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1082).

In this instance, those present, who were from all over the known world, heard what the apostles were saying in their own language. Generally speaking, this manner of speaking in tongues and others understanding what was being spoken was rare. While there may have been other instances similar to this one, from what we know of recorded history, it was not a normal occurrence.

Paul had and wrote about the gift of tongues. He used this gift often and expressed that point by saying he used it more than all the members of the Corinthian church to whom he was writing (1 Cor. 14:18). At the same time he counselled the believers about their use of tongues in their meetings, due to the fact that when one speaks in tongues, others do not understand what is being said. “One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit” (1 Cor. 14:2).

Paul writes about the use of tongues in a united praise or worship session with other believers, and about its use by individuals in private prayer. When used in a praise or worship setting, Paul explains that it’s best to not speak in tongues unless there is someone present who can interpret them; because with an interpretation of what is being said, the assembly is edified, whereas if there is no interpretation of the tongues, those listening aren’t.

Author Wayne Grudem defines speaking in tongues as follows: Speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.¹⁰ As the verse quoted above says, the person who speaks in tongues usually speaks to God, which would mean that speaking in tongues is most often a means of prayer or praise to the Lord. When one prays in tongues, their spirit prays and communicates directly with God, even though the individual doesn’t understand what is being said, as they are bypassing their mind and understanding. “If I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don’t understand what I am saying” (1 Cor. 14:14 NLT).

10. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1070).

When we pray and praise in tongues, we are personally edified.

” One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. (1 Cor. 14:4 NAU)

I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

Praying in tongues individually edifies those who use this gift, and it edifies the church when there is someone to interpret the tongues. The apostle Paul obviously thought it was important and encouraged its use. “Now I want you all to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5).

TEACHING

The gift of teaching is the ability to explain Scripture and the godly principles, knowledge, and wisdom found in Scripture, and help people apply these to their lives.¹¹ In the New Testament there are examples of people teaching others God’s Word (Acts 18:11), and exhortations to do so.

” Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. (Acts 15:35)

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16)

11. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1061).

Teaching the Word and its application in one's life is a key element in making disciples. When speaking of going into the world and making disciples, Jesus spoke of teaching them. After the day of Pentecost, we see that the apostles were teaching the new converts, in obedience to what Jesus had said.

” Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:19–20)

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

The gift of teaching is crucial to sharing the faith with those we win to the Lord, to grounding them in their faith and helping them to become disciples. It's important to have knowledge and understanding regarding one's faith, and those with the Spirit-given ability to read and study, and then to teach, offer a great service to those who are hungry to learn and become disciples. Teaching helps change lives as it brings better understanding of the Bible and how to apply it.

Not much is said about the following gifts, but they are mentioned in the various lists given in the New Testament.

ADMINISTRATION

The gift of administration is included in the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Various translations render the original Greek word as *governments*, *managing*, *administrating*, or *forms of leadership*. This gift can be seen as the ability and anointing to govern or manage the affairs of the church, to plan, organize, and implement the work that needs to be done so as to accomplish tasks and reach goals.

HELPING

The gift of helps is the ability to help others in a variety of ways. In a church, fellowship group, or witnessing ministry, it is often seen in those who are especially gifted in offering assistance in a variety of practical ways. People with this gift are invaluable and are often the unsung heroes, those who do the hands-on, behind-the-scenes work that is the backbone of every work of God. They have a joy in doing whatever is necessary to assist in the Lord's work.

EVANGELIZING

Every Christian is called to share the Gospel with others and is empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit, so every Christian is equipped to evangelize to some extent. While all Christians can and should evangelize, some are called to make evangelization their ministry and are given the gift of evangelizing or specific power and effectiveness in sharing the message of salvation with others. In the early church, when a great deal of preaching the Gospel was being done, those who were especially gifted by the Holy Spirit to evangelize were seen as evangelists.

”

On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. (Acts 21:8)

A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures ... he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. (Acts 18:24, 27–28)

The gift of evangelism isn't limited to those whose calling is to become an evangelist or a full-time witness. It is seen in those who have a Spirit-given ability to share the Gospel in specific types of situations or in different

or unusual ways—such as witnessing to large crowds, or through music or skits. Some excel in witnessing one on one to the people they meet. Some have a particular gift for witnessing to certain types of people, such as young people, gang members, or the elderly. For some, this gift is seen in their desire to minister to those of other cultures, to be missionaries in foreign lands. The gift of evangelizing goes hand in hand with the Great Commission of winning others to the Lord.

SERVING

Serving can be understood in different ways. One is in showing hospitality to others, such as in opening your home to those in need of lodging, food, or fellowship. It's showing love through making others feel welcomed, valued, and cared about. People with this gift can cause others to feel at ease, to feel loved and secure. They have the ability to make newcomers to a fellowship or community feel comfortable and accepted.

Another way to see this gift is being in or putting oneself into a role of serving others in God's work. It is the gift of a willingness to gladly accept a role that isn't at the forefront, but rather is one that serves in a behind-the-scenes manner. One's desire is to serve rather than be served, to help in any way necessary; there is a willingness to do the humble but crucial jobs.

CONTRIBUTING OR GIVING

In [Romans 12:8](#), when writing about the gifts, Paul mentions “the one who contributes.” This gift of the Spirit is a gift of giving, of generosity. It is the motivation to share your material resources with others in order to further God's work. It has to do with giving beyond a tithe by giving gifts and offerings, by helping fellow Christians and others who are in need, such as the poor and needy unselfishly, often anonymously, in a manner that helps others and glorifies the Lord.

LEADERSHIP

The gift of leadership enables men and women to lead others through the setting of goals in alignment with God's desires, and to communicate these goals in a manner which motivates others to work together toward reaching them. Leaders inspire through articulating a vision; they stir the hearts of those who feel called to serve the Lord. They are able to inspire others to do their best in God's service, to work hard to achieve the collective goals.

MERCY

The gift of mercy is the ability to feel compassion and empathy for those who suffer and to take action to relieve their suffering. Those with this gift often feel called to minister by visiting the sick, the elderly, those in prisons, the shut-ins. They are often able to comfort the grieving, those who have lost loved ones. They minister to those in need through their help and love, by transforming their compassion into action as they work to alleviate the pain others suffer. They are a good reflection of the love and compassion of God.

CLOSING POINTS

The degree to which a person exercises the gifts of the Spirit can grow stronger or weaker over a person's lifetime. Once a gift is given, it often takes time for the recipient to develop it and strengthen it by using it. When speaking of the gift of prophecy, Paul referred to using it in proportion to our faith (Rom. 12:6). This indicates that spiritual gifts can be more or less developed in different individuals.¹² Paul also wrote about not neglecting one's gift (1 Tim. 4:14), and about rekindling the gift (2 Tim. 1:6), which shows that a gift can weaken through disuse.

The gifts are given to each one according to how the Spirit wills (1 Cor. 12:11). Therefore, not everyone has the same gifts. This was expressed

12. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 1022).

by the apostle Paul, who wrote: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:29–30). The way the Greek text is written, the expectation is that each question will be answered with a *no*. Not all have the gifts of healing, or speak with tongues, or are prophets, etc. The gifts are given according to the will of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts of the Spirit are given to us as Christians to help in our witness, in our spiritual lives, and in the strengthening of the spiritual community—the church, fellowship, or mission work to which we belong. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers, and the gifts are a manifestation of the Spirit in our lives. They are the Spirit of God working within us for our benefit and that of others. Having been given such precious gifts, it is up to us to allow God’s Spirit to be manifested in our lives. We should use them, stir them up within ourselves, and not neglect them.

GOD IN THREE PERSONS

For the uninitiated, the impression could be that Christianity believes in three Gods—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But that’s not the case. Christians believe that there is only one God. The doctrine that explains the concept of how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God is called the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine explains that God has always existed as three persons in one being. This is very different from humans, as we exist as one person in one being—we are uni-personal. God exists as a tri-personal being—three persons, each distinct from the other, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and yet is one being. While God is tri-personal, each of the persons is fully God, having all of the attributes and the complete essence of God.

Theologian Louis Berkhof wrote that the word “person” is an imperfect expression of the idea, because today it denotes a separate rational and moral individual. Christian philosopher Kenneth Samples concurs. “The three persons of the Trinity should not be understood as three ‘parts’ or ‘fractions’ of God. Each person is fully divine and equally possesses all of God’s being ... the term ‘person’ in reference to the Trinity is used in a unique sense and should not be understood to refer to a separate entity or being, for this would divide the divine essence.”¹

Our experience as human beings is that where you have a person, you also have a distinct individual essence. Every person we know is a distinct and separate entity, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there aren’t three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another. Rather, there is one divine being, one essence, with three personal self-distinctions. Another way to put it is that in the being of God, the three distinct Persons have an interpersonal relationship. They communicate and have

1. Samples, Kenneth (2007, p. 134).

interaction with one another. In Scripture you have the Father addressing the Son as *You*: “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

You also have the Son referring to the Father as *He*, and showing communication between them: “For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing” (John 5:20). You have an example of the Son calling Himself *I*, and differentiating Himself from both the Father and the Holy Spirit: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me” (John 15:26). Thus God, who is tri-personal, has interaction and a personal relationship between the different Persons within the being of God.

I particularly like how Christian philosopher and author William Lane Craig describes the Trinity in one of his lectures:

” Just like I, as a being, support one center of self-consciousness, which I call I or me, God is a being that supports three centers of self-consciousness. God is a being with three centers of self-consciousness, three I’s or selves. Thus God’s being supports three persons.²

The concept of three persons in one God was not something that was explicitly expressed in the Old Testament, though there are Old Testament verses which infer that there is more than one person in God. The understanding of the three persons in one God became clearer in the New Testament because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believers. The followers of Jesus came to understand that He was God, but was distinct from the Father, and that the Holy Spirit was also God, but was distinct from the Father and the Son. So it was in New Testament times that the truth of the Trinity unfolded and was revealed.

2. Craig, William Lane. “The Doctrine of the Trinity, part 1, 2007.

Although the word *Trinity* doesn't appear within the biblical text, Scripture reveals the doctrine, and the word *Trinity* conveys the concept.

CONCEPT OF THE TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

While the Old Testament does not reveal that God is a triune being, some Old Testament passages do speak in a manner that suggests that God is more than one Person.

” Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen. 1:26)

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:22)

“Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” (Gen. 11:7)

In the next verses, also from the Old Testament, the speaker is either God the Father or God the Son, and they make reference to each other or to the Spirit, again inferring different persons in the Godhead.

” Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name? Surely you know! (Prov. 30:4)

Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psa. 2:12 NASB)

“Draw near to Me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit. (Isa. 48:16)

One of the great scriptures from Torah—the five books of Moses, corresponding to the first five books of the Christian Old Testament—which is fundamental to Judaism is: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4 KJV) . Judaism is a monotheistic religion which believes there is only one God. This belief was by and large unique to Israel in the time of the Old Testament, as virtually all cultures in the region were polytheistic, including all of Israel’s neighbors throughout history until the time of Christ.

Christianity is monotheistic as well. Christians believe there is only one God, and affirm this same Bible verse, “the Lord our God is one Lord.” However, unlike Judaism, Christians believe in the tri-personal God, three persons in one Being.

AUGUSTINE AND TRINITY LOGIC

Augustine (354–430 AD), one of the greatest figures of Christianity in the western part of the Roman Empire and considered the most important Christian writer next to the Apostle Paul, summarized the fundamental logic of the Trinity in seven short statements. These statements are:

1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.
4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
7. There is only one God.

The first three statements express that each member of the Trinity is God. The second three statements assert that each member of the Trinity is distinct one from another. The last statement declares that there is only one God. While all of this may be difficult to fully understand, if we build from Augustine’s foundational seven statements, it’s plain to see

that the Bible lays out the case for the Trinity—three distinct persons as one God.

THE FATHER IS GOD.

The following verses express that the Father is God:

” Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting. (Isa. 63:16 KJV)

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. (Matt. 6:9 KJV)

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:6 KJV)

John chapter 17 is a prayer that Jesus prays to the Father, showing that He considered the Father as God.

THE SON IS GOD.

The following verses express that Jesus is God:

” In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

He [Jesus/Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and

the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. (Col. 1:15–20 NIV)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form. (Col. 2:9 NIV)³

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD.

Psalm 139 shows that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, something that only God is:

” Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. (Psa. 139:7–10)

1 Corinthians 2 shows the Holy Spirit as omniscient, knowing everything, one of the attributes of God alone: “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10–11). This verse states that as a human is the only one who knows what goes on in his mind and spirit—his inner thoughts are known only to him—similarly the inner thoughts of God are only known to God Himself, thus showing that the Spirit of God is God, since the Spirit of God comprehends the thoughts of God.

3. See also [John 8:58](#); [Heb. 1:1–3](#); [John 1:18](#).

Scripture shows that the Holy Spirit was present from before the creation of the world, and played a role in some manner: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen. 1:2 NIV).

The following verses show the Holy Spirit working along with Jesus in our lives as Christians.

” You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11 NIV)

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26 NIV)

THREE DISTINCT PERSONS

In 2 Corinthians, Paul lists the three persons of the Trinity in a manner that shows they are distinct from one another. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). Jesus, just before ascending into heaven, commands the disciples to baptize in the name of each person of the Trinity, thus showing He saw them all as equal, all as God (Matt. 28:19).

The way the New Testament authors refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shows their distinctness—that they are *different* from one another and that they *interact* in ways that show they are not the same person. For example, Jesus asks the Father to send the Spirit, which shows three different Persons interacting together.

” I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth. (John 14:16–17; see also John 7:39)

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. (Matt. 11:27)

When Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:16–17)

These verses help to show that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct one from another.

ONE GOD

Augustine’s last statement is “There is one God.” Both the Old and New Testaments, as well as Jesus Himself, affirm that there is only one God.

” One of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He answered them well, asked Him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’” (Mark 12:28–29)

There is no other god besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. . . . Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:21–22)

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” (1 Cor. 8:4)

Augustine's statements, which are based on Scripture, make it clear that God is three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—that they are distinct from each other, and that there is only one God.

DEFINING THE DOCTRINE

During the “Apostolic Age”—the period from Jesus' death and resurrection until about the end of the first century, during which the apostles were alive and the books of the New Testament were written—the focus of the church was on spreading the message of salvation, winning converts, and building communities of faith. In time the first apostles died and there were no living eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry. Thankfully, the apostles and their converts left behind writings which we still have today in the Gospels and Epistles. The apostles, of course, had their own disciples, people whom they had trained in the faith who continued teaching the faith to others and building communities. The early church grew tremendously during the second and third centuries.

In the centuries after the apostles died, there were numerous “church fathers”—important Christian bishops and teachers who wrote about the faith and who attempted to further explain and interpret what was written in the Gospels and Epistles. It was from the Gospels and Epistles, as well as the Old Testament that the various Christian doctrines, including the doctrine of the Trinity, originated. However, the word *Trinity* and a precise explanation of the Trinity weren't articulated in the New Testament. The wording that explained the Trinity developed gradually, subsequent to the writings of the New Testament.

One of the earliest persons to use the term *Trinity* when trying to formulate the doctrine was a church father named Tertullian (circa 155–230). His formulation expressed some of the major fundamentals of the doctrine of the Trinity, but wasn't fully correct. Another church father, Origen (circa 185–254), provided further explanation of the doctrine. This also was not fully accurate. However, much of what these early writers wrote was

correct and the correct portions of their writings provided the basic building blocks for the doctrine that would eventually become widely accepted as orthodox.

HERESIES AND MISINTERPRETATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE

In the third and fourth centuries, various Christian teachers and writers built on these earlier explanations, writing about the Trinity in an effort to explain it. The problem with some of these explanations was that they often affirmed one aspect of the doctrine, but in doing so refuted another aspect of it. Three of the most common were:

- *Modalism* or *Sabellianism*: This denied that God was three distinct persons.
- *Subordinationism*: This denied that the three persons were equal.
- *Arianism*: This denied that all persons of the Trinity were fully God.

One of the earliest examples is the teaching that there is one God who takes on different *modes* or who plays different *roles*; sometimes He is the Father, at other times He is the Son, and sometimes He is the Holy Spirit. This is known as *Sabellianism* after Sabellius, who taught this in the third century, more commonly known as *modalism*. While this teaching strongly affirmed that there is one God, it denied that there are three persons in God. Modalism was eventually condemned by the church as heresy.

Subordinationism claimed that Jesus was eternally God but that He was not equal with the Father in being. Instead it claimed He was subordinate to the Father. If this were so, then He couldn't be God, because in order to be God He must have the same essence as the Father, and to have the same essence He must be equal with God. Subordinationism was also rejected by the church.

Arius (circa 256–336), a bishop in Alexandria, Egypt, taught that the Son was a created being that at one time didn't exist. According to Arius,

the Son was created before anything else was created. This meant that the Son is greater than any other created thing, but that He is nevertheless a creation and did not exist eternally, and therefore isn't equal with the Father; that He doesn't have the same nature or essence as the Father. This doctrine, known as Arianism, affirmed that there are three persons in the Trinity, but rejected that the three persons were God or that they all have the attributes of God.

Arius based his theology on verses which called Jesus the only *begotten* Son, as well as Colossians 1:15, which says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Arius taught that if the Son is begotten, that means He had a beginning, since begotten implies a birth. Therefore, he taught, there was a time when the Son didn't exist. "The firstborn of all creation" in Colossians 1:15 is better understood as Christ being the *heir* of all creation, that He has the rights and authority granted to the firstborn son, that He is the head or leader of the family. The NIV translates this as the "firstborn *over* all creation."

CONCLUSIONS OF THE NICENE COUNCIL

In 325 AD the Roman emperor Constantine convened the first ecumenical council in Nicaea (in present-day Turkey). Approximately 300 bishops attended. The purpose of the first church council was to make a decision regarding Arius' teachings. The council condemned Arianism as a false doctrine and thus a heresy, because if Jesus was a creation of God, then He couldn't *be* God, and if that were true, then there could be no Trinity. However, it's clear from the Bible that there *is* a Trinity. In the process of condemning Arianism, they realized that they had to find wording which affirmed that the Son was God and was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. They also had to articulate the distinctness between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The challenge in this task was that there are no Bible verses which state specifically that Jesus is co-equal with the Father, or that He is co-eternal

with the Father. However, there are many Bible verses which reveal that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each God. The New Testament writers expressed that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were equally God with the Father through what they wrote, though they didn't say so in those exact words. The bishops at the council had to find the words to express in technical language the concepts which had been basically understood, though not necessarily worked through theologically, since the beginning of Christianity. They expressed those words in a formal declaration called the Nicene Creed.

In this creed they gave greater clarity to the *intent* of the word *begotten*. There were so many scriptures that stated or implied that Jesus, the Son, *was* God, including verses which state that Jesus participated in the creation, that the council determined that whatever the original writers meant by "begotten," they didn't mean "created." The intent of the word *begotten* was to express that the Son had the same *essence* as the Father, that there is a difference between *creating* something and *begetting* something.⁴ *Creating* implies making something different from yourself, while *begotten* implies being of the same essence or substance. Thus saying that the Son is begotten is stating that He is of the same substance, the same essence, as the Father. The Greek word used in the Nicene Creed to explain this essence was *homoousios*, meaning "of the same nature." This means that the three persons of the Trinity are co-equal, there is no subordination in their essence, and the second and third persons of the Trinity were not created.

This ultimately means that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same in their *being* as God; they are equally God, each possessing all the attributes of God. One is not more God, or more powerful, or more wise, than the other. If one were, then they wouldn't be equally God, which would deny the truth of the Trinity. This understanding that they are all equally God in their being is key. This is known in theology as the

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 243).

ontological Trinity, meaning that in their being or essence they are fully equal.

While they are all equally God and there is no difference in their *being*, there *is* a difference in their *relationship* to one another. There is a specific arrangement in their relationship within the Trinity. The Father is unique in the way He relates to the others as Father. The Son is unique in the way He relates as Son. And the Holy Spirit is unique in relating to the Father and the Son as the Holy Spirit. The difference in persons is one of relationship, not one of being. The Father is always the Father, the Son is always the Son, and the Holy Spirit is always the Holy Spirit.

The relationship of the Son to the Father is such that the Father directs and the Son obeys and is responsive to the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit responds to the directives of both the Father and the Son. They all are exactly the same in *being*, *essence* and *nature*, they are all fully and completely God, but they are *different* in *relationship* and in their *roles*. Christian philosopher Kenneth Samples wrote,

” The members of the Trinity are qualitatively equal in attributes, nature, and glory. While Scripture reveals a subordination among the divine persons in terms of position or role (e.g., the Son submits to the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son), there exists absolutely no subordination (inferiority) of essence or nature. The persons are therefore equal in being, but subordinate only in role or position.⁵

The mystery of the Trinity is something beyond our full comprehension, considering that we are material creatures living in time and space, and God is the eternal creator who is the source of everything. While we can understand the concept, the mechanics of it are a mystery.

5. Samples, Kenneth. “The Triune God,” 2014.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY

Besides the specific arrangement within their relationship, there is also a difference in their roles or primary functions in relation to the world. One way to generally explain the basics of this in a few words is to attribute creation primarily to the Father, redemption primarily to the Son, and sanctification primarily to the Holy Spirit. This doesn't mean that is the only role each holds, nor that the other persons didn't have a part in these things, because they did, but these things can be looked on as a *primary* function of one person of the Trinity.

For example, in creation we see the Father speaking the “Let there be...” commands for the creation of the universe, but we see the Son carrying out these commands, as the Word/Logos that proceeds from the Father, as expressed in [John 1:3](#) and other verses. “In these last days He [the Father] has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He created the world” (Heb. 1:2). We also see that the Holy Spirit was present and played a role in creation as well ([Gen. 1:2](#)).

Another example is in regard to our salvation, redemption, and our work for God. God the Father sends the Son, and the Son obeys the will of the Father by dying for humankind—something the Son specifically does, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Once the Son returns to heaven after the resurrection, He and the Father send the Holy Spirit to strengthen our spiritual lives and give us power and gifts for our service to God ([Acts 1:8](#); [1 Cor. 12:7–11](#)).

Each person of the Trinity has different functions, and within those functions there is subordination. The Father is Father, the Son obeys the Father, the Holy Spirit responds to the will of the Father and the Son; however, in their *nature*, in their *divine essence*, there is *no* subordination; each is fully and equally God. If there was subordination in their nature or essence, then they wouldn't be equally God and there could be no Trinity, as the

Father would be more God than the Son or the Holy Spirit. However, Scripture clearly shows they are all equally God in their being.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRINITY

In truth, the concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being one God is impossible for us as humans to completely understand. We have nothing like it in our world. It's completely beyond our experience. That might be disconcerting, but it's also consistent with our belief that an all-powerful, all-knowing creator God exists. As He reveals Himself to us, it stands to reason that understanding some aspects of Him might be beyond our human experience and understanding. So if you feel you can't fully understand it, don't worry about it. The important things are to know that there is one God, that there are three Persons in God, that God loves you and Jesus died for your salvation, and that the Holy Spirit is with you as a helper and counselor.

When speaking of the Trinity, theologian A. W. Tozer stated, "The doctrine of the Trinity ... is truth for the heart. The fact that it cannot be satisfactorily explained, instead of being against it, is in its favor. Such a truth had to be revealed; no one could imagine it."⁶

The apostles and disciples—who were all Jewish and who had all their lives believed there was only one God, and for whom believing otherwise was blasphemy—came to understand, especially after His resurrection, that Jesus, this man they knew and lived with, was God. They knew He wasn't God the Father, but that He *was* God. Once Jesus had ascended into heaven and the promised Holy Spirit powerfully came into their lives at Pentecost, these same men came to understand the Holy Spirit as God, yet they knew that the Spirit was neither the Father nor the Son.

6. Tozer, A. W. (1961, p. 18).

The writers of the New Testament understood, accepted, and wrote in terms of one God, and of the distinct persons of the Godhead. The early church believed it, and Christians today believe it. It's at the heart of our faith. Our God is one God; He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal Persons, who exist in perfect unity and perfect love, each with the same essence, the same divine nature.—Three Persons, one God. Incredibly wonderful!

CHAPTER 15

EXPLAINING THE TRINITY

As we've seen in the previous chapter, the doctrine of the Trinity is not a simple doctrine to understand; some parts of it are incomprehensible to our natural reasoning, and as such, it is a mystery. Though it can't be *fully* understood, it is nevertheless true. Christian philosopher Kenneth Samples states:

” Even though the Trinity doctrine is not fully comprehensible to the finite human mind, what Christians believe about the doctrine is clear and distinct in the church's creeds and statements of faith. The truth of this doctrine, however, can only be clearly and cogently communicated if believers take seriously their responsibility to study and show themselves approved (2 Tim. 2:15).¹

Despite its mysterious nature, we find ourselves at times needing to explain the doctrine of the Trinity as we witness or teach others who wish to grow in the faith.

THE TRINITY AND GENDER

One aspect of the Trinity that can arise with the contemporary focus on gender identity is God's gender. Scripture teaches that God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is spirit, which means God doesn't have a body and therefore has no specific gender. In other verses God says that He is *not a man*, meaning He is not a material being; therefore He is neither male nor female.

” God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

1. Samples, Kenneth. "The Trinity: One What and Three Whos," 2007.

God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. (Num. 23:19)

God is Spirit. He isn't human. He is neither male nor female.

As we saw in Chapters 8 and 9 covering the incarnation of Jesus, while Jesus was God living on earth in human flesh, He was fully human, with the same human attributes as we have, including gender. It was necessary for Jesus to become incarnate, to take on full humanity, to be both fully God and fully man, to make salvation possible. As the second person of the Trinity, He also shares in all the attributes of God.

While the majority of the time Scripture speaks of God as being masculine, using terms which refer to male representations, such as Father, King, Husband, etc., there are also some verses in which God is portrayed as being involved in womanly activities. All of these portrayals, both male and female, are either metaphors or anthropomorphisms—expressions which attribute human physical and emotional characteristics, as well as human experiences, to God, in order to help us understand Him and what He's like. Using these terms helps us picture what God is like. However, they shouldn't be taken to specifically mean that God is male or female, for God is neither—He is Spirit.

It is, however, interesting that Scripture depicts female or feminine images or activities in reference to God. In Old Testament Scripture God likens Himself to a woman in labor, to a mother who nurses her child, who comforts her children, a God who bore and who protects His people.

” For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. (Isa. 42:14)

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. (Isa. 66:13 NIV)

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. (Deut. 32:18)

In Hosea 11, God is portrayed as being involved in activities which would normally be handled by a mother. “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk ... I bent down to them and fed them” (Hosea 11:3–4). Another example is God’s role as a *midwife*, a role that was only performed by women in Old Testament times. “You are He who took me from the womb; You made me trust You at my mother’s breasts. On You was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb You have been my God” (Psalm 22:9–10).

In conclusion, God is spirit and therefore has no gender. Yet within the Old Testament, God is spoken of in a manner which includes examples of maternal and womanly attributes and activities. In light of the Bible verses which speak of male and female being made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26–27); God’s wisdom being spoken of in feminine form, and referenced as being with God at the creation of the universe (Prov. 8); and other female anthropomorphic references to God, one can understand the concept of feminine and maternal elements of the Trinity of God.

ANALOGIES FOR THE TRINITY

When Christians find themselves in a position where they need to explain the Trinity to someone, one of the most common means of explanation is to liken it to something familiar through using analogies. You might say, “The Trinity is like ...” and then include a comparison that helps to explain the Trinity in terms that are relatable or familiar. This can be a fairly good way to explain it in simple terms, though there are some difficulties in using analogies. While analogies have *similarities* to the Trinity, they don’t fully or accurately explain it, and some of them, while seemingly good explanations on the surface, can contradict the doctrine.

Some of the more commonly used analogies are helpful to know, in case you ever find yourself in a situation where you may need to use one of

them in explaining the concept of the Trinity. It's also important to know the flaws of the different analogies so that you can be careful when using them to explain the doctrine. One example is the popular analogy that the Trinity is like water, which in different states can be ice (a solid), water (a liquid), and steam (a gas). All three are different, but the same substance. While this seems to be a good analogy at a basic level, its flaw is that water can only be in each of those states in succession. It cannot be in all three states at the same time. Another example is the egg analogy: just as an egg consists of three things—the shell, the yolk, and the white, which together make an egg—so God consists of three Persons in one entity.

Both of these analogies offer certain *likenesses* to the Trinity, yet they have a major weakness. The water analogy expresses modalism, which professes that the Persons of the Trinity are not distinct from one another, but rather are only different manifestations of God. The egg analogy shows three parts making up a whole egg; however, none of the parts individually is the whole entity, the egg. Whereas in the Trinity, each part—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is God and is of the same essence.

There are analogies based on relationship ideas, that the Trinity is like a family, or a society; or like a man who is a father, a son, and a husband, and thus three persons in one. Others use concepts drawn from the natural world, like a mountain with three peaks rising from the same base, or an apple with its skin, pulp, and core, or the three-leaf clover. All these popularly used examples are likenesses or analogies which, while they cannot fully explain the doctrine, can be helpful as tools to express a relatable similarity to the Trinity. As such, they can be helpful in witnessing to others at a basic level. But they don't portray a fully accurate representation, and in a challenging discussion or debate with someone who is knowledgeable, they won't hold up as showing the full truth of the Trinity. Analogies can be helpful at a basic level, but they have their limitations.

However, even though there are no analogies that are completely accurate, nor do any explanations of the Trinity bring total comprehension of the doctrine, this doesn't mean that the Trinity cannot be apprehended by our God-given understanding. I like the explanation that Christian theologian Robert M. Bowman Jr. gave when addressing the issue of the finite human mind comprehending the Trinity:

” To say that the Trinity cannot be understood likewise is imprecise, or at least open to misinterpretation. Trinitarian theologians do not mean to imply that the Trinity is unintelligible nonsense. Rather, the point they are making is that the Trinity cannot be fully fathomed, or comprehended, by the finite mind of a man. There is a difference between gaining a basically correct understanding of something and having a complete, comprehensive, all-embracing, perfect understanding of it. The way many other theologians would express that difference is to say that the Trinity can be understood, or “apprehended,” but not “comprehended.”²

C. S. Lewis also addressed the issue of comprehending the Trinity in his book *Mere Christianity*. He states:

” On the Divine level, you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being... Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube.

When thinking about the Trinity, we should not think it is an impossible contradiction or bad math ($1+1+1=1$). Thinking this way assumes we can comprehend God in the same way that we com-

2. Bowman, Robert M. Jr. (1992).

prehend humans and human relationships. God is incomprehensible to an extent. After all, we are talking about the eternal Creator.³

EARLY CHRISTIAN CREEDS

In an attempt to provide clear doctrinal teachings and definitions for all believers, a number of what were referred to as “creeds” were articulated in the early eras of church history. These served both as a declaration of faith and a statement of the doctrine for the believers. One of the most important of these creeds, the Nicene Creed, was the work of the first ecumenical council, a council consisting of bishops from the whole Christian church of the day. This council was convened by the Emperor Constantine in 325 A.D. to deal with the question of Arianism. The man who led the argument against Arius was named Athanasius, a twenty-nine-year-old who was a secretary to the bishop of Alexandria. A few years later he became the bishop of Alexandria. Even though the council agreed with Athanasius, issued the Nicene Creed, and condemned Arianism, the controversy continued until another ecumenical council, the Council of Constantinople in 381, reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and made a few additions to it. After that, Arianism began to lose favor and basically died out.

Creeds such as the Nicene Creed and the earlier Apostles’ Creed were memorized and recited in churches and in fellowships as a means of educating members in Christian doctrine and belief. The Nicene Creed is still taught and recited in many churches today. The version that is quoted today includes the few changes added by the Council of Constantinople. It also includes an addition known as the *filioque* clause, added to the creed much later.⁴ *Filioque*, which means *and the Son* in Latin, was added to the

3. Lewis, C. S. (2009, p.162).

4. In 1054 the filioque clause was added to the creed. This brought about the schism or division between the western church with its base in Rome, and the eastern church with its base in Constantinople. The two branches, the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches, remain split today. The split was caused mostly because the clause was added by the Roman Catholic pope without consultation with the Eastern church.

line that previously said that “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.” It now says, “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

Following is the Nicene Creed with some commentary in italics, to point out the specific Trinity points and how they are precisely worded.

The Nicene Creed (also known as the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creed)

” We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (*showing the Son existed before creation*), God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made (*The Son is God of God, begotten, not made; one substance with the Father, meaning the Son has the same essence, the same divine nature and is equally God, and that He wasn't made or created by the Father, as Arius claimed.*); who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick (*living*) and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son (*the filioque clause, which was added later*), who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. (*Catholic in this case means universal, or the overall community or church of Christians, not*

the Roman Catholic Church.) We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Another creed which gained usage in the 400s was the “Athanasian Creed,” which, though not thought to be written by Athanasius, affirms the beliefs of the Doctrine of the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed very precisely lays out various points of the Doctrine of the Trinity. I am including only those points which touch on the Trinity.⁵

3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.

5. To read the full creed, see www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html.

11. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;
16. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There are three Gods or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

25. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THEIR LEGACY

The church fathers of the first four centuries worked to find the right technical words to articulate this doctrine. As noted in the previous chapter, the development of the doctrine and its wording came gradually, often when the inherent truth of the doctrine was challenged by someone making false claims against it. The early church fathers, a number of whom were martyred for their faith, were the pioneers of Christian doctrine and theology, and deserve our gratitude for bearing the responsibility they were given in articulating the doctrines of the Christian faith of which we are beneficiaries today.

In this day and age, with massive information at our fingertips, it is hard to imagine it taking hundreds of years to work out such a doctrine, but those centuries were very different from today. Books weren't readily available; printing hadn't yet been invented, and all books were duplicated by hand. Travel was slow, by foot or by horse, donkey, or camel, or by boat. Communications were as slow as transportation. Also, Christians underwent persecutions during those centuries. Not all the persecutions were equally severe, but they were at least disruptive and at times resulted in the death of believers, including some of the apostles and later church fathers. There were ten major periods of persecution against Christians, starting in about 64 AD under the emperor Nero, and culminating in the great persecution under the emperor Diocletian lasting from 303–311 AD, during which Christians were killed in the arenas for amusement.

It wasn't until after Constantine became emperor and issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD that Christianity became legal and the persecutions stopped. This made it possible for church leaders to gather, such as during the Council of Nicaea, to work out issues in counsel together. We, as Christians today, can be thankful for such diligent men—the church fathers of those centuries, and men of faith in later centuries as well—for having the will and determination to work hard to find the language and terminology and to work through the theology, so that today we have a much greater understanding of the foundations of our faith.

THE CREATION OF HUMANKIND

In the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1, human beings were the last things created. The universe and everything in it—the sun, moon, stars, planets, oceans, land, animals, fish, and birds—were all created before human beings. The Bible states that God created Adam, the first man, and afterwards created Eve, the first woman.

HISTORICITY OF ADAM AND EVE

When it comes to the origins of humankind, Christianity is committed to the biblical teaching that God historically created the first man and woman. Without getting into what time frame God may have used in creating the world and mankind, the story of Adam and Eve's creation and existence isn't seen as being mythological or as a literary device. Rather, standard Christian understanding sees them as actual people who lived within the history of the world.

The Old Testament provides continuity and connectivity between Adam and the other Old Testament historical figures. It shows the connection between the generations of the first man and those who followed within Old Testament history. (It is likely that these genealogies do not include all the generations, but only the main or most important ones, meaning there may have been much more time and many more generations than the generations listed.) Genesis 5 gives the genealogy from Adam to Noah and his sons (Gen. 5:1–32). Luke 3 gives the genealogy from Adam to Jesus (Luke 3:23–38). In the New Testament it's clearly indicated that Adam is a historical figure.

” Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45)

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Tim. 2:13)

On the historicity of Adam and Eve, and that of the Genesis narrative, J. I. Packer offers the following insights:

” Though telling the story in a somewhat figurative style, Genesis asks us to read it as history; in Genesis, Adam is linked to the patriarchs and with them to the rest of mankind by genealogy (chapters 5, 10, 11), which makes him as much a part of the space-time history as were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ... Paul’s statement “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22) only makes explicit what Genesis already clearly implies.¹

The following verses speak specifically about the creation of man and woman, with the first ones from Genesis 1 giving an overview and those from Genesis 2 and 5 giving more specifics.

” Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” ... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26–27)

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Gen. 2:21–23)

When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and named them Man when they were created. (Gen. 5:1–2)

1. Packer, J. I. (1993, p. 81).

EQUALITY, PLURALITY, AND TERMINOLOGY

Man and woman, Adam and Eve, were created by God. They both were created in God's image and likeness, and once God created them, He named them together as Man. In times past it was common to use *man* or *mankind* when referring to the human race, both male and female. Today it is used less, with words such as *humankind* and *humanity* more commonly used so as to be gender neutral. Because of gender sensitivities, it is generally considered more appropriate in most cases to use *humanity* and *humankind* when writing or speaking. However, in most translations of the Bible, the terms *man* and *mankind* are used, based on the fact that God originally named humankind, both male and female, "man." Perhaps it was one way of God expressing equality of the sexes, even if they generally have different roles.

As explained in the chapters covering the Trinity, God exists as a plurality, three persons in one. When God created the first humans, male and female, He called them *man*. They were created with some degree of plurality. Similar to how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had loving interaction before the world was created (John 17:5, 24), God made Adam and Eve and their descendants able to love, communicate, and interact in marriage—where two persons, a man and a woman, become one flesh. He also made us able to have intricate personal relationships within families, as well as friendships and communities. These personal relationships show a similarity to the personal God having relationship within the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Theologian Wayne Grudem explains it this way:

” Interpersonal unity can be especially deep in the human family and also in our spiritual family, the church. Between men and women, interpersonal unity comes to its fullest expression in this age in marriage, where husband and wife become, in a sense, two persons in one: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and

cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). This unity is not only a physical unity; it is also a spiritual and emotional unity of profound dimensions. A husband and a wife joined together in marriage are people that “God has joined together” (Matt. 19:6).

There is some similarity here: just as there was fellowship and communication and sharing of glory among the members of the Trinity before the world was made (see John 17:5), so God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they would share love and communication and mutual giving of honor one to another in their interpersonal relationship. Of course, such reflection of the Trinity would come to expression in various ways within human society, but it would certainly exist from the beginning in the close interpersonal unity of marriage.²

This is an example of man having similarities to God and thus being made in the image and likeness of God. God making male and female equally in His image expresses the equality of the two genders. They are both equally human. Similar to how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally God in essence, male and female are equally human in essence. They are equal in personhood and equal in importance. Wayne Grudem expresses it this way:

” If we are equally in God’s image, then certainly men and women are equally important to God and equally valuable to Him. We have equal worth before Him for all eternity. The fact that both men and women are said by Scripture to be “in the image of God” should exclude all feelings of pride or inferiority and any idea that one sex is “better” or “worse” than the other. In particular, in contrast to many non-Christian cultures and religions, no one should feel proud or superior because he is a man, and no one should feel

2. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 454–455).

disappointed or inferior because she is a woman. If God thinks us to be equal in value, then that settles the question, for God's evaluation is the true standard of personal value for all eternity.³

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

The New Testament, while written from within a very male-dominant society, teaches the equality of women in relation to God. A primary example is the infilling of the Holy Spirit falling equally to men and women.

”

In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17–18)

When speaking of the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, both Paul and Peter point out that these gifts are given to “each,” showing that both genders were able to receive them (1 Cor. 12:11; 1 Pet. 4:10). Knowing and witnessing that the Spirit was poured out on all flesh, both male and female, makes it clear that “each” isn't referring only to men. It's evident that there were women with spiritual gifts in New Testament times.

”

On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. (Acts 21:8–9)

In His time on earth, Jesus made a point of breaking societal taboos that were unfavorable to women. He spoke with them in public;⁴ He spoke

3. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 456).

4. See Matt. 9:21–22, 15:21–28; Luke 13:11–13.

to the Samaritan woman alone (John 4:4–26); He approved of the woman who uncovered her hair and touched Him in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–44); He had women followers who traveled with Him and His disciples (Luke 8:1–3)—all of which were culturally unacceptable in Jewish society at the time.

Kenneth Bailey, author of *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, said the following about Jesus’ interaction with women.

” The woman [at the well] approached. On seeing her, Jesus was expected to courteously withdraw to a distance of at least twenty feet, indicating that it was both safe and culturally appropriate for her to approach the well. Jesus did not move when she approached.... Jesus asks for a drink ... He breaks the social taboo against talking to a woman, particularly in an uninhabited place with no witnesses ... In village society, a strange man does not even make eye contact with a woman in a public place ... Jesus not only talked to women, He invited women into His band of disciples, was financed by them, and some of them traveled with Him (Luke 8:1–3). The radical nature of the changes in the attitudes toward women that Jesus introduced are beyond description.⁵

Speaking of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet and dried them with her hair, Bailey wrote:

” He [Jesus] was expected to be embarrassed over the “touching” that He was receiving from the woman and shocked that she exposed her hair. Everyone in the room would assume that He would instinctively judge these acts as beyond the range of “acceptable behavior” and reject her ... But to the amazement of the entire assembled crowd, Jesus allowed the scene to proceed and accepted her gestures.⁶

5. Bailey, Kenneth E. (2008, pp. 202–203).

6. Bailey, Kenneth E. (2008, p. 250).

Paul makes the point about the equality of all people, including gender equality, within the church: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27–28). Christian author Amy Orr-Ewing offers the following observation in regard to Jesus’ acceptance of women and the role of women in the early church:

” In contrast to the cultural norms of the time, Jesus made a habit of revealing great theological truths to women. The first person who discovers Christ’s true identity in John’s Gospel is the Samaritan woman at the well. We must not underestimate how radical this is: Jesus was turning cultural taboos on their heads by teaching women and allowing women to be His disciples. In reality, it is clear that women played a full and vibrant role in the ministry of Jesus, both as examples within His teaching and as recipients of it.

While this may seem absolutely right and proper in our 21st-century context, we must remember how radical this was in first-century Palestine. Jesus intentionally affirmed and included women. We see a continuation of this in the early church, from Lydia and Tabitha to Philip’s daughters, where women undertook various roles. While it is true to say that there are two particular passages in Paul’s writings which seem to go against all of this, by commanding some women to be silent and forbidding others from teaching, these must be read and interpreted in the context of the rest of the Bible. Paul himself gives guidelines for women when they publicly prophesy and mentions women who do teach like Priscilla [1 Cor. 11:4–5; Acts 18:24–26].⁷

James Leo Garrett expresses the worth and status of women in the Bible in this manner:

7. Orr-Ewing, Amy. “Isn’t the Bible Sexist?” 2017.

”

Although both Old and New Testaments are set in the context of patriarchal societies with strong emphasis on male dominance, the Bible affords no little evidence of the significance of women in salvation history. In the Old Testament, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther had leadership roles. Jesus' attitude toward women may be seen in reference to the adulterous Samaritan woman, the woman with a hemorrhage, the Syro-Phoenician woman, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. The response of women to Jesus may be seen in Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna. Paul recognized such women as Phoebe and Priscilla as leaders.⁸

DIFFERENT ROLES

As explained in Chapter 14 on the Trinity, while the three Persons of the Trinity are all equally God, in essence they each have different roles and functions within the Godhead. The difference in roles doesn't negate the equality, the divinity, or the personhood of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. Man and woman, though equally made in the image of God and equal in personhood and essence, also have different roles according to Scripture. In the verses about the creation of woman, the concept of different roles is expressed.

”

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen. 2:18)

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen. 2:21–24)

8. Garrett Jr., James Leo (2000, p. 494).

Though Eve was created later than Adam, God stated that man *and* woman were made in His image. When woman was created, God was making a helper that was fit for man. This is seen as the first indication that there are differences in the role of man and woman, with man being in the leadership role. This designation of woman being a helper to her husband and man having a leadership role was made prior to the fall, as opposed to something which happened after the fall. While there are some changes which came about in the application of these roles because of the fall, the difference in roles was stated before sin entered the picture.

Other indications of a difference in roles is that Adam was created first; Adam was given the responsibility to name the animals, and also was the one to call Eve “woman”; God spoke to Adam first after they both had sinned; Adam is seen as being the representative for humanity. These indicate that Adam is given a place of leadership, similar to how God the Father has leadership within the Trinity. This place of leadership doesn’t take away the equality insofar as the humanity, the value, the worth, or the goodness of each gender or individual; it rather expresses a difference in role. While one has a certain God-given authority within the relational role, they are equal in being and in essence, equally important and significant.

In the Epistles Paul states: “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). Similar to how God the Father is the head of, or has authority over, the Son, so man is the head of his wife. There is a distinction in authority between husband and wife, with the husband being the head in the marriage and family. Along with this headship comes the husband’s responsibility for the care, nurture, provision and protection of his wife and family.

While the Bible states the headship of man in a marriage, it doesn’t state that men are to have authority over women in all areas of interaction. Clearly there are examples in both the Old and New Testaments of wom-

en in leadership roles outside of their marriages, the inference being that there are times when women lead or have authority over men. However, in marriage the role of the man is as the head of the family.

While there was a difference in roles between Adam and Eve, harmony is inferred in the relationship, similar to how there is harmony and love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Authors Lewis and Demarest express it like this:

” Prior to the Fall Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with their Creator and Sustainer. Apparently it was common for them to consciously encounter their Maker morning and evening (Gen. 3:8). The first pair enjoyed also faithful loving relationships with each other. No evidence of suspicion, envy, jealousy or hatred occurred before the Fall. Male and female were like God in having mutual relations of respect, love, and trust.⁹

When Adam and Eve sinned, the difference in roles didn't change, but the harmonious interaction did, as God expressed it would when He said that woman's desire would be “for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). The expression “your desire shall be for your husband” has been widely accepted to mean the woman's desire to conquer her husband or to rebel against his leadership within the marriage, or to take the leadership role from him, and in doing so bring disunity or conflict within the relationship. In stating that the husband “shall rule over you,” the understanding is that the husband would misuse his authority to rule dictatorially over the wife, bringing conflict into the relationship. Wayne Grudem explains:

” Concerning Adam, God told Eve, “He shall rule over you.” Here the word “rule” (Hebrew: *mashal*) is a strong term usually used of monarchical governments, not generally of authority within a fam-

9. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, p. 206).

ily. The word does not imply any “participatory” government by those who are ruled, but rather has nuances of dictatorial or absolute, uncaring use of authority, rather than considerate, thoughtful rule. It suggests harshness rather than kindness. The sense here is that Adam will misuse his authority by ruling harshly over his wife, again introducing pain and conflict into a relationship that was previously harmonious. It’s not that Adam had no authority before the fall; it is simply that he will misuse it after the fall. So in both cases, the curse brought a distortion of Adam’s humble, considerate leadership and Eve’s intelligent, willing submission to that leadership which existed before the fall.¹⁰

The New Testament tells Christian men to not be harsh with their wives and tells wives to submit to their husbands. “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them” (Col. 3:18–19). The inference is that though the consequences of sin brought conflict in the relationship between the first husband and wife, and subsequently to all married couples, Christians should act more like the pre-fall Adam and Eve within their marriage. When Scripture tells women to submit to their husbands and men not to be harsh with their wives, it is directing them away from the consequences of sin and toward love and harmony in the marriage. Salvation, being a new creature, regeneration, and growing in one’s faith should result in growth toward being more Christlike, reflecting more of the image of God.

UNITY IN MARRIAGE

The union of a man and woman in marriage makes them a team, and in order for a team to succeed, they must work together in unity, with each person playing their role properly. Every team needs a head or captain. According to Scripture, the husband is the captain in a marriage. But the man being the captain doesn’t negate the necessity for the team to work

10. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 464).

together in unity. The captain of the team isn't meant to be a dictator who never listens to or takes the advice of other members of the team. The team is meant to work together in unity, and so is the marriage.

If husbands are being harsh and dictatorial, or if wives are attempting to rule the marriage, they should recognize that these attitudes and behaviors are in alignment with fallen humanity. And as new creatures in Christ, we are meant to be transformed more into His image, and thus to reflect Him in our relationships. "We all ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

God made man and woman in His image and likeness. That image and likeness still exists, though marred by sin. In God's eyes, men and women are equal. In marriage, men are given the role of headship; however, there is equality of the genders in value and personhood. As Christians, in marriage we should strive to be a union of two equal human beings fulfilling the roles He has given us to play in harmony, mutual understanding, and love one for another, as exemplified by the unity within the Trinity of God.

CHAPTER 17

MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ ... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him” (Gen. 1:26–27). As these verses state, human beings (male and female) are created in the image and likeness of God. In saying this, God was saying that He was going to create beings that were *like* Him. He wasn’t saying that humans would be *exactly* like Him or that those He was about to create would be divine like He is, but rather that human beings would possess some similarities to God.

The Hebrew word used for image is *tselem*, which means a likeness, semblance, or image. Another meaning of image would be something that represents something. The Hebrew word translated as likeness, *děmuwth*, means similar, in the likeness of, like as. These two Hebrew words are virtually synonymous. So in speaking about the kind of creature He was going to make, God said He would make humans similar to Himself, in the way that an image is like the original, but is neither the original nor exactly the same as it.

The words *děmuwth* (likeness) and *tselem* (image) are both used in the following verse: “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (Gen. 5:3). The meaning here is that Seth, while not exactly like his father, was like him in many ways. This is often the case between a parent and child. This verse helps give a good understanding of what image and likeness to God means. Wayne Grudem expresses it this way:

” It is evident that every way in which Seth was like Adam would be a part of his likeness to Adam and thus part of his being “in the

image” of Adam. Similarly, every way in which man is like God is part of his being in the image and likeness of God.¹

Human beings were made to have similarities to God. Even though Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from God, and through sin all of humanity is separated from God, this hasn't caused the image and likeness to be completely lost. After destroying all humanity, except for Noah and his family, in the flood, God reiterated that humans are made in His image (Gen. 9:6). In the New Testament, reference is also made to people being in God's image (Jam. 3:9).

While humans are still in the image and likeness of God, it's not exactly the same as it was before the fall. Prior to the fall Adam and Eve were pure and were *posse non peccare*, a theological term meaning *able not to sin*. While they could choose to sin, they could also choose not to sin, and thus to remain sinless. After the fall they were different. Their moral purity was gone, and the desire and ability to stay aligned with God's will was distorted. Their ability to not sin and thus remain sinless was no longer there, as from that point on they, and all of subsequent humanity, were *non posse non peccare*, meaning *not able not to sin*. From that point on, humans were sinners by nature, and while they can refrain from sinning sometimes, by nature they sin and don't have the ability to not sin. Though we are still in the image of God, that image has become altered due to sin.

The *original* human nature was that of pre-fallen man, but human nature ever since the fall has been corrupted by the effects of sin. Thankfully, as Christians, we can counter some of the effects of our fallen nature through believing, abiding in, absorbing, and applying God's Word; and at the time of the resurrection of the dead, when Christians are raised in glory and reunited with their bodies, we will be freed from the effects of our fallen human nature.

1. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 444).

ARE “IMAGE” AND “LIKENESS” THE SAME?

Throughout Christian history there have been different points of view as to what the image and likeness of God mean. Some of the early Church Fathers felt that image (*tselem*) and likeness (*dēmuwth*) represented two distinct things. Some felt that image had to do with bodily traits, and likeness was found in the spiritual nature of man. Others taught that image had to do with the characteristics of man as man, and likeness had to do with qualities which are not essential to man. Others felt image was the ability to reason and likeness was original righteousness.² Some felt that image was the rational mind and free will, which humans retained after the fall, while the likeness was a special gift of righteousness which was lost because of sin.

Roman Catholics today make a distinction between image and likeness, with the image being reason and free will, and the likeness the added endowment of righteousness.³ They believe the image, the rational mind, and free will, were untarnished by the fall, but the likeness, the additional righteousness, was lost; yet is restored by baptism. Martin Luther took a different view, teaching that both the image and likeness were lost when man sinned. He taught that intellect and will remained but are impaired. John Calvin felt that the pre-fallen Adam was righteous and had true holiness, that it wasn't an additional gift, and that image mainly referred to the mind and heart. He claimed that the image was destroyed and obliterated by the fall, though there were remaining traces of it in humankind. But in his view, even this remnant was maimed and completely polluted.⁴

The majority of theologians today believe that the image and likeness don't refer to separate things but are synonymous and can be used interchangeably; the use of both words is an instance of synonymous Hebrew parallel-

2. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 202).

3. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, pp. 124–125).

4. Garrett, Jr., James Leo (2000, p. 459).

ism.⁵ This is a literary technique of using synonyms to strengthen the point being made, which is used many times throughout the Old Testament. While different theories regarding the image and likeness and exactly what they mean have been put forth over the centuries, there is no place in Scripture where God specifically states in which exact ways humans are made in His image and likeness. It seems that, as Wayne Grudem expressed above, it's best to consider that *every way in which man is like God is part of his being in the image and likeness of God.*

HUMANITY'S UNIQUE FEATURES

As humans are the only creatures that God states are made in His image and likeness, this makes humans significantly different from all of the animal creation. While animals might have some elements of these features, or have them to some degree, man has them in a qualitatively greater fashion. Following are some of the ways we can see that humans have similarities with God which His other earthly creations don't have or don't have to the same degree.

- As God is a plural being in the Trinity, in a similar fashion, human beings reflect some of that plurality in that man and woman are two which become one flesh in marriage.
- Humans are personal beings. We interact and establish deep and complex relationships with others.
- God is spirit; human beings have a spirit.
- We have self-awareness; we are conscious of ourselves, of our own existence. We can know, examine, and judge ourselves.⁶
- We possess free will and self-determination. We have the ability to choose among options, and having decided on an option, we can move toward achieving that goal.
- We are moral beings and have an inner sense of right and wrong.

5. Garrett, Jr., James Leo (2000, p. 153).

6. Lewis, and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, p. 150).

- Our immaterial invisible spirits are immortal. God has always existed and immortality is part of His essence, and being in His likeness (though not exactly like Him), the spirits of human beings are immortal in that they live forever after their separation from the body at death.
- We are rational creatures with the ability to think logically, to reason, to be aware of the past, present, and future.
- We are creative. While we don't create to the degree that God does, we possess creativity of ideas and thought and thus can "create" new music, art, or literature. We can think of new ideas and possibilities and bring them into being.
- We use complex language to communicate.
- We experience a wide range of emotions. Some 'soulish' animals show a few emotions, but the variety of emotions in humans far surpasses them.

There are other ways in which God's image and likeness are manifest within humankind, but these are some of the most significant.

ORIGINAL GOODNESS

The Bible says that when God completed creation He stated that everything He made was *very* good (Gen. 1:31). This included Adam and Eve. It also says that man was made upright (Eccl. 7:29). The New Testament makes reference to God's image and likeness as having to do with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This would indicate that part of the nature of the first two humans, *before* the fall, would include some elements of "knowledge, true righteousness, and holiness."⁷

”

Now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have

7. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 204).

put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Col. 3:8–10)

To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22–24)

Having been created *very good*, with elements of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, would mean that Adam and Eve were not created in a state of innocence with moral neutrality, but rather were created morally upright. From the time they were created until the time they sinned, Adam and Eve were capable of not committing sin. It's not possible to know how long they were in this state before sinning. What is known is that their firstborn Cain and their second son Abel were born after they sinned.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they continued to be in the image and likeness of God; however, they were not as fully like God as they had been. They were no longer morally upright as they once had been, because they had chosen to disobey God's command. It corrupted the original human nature. It also changed their relationship with God, as they were sent away from Eden and blocked from returning "lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22–23). Along with this, physical death entered into humanity. God telling them that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would surely die (Gen. 2:16–17) implies that if they didn't eat of it, they wouldn't have died. Exactly how that would have happened, Scripture doesn't tell us, but it does express that death entered humanity due to sin.

” By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:19)

Louis Berkhof expressed it this way: “Man, as he was created by God, did not bear within him the seeds of death and would not have died necessarily in virtue of the original constitution of his nature.”⁸ J. Rodman Williams explains:

” Let us be quite clear. Physical death is by no means portrayed as the “natural” issue of man’s existence. “Returning to dust” is not the result of man’s being human and finite, rather it is the result of finite man’s failure to partake of God’s own self-offering and instead to seek his own prideful ends.⁹

GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

Adam and Eve sinning brought changes in humanity of epic proportions. The consequences of their sin brought a separation between God and humankind. It caused a distortion and degradation within the image of God in man so that man was no longer morally pure, causing them to live in a state of sinfulness, no longer having the ability to not sin. Thus God’s Word says that “all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). While the human spirit lives beyond the death of the physical body, the body returns to dust, in accordance with God’s judgment for sin.

The consequences of sin among humanity are deeply connected to God’s plan of salvation. In Jesus’ incarnation, death, resurrection, and return, these consequences are overcome. His death and resurrection have brought about the salvation of our souls, meaning that the sins of humanity have been atoned for by Christ and that atonement is available to all who accept Him. The separation between God and the believer is no longer there, as Jesus’ death has brought reconciliation between God and those who have received His Son (Rom. 5:10–11).

8. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 209).

9. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, Vol. 1, p. 259).

”

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:17–19)

You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him. (Col. 1:21–22)

While all the bodies of believers die, at Jesus' return their bodies will rise from the dead (the bodies of those believers who are alive at that time will be immediately changed), and their spirits will be joined with their resurrection bodies, and their rejoined bodies and spirits will live forever (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

”

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:51–54)

Through God's love, grace, and mercy, manifest in Jesus' death and resurrection, humans have been given the opportunity to overcome all of the effects of their sins and fallen nature. Physical death will be defeated as we rise from the dead and receive resurrected, imperishable bodies. The spiritual separation caused by sin will be gone and fellowship with God will be fully restored. Instead of being like the first man, the man of dust, Adam, we will be like the man from heaven, Jesus, and will bear His image.

”

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (1 Cor. 15:47)

We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor. 15:49)

HUMAN VALUE

Knowing that we as individuals, and all human beings, are made in God's image, what does that mean in our everyday lives? Is it significant? Should it affect our thinking and actions? The simple answer is yes, it should. Being the only created thing that God said is made in His image and likeness shows that human beings are special in God's eyes. The Bible states that humankind is at the pinnacle of physical creation and that God put man in place to rule and take care of the earth.

”

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (Psa. 8:4–8.)

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:27–28)

God has made humans to be different from all other physical creatures. He has placed them above the other creatures and has made them distinct. Let's take a look at what being in the image of God tells us about ourselves.

INTRINSIC WORTH

The primary thing is that we, as people, have value to God. While He created us along with all other things, He made us different from all other created things by making us in His image. He created us as unique beings and intimately breathed life into us. “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen. 2:7).

German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer states:

” The Bible expresses the essential difference between this work and all God’s previous creative activity by the way in which it introduces this work. The Hebrew plural here indicates the significance and sublimity of the Creator’s action. It is also to be noted, however, that God does not simply call humankind forth out of nonbeing, as God called forth everything else; instead we are taken up into God’s own planning, as it were, and thereby become aware that something new, something that has not yet been, something altogether original, is about to happen. And God said: “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness.” Humankind is to go forth from God as the last work, as the new work, as the image of God in God’s work. There is no transition from somewhere else here; here there is new creation.¹⁰

He made us personal beings, able to enter a relationship with Him and other humans. He made us a combined physical and spiritual being by giving us body and spirit. And even though all humans have sinned against Him, He loves us so much that He made a way for humanity to become reconciled with Him through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. God loves His image-bearing creatures, and He values us.

10. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1997, pp. 61–62).

Because God values human beings, each has intrinsic, essential value. This should cause *us* to value each human being. All humans, no matter what their gender, race, skin tone, or creed, are created equal. Each person bears God's image and should be respected and treated as such. Neither one's place nor one's value in society diminishes a person's intrinsic value. Authors Lewis and Demarest put it this way:

” Each person is of inestimable temporal and eternal value and significance. Persons have this inward worth inalienably as creatures of God made in the image of God. Their value goes far beyond that of their amazing bodies or that of being the highest animal on earth. Their value is not diminished when for some reason and for some time they are not useful to society in the form of their family, church or nation. Every living human being is of intrinsic worth—poor or rich, female or male, educated or not, lighter or darker—because he or she is an endlessly existing active spiritual person like God.¹¹

Newborns, children, the elderly, the infirm, the disabled, the mentally retarded, the unborn, the hungry, widows, and prisoners, those you disagree with, even enemies—every human being, no matter what their condition, circumstance, or religious belief—has the dignity of being God's image bearer, and deserves—and should be granted—equal honor and respect by all other human beings. Seeing others as God's image bearers should rid us of racial, religious, and all other prejudices. It should cause us, as individuals, to view and treat others with respect, regardless of our differences.

It should also cause us to look at *ourselves* with respect and dignity. To realize that God loves and values us should help us to value ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually. It should cause us to view ourselves positively, to take care of ourselves physically, to nurture our spirits with positive and godly input. It should remind us of the sanctity of our own lives, thus

11. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, p. 172).

keeping us from harming ourselves in any way. We should recognize that despite any personal weaknesses or failures, how we may perceive our own worth, how we view our physical appearance or our education or mental abilities, we are valued by God and thus should value ourselves.

Realizing that God values human beings, that He loves and cares for us, should cause us to value humanity, to recognize the worth of every person, ourselves included, and to do what we can to live in harmony and peace with others. In short, we should love and care for our neighbor, because God does.

Besides loving and caring about others and caring for ourselves, we should understand that as those given dominion over the earth, we are responsible to care for and use its resources wisely. When God created the earth and all that is in it, He said it was good. He then told man to be in charge of it, to take care of it. It is up to us, as those given dominion over this good earth, to be good stewards of the environment, to wisely and judiciously and equitably use its resources for the benefit of humankind. We are to value the earth as part of God's creation, and not to greedily exploit it or otherwise damage, endanger, or destroy it.

SALVATION AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

We've seen that sin brought separation from God and that it has brought a serious deterioration in His image and likeness within humankind. Sin has negatively affected our conscience, our ability to do God's will, our desire to align our will with God's, our thought processes, our decision making, our motives, etc. God's Word says that because sin entered humanity, we are slaves to it. Clearly we are a long way off from the pre-fall Adam and Eve, when they were morally upright with elements of righteousness, knowledge, holiness, and the ability to not sin.

Through salvation, we are spiritually born again. It makes us new creatures in Christ, and this greatly affects our lives. To begin with, it brings us into

God's family, it brings forgiveness of sin, it takes away the guilt of our sin, it means we will live with God for eternity, in spirit when we die and in body and spirit after Jesus returns. Salvation breaks the bondage of sin; and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, God living in us, makes it possible for us to grow into greater likeness of Christ. Jesus was the image of God on earth, and as we become more like Him, we grow in the image and likeness of God.

” He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Col. 1:13–15)

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor. 15:47–49)

Growing in Christ's image is a progressive growth which comes over time, in degrees, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

” We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Even though as Christians we still sin, salvation sets us free from the *dominion* that sin has over us. We become dead to sin, in that we have the power to overcome acts or patterns of sinful behavior (Rom. 6:11–22).¹² Salvation doesn't make us sinless, but as we grow in our Christian life and walk with the Lord—a process called *sanctification* in theology—we are

12. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 747).

better able to not sin. In this lifetime no one can reach a state of sinless perfection, as sin will not be entirely eradicated. Sanctification, or growth in our walk with the Lord, is a process in which regenerate persons, depending on God's help, work toward spiritual growth, obedience to and application of God's Word in their lives.¹³ As we spiritually grow, we can progressively transform more into the likeness of God. As we grow and mature in our faith, we exhibit more of the fruit of God's Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22–23).

Maturing in our spiritual lives and walk with the Lord is something Scripture says is a goal of Christians (Eph. 4:11–15). As Christians who grow in our faith, we can be more like Jesus, and thus exhibit more of the image and likeness of God in which we are made. As His image bearers, we should strive to become more like Him. As His witnesses we should reflect Him, so that others will see Him in us and thus want to come to know Him.

” Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16)

13. Packer, J. I. (1993, p. 170).

CHAPTER 18

WHY HUMANITY?

In these chapters about humanity, we have seen that God created unique beings on this earth—beings that were made in His image and likeness. We've seen that human beings have many similarities to God: they have a spirit, are personal, have rational minds, free will, and creativity. God intimately breathed life into us. Humans were made a little lower than the angels, and were given dominion over the earth. We are certainly a special creation, as shown not only by how uniquely God made us but also by the fact that He sent His Son to die for us so that we can be reconciled to Him and live with Him forever.

MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL

The Bible teaches that human beings consist of a material element and an immaterial element that together form the unity of a human being. The material element (the body) and the immaterial element (the soul or spirit) combine to constitute a complete human being. Both our body and our soul inherently make up who we are, and after a period of separation, between our deaths and when Jesus returns, they will be reunited forever. Not everyone agrees that our souls continue living after we die, so it is helpful to understand the Bible's premise regarding our physical and spiritual elements.

According to Scripture the spirit (or soul)—the immaterial element—is distinct from the physical body. After the body dies, the spirit continues to carry on, consciously acting and relating to God apart from the physical body.¹ While dying on the cross, Jesus told the thief being crucified next to Him that on that day he would be with Jesus in paradise. Knowing that physical death was imminent, Jesus referred to the continuation of the im-

1. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 483).

material (soul/spirit) in nonphysical life (Luke 23:42–43). The apostle Paul speaks of a choice between living in the flesh or departing and being with Christ, showing his belief that he would continue on with the Lord even without his physical body.

”

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. (Phil. 1:21–24)

DIFFERING OUTLOOKS

It is generally standard Christian belief that humans are composed of material and immaterial elements. There are differing outlooks within that basic principle regarding whether humans consist of *one* material element (the body) and *one* immaterial element (which is interchangeably called soul or spirit), or whether humans consist of the body and *two* immaterial parts—the soul and the spirit, distinct from each other. The theological term for humans consisting of *two* elements, body and spirit/soul, is *dichotomy*, which comes from two Greek words: *dicha*, meaning in two or asunder, and *tomos*, meaning cutting. The belief that humans consist of three elements is referred to as *trichotomy*. Either of these views fits within Christianity, as each holds that human beings are composed of both physical and spiritual elements which act together. Dichotomy is a much more widely held view within Christianity, but there are many who hold to trichotomy.

Another outlook on the human makeup is the belief that humans cannot exist without the physical body. This stance holds that there is no life outside of the physical, and that man consists of only the physical element; that there is no soul or spirit, that humans are monistic or unitary, a single entity with no immaterial element. When the body dies, all life is extinguished. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists believe this, and

both believe that all wicked human beings will be utterly or completely annihilated at death or immediately after being resurrected and will cease to exist.²

This unitary or monistic point of view gained some popularity in the early 1900s among some theologians. Those who hold to this point of view believe that the body can be resurrected and can become alive again at that point, but that there is no soul or spirit which lives in the period of time between the death of the body and the resurrection of the body. The New Testament makes many references, however, to the spirit or soul living beyond the death of the body. Here are some examples of that concept as portrayed in the Bible:

” Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” And having said this He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)

As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (Acts 7:59)

As her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. (Gen. 35:18)

Both the dichotomous and trichotomous views are compatible with standard Christian belief. Both positions hold that humans have physical and spiritual elements (though they disagree on the number of elements), and both agree that the spiritual and physical elements work as one, in unity, so that everything a person does—every action, mental or physical—is done by the whole person; in other words, physical and spiritual elements are present in each action. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig give the following explanation of this belief:

2. Garrett, Jr., James Leo (2000, p .512).

”

It is virtually self-evident to most people that they are different from their bodies. Almost all societies throughout history (unless they are taught to think otherwise) have believed in some form of life after death, and this belief arises naturally when a human being reflects on his or her own constitution. Moreover, throughout church history, the vast majority of Christian thinkers have correctly understood the Scriptures to teach the following: (1) Human beings exhibit a holistic functional unity. (2) While a functional unity, humans are nevertheless a duality of immaterial soul/spirit and material body, both of which are intrinsically good. Setting aside the question as to whether the soul and spirit are the same or different, and acknowledging that the biblical terms for soul (nephesh, psyche) and spirit (ruach, pneuma) have a wide variety of different meanings, it is still clear that the Scriptures teach that the soul/spirit is an immaterial component different from the body (Eccl. 12:7; Matt. 10:28), that death involves the soul's leaving the body (Gen. 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21, 22), and that after death, the soul continues to exist in a disembodied intermediate state while awaiting the resurrection of the body (Heb. 12:23; Luke 23:46; 2 Cor. 5:1–10, Phil. 1:21–24).³

THE UNITY OF A HUMAN BEING

The core concept is that human beings have physical and spiritual elements: body and soul/spirit—which are a unity and act as one being. When the mind thinks, the spirit and brain (which is part of the physical body) work together as one; when the body moves, it is the spirit, brain, and body working together. Each element can also affect the other, such as how the spirit can be willing but the body can be weak and tired and thus weigh down the spirit (Matt. 26:41). Another example is a joyful heart being good medicine for the body, but a crushed spirit “drying up the bones” (Prov. 17:22). Both the material and spiri-

3. Moreland and Craig (2003, pp. 228–229).

tual function together in all of our actions, because body and soul are a unity.

Because each of these elements is integral to our being, we should not look at one of the elements as good and the other as bad, that our physical bodies are inherently negative and our spirits are good. The idea that our bodies are essentially evil crept into Christian thought in the earlier centuries of Christianity, which resulted in ascetic movements with followers who would starve, deprive, and beat their bodies in order to be more spiritual. Our bodies are not inherently evil. As Christians, our body and spirit are both redeemed through Christ.

When we die, our bodies do not continue living, but our souls do. And yet, that isn't the end of our bodies, for after a time of separation, during which our spirits continue living, our changed incorruptible bodies and our spirits will be reunited at the Lord's return, and will remain together forever.

” So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:42–44)

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:51–54)

WHY HUMANS?

When thinking about humans being made in God's image, we can understand King David's awe when he said, “I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well” (Psa. 139:14). As we are rational beings, one question that naturally arises

in the mind of man is *why* God made such unique beings as humans. Why were we created, and what is our purpose?

Scripture doesn't say much about why God created humans, but what it says is as simple as it is profound. It says that God created humankind for His glory. "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa. 43:7). That simple statement tells us that our lives are meant to glorify God. The *Westminster Catechism* asks the question: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." J. I. Packer offers the following commentary on the preceding quotation:

” We must recognize that He is at the heart of things and that we exist for His glory; that is to say, we exist for Him, not He for us. And it is only as we set ourselves to glorify Him as the one who supremely matters that we are going to enter into the joy and fulfillment which being a Christian brings.⁴

In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, John Calvin wrote:

” Master: What is the chief end of human life?
 Scholar: To know God by whom men were created.
 Master: What reason have you for saying so?
 Scholar: Because He created us and placed us in this world to be glorified in us. And it is indeed right that our life, of which Himself is the beginning, should be devoted to His glory.

In referring to God's final creation of humankind, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses the purpose of this creative act:

” Humankind is here the final work of God's self-glorification. The world is created for God, for God's honor alone, and humankind

4. Ascol, Tom (1994).

is the most precious receptacle, the very mirror of the Creator. It is totally for the sake of God's glory and honor as Creator that everything comes to pass.⁵

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GLORIFY GOD?

There are two general ways in which the word *glory* is used in the Bible. One is in regard to God's intrinsic glory, which is the bright light that surrounds His presence as He manifests Himself in His creation. This is used as an outward expression of His excellence.⁶ J. Rodman Williams expressed it as follows:

” What then is the glory of God? Perhaps the best answer is that the divine glory is the radiant splendor and awesome majesty of God Himself ... the effulgence [radiating brilliant light] of splendor and majesty that shines through in every aspect of God's being and action ... In regards to God's being, the glory of God is like an aureole [aura or atmosphere of splendor] emanating from and surrounding Him.⁷

This light is expressed in both the Old and New Testaments.

” Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. (Psa. 104:1–2)

The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light. (Isa. 60:19–20)

5. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1997, p. 72).

6. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 221).

7. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 180).

The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Rev. 21:23)

This light of God's glory is glory that belongs to God alone. "My glory I will not give to another" (Isa. 48:11).

TWO MEANINGS OF GLORY

The main Hebrew words translated as *glory* in the Old Testament mean honor, abundance, dignity, worth, reverence, to shine, to flash forth light, majesty, splendor, and beauty. In the New Testament, the main word translated as glory in reference to God is *doxa*, which means splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence, preeminence, dignity, majesty, a thing belonging to God, the kingly majesty which belongs to Him as supreme ruler, majesty in the sense of the absolute perfection of the deity, the absolute perfect inward or personal excellency of Christ, a most glorious condition, a most exalted state.

The second general way glory is used means honor or excellent reputation.⁸ When used in this way, it isn't speaking about God's intrinsic glory, but rather describes the honor which should be given *to* God. It's in this sense that glory is used when speaking of humans being created to glorify God. The Word says that whatever we do, we should do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). It also instructs us to glorify God in our body and in our spirit (1 Cor. 6:20).

The human essence consists of the material and immaterial, which together make up the complete person. When Scripture tells us that we should glorify God in body and spirit, it can be seen as guidance to glorify Him with *all* of our being—both inner and outer, physically and spiritually—in all that we do and are. It means that the actions of our life, our interactions with others, as well as all aspects of our inner or spiritual

8. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 200).

life and self, should glorify Him. What are some of the ways we can do this?

GLORIFYING GOD IN OUR INNER LIVES

In our inner lives we can be deeply aware of God and all that He is and has done. We can remember His attributes, His power, and His love. We can look at the incredible creation and its beauty and magnificence. We can deeply appreciate the goodness He has shown to all people and recognize that He loves each person. We can be in awe of the grace and mercy He has bestowed upon us through salvation. We can rejoice that we are adopted into His family through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. We can be profoundly humbled that the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

We can understand that He is personal and has created us to be personal as well and thus able to have a relationship with Him. We can consistently nurture and strengthen that relationship. We can love Him, express our gratitude, communicate with Him in prayer, and listen to Him through the various ways in which He communicates with us.

We can praise Him. The Hebrew and Greek words translated as praise are, by their definitions, essentially telling us to give God the praise which is demanded by His qualities, deeds, and attributes; bless, adore; give thanksgiving, appreciation, and commendation. We can regularly express our admiration, gratitude, awe, appreciation, and love, as we come before Him in humility realizing what an awesome, wonderful, and loving God He is.

We can realize that God has told us about Himself through His Word—that He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's told us what He's like, what He's done, how to be reconciled with Him, how to receive Him, how to have His Spirit dwell in us. Through His Word He's shown us how to know and love Him, how to trust Him, what pleases Him. He's expressed His love, His faithfulness, His care for us. We can therefore know Him,

love Him, rely on Him, and confidently believe in, trust, and obey His Word.

In our inner lives, in our spirits, we can glorify God by always remembering that He is God, and what that means.—That He is the Supreme Being who has made us, who knows everything about us and everything else; and who, as majestic as He is, loves us and wants to have a personal relationship with us. When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, or looked at in different words, what is the most important thing that humans are supposed to do in our lives, He said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

We are to love God, and thus glorify Him, from within our inward being, with our soul/spirit, with our rational minds, and with all that is within us. As Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote:

” We must love God with all our hearts, must look upon Him as the best of beings, in Himself most amiable, and infinitely perfect and excellent; as One whom we lie under the greatest obligations to, both in gratitude and interest.⁹

J. I. Packer in referring to our glorifying God says: “The to-and-fro of seeing glory in God and giving glory to God is the true fulfillment of human nature at its heart, and it brings supreme joy to man just as it does to God (Zeph. 3:14–17).”¹⁰

GLORIFYING GOD IN OUR ACTIONS

In our *outer* life we can glorify God in our actions. We glorify Him when we follow what His Word tells us to do, when we live in accordance with it, and

9. Henry, Matthew (1706, p. 226).

10. Packer, J. I. (1993, p. 59).

put biblical principles into everyday action. Because we are personal beings who have a relationship with God, we can also follow Him by seeking His direction in prayer and doing those things He shows us. Each of us is different, and the Lord can give guidance that is specific to our life. We show Him honor when we ask Him to lead us and when we follow His leading by faith.

We bring glory to God when we live our lives in a manner which reflects God's love and the principles of His Word. His Word instructs us to let our lights shine before others, so that they can see what we do and how we live, feel God's love, and glorify Him because of it. Our godly interactions with others, our living in alignment with the instructions and principles of His Word, are seen by others and can affect them for good. We also glorify the Lord before others when we witness, when we tell our personal testimony, when we speak of how He has worked in our lives and hearts, when we give out literature or teach or by any means inform people about God and His love for them. We glorify Him when we help those in need, the widows and orphans, the needy, the poor—when we give of ourselves in any way that reflects God's love and concern for others.

When we pray and ask Him for help for ourselves or others, when we claim His promises and stand on them, when we seek His guidance, we are giving Him glory. We are acknowledging our belief in His care and concern for us, in the truth of His Word, and in the dependability of His promises. We acknowledge our need and declare, through our prayers, that we trust that He will both hear and answer them. When we confess our sins to Him, we honor Him by acknowledging that we have done wrong and are in need of His forgiveness.

We glorify God when we love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:37–40); when we do to others as we'd have them do to us (Matt. 7:12); when we love in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18); and when we love, obey, and revere God and do the things He says, for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13). "All life activities, too, must be pursued with the aim

of giving God homage, honor, and pleasure, which is glory-giving on the practical level (1 Cor. 10:31).¹¹

When we understand that God created us to glorify Him, it should help us to do our best to live in a manner which brings Him glory. Living a God-glorifying life, however, isn't a one-way street, with all the benefits going to Him. There are blessings received in this life and in the life to come for those who live to glorify Him.

” The one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jam. 1:25)

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. (Psa. 128:1–2)

Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt. 6:6)

As Christians who understand that the Lord desires us to live lives which glorify Him, which will be blessed by Him and will bless others, we have the opportunity to fulfill the purpose of our Creator in this life, and to live with Him forever in joy and happiness, always being able to give Him the glory He deserves.

” Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created. (Rev. 4:11)

11. Packer, J. I. (1993, p. 60).

WHAT IS SIN?

Sin is an important topic, since it affects the life of every human being and is what has caused the separation of humans from God. Thankfully, God, in His love and mercy, has made salvation from sin available to humanity through Jesus' suffering and death.

As Christians, it is important for us to understand the various aspects and effects of sin in our personal lives as well as in the lives of others we are trying to reach and help; also, it motivates us to bring the good news of salvation from sin to those who haven't yet received it. It also helps us to better understand and explain to others why evil things happen in our world, and the origin of many of the problems and suffering humankind faces today. Having a fuller picture of sin helps us to better understand and communicate to others the need for and importance of salvation, while bringing about a deeper appreciation for our own salvation and what we've been saved from. While we've been blessed with redemption, for those who reject salvation, the effects of sin will have serious long-term consequences, not just in this life but in the life to come.

Christian philosopher Rufus M. Jones offers the following exposition of sin:

” Sin is no abstract dogma. It is not a debt which somebody can pay and so wash off the slate. Sin is a fact within our lives. It is a condition of heart and will. There is no sin apart from a sinner. Wherever sin exists there is a conscious deviation from a standard, a sag of the nature, and it produces an effect upon the entire personality. The person who sins disobeys a sense of right. He falls below his vision of the good. He sees a path, but he does not walk in it. He hears a voice, but he says “no” instead of “yes.” He is aware of a higher self which makes its appeal, but he lets the lower have the

reins. There is no description of sin anywhere to compare with the powerful narrative out of the actual life of the Apostle Paul, found in Romans 7:9–25. The thing which moves us as we read it is the picture here drawn of our own state. A lower nature dominates us and spoils our life. “What I would, I do not; what I would not, that I do.”¹

WHAT SIN IS

The most common Hebrew word used for sin in the Old Testament is *chata*, which is defined as “to miss the goal or path of right and duty, to miss the mark, to wander from the way.” The Old Testament also uses words translated as to break off (as in breaking God’s covenant), transgression of God’s will, rebellion, going astray. The New Testament uses a variety of words when speaking of sin. These are translated as violate, transgress, overstep, miss the mark, go past, fall beside, failure, wrongdoing, deviate from the right path, turn aside, a deviation from truth and uprightness, unrighteousness of heart and life, lawlessness, ungodliness, unbelief, rebellious disobedience, and falling away.

Some definitions of sin from theologians are as follows:

” Sin may be defined as the personal act of turning away from God and His will. It is the transgression of God’s law ... the violation of God’s command. It is the turning away from God’s expressed will.²

We define sin in general as a deviation from the divine moral law, no matter whether that law has been written in the human heart, or communicated to man by positive precept [through Scripture].³

1. Jones, Rufus M. (1906, pp. 60–61).

2. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 222).

3. Mueller, John Theodore (1934, p. 212).

Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.⁴

While God has expressed His will and moral law through the Bible, there was a time when the Bible didn't exist. There are also many who haven't heard of it or read it, or don't know that it contains truth about God and His will. However, all throughout history humans have inherently known God's moral law to some extent, as God has embedded it in the heart of each person.

” When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. (Rom. 2:14–15)

While many people do not specifically know the moral laws of God as expressed in Scripture, everyone has a basic understanding that murder, stealing, lying, etc., are wrong, which is evidence of an overall moral consciousness that humans have. This understanding is often referred to as natural law or moral law and is contained within the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:13–17). Because humans have intuitive knowledge of the moral law within them, they have a sense of what is right and what is wrong, of moral accountability. Their conscience “bears witness.” J. I. Packer offers the following explanation:

” Conscience has in it two elements, (a) an awareness of certain things as being right and wrong, and (b) an ability to apply laws and rules to specific situations. Conscience, as distinct from our other powers of mind, is unique; it feels like a person detached from us, often speaking when we would like it to be silent and saying things that we would rather not hear. We can decide wheth-

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 490).

er to heed conscience, but we cannot decide whether or not it will speak; our experience is that it decides that for itself. Because of its insistence on judging us by the highest standard we know, we call it God's voice in the soul, and in that extent so it is.⁵

Wayne Grudem explains it this way:

” The consciences of unbelievers bear witness to God's moral standards, but at times this evidence of God's law on the hearts of unbelievers is distorted or suppressed. Sometimes their thoughts “accuse” them, and sometimes their thoughts “excuse” them, Paul says. The knowledge of God's law as derived from such sources is never perfect, but it is enough to give an awareness of God's moral demands to all mankind. (And it is on this basis that Paul argues that all humanity is held guilty before God for sin, even those who do not have the written laws of God in Scripture.)⁶

God's expressed moral law and will in Scripture, and each person having an intuitive knowledge of the moral law and a conscience that bears witness when they break the moral law, means that all humans—whether they know Scripture or not—are aware that they fail to conform to or that they deviate from the moral law, and that they are doing wrong. While the sins humans commit are often sins against others, such as stealing from someone or lying about them, and while these sins can also damage the person committing the sin, they are first and foremost sins against God. To do such things is to break the moral laws of God; however, more importantly, these are sins against the Lawgiver Himself. They are an affront to His holiness and righteousness, and cause a separation between human beings and Him.

5. Packer, J. I. (1993, Vol. 1, p. 96).

6. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 122).

SIN IS UNIVERSAL

The Bible teaches that sin is universal—that every human being, with the exception of Jesus, has been and is a sinner. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of everyone as sinners and no one as fully righteous (Prov. 20:9; Psa. 143:2; 1 John 1:8).

” All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:6)

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. (Eccl. 7:20)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

The universality of sin is a concept that is present even in many pagan religions, which confirms that humankind has an intuitive understanding of God's moral law, and of man's sinful condition. Throughout the ages, religions made sacrifices because they believed they had displeased their gods. Louis Berkhof wrote:

” The heathen religions testify to the universal consciousness of sin and of the need of reconciliation with a Supreme Being. There is a general feeling that the gods are offended and must be propitiated in some way. There is a universal voice of conscience, testifying to the fact that man falls short of the ideal and stands condemned in the sight of some higher Power. Altars reeking with the blood of sacrifices, often the sacrifices of dear children, repeated confessions of wrongdoing, and prayers for deliverance from evil—all point to the consciousness of sin.⁷

7. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 239).

WHERE DID SIN ORIGINATE?

Before God created the universe, sin didn't exist, as only God existed. It is clear from Scripture that God is holy and that He doesn't abide evil and doesn't sin. Therefore, sin would not have been present before God created the angels.

When God created moral beings, angels and humans, He created them with free will. He created them with the ability to make moral choices, and in doing so, made it possible for them to choose to do good and right. However, giving them free will also allowed for the possibility for them to choose to do wrong. Their freewill choice to disobey God is where sin originated. God did not cause the moral beings He created to sin. However, they freely chose to disobey His commands and expressed will, and thus to sin.

God is not the author of sin. He is holy; He separates Himself from sin. He doesn't commit sin, He does no wickedness or wrong, and He doesn't tempt people to do evil. Evil is the absence of good. It's not a physical thing that is created. Evil is, in a sense, the absence of God, just as darkness is the absence of light. God couldn't create evil, as if He did, He would be acting against His nature and character, which God does not do, and in fact cannot do.

Let's take a brief look at how the Bible expresses God's holiness and righteousness and His outlook on sin:

” The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He. (Deut. 32:4)

The Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (Psa. 92:15)

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. (Jam. 1:13)

In the King James Version of the Bible there is a verse which says, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isa. 45:7). This translation could be seen as meaning that God created moral evil. While the Hebrew noun *ra*, translated as evil, can mean moral evil, it has other meanings as well, such as disaster or calamity, which aren’t moral evils. Most modern translations don’t use the word *evil* in this verse, but rather *disaster* or *calamity*. The ESV renders the verse this way: “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.”

God hates sin and it is an abomination to Him (Prov. 6:16–19).

” These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord. (Zech. 8:16–17)

For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God. (Deut. 25:16)

While God didn’t create or cause sin, He did create a universe with creatures that have free will, which meant that His free-will creatures could choose to do wrong. In His omniscience and foreknowledge He knew this would happen, and in His love and mercy He made the way to reconcile humankind to Himself. Theologian Jack Cottrell states:

” If there were only rocks and trees and animals, “right and wrong” would still not be applicable. But with the creation of angels and men, who have the unique capacity consciously to choose to act

either within or against the will of God, right and wrong suddenly become meaningful concepts, since there now exists the potential for the reality of moral evil or sin.⁸

Before the first humans sinned, sin was present in the spiritual or angelic world. Angels were created as immaterial beings without physical bodies. They are created moral beings with free will and the ability to choose to do right or wrong, as evidenced by the fact that at some point they were faced with a moral choice in which some angels chose wrongly and fell away from God while others chose to remain true to God. Not much is said in Scripture about the fall of the angels, as to when it happened or what the sin was, though it is commonly understood to be pride. In any case, some of the angels sinned and are thus separated from God. They are now referred to as fallen angels and their leader as the Devil or Satan (Matt. 25:41).

”

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment. (2 Pet. 2:4.)

The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, He has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6)

THE ORIGIN OF SIN IN THE WORLD

The Bible explains the entrance of sin into the physical world through the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis chapter 3, with some important points also brought out in chapter two (Gen. 2:8–9, 15–17). God created man (Adam) and placed him in a garden called Eden. In the garden were trees that were pleasant to look at and which were good for food. Also in the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

8. Cottrell, Jack (2000, p. 249).

God said to Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). God then created Eve, the first woman, as a helper for Adam. They were together in Eden and were both naked and were not ashamed. At some point after this, a serpent spoke with Eve:

” He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’”? And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen. 3:1–6)

Once they had sinned, things immediately changed. They were now aware of their nakedness and were ashamed; they hid when they heard God calling for them; they tried to pass the blame for their sin on to someone else—Eve blaming the serpent, and Adam blaming Eve and indirectly God, since she was the woman whom God had given to be with him. The ground was cursed, and “in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:17). Death of human beings, which God had told them would be one of the consequences if they ate from the tree, was pronounced when God said: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

They were also banished from the Garden.

”

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:22–24)

Some theologians throughout history, as noted in an earlier chapter, have seen this account as non-historical and as purely symbolic; however, throughout the New Testament this account is accepted as historical. Adam is included in the genealogies along with other historical figures in Scripture. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote of Adam being a historical person, and even contrasted Adam to Jesus, whom Paul knew to be a historical person. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

Modern theologians who reject the idea of the existence of Adam as a historical person and that there was an original human couple living in Eden see the Genesis story as an allegory with symbolism. Others see the Genesis account as a myth or parable. They see the story as being representative of what every human being goes through in making an individual decision to sin in rebellion against God’s authority. As such, they deny that sin is inherited from generation to generation, but rather see it as only an unavoidable part of human nature.

While Scripture portrays the Genesis account as a historical event, and Adam and Eve as historical people, there is also symbolism in the account. Their first sin is a picture of the first sin in the life of each individual. Adam and Eve made personal choices to disobey God, to put their will before His. They succumbed to temptation; they were dazzled by that which was pleasing to the eye and would make them like God. Just like every human, they succumbed to sin. This symbolism, however, doesn’t mean the event didn’t happen.

William Lane Craig spoke of the Genesis account this way:

” The fall of Adam is a historical event; it’s something that actually occurred. Mankind did fall into sin in this way. It’s not mythology. On the other hand, it does seem to be related in a literary dramatic form that shouldn’t be pressed for literal details or accuracy. This is especially evident, for example, when you have God walking in the garden looking for Adam and Eve, saying, “Adam, where are you?” and them hiding from Him. God’s not a physical person who walks around and has a body and doesn’t know where somebody is hiding. You’ve got things like the talking snake and other colorful features of this narrative of the Fall. I think what one can say is that this is the relation of a historical event in a kind of dramatic literary or picturesque form that shouldn’t be pressed for literal details in the way that you would read a police report.⁹

THE FIRST SIN

When Adam was told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God didn’t give him a specific reason why he shouldn’t eat it, only that there would be serious consequences if he did. Adam was in a position to show his willingness to obey God’s commands, to submit his will to the will of his Creator. It can be seen as a test of whether he would allow God to determine what was right or he would undertake to determine this for himself.

Adam and Eve’s first sin shows the essence of sin. They resisted God’s will and would not subordinate themselves to it, but rather chose to do what they felt was in their best interest. They wouldn’t let God decide what was best for them. Louis Berkhof explained it like this:

” The essence of that sin lay in the fact that Adam placed himself in opposition to God, that he refused to subject his will to the will

9. Craig, William Lane. “The Doctrine of Man, Lecture 9,” 2009.

of God, to have God determine the course of his life; and that he actively attempted to take the matter out of God's hand, and to determine the future for himself.¹⁰

Instead of accepting that God was their Creator and as such they were subordinate to Him, they yielded to the temptation to put themselves in the place of God. God had said that if they ate of the tree they would surely die. The serpent told them they wouldn't. God had told them what was true, yet they disbelieved God's word; they questioned *who* was right.

The decisions Adam and Eve made to not subordinate themselves to God, to not accept His determination as to what is right, and to not believe Him, are emblematic of the root cause of the specific sins of individuals throughout the history of humanity. Every human is tempted to sin just as the first humans were, and every human yields to that temptation. In doing so, each of us has acted toward God in the same manner as Adam and Eve did. Prior to this first sin, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with their Creator. They enjoyed His fellowship; they trusted and believed Him. Their freewill decision to disobey God changed that, not just for themselves but for all of humanity. This sin resulted in the fall of man, and humankind hasn't been the same since.

Humankind stands guilty of sin before God due to Adam and Eve's sin being imputed to all, and due to our own individual sinning. As sinners, we are separated from God; we physically die and stand guilty before Him and deserve punishment for our sins. God, in His love for humankind, made a way for humans to be forgiven, to be reconciled with Him, and to be spared from His wrath.

” Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ... For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned

10. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 222).

through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:12, 17–19).

As Christians, we have the incredible blessing of being forgiven for and redeemed from our sins. We are saved from the punishment of sin in the afterlife, a gift which is of inestimable value, as we will live forever with God. Sadly, we live in a world with many who don't know that salvation is available. It is our mission as Christians to share the good news of the Gospel with them.

CHAPTER 20

HUMANITY'S SINFUL NATURE

The Bible speaks of humans being sinful from birth, which would indicate that humans are born with inherent sinful natures.

” Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one. (Job 14:1–4)

What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? (Job 15:14)

When King David was confessing his sins to the Lord, he stated that he had always been a sinner, that even when he was conceived in the womb of his mother he had a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5). The sinful nature of human beings causes people to have a natural disposition toward sin.¹ Sin has polluted everyone (Rom. 3:10–18; 2 Tim. 3:2–4). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Because of the corruption and pollution of sin, human beings are said to be by nature children of wrath. “Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:3). Our sinful nature alienates us from God (Eph. 4:18), makes us hostile to Him (Rom. 8:7), hard of heart, and in possession of defiled minds and consciences (Titus 1:15). It translates into every aspect of a person being affected by sin.

1. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 246).

There is corruption at the very center of man's being which affects both body and soul. It also makes us unable to deliver ourselves from sin's power. In body and soul, we are sinners and are incapable of saving ourselves from our sinful nature.² The apostle Paul expresses the difficulty of living with a sinful nature.

” For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:18–25)

The universal corruption of humanity's nature makes it impossible for humans not to sin. We are by nature depraved sinners. This doesn't mean that humans can't do good, or that everyone is as evil as they can possibly be, or will engage in every form of sin, or that they have no discernment between good and evil. However, we have a natural disposition toward sin.

ORIGINAL SIN (INHERITED SIN)

The question of why all human beings have a sinful nature and how they acquire it is one that the Church Fathers and subsequent theologians have sought to understand through the centuries. As is the case with many doctrines in Christianity, the understanding of how the sinful nature of human beings due to the sin of Adam and Eve is passed on to their pos-

2. Garrett Jr., James Leo (2000, p. 558).

terity is something that developed over time. As the centuries went by, different outlooks and theories were put forth and debated. While not all theologians and denominations hold to the same understanding, the Roman Catholic view, as well as the dominant view in Protestant Christianity, is that because Adam sinned in disobeying God, sin and sinful nature is passed on to all humans through Adam. This sin or sinful nature is often referred to as “original sin” or inherited sin. Since there are different outlooks on how sinful nature is passed on to Adam’s descendants, I’m including some history as to how the doctrine developed.

Some of the early Church Fathers felt that all humanity was present in Adam seminally, in the sense of Adam having within him all of humanity, and that from his seed all humanity would be born. As such, all of humanity was potentially and numerically present in Adam when he sinned, and thus we all sinned. The main focus at that point in the development of the doctrine was that the pollution of Adam’s sin was passed on to humanity, but not necessarily his guilt. Over time, the idea of Adam’s guilt being imputed to all humans took root. The concept of both the nature of sin and the guilt of Adam’s sin being passed on came to be generally accepted. The debate then focused on how it was transmitted.

A further development was the interpretation of the historical Adam being the representative of the human race. Adam was seen as representing humanity when he chose to sin, and thus God counted all of humanity legally guilty of his sin. This doctrine is called federalism. It sees Adam as the federal head or representative of humanity. It’s as if the president of a country makes an agreement with another nation, and then all the citizens of that country are bound by that agreement. The president represents all members of his country when he signs the agreement. In similar fashion, Adam represented all humanity when he sinned, thus we share guilt with him since he was our representative before God.

Some of the primary verses used to support the doctrinal position that human beings are sinners who are guilty because of Adam’s sin are in

Romans chapter 5, where the apostle Paul draws a parallel between Adam, whose disobedience brought sin and thus punishment for sin into humanity, and Jesus, whose death and resurrection have redeemed us from all sin and guilt. Paul is drawing the parallel between all people being legally guilty in Adam and all people having their sin and guilt redeemed through belief in Jesus. He's stating that as humanity's representative, the guilt of Adam is imputed to everyone and that Jesus, who represented humanity by suffering and dying for our sins, has brought forgiveness of sins, and His *righteousness* is imputed to us. In Adam we are all guilty; through Jesus we are made righteous.

” Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:18–19)

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:21–22)

We all come into this world with sinful nature, due to the sin and disobedience of Adam. We all are somehow culpable for Adam's sin and thus face condemnation. By God's grace we can be spared the condemnation through Jesus' taking our sins upon Himself.

ACTUAL SIN

While our sinfulness is connected to Adam's sin, we are also all guilty in our own right, due to the sins we personally commit. Humans are sinners not only because of our sinful nature, but because we freely commit sins. We know that some things are wrong, and we do them anyway. While there may be varying opinions about how the guilt of Adam's sin or the sinful nature is transmitted to people, there is no question regarding how

individual guilt comes about. Every person knowingly sins, thus everyone is responsible for the results of their sins. While it may seem unfair that due to Adam's sin, all humankind fell into sin, each person also does exactly what Adam and Eve did—they freely choose to do wrong, and thus sin.

No matter what the circumstances or the temptations, personal sin comes from the heart, from the freewill choices of each individual. As such, we are morally responsible for the sins we commit in our own lives.

” What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. (Matt. 15:18–20)

Realizing our tendency to sin, our sinful nature, our inherited corruption, and the ultimate result of sin in our lives, should make us forever grateful for the free and undeserved gift of forgiveness of our sins. As Christians, we have the blessing of knowing that though we are sinners, we are forgiven sinners through our wonderful Savior, Jesus. It should also help us to realize the dire need that so many people have, as they exist in this world without knowing that salvation from their sins is available. It should instill in us the desire to bring the message of salvation to all we can.

OUR LEGAL STANDING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

As human beings with sinful natures who universally sin, we all suffer the effects of sin. Sin affects our “legal” standing with God, in that we stand “guilty” before Him. It also affects our relationship with Him, our interactions with others, and us as individuals. We'll look at each of these components in order to see the ramifications of sin in the lives of human beings.

Because God is holy, righteous, and just, any and all sin is an affront to Him. When we sin, we are “lawbreakers,” as we are “legally” guilty of breaking God's law and violating His holiness. The penalty of sin is death,

both physical and spiritual, a separation from God. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden expresses in the physical the spiritual separation between God and humans, as we are no longer fit to be in His presence due to sin. Besides the separation from God in this life, all humans suffer physical death, and some continue on in separation from the Lord in the life to come. They suffer *spiritual* death (Rom. 6:21-23).

” Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (Jam. 1:14-15)

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might. (2 Thess. 1:9)

A further effect of sin on humanity's relationship with God is alienation or enmity (hostility) toward God. “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot” (Rom. 8:7).

While sin makes humans legally guilty before God and causes separation from Him, there are those whose hearts are toward God but don't know of or understand about Jesus and salvation. Scripture doesn't specifically say what happens in such cases, but it seems to infer that they will be judged according to the truth they know. While we may not know specifically how God will judge each person, what we do know from understanding God's attributes is that God is just, righteous, loving, and merciful; and He will therefore judge people with fairness and righteousness. “He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Psa. 98:9).

Salvation, however, brings about a major change in the relationship between God and those who accept Jesus as their Savior. With salvation, the relationship becomes one of being members of God's family, His children (Gal. 3:26; Rom. 8:13-14; John 1:12).

”

We also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:3–6)

THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Besides affecting our relationship with God, sin also has consequences in people’s relations with one another. Earlier we saw that the first sin brought conflict to the relationship of Adam and Eve. This was only the beginning of the consequences of sin among humanity. The heightening degree of conflict between humans escalated into hatred and then murder when Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:8).

The discord which sin brings manifests itself in more than just bad relations between two individuals. It is also expressed in conflict between one group of people and another, nation against nation, race against race, animosity between institutions, political factions, and even within families. It is manifested in racial prejudice, extreme nationalism, in class conflict. All human groups or institutions, whether they’re educational, community, social, leisure, or religious in nature, experience some measure of discord and conflict.³ Further manifestations of sin can be seen in people exploiting others through violence, abuse, oppression, and slavery.

Sin can be seen in our taking advantage of others, using people for our own ends, not treating others with dignity and equality. Even when we wish to know others and be known by them, there can still be miscommunication and misunderstanding. Our personal relationships can turn deceitful, selfish, and possessive. All of this is because of our sinful nature. While we, as Christians, still sin and have conflicts with others, we are ad-

3. Milne, Bruce (2009, p. 144).

monished to love one another and to act in love toward others by building relationships with others based on God's love, in kindness, caring, and unselfishness.

IN RELATION TO OURSELVES

As sinners, we suffer guilt and shame. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened, not to divinity as the serpent said they would be, but rather to shame and guilt. They were exposed to God and to each other. They became aware that they had done wrong in disobeying God's command and they lost their innocence, as seen in their trying to cover themselves. They felt guilt and tried to hide from God. They now were afraid of God, whereas before they had personal loving fellowship with Him.

”

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” (Gen. 3:7–10)

As a result of our sinful nature, we suffer from inner conflict and shame; we have fear and distress (Rom. 2:9), restlessness, hopelessness, a lack of inner peace (Eph. 2:12). Because we are sinners, we are troubled with internal discord (Rom. 7:23).

IN RELATION TO CREATION

Because of greed and selfishness, humans have plundered the earth rather than being wise stewards of its beauties and treasures, as God had instructed humanity (Gen. 2:15). Bruce Milne expresses this point very well:

” Humanity loses its harmony with the natural order and our God-given stewardship of the environment gives place to sinful plundering. This is manifest as exploitation, the needless destruction of the world without thought for its created beauty or intrinsic worth. It is also manifest in pollution, the selfish and rapacious use of raw materials, contaminating the oceans and the very atmosphere, all too often in the interests of economic profit, luxury and self-indulgence. Today the very survival of life on our planet is threatened by the sin-rooted dissonance.⁴

PUNISHMENT FOR SIN

As stated above, God is holy, righteous, and just; and because He is, it is imperative for Him to judge and punish sinners, just as it is imperative in human courts that those that break the law be punished and not be permitted to commit crimes unpunished. God reacts against sin, and His reaction is punishment. If He didn't punish sin, He wouldn't be righteous and just, as He would be acting contrary to His nature and His Word (Deut. 32:4; Jer. 9:24).

God doesn't take pleasure in punishing sinners. He would much rather they repent, and in His patience and mercy gives them time to do so. But in order for Him to be true to His nature and character, He must eventually mete out punishment, in some cases in the afterlife.

” Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezek. 18:23)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

4. Milne, Bruce (2009, p. 145).

Scripture speaks of what can be seen as natural punishment for sin. These are the natural consequences for sin, when people reap what they sow (Psa. 9:15; Prov. 5:22). “As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:8).

Punishment as a consequence for sin can also come from the Lord's hand.

” The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book.” (Exo. 32:33)

Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt. 3:10)

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 24:50–51)

Punishment for sin serves as a deterrent to keep the sinner, or others, from sinning, but that isn't the main reason for punishment. Rather it's that God's righteousness demands it. There is a difference, however, between *chastisement* for the believer and *punishment* for the unrepentant sinner.

” The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Heb. 12:6–7)

Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. (Job 5:17)

As seen in the preceding verses, sin negatively affects people's lives, and those consequences are part of the punishment of sin. Beyond that, Scrip-

ture teaches that death is the ultimate punishment for sin. This death, as spoken of in the Bible, is seen as comprehensive death, both physical and spiritual. One of the main words used for death in the New Testament is the Greek word *thanatos*, which has the following definitions: the death of the body; that separation of the soul and the body by which the life on earth is ended; the misery of the soul arising from sin, which begins on earth but lasts and increases after the death of the body in hell; the loss of a life consecrated to God and blessed in Him on earth.

God told Adam and Eve: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). While they didn’t physically die on that day, they experienced the spiritual death of separation and estrangement from God. The penalty of physical death came at the end of their lives.

When speaking of the effects of sin in our personal lives as being part of the punishment of sin, Louis Berkhof wrote:

” The sufferings of life, which are the results of the entrance of sin into the world, are also included in the penalty of sin. Sin brought disturbance in the entire life of man... His very soul has become a battlefield of conflicting thoughts, passions and desires. The will refuses to follow the judgment of the intellect, and the passions run riot without the control of an intelligent will. The true harmony of life is destroyed, and makes way for the curse of the divided life. Man is in a state of dissolution, which often carries with it the most poignant sufferings.⁵

Physical death is also part of the punishment of sin, which God said would be a consequence of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and which is manifested in Adam and Eve returning to the ground

5. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 259).

(Gen. 3:19; Jam. 1:15). The continued separation from God and the punishment of humans in the afterlife is seen as God's wrath, His response to sin.

”

Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Rom. 2:5–8)

The punishment for sin is real. The severity of sin and God's displeasure of it can be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus. The pain, the suffering, the agony which Jesus suffered for humanity is seen as Jesus bearing God's wrath for us, the wrath we would have suffered if He hadn't taken it upon Himself in our place. While we each deserve the full punishment and wrath of God for our sins, the holy, righteous, and just One is also gracious and merciful. He has made a way for people to be forgiven for their sins. He made it possible for us to be freed from the legal guilt and punishment we deserve. Jesus' suffering and death bore the wrath of God for us. All that is necessary is to receive Him as Savior. As Christians we are redeemed, our sins are atoned for, our punishment is averted, and we have eternal life with Him. There are so many who don't know or understand the importance of salvation, and we who have this wonderful gift from God owe it both to the Lord and to others to share this good news, this Gospel, with as many as we can.

DEGREES OF SIN?

We have seen that through both "original sin" as well as the actual sins we commit, our "legal" standing with God is affected. Every sin we commit is an offense against His holiness; no matter how minor or major the sin, we are transgressors, and therefore guilty before God. So in this sense, all sin is

equally bad. However, in another sense, while all sin makes us legally guilty before God, some sins are worse than others in relation to the consequences of those sins. The reason for this is that some dishonor God to a greater degree, or they may cause greater damage to ourselves and others, or bring about more harmful or more widespread consequences.

Jesus made reference to some sins being greater than others when He told Pilate that the one who betrayed Him, Judas, had the greater sin (John 19:11). Judas knew more truth than Pilate did. Therefore he was more accountable for that truth, and thus his sin was greater. Another example of degrees of sin is seen in the book of Ezekiel where God is showing Ezekiel about the sins committed in the temple and how each sin being committed is progressively worse than the one before it. (See Ezek. 8:6–16.)

The Bible also speaks about the difference between sins committed deliberately and defiantly—with the full knowledge of wrongdoing—and those which are committed in ignorance or without knowledge that the action is a sin. The first is referred to as sinning *defiantly*, the second as sinning *unintentionally*. In the Old Testament, sins committed defiantly were treated severely, while those committed unintentionally could be forgiven through offering a sacrifice.

” The person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him. (Num. 15:30–31 NAU)

Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord’s commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them ... then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the Lord for a sin offering. (Lev. 4:2–3)

A differentiation is made throughout Scripture between deliberate sin, committed without remorse or repentance, and sins which are unintentional and unpremeditated—whether due to negligence or in moments of weakness and human frailty—for which one is sorry and asks God's forgiveness. Theologian Wayne Grudem explains:

” We can readily see how some sins have much more harmful consequences for ourselves and others and for our relationship with God. If I were to covet my neighbor's car, that would be a sin before God. But if my coveting led me to actually steal the car, that would be more serious sin. If in the course of stealing the car I also fought with my neighbor and injured him, or recklessly injured someone else as I drove the car, that would be even more serious sin . . . Our conclusion, then, is that in terms of results and in terms of the degree of God's displeasure, some sins are certainly worse than others.⁶

Louis Berkhof wrote:

” Sins committed on purpose, with full consciousness of the evil involved, and with deliberation, are greater and more culpable than sins resulting from ignorance, from an erroneous conception of things, or from weakness of character. Nevertheless, the latter are also real sins and make one guilty in the sight of God.⁷

As Christians, we are not condemned for our sins, because Jesus' death on the cross has brought forgiveness for our sins. However, that doesn't mean that we don't sin, that sinning doesn't matter, or that we don't suffer the consequences of our sins in this life, in the damaged relationship with God that sin brings or in the hurt that sin causes others and ourselves.

6. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 503).

7. Berkhof, Louis (1996, p. 252).

As Christians, sin does not affect our legal standing before God. We are saved, we are His adopted children, members of His family, and we don't lose that; we are not condemned. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Sin, however, is displeasing to God. He doesn't stop loving us, just as we don't stop loving our children when they disobey or do wrong things. We may feel some relationship "distance" from children who have deliberately disobeyed, and we may need to discipline them in some manner, but they are still our children and we still love them. This is similar to God in relation to us when we sin. He is still our Father, He still loves us, but there is some damage done to and some distance created in our relationship with Him.

When children are disobedient or do wrong things, parents expect them to apologize, and when appropriate take action to make restitution of some sort. While there may be consequences, their acknowledgment of wrongdoing and their apology and asking for forgiveness help to repair the damage done to the relationship between the child and the parent. The same concept holds true in our relationship with God. He expects us to ask His forgiveness when we sin. As Jesus has already paid for all of our sins, asking for forgiveness isn't related to our salvation, but rather is a means of repairing the damage our sins cause in our relationship with God.

When His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, Jesus taught them the "Lord's prayer," which includes: "Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:3-4). Jesus told His first disciples to ask the Father to forgive their sins, and as His disciples today, we should do the same.

Scripture also teaches that God, in His love for us as His children, disciplines us for our own good and so that we may share in His holiness (Heb. 12:6-11). As Christians, we should want to grow in our faith, in our relationship with the Lord. Sin in our lives hinders our spiritual growth and hurts our relationship with God, which negatively affects us in this life and has potential repercussions in the afterlife as well.

The issue is not our legal guilt, as this has already been covered by Jesus' death and resurrection. We are already given eternal life through Christ. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24). However, the lives we lead on earth have some effect in relation to the afterlife, as shown in Scripture when it talks about our coming before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10–12). The Bible teaches that there are degrees of rewards for those who are saved, and that the lives we lead factor into those rewards (Luke 19:16–19).

” We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor. 5:10)

If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:12–15)

The lives we lead in accordance with God's will, our relationship with God, our decisions to sin or not sin, and the fruit we bear, all factor in to our lives now and beyond. As Christians, we should be mindful of our thoughts and actions as we try to live godly lives. We won't and can't be sin-free, but we can make the effort to not sin, and we can regularly ask God to forgive us when we do.

Being reconciled to God through Jesus, being forgiven for our sins, being redeemed, is the greatest gift one can receive—a personal gift directly from the hand of God. It not only changes our lives today, but for eternity. It

is a gift that each of us has received, and that we have been asked to pass on to others. It's the good news we are commissioned to tell others about, so they too can be freed from sin's grasp and can become children of the eternal, loving, gracious, and merciful God.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

The core teaching of the New Testament can be found in one of the most beautiful verses of Scripture: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This verse reveals the amazing truth that the Creator of the universe loved the human race so much that He sent the second Person of the Trinity—God the Son, Jesus—to become human and to die in our place for the sins we have committed, so that we wouldn’t have to suffer the penalty for those sins even though we deserve to. We have the opportunity to receive everlasting life because Jesus has paid the price for our sins through His sacrifice. God’s plan of salvation, which was decided upon before the creation of the world, is rooted in God’s love for humankind. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love us and made a way for us to be saved from the ultimate consequence of sin—spiritual death and separation from God in the afterlife, which is called hell in Scripture.

Some people have the impression that God is a cruel and angry God: that He judges people harshly because He is personally offended that they sinned against Him, and therefore He selfishly demands that they be punished. The true picture is very different. Because God’s nature includes the attributes of holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath, in order to be true to His divine nature He must judge sin. He could have justly punished every human being for their sins. Instead, because His divine nature also includes the attributes of love, mercy and grace, His wish was that no one should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), and to that end He has made a way in which humans can be redeemed. That redemption is rooted in His love, because He “so loved the world.” His love is such that even though we are sinners and have sinned against Him, He has, in love, made a way that we can be saved from the merited judgment for our sins. God’s plan of salvation is the manifestation of His mercy and love for humankind.

”

God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10)

FROM THE BEGINNING

God knew, before creating the universe, that human beings created with free will *would* sin, so He made a way to save humanity from the penalty for sin through His plan of salvation. God’s desire is to save humans, to redeem them, to reconcile them with Him, while remaining true to His nature. He was under no obligation to save us; He could have simply let all humans suffer the penalty of sin, but He didn’t. God’s plan of salvation was put into play starting with Adam and Eve’s first sin and which culminated in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Since God is the omniscient Creator, it was no surprise to Him that Adam and Eve sinned. He knew that they would freely choose to disobey Him, and in His foresight, He had already designed His plan of salvation. When God told Adam and Eve the consequences of their sin, He also spoke to the serpent, saying: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). From the very beginning, God said that an offspring of the woman would bruise or crush the head of the serpent—Satan—while Satan would only bruise his foot. At the time that the first sin was committed by humanity, God was already foretelling how Jesus would defeat Satan.

His plan of salvation included calling out a people, Israel, to whom He would reveal Himself and give His commandments. It was through His

words spoken to Israel that God revealed knowledge about Himself, the one true God, and His law. Israel guarded and passed on His revelation from generation to generation, thus ensuring its preservation. It was through the lineage of Israel that He sent His Son as the God-man, through whom He brought salvation to humanity. The history of Israel is the history of God laying the groundwork for the salvation of humanity through Jesus.¹ The Old Testament not only contains prophecies about the Messiah's life and mission, but also numerous foreshadows of the salvation to come through His incarnate Son (John 1:17).

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES AND SHADOWS

In order to gain a deeper understanding of salvation and redemption, of why Jesus had to die on the cross in order for us to be forgiven for our sins and become reconciled with God, it's important to review some of the "types and shadows" within the Old Testament. We'll focus here only on those which are directly connected to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Throughout the book of Genesis there were sacrifices made to God, beginning with Cain and Abel, then continuing with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others. One particular story, that of Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, prefigures God's sacrifice of His Son for the sins of humanity. When Isaac asked his father where the lamb for the sacrifice was, Abraham said that God would provide it. When Abraham was about to slay his son on the altar, the Lord then showed him a ram that was caught in the bushes, which Abraham sacrificed instead of his son. The substitution of the lamb for Isaac as a sacrifice to God portrays the concept of substitutional sacrifice, which is the basis for the animal sacrificial system which God later gave to Israel through Moses as a means of atoning for their sins. God's provision of the ram foreshadows His supply of a sacrifice, His Son, for the sins of humanity.

1. Cottrell, Jack (1987, p. 402).

” Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together ... And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. (Gen. 22:6–8,13)

Centuries later, when the descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews, were enslaved in Egypt, God spoke to Moses and told him that He would deliver the Hebrews out of the hands of the Egyptians. When the pharaoh of Egypt wouldn't let them go, God informed Moses that on a certain night He was going to kill all the firstborn in Egypt, both men and animals. He commanded each Hebrew household to kill a year-old sheep or goat and to sprinkle its blood on the door frames of their houses. If they would do so, the firstborn in the houses with blood on the doorposts would be spared the judgment of God. Those without the blood would not be spared.

” The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” ... Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb.” (Exo. 12:13, 21)

Their obedience in sacrificing the Passover lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doorframe was the key to the Hebrews being spared from God's judgment and resulted in them being freed from bondage and slavery. In the second year after their deliverance from Egypt God instructed Moses to initiate the Levitical sacrificial system in which animal sacrifice would

atone for sin (Exo. 40:17, 29). Authors Lewis and Demarest give the following excellent basic explanation of this sacrificial system:

” In the burnt offering, the fellowship or peace offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering, a sacrificial procedure was followed that generally involved the following elements: (1) an unblemished animal, connoting the idea of moral perfection, was presented at the door of the sanctuary by the offerer. (2) The offerer places his hands on the animal's head, signifying identification with the victim and the transfer of the penalty of sin to the substitute. (3) The animal was slain by the offerer (in later times by the priest), signifying that death is the just punishment for sin. (4) The priest sprinkled the blood of the victim on the altar and around the base of it, the blood representing the life of the victim. And (5) the offering, in part or in whole, was burned on the altar of burnt offering, its fragrance ascending to God as a pleasing aroma. Repeatedly Scripture indicates that the purpose of these sacrifices was “to make atonement” for the offerer (Lev. 1:4; 4:20; 5:13; Num. 5:8; 8:12; 15:25).²

Every year on the Day of Atonement a special sacrifice was made for the sins of all the people. First the high priest made an offering for his own sins, followed by a special offering for the people. Again, Lewis and Demarest give a concise explanation:

” The high priest sacrificed the first male goat brought by the people as a sin-offering and sprinkled its blood on and in front of the “atonement cover” in the Holy of Holies, thereby expiating the uncleanness of the people (Lev. 16:15–19) and making atonement. This act of blood shedding, according to Leviticus 17:11, represents God's ordained way of securing atonement. The high priest then laid his hands on the head of the second goat (the “scape-

2. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, pp. 383–384).

goat”) and confessed all the sins of the community, thus symbolically transferring guilt from the people to the victim. The second goat became the sin-bearer, as it irretrievably carried the sins and iniquities of the people into the wilderness.³

In these Old Testament sacrifices we can see the concepts of atonement and reconciliation for sins through substitution. In the same way as the ram was sacrificed in Isaac’s place, the animals were sacrificed for the sins of the offerer. These Old Testament sacrifices atoned for past sins but needed to be repeated as new sins were committed.

GOD THE REDEEMER

Besides these types and shadows of atonement for sin through the substitutionary sacrifice of another in the place of the sinner, and sins of all being placed on a single “scapegoat,” there is another foreshadow in the Old Testament of things to come; namely, the understanding of God being the “Redeemer.” In the exodus from Egypt, God Himself, through His mighty acts, delivered His people from bondage and slavery. He redeemed them and freed them. Speaking to Moses, He said:

” Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” (Exo. 6:6)

From this point on, God was called the Redeemer (Deut. 7:8, 15:15). “They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer” (Psa. 78:35). The deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery was the work of God. God is the one who pronounced judgment on the Egyptians when pharaoh would not let the Israelites go, and brought upon them the plagues that resulted in the miraculous deliverance of the

3. Lewis and Demarest (Vol. 3, 1996, p. 184).

Hebrew people. Through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, God preserved the Hebrews from the punishment He inflicted upon the Egyptians.

God delivered the Hebrews through supernatural acts and wonders by His own hand, and not by their works. This was a foreshadow of the grace by which He redeems us through the work of God in salvation. It's His work, not ours, which saves us. Salvation is available only by His grace, mercy, and love. God's plan of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus was His plan of redemption for human beings before humans ever existed. Within the Old Testament He begins to reveal His plan; and then in New Testament times when John the Baptist proclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), the fullness of His plan begins to be fully revealed.

THE LAMB OF GOD

The fulfillment of God's plan of redemption through Jesus' death, His sacrifice of Himself in our place through His blood shed for our sins, is repeatedly spoken of throughout the New Testament.⁴ He is the Lamb sacrificed, the one who has died in our stead, and who, like the scapegoat, has taken our sins upon Himself (1 Pet. 1:18–19; 1 Cor. 5:7). He is the Redeemer who saves us from the slavery of sin. His death and resurrection are the culmination of the Old Testament types and shadows. It is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption (Rom. 5:8–9). God has been holy, righteous, and just to His creations. He has been loving, merciful, and gracious. And we are beneficiaries of the greatest sacrifice ever made.

”

Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:2)

4. See Matt. 26:28; Eph. 2:13; Heb. 7:27, 9:12–14.

We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ... For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Heb. 10:10,14)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph. 1:7)

ATONEMENT

Now we'll look at some specific insights as to how Jesus' death on the cross brings forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God—how His death results in our atonement. The word *atonement* in the Bible is the translation of the Hebrew word *kippur*, which is derived from the word *kaphar*, meaning to cover, cover over, or be covered. J. I. Packer defines it as follows: “Atonement means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship.”⁵

The biblical concept of atonement refers to the revealed way to reconciliation with God through the mediation of His Son. In the New Testament it is very clear that the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection is central to His mission on earth. Matthew devotes about one-third of his Gospel to the last week of Jesus' life, Mark over one-third, Luke one-fourth, and John just under half.⁶ Jesus' death on the cross, His shedding His blood for us as the Lamb of God, brought something unique into the world of humanity: eternal reconciliation with God. From that point on, human beings could be permanently reconciled with their Creator.

A question that is often asked is: Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? What did His death do that brought us forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God? A combination of four scriptural concepts gives a

5. Packer, J. I. (1993, p. 134).

6. Griffith Thomas, W. H. (2005, pp. 51-52).

well-rounded understanding of how Jesus' death saves us from the punishment of our sins and reconciles us to God.

PROPITIATION

The first concept is *propitiation*. The basic meaning of propitiation is *an offering that turns away wrath*. This concept has to do with the wrath of God, in that due to His holiness and righteousness, God must judge and punish sin. However, the sacrificial offering of Jesus' death, like the sacrifices made in the Old Testament, propitiates or satisfies God's wrath. In His love for us, God made a way to pardon our sin, while remaining true to His nature.

” He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. (Rom. 3:23–25)

How was it that Jesus' death turned away the wrath of God from us? He turned it away from us by taking it upon Himself. We justly deserve God's wrath, but Jesus took the guilt of our sin upon Himself and suffered the penalty for our sins. He bore the wrath of God in our place for our sins. Authors Lewis and Demarest explain it this way:

” The Judge of the world, whose moral law is constantly violated, found us guilty and pronounced the just sentence of death. Then, leaving heaven, the Son became a man, lived without sin, and paid in full the inestimable penalty for our sins. To demonstrate how He remains just while justifying the ungodly who believe, the Father

sent the Son as a sacrifice of Atonement. The Judge who found us guilty came in the person of His own Son to atone for our sins.⁷

Some people object to the concept of an innocent person taking the punishment of the guilty, saying that it is immoral. However, in this case, God the Son is the one taking the punishment. God, who is the one who has been sinned against, is both the Judge who is passing judgment and the one who is paying the penalty for the sin. The sacrifice of God's Son is the propitiation that satisfies God. The wrath of God, His righteous judgment, is poured out on sin, but God Himself, having taken on the form of a man, bears that wrath in our place. This is something far beyond fairness and justice—it is the compassionate and loving plan of our very loving God.

REDEMPTION

Another biblical concept which helps to explain how Jesus' death has brought us salvation is *redemption*. The words translated *to redeem* and *redemption* come from the Greek family of words *lutron* in the noun form and *lutroo* in the verb form, which means to loose, to set free through a ransom payment, to ransom. Other variations are a ransom price, the act of ransoming, to pay a ransom price. Some of the verses using these words are:

” Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:28)

There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim. 2:5–6)

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or

7. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 2, p. 399).

gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Pet. 1:18–19)

The use of the words *ransom* or *redeem* in these verses expresses the concept of paying a price, a ransom, to set someone free, to remove them from bondage or dominion. Theologian Jack Cottrell gives clarity to this concept by explaining the redemption of the firstborn males in the Old Testament. He wrote:

” The Old Testament practice providing the sharpest background for understanding Christ’s redeeming work is the redemption of the first-born males from their status of special consecration to God. God decreed that every first-born male, man or beast, belonged to Him... Every first-born male had to be redeemed—bought back from God—by paying the “money of the redemption,” five shekels of silver (about two and one-half ounces). This practice demonstrates the basic meaning of redemption; i.e., the payment of a price to set someone or something free.⁸

In the verses quoted above, Jesus said He came to give His life as a ransom for many. Through His sacrificial death, His blood shed for us, we are redeemed or ransomed. He paid for our freedom from the penalty for our sins by taking the punishment in our place. The ransom is paid to God the Father, since He is the one who has put the penalty in place. Jesus, God’s Son, pays the ransom by way of His death. It is as if the judge passes a guilty verdict on a criminal, then he leaves his judgment seat and goes and pays the fine for the criminal. The criminal is judged guilty and by law must pay the penalty, but the price is paid by the judge. Justice is done, the penalty for the crime is paid, and the guilty one is now free. The guilty one is not only declared innocent, but is also transformed into a new creature, and ideally begins to live a life of love for God and others in gratitude for receiving God’s great gift.

8. Cottrell, Jack (1983, pp. 438–439).

We see in the above analogies that due to God's love for us, He both judges and redeems us. His plan satisfies the need for righteous judgment, but God the Judge has also paid the price for our redemption by the shedding of the blood of His only Son.

SUBSTITUTION/VICARIOUS SACRIFICE

A third concept which can provide further understanding of salvation is *substitutionary sacrifice*, sometimes called *vicarious sacrifice* or *penal substitution*. Vicarious in this case means to stand in place of another or represent another; thus Jesus being sacrificed in our place is considered a vicarious sacrifice. Penal substitution refers to Jesus' payment of the penalty of sin in our place. This concept was the foundation of the Levitical sacrificial system, whereby a sacrifice was offered in the place of the offerer. Such a sacrifice for sin required the shedding of blood, which God said was necessary to make atonement for sin (Lev. 17:11; 1 John 1:7).

The concept of a substitute bearing our sins and taking the punishment in our place is conveyed in Isaiah 53, which is sometimes called the *Song of the Suffering Servant*.

” Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... Stricken for the transgression of My people... His soul makes an offering for guilt.

By His knowledge shall the righteous one, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities... He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Excerpted from Isa. 53:4–12)

Jesus stated that He gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The word “for” in this verse is translated from the Greek word *anti*, meaning *instead of* or *in place of*. While not using the same Greek word *anti*, numerous other verses also express the concept of *in place of*, or *on behalf of*.

”

[Jesus] said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (Mark 14:24)

Who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. (Gal. 1:4)

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3)

We see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. (Heb. 2:9)

Jesus’ death was a substitutionary sacrifice. He took our place, our punishment. He suffered in our stead so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life.

RECONCILIATION

Jesus’ death on the cross, the shedding of His blood, is what cleanses us from sin, and what makes it possible for us to become reconciled with God. The fourth concept, reconciliation, generally refers to the ending of hostility between two persons who have quarreled. It signifies bringing back together those who were separated or enemies. Sin brings separation of humanity from God, but Jesus’ death has taken away the separation and has thus changed our relationship with God.

” In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph. 2:13–16)

In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him. (Col. 1:19–22)

Propitiation, substitution, reconciliation, redemption, and salvation are different ways to describe the act of the merciful God who loves us. Salvation is His free gift to us, a gift we have done and can do nothing to deserve. While it is a gift freely given, it was a costly gift for the Giver. He gave His Son, who in His torturous death on the cross took on the sins of the world as His own and suffered the separation from God in our place.

Jesus' death was a vicarious sacrifice for us. His blood was shed for our salvation. He paid the price of our ransom so that we could be freed, and through this He reconciled us to God. As a parallel to the ordinance in God's law that decreed that only animals without blemish could be presented for sacrifices, even so Jesus, the sinless Savior, was the only one who could be sacrificed as a propitiation for our sins. He lived a human life of obedience to God, a life without sin. Had He sinned, then He would have had to die for His own sins, instead of ours. However, He didn't sin, and as such He was the sacrifice without blemish.

He upheld God's holiness in His incarnate life, and therefore deserved no punishment for sin. He took our sins upon Himself, like the "scapegoat,"

and became our sin bearer. Our sins were imputed to Him; they became His, as He substituted Himself for each one of us. He suffered the death and punishment of all sinners, which resulted in His righteousness being imputed to those who believe. He took both our guilt and punishment upon Himself, and in doing so made it possible for each of us to be reconciled with God.

The act of reconciliation between God and us is God's doing, not our own. In His great love and mercy, He has reconciled us to Himself.

”

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Rom. 5:10–11)

CHAPTER 22

FROM RECONCILIATION TO REGENERATION

We have been redeemed by the sacrifice of God in the death of Jesus. He paid the price of our sins on the cross. But what did it cost Jesus to bear our sins and punishment? It started with His incarnation when He “made Himself nothing” by becoming human and living for decades on earth, humbling Himself by being obedient unto death (Phil. 2:6–8). Jesus suffered when He was tempted and He learned obedience through what He suffered (Heb. 2:18, 5:8–9). He suffered extreme physical pain and a horrible death by crucifixion. He was brutally tortured and nailed to a cross.

Besides the physical pain and suffering, He endured the pain of bearing the sins of humanity. The guilt of our sins was imputed to Him. God looked upon the sins of humanity as belonging to Jesus, instead of to us. Because He took upon Himself the sins of us all, “He who knew no sin was made to be sin for our sakes” (2 Cor. 5:21). Sin brings separation from God, and Jesus, being seen as guilty of all of humanity’s sins at the time of His death, suffered this separation. He felt the separation from the Father that one who dies in sin feels. This is evidenced in Jesus’ cry on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) Added to this, He also bore the pain of the wrath of God, God’s righteous judgment, poured out upon Him for each human being’s sin. The punishment each of us deserved, He suffered for us. He bore the wages of sin in our place.

Author John Stott expressed the cost of the cross in this way:

” The accumulated sins of all human history were laid upon Him. Voluntarily He bore them in His own body. He made them His own. He shouldered full responsibility for them. And then in

the desolate spiritual abandonment that cry was wrung from His lips, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me” ... He was bearing our sins. And God who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” and cannot “look on wrong,” turned away His face. Our sins came between the Father and the Son ... He tasted the torment of a soul estranged from God bearing our sins, He died our death. He endured instead of us the penalty of separation from God which our sins deserved.¹

J. Rodman Williams speaks of the cost in these terms:

” The weight of the divine fury directed against sin at the cross is humanly inconceivable. For at Calvary all the sin of all the world was receiving the outpoured vials of divine wrath. It was for Christ alone to bear that awesome punishment and to experience its indescribable torment and anguish ... The Son of God, having so become sin that the Father could not look upon Him, now experienced the horrible God-forsakenness that belongs to hell itself ... But this was God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, enduring our condemnation and punishment, dying for the sins of mankind ... This is vicarious punishment—beyond all human measure. Christ experienced the full consequences of our sinful condition—forsakenness, abandonment by God, damnation itself. He has taken our place, He has received the judgment upon Himself, He has gone all the way.²

Going to the cross cost Christ dearly. He paid the price and suffered the penalty of sin for each of us. His pain and agony brought us forgiveness of sin, freedom from the penalty of sin, and reconciliation with God. It is the greatest gift of all—the free gift of eternal life. And because we are the recipients of this gift—free for us, but costly for Christ—we are asked by

1. Stott, John (1971, pp. 117–118).

2. Williams, J. Rodman (1996, p. 358).

God to become ambassadors for Christ, bringing His message of reconciliation to others, imploring them to become reconciled to God.

” All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18–20)

Three significant results of Jesus’ death and resurrection are *justification*, *adoption*, and *regeneration*. These results bring about massive change in the lives of those who become reconciled to God through Jesus. Justification refers to our “legal” status before God, adoption speaks to our personal familial relationship with Him, and regeneration to a change in our spiritual nature.

JUSTIFICATION

Through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, God forgives our sins. They have been imputed to Christ, meaning they became His and are no longer ours. At the same time, Jesus’ righteousness has been imputed to those who receive Him and accept His gift of salvation, so God no longer sees us as sinners worthy of punishment, but rather as righteous in His sight. Our “legal” guilt and condemnation are removed, and the separation between God and us is no longer there.

The word *justify* used in the New Testament is the Greek word *dikaioo*. One of its definitions is to *declare or pronounce someone to be righteous*. Our justification means that God declares us righteous, or declares us no longer guilty and condemned. This doesn’t mean that we who have received His gift of salvation are now sinless, as we are all still sinners, but it means that “legally” we are seen by God as righteous. As our sins were imputed to

Jesus, and thus are seen as His, so is His righteousness imputed to us, and His righteousness is seen by God as ours.

All of this is God's work, not our own. There is nothing we could do or achieve to deserve this forgiveness and righteousness. It's a gift from God. In His love He made the way for us to be righteous in His sight—not by our works or good deeds, but by His grace, mercy, and love. It's a gift of love, costly on God's side, free on ours. "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Scripture makes it clear that people are not saved by being good or doing good works or keeping the laws of Moses—or anything we do ourselves. Salvation, which results in justification, depends solely on God and His plan. All we have to do is believe that God has made it available through Jesus and accept it by faith.

” If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom. 10:9–10)

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal. 2:16)

A beautiful feature of justification is that, as Christians, we no longer need to feel anxiety regarding our standing with God. Though we still sin, our status of having the righteousness of Christ does not change. We no longer need to question whether we've done enough or are close enough to God to merit salvation. God has done it all, and through Jesus' death and resurrection we are, and will always be, seen as righteous by God.

When we sin, we need to repent and ask God to forgive us, as well as actively strive to become stronger in resisting temptation. However, the key point of justification is that if we are in Christ, our sins are forgiven, and through Jesus, we are declared righteous in God's eyes. This doesn't mean that there will not be consequences for sin. Scripture teaches that God disciplines His children, and sin can result in God's discipline in our lives. Unrepented sin can bring about disruption in our relationship with God and loss of blessings. The Bible also teaches that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ in the afterlife. However, sin doesn't cause us to lose salvation or justification, and "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The love and sacrifice of God through Jesus' death on the cross has resulted in our justification before God. It has removed our separation and has reconciled us with Him. What a precious and valuable gift has been offered by the God of love to humanity! "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

ADOPTION

Besides the "legal" change we experience in justification, whereby we are seen by God as righteous due to Jesus' sacrifice, we experience another significant change in our position and relationship with God through salvation. With sin no longer separating us from God, our relationship with God changes, as we become part of God's family—we become His children. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12 NKJV).

This change of relationship, this entry into God's family as His children, is called *adoption*. We are not the sons and daughters of God in the same sense as Jesus, who is the *only begotten Son*, but we are *adopted* into His family. In one sense this change is a legal one, since as God's children we

become heirs of God with all the rights of heirs. But more than that, we now have a relationship based on being members of God's family. God is our Father (Gal. 3:26).

” When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:4–7)

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:14–17)

While God was seen as Father in the Old Testament, the emphasis was more on God's holiness, and that holiness largely defined the relationship between humans and God. The general portrayal of God is that He is mighty, holy, pure, and separate, and sinful humans need to be humble before Him, obey Him, and venerate Him. When speaking of the Old Testament relationship with God, J. I. Packer wrote:

” Religion was “the fear of the Lord”—a matter of knowing your own littleness, of confessing your faults and abasing yourself in God's presence, of sheltering thankfully under His promise of mercy, and of taking care above all things to avoid presumptuous sins. Again and again it was stressed that we must keep our place, and our distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis overshadowed everything else.³

3. Packer, J. I. (1973, p. 203).

Redemption through Jesus changed this relationship to a much more personal one. We can now relate to God as a child relates to his or her loving father. It is a much more intimate relationship than what existed in Old Testament times. This closeness to God as Father, and His love for us, is seen in things that Jesus said about His Father:

” Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matt. 6:26)

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matt. 7:11)

All the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:30–31)

The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. (John 16:27)

We see God’s deep love in our adoption. He didn’t have to invite us into His family, He didn’t have to adopt us, but He did. Adoption is an act of love by someone who is not obligated to take in, care for, and love a child—it is by choice. God doesn’t adopt us because of how great or wonderful we are, or because we do good things for Him. He adopts us because He loves us—He loves humanity. He made it possible—at great personal cost to Himself—for sinners, separated from Him, to be redeemed, to be forgiven, and to enter His family. This is the love, mercy, and kindness of our God, who is love. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1).

J. I. Packer expresses God's love in adoption like this:

” Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into His family and fellowship—He establishes us as His children and heirs. Closeness, affection, and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater.⁴

As His children, His heirs, we can be sure of our inheritance of eternal life. Adoption brings us into God's family and gives us rights as heirs. This means that the blessings of salvation both in this life and the next are ours.

REGENERATION

Another result of Jesus' death and resurrection in the lives of believers is a spiritual change which is referred to in the following ways: being born again ([John 3:3–8](#)), rebirth, regeneration, ([Titus 3:5](#)) being born of the Spirit ([John 3:6–8](#)), and becoming a new creation ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). All of these concepts generally refer to a spiritual change which occurs in the heart of one who is redeemed by Christ. While justification brings a change in our “legal” standing with God, regeneration, or new birth, brings a change in our spiritual nature. The Holy Spirit transforms the redeemed person's sinful nature in a way that renews them and brings a spiritual change in the person. This new birth is the clean slate or fresh foundation on which the new Christian begins his or her spiritual life, and from that point forward can grow in it.

Being born again, or born of the Spirit, is a key element in salvation. Jesus told Nicodemus that without it one can't see or enter the kingdom of God.

4. Packer, J. I. (1973, p. 207).

” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:3–8)

This rebirth is a result of belief and acceptance of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for us. When someone believes in and accepts God’s plan of salvation, when they acknowledge that Jesus is their Savior, they are reborn. The person may or may not feel the change, but the change has occurred. They are born of God because they have believed in Him (1... John 5:1).

” 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. (John 1:12–13 NIV)

Becoming a new creation doesn’t mean that the original created nature of the individual no longer exists and is replaced, but rather signifies his or her sinful nature being changed or re-created.⁵ It’s a spiritual or moral renewal of the redeemed individual’s nature. It’s a new self that is in alignment with the likeness of God.

” If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who

5. Garrett, Jr., James Leo (2000, Vol. 2, p. 309).

through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:17–18)

To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22–24)

The spiritual rebirth of a Christian is also seen as being brought to life from spiritual death through belief in the risen Jesus.

” God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4–6)

You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Col. 2:13–14)

Regeneration is generally referred to in the Bible as a work of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus spoke of being born of the Spirit. The apostle Paul made reference to this being the work of the Holy Spirit as well.

” But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:4–6)

There are other verses which also speak of the Father's role in the new birth.

” Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Pet. 1:3)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created. (Jam. 1:17–18)

Both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have a role in the new birth and regeneration, which was foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

” I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

God's loving plan of salvation has justified us so that we are seen by Him as righteous. We have become His children by adoption. We are members of His family and no longer separated from Him. We are heirs of eternal salvation and of God's other promises. We also become a new creation, as we are born again. These precious gifts are the fruits of God's costly love, of Jesus laying down His life for us. We have been reconciled to God, and nothing will change that.

” I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38–39)

May we truly understand and appreciate the deep love God has for humanity through all He has done for us. May we also be ever aware of and concerned for the people around us who don't know or understand that they can become justified and adopted by God, that they can become His children. And may we have the love and conviction to share this good news with them, to invite them to become God's children.

CHAPTER 23

ETERNAL SALVATION

While all Christians believe that Jesus died for our sins and we are saved through the sacrifice of His death on the cross, there are some differences in belief among different denominations as to whether that salvation is permanent or whether it can be lost. It is a fact that there are Christians who lose faith, who stop believing in Jesus and salvation, and who turn from living a Christian life. The question arises in such instances: Did that person lose his or her salvation? Having once been saved, can you lose your salvation?

The Roman Catholic position on salvation differs significantly from the Protestant view and I'll mention a few general things in brief. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that by the sacrament of baptism God infuses justifying grace into the soul, which cancels original sin and imparts the habit of righteousness. This initial justification is strengthened through other sacraments, love-inspired works, and special merit from Mary and the saints.¹ The belief is that when Catholics die, if they have committed venial (minor) sins which haven't already been forgiven through the sacrament of confession, their souls will go to purgatory, a place where they will be fully cleansed. Having gone through the cleansing work of purgatory, they are then justified before God. Believers who commit mortal (serious) sin and die without receiving forgiveness through confession fall from grace and lose their salvation. Salvation in Catholic theology depends on continued obedience and can therefore be lost.

The two primary Protestant views are presented in general terms in this article. Beyond the main basic premises, various denominations on both sides of the issue also have further nuances within their belief systems, which aren't necessary to delve into here.

1. Lewis and Demarest (1996, Vol. 3, pp. 175–176).

CONDITIONS

Those who believe that it is possible for salvation to be lost believe that once one is saved, there are certain conditions that must be maintained in order to keep salvation. The belief is that God has reconciled us to Himself and we will have eternal life, provided these conditions are met. Some Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, as well as Wesleyan-based ones such as the Methodists believe this. These conditions mainly have to do with maintaining one's spiritual life and living a Christian life.

Those who believe that salvation cannot be lost also believe that it's important to maintain one's spiritual life, but don't believe salvation will be lost if one fails in this duty. The conditions, as seen by those who believe salvation can be lost, are based on five general principles that must be fulfilled: abiding, continuing, enduring, firmness, and faithfulness.² The position is that these conditions must be fulfilled throughout one's life to maintain salvation. I've included references to some of the verses which those who take this position base their understanding on.

Abiding: The first condition in this belief system is that one must abide in what they have heard concerning the Gospel. They must stay close to the source, God's Word and Christ ([Heb. 2:1–3](#); [1 John 2:24–25](#), [John 15:6](#)).

Continuing: Continuing means remaining steadfast. While God has begun the work of salvation, one must continue steadfast, to hold fast and continue in the faith. If one moves away from the faith and hope that is in the Gospel, then salvation will be lost ([Col. 1:21–23](#)).

Enduring: Enduring in the faith to the end of our lives is seen as one of the conditions of the final salvation of a believer. Life is filled with ups and downs, and the expectation is that individuals will hold on to their faith and live it through life's trials. If there is a failure to endure in the faith un-

2. These points are summarized from Williams, J. Rodman (1996, pp. 122–127).

til the end of one's life, eternal life will not be obtained (2 Tim. 2:10–12; Heb. 10:35–36).

Firmness: Those who don't confirm—or make firm—their faith by supplementing it with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love are in danger of losing their salvation. By spiritually growing in these—and presumably other—virtues, they confirm their salvation (Heb. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:10–11).

Faithfulness: It is necessary to remain faithful to the end. The believer must remain in faith and belief. If that faith weakens and turns to unbelief, then there is a loss of salvation and eternal life, unless there is repentance and return (Rev. 2: 4–5, 2:10, 3:12).

ETERNAL SECURITY

Other Christians disagree with the idea that salvation can be lost. They see God's work in salvation through Jesus' death as bringing eternal life and consider that Christians have assurance of that eternal life due to Christ's sacrifice. Among those who believe in eternal security, sometimes referred to as “the perseverance of the saints,” there are differences of opinion as to *why* salvation can't be lost. Nevertheless, they are in agreement that it cannot be lost.

Reformed churches (Calvinists) believe that God predestined people to be saved, and since they are predestined by God for salvation, they can't possibly lose their salvation. While they don't believe predestined Christians can lose their salvation, they do believe that some who profess to be Christians aren't truly saved, that they aren't predestined to salvation, and that those who lose their faith or turn their back on God were never truly saved in the first place. From their point of view, no truly saved Christian will ever turn against God. While there are undoubtedly people who profess to be Christians who aren't actually saved, or who have said a salvation prayer but didn't really mean what they were saying and thus weren't born again,

it doesn't seem within the realm of possibility that no saved Christian ever turns away from faith in Jesus. Most Christians probably know of, or have heard of, saved Christians who abandoned the faith.

Many Protestant and evangelical churches base their belief in eternal security on specific promises in the Bible, without linking them to belief in predestination. Reformed churches also use scriptures which speak of eternal life as the basis for their understanding and belief in the perseverance of the saints. Those who believe "once saved, always saved" believe this due to several key verses which are very specific regarding having salvation permanently.

” This is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:39–40)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27–29)

These verses have no caveats. They explicitly say that those who believe *have* eternal life, and no one or nothing can take it away. *They will never perish. I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me.* Scripture states that those who believe in Jesus have eternal life (John 3:16, 36). The next passage strengthens that understanding.

” I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38–39)

ETERNAL LIFE

Some who believe that Christians can lose their salvation don't look at eternal life as meaning forever, but rather see it as a quality of life, a type of life in relationship with God, which one can have for a time and then lose. However, this concept doesn't match the meaning of the Greek word *aiōnios* which is most often used in the Scripture for *everlasting* or *eternal*. The definition of *aiōnios* is without end, never to cease, eternal, everlasting.³

Eternal life stands in contrast to judgment, condemnation, and separation from God. Those who receive Jesus, who are born again, are not condemned—they have been redeemed by Christ's death on the cross.

” God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned. (John 3:17–18)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

Salvation doesn't bring an end to sin in our lives. As Christians we are to continually strive to overcome sin, but humans have sinful natures and therefore we sin, and when we do, we should ask God for forgiveness. While our sins have ramifications in our spiritual lives, in that they affect our personal relationship with God, they aren't a cause for the loss of our salvation. We may suffer the consequences of our sins and be chastised for them, since God, as a good parent, lovingly tries to teach and train us; but we don't lose our place as a child of God, one adopted into God's family.

” For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives ... If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons

3. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 790).

... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:6, 8,10–11)

As children of God, we are heirs of eternal life (Gal. 4:7). It is our promised inheritance through salvation.

” When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4–7)

Being justified by grace, which means being saved through Jesus’ sacrifice, we are heirs of an imperishable inheritance which is kept in heaven for us and which is guarded by God’s power.

” Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1:3–5)

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE GUARANTEE

As believers, we are “sealed by the Holy Spirit,” who is “the guarantee of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13–14). Theologian Wayne Grudem explains the seal of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our eternal inheritance like this:

” The Greek word translated “guarantee” in this passage (arrabon) is a legal and commercial term that means “first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge” and represents “a payment which obligates the contracting party to make further payments.” When God gave us the Holy Spirit within, He committed Himself to give all the further blessing of eternal life and a great reward in heaven with Him. This is why Paul can say that the Holy Spirit is the “guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.” All who have the Holy Spirit within them, all who are truly born again, have God’s unchanging promise and guarantee that the inheritance of eternal life in heaven will certainly be theirs. God’s own faithfulness is pledged to bring it about.⁴

God has promised salvation; through His death and resurrection Jesus has secured it; the Holy Spirit guarantees it. Our salvation is secure, is permanent, and is eternal. Once you have it, you don’t lose it. We may have temporary lapses in faith, but these lapses in faith and obedience do not change our legal standing as heirs, as those justified by the blood of Jesus (Rom. 5:9). Those who are saved, who have received Jesus, who are born again, do not lose their salvation.

One verse which is used by those who believe a Christian’s salvation can be lost is:

” For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt. (Heb. 6:4–6)

4. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 791).

This is a much debated scripture passage, and depending on one's theology it is looked at differently. Those who believe one can lose their salvation use this verse to show that it can be lost. According to this view, those who have *been enlightened*, who have received the *heavenly gift* of salvation and have *shared in the Holy Spirit*, if they fall away, lose their salvation.

From the Reformed point of view, Wayne Grudem argues that the author of the book of Hebrews is not talking about born-again believers, but rather about those who were associated with the early church, who were enlightened by the Gospel but had not come to full belief and salvation. They knew something of God's Word, they had seen the Holy Spirit work in different situations, and had seen the power of God manifest in others. They were connected with Christians and had been influenced by them, but had not made the decision to believe. They had become "associated with" the work of the Holy Spirit, they had been exposed to the true preaching of the Word and had appreciated much of its teachings, but in spite of all this, they willfully rejected all of these blessings and turned decidedly against them.

In this view, the author of Hebrews was saying that it's impossible to restore these particular people, as their familiarity with the things of God and their experiences of the influences of the Holy Spirit had served to harden them against conversion.⁵ This interpretation fits the Reformed belief that those who are truly saved won't stop believing, but will persevere to the end due to their being predestined to salvation.

From the non-Reformed position, Baptist professor Dr. Andrew Hudson explains these verses in the larger context of what the book of Hebrews is teaching. Within the context of the complete book, he argues that while this verse *is* speaking about saved Christians, it *is not* speaking about them losing their salvation. He begins by making the case that "those who were once enlightened" *does* mean saved Christians. He goes on to point out

5. Grudem, Wayne (2000, pp. 794–803).

that “falling away” in this context is not fully rejecting Christ, and that the judgment for the Christian who falls away isn’t a loss of salvation.

Hudson makes the point that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were facing persecution and who were faced with either trusting God for help (through Jesus) or refusing to trust Him. If they were to turn away from Christ and return to the Mosaic worship system, they would be saying that Jesus’ sacrifice was not sufficient for their daily faith needs. In taking that stand, they would be saying that Christ’s work on the cross was defective. In doing so they would be criticizing His public ministry and thus “putting Him to open shame.” In such an instance, these Christians would lose God’s blessing and experience His discipline. If they repented, they would be forgiven, but they would still face discipline from God’s hand. The believer would not escape the consequences of his sinful action by simply repenting. He’d be forgiven, but would face the repercussions.

Hudson suggests that the verse could be paraphrased like this:

” For it is impossible for true believers who have been once enlightened, and have accepted the heavenly gift, and have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and have experienced the good word of the Gospel and the power of the coming kingdom; and then they fail to live their daily life by faith in Christ, to return by means of repentance to a place where they can escape God’s temporal chastisement because they have openly claimed that Christ’s sacrifice was insufficient to maintain fellowship with God and they have publicly embarrassed and dishonored Christ, their patron.⁶

I see Hudson’s explanation as the proper interpretation of the verse. It shows that Hebrews 6:4–6 isn’t speaking of Christians losing their salvation and being unable to regain it. Christians who have accepted Jesus as

6. Hudson, Andrew (2011).

their Savior, who have been born again, are saved permanently. We have received eternal salvation, God's gift of love. We have everlasting life, we are reconciled to God, and we will live forever.—All because God loves us and Jesus died for us, so that we might receive the wonderful gift of salvation.

There will probably always be some theological debate among Christians as to who is saved and who isn't, or whether some are predestined and others aren't, as the scriptures on these matters and the interpretation of them will probably always generate some controversy. Let's remember that these things are truly in God's hands and it's not our place to be judgmental. There may well be those whom we will be surprised to see in heaven, as we may not have thought they were believers, or that they sincerely meant it when they prayed for salvation. But we must remember that God is the true and righteous judge; He is the one who knows each person's heart and motives, who understands everything about each of us. He longs for people to be saved. He loves us all and freely extends His gift of salvation to all who will receive it.

” I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)

PREDESTINATION?

There is another notable difference within the various Protestant belief systems related to the subject of salvation. This variance is rooted in different ways of looking at God's providence, which is defined as His continuous activity of preserving and governing the whole of creation by His wisdom and goodness and power, for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose and for the glory of His name.⁷ There are two general overarching positions: the Reformed position, which follows John Calvin's (1509–1564) teaching regarding predestination, and the Arminian position, which follows the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609).

7. Cottrell, Jack (1984, p. 14).

Some denominations, such as the Reformed churches that follow the teachings of John Calvin, believe that each human being's actions are decreed by God, and thus God ordains all that happens in the world. Within their definition of God's providence they state that *God cooperates with the created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and directs them to fulfill His purposes.*⁸ Believers in the Reformed tradition consider that humans have free will, in that they make free choices, but the choices they make are predetermined by God. Christians in the Arminian tradition also believe in God's providence as defined above, but believe that humankind has been granted true free will, in that people can make choices that are not previously decreed by God.

THE "ELECT"

When these two different belief systems approach the matter of salvation, the question arises as to whether believers—those who are saved and are called “the elect” in scripture—are predestined to salvation or whether they make a freewill choice to accept salvation. Are the elect chosen by God for salvation from before the foundation of the world? Has He predetermined who will be saved and who won't be? Or is it the case that God, in His foreknowledge, knows the freewill choices individuals will make, and thus knows in advance who will choose to accept salvation? In the Reformed belief system, the view is that God chose those who would be saved before the world was created. In the Arminian belief system, it's considered that He knew who would accept His gift of salvation because of His omniscience, but not because He predestined some to be saved and some not to be.

Within the Reformed belief system, humans are seen as making a free choice regarding salvation. They hear the Gospel call to salvation and they respond positively and thus have made a freewill choice. However, the Gospel call is seen as being irresistible. In the Reformed understanding, the

8. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 315).

Gospel call goes out in a general way, but the only ones who respond, who receive the summons that guarantees the right response, are those who are predestined to salvation. Those who reject the call do so because they are not chosen for salvation.

GRACE AND WORKS

Those who hold the Arminian interpretation of free will and predestination see the Gospel call as offering the hearer a completely free choice to accept or reject the call. They see God's election as having to do with His foreknowledge of an individual's acceptance of salvation, rather than God choosing those who will be saved and those who won't. From this perspective, God's elect are those who God, in His omniscience, knows will respond when they hear the Gospel.

Both the Reformed and Arminian positions affirm that we are saved by grace and not by works. The difference between the two positions is that the Reformed put forth that salvation is a complete act of God, with God being the one to prepare the heart to receive the Gospel of those whom He has elected and foreordained to be called and chosen. He bestows irresistible grace on the foreordained, and because it is irresistible, the elect person can do nothing else but get saved. Thus there is no participation on the human side, and salvation is a complete act of God.

In the Arminian view, it is also understood that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, and that no works are involved on the part of humanity. This free gift from God is offered to all, but not all accept it. Salvation is made available, but individuals are able to freely choose to either accept or reject God's gift. That is a freewill choice, granted to humans by God. Such a choice isn't seen as a "work" to merit salvation.

William Lane Craig makes the following point regarding our freewill choice:

” John 6:65 means that apart from God’s grace, no one can come to God on his own. But there’s no suggestion there that those who refused to believe in Christ did not do so of their own free will ... the fault does not lie with God that some persons freely resist God’s grace and every effort to save them; rather they like Israel fail to attain salvation because they refuse to have faith.⁹

WHO DID JESUS DIE FOR?

The difference in beliefs carries over into Jesus’ work of salvation. The question arises: did Jesus die for the sins of everyone or only for the sins of those who were predestined to salvation? The Reformed position is that Jesus died for the sins of the elect, it is a *limited atonement* or a *particular redemption*, and He didn’t die for the sins of *all*. The Arminian belief is that of *unlimited atonement* or *general redemption*, that Jesus died for the sins of *all*, although the atonement, while available to all, isn’t accepted by all because of free will.

The Reformed understanding is that the people Jesus laid down His life for are the sheep, those who know Him, because they were predestined to know Him (John 10:11, 14–15). And the others aren’t His sheep, He doesn’t know them, and He didn’t lay down His life for them.

” I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. (John 17:9)

Based on these and other verses, the Reformed position is that Jesus died for particular people (specifically those who would be saved and whom He came to redeem), that He foreknew each of them and had them individually in mind for His atoning work.¹⁰

9. Craig, William Lane. “Molinism and Divine Election,” 2008.

10. Grudem, Wayne (2000, p. 596).

Those who embrace the Arminian position, who believe in universal—or general—atonement, base their understanding of Christ’s atonement on other verses which indicate that Jesus tasted death for everyone (Heb. 2:9) and that He died for the sins of the world, as a ransom for all, for whoever believes in Him.

” [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh. (John 6:51)

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all. (1 Tim. 2:5–6)

The understanding in the Arminian position on these verses, which I agree with, is that Jesus died for the sins of the world, meaning for the sins of all. This doesn’t mean that all people in the world are saved, as clearly many people reject the offer of salvation, but it means that through Jesus’ death on the cross salvation is made possible for all men. God doesn’t wish for anyone to perish, and He desires that all people receive salvation (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:3–4). In His great love, mercy, and patience, He has made salvation possible through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for “the world,” for humankind, so any who believe can be saved.

The atonement is universal in God’s attitude and desire that none would perish, and in the saving grace made available through Jesus’ sacrifice. But not all believe or receive, so the atonement, the forgiveness of sin, and eter-

nal life, is not given to all. It is bestowed on those who believe. Theologian Jack Cottrell explained it this way:

” God’s grace as it appears within His own nature in the form of a desire to give forgiveness to sinners is universal in scope. It is true that this gift is actually given only to particular individuals, but the limitation is the result of man’s choice and not God’s. It was God’s choice to create man with a relative independence and a relatively free will. He does not force His own desires upon man, but respects the integrity of the free will with which He endowed His image-bearers at the time of creation. The reason why some receive grace and some do not is because some freely reject it and some freely accept it. This is to say that the actual reception of grace is conditional; i.e., it is conditioned upon a man’s willingness to accept it.¹¹

As much as I admire many of the Reformed theologians and feel that they are right and very strong on many aspects of Christian doctrine and faith, I believe they are mistaken in this case, and I agree with the Arminian position in this instance. While there is a difference in some beliefs between Reformed and Arminian Christians, we are, along with all Christians, all part of the body of Christ. All Christians believe God loves humanity, that everyone needs to hear the Gospel message from Christians who are willing to bring it to them. There are differences in theological perspectives, but we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, who love Him deeply and who desire to see others receive God’s gift of salvation.

God loves humanity. In His great love, He made it possible for human beings to become reconciled with Him, justified before Him, and able to possess eternal life, all through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. He loves each human being. His Son died for the sins of each individual. He has given humans the ability and the freewill choice to believe and receive

11. Cottrell, Jack (1987, pp. 382–383).

salvation or to decide against it. His desire is for all men to receive redemption, but in choosing to create human beings with free will, He does not force people to accept His love.

” For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

CHAPTER 24

CONCLUSION

I wasn't originally intending to write about the foundations of Christian theology. I had a burden to write about Jesus, and I was thinking of working through the four Gospels, writing about and commenting on His life, the deep truths He revealed, the principles of His teachings, and how they were understood by those who originally heard them. I wanted to more deeply understand what the Gospels had to say about Jesus' words, His actions, and His life, death, and resurrection, and write about those topics.

As I began writing, the Lord began to impress upon me how understanding the foundational doctrines made studying Christ and who He was more meaningful. Granted, the study of theology can be technical, and even boring at times; however, learning about the "details" of our Christian faith gives a greater understanding of the breadth and depth of our faith. A better understanding of the nature of God, who He is and what He does and why He does it, opens up a fuller appreciation of and love for Him. A deeper understanding of these doctrines causes us to think more deeply about the Lord, which in turn helps us to better comprehend His love, mercy, forgiveness, grace, comfort, and care.

Theology isn't "warm and fuzzy," and at first glance it doesn't seem like it would be an important part of one's personal relationship with God. Yet, gaining a better understanding of God and what He's like, of sin and how it keeps us from Him, of salvation and what Jesus has saved us from, of God's relationship to the world, can bring about a greater awareness and a more profound appreciation of God's love for us.

God's unconditional love for us is worth thinking about regularly. It is easy to get caught up in the fast pace of life and forget some of the fundamental truths that bring us joy, peace, and confidence as Christians. The nature of

God's love, its unconditionality and universality, is truly a wonderful thing. God's love is not the kind of love that is expressed by so many in today's world: a love of convenience, need, or ego. Too often, the love we see in society is predicated on the value that the other person provides, and when that value ceases or is no longer needed, the love fades with it. Not so with God's love. It is the essence of who He is. His love endures forever. It never fails. God's love is the source of His compassion for all mankind—believers and unbelievers. He delights in our company and wants to befriend us. God's deep and abiding love motivates His continual call to each human being He has created, inviting them into relationship with Him, into transformation.

We, as members of God's family, His adopted children, play a role in God's great story, in His love for humanity, His love for His creation. For we are called to share this story with those who haven't heard it, who don't understand it, and who have trouble believing it. With God's Spirit dwelling in us, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. We are ambassadors of Christ, who have a personal relationship with God, and our commission from Jesus Himself is to share the message, to tell the story, to let others know that they can be part of God's family. They can become part of God's kingdom, of His new creation. Their sins can be forgiven, all for free, since the price of their entry into God's family has been paid for. It's theirs for the asking.

It's helpful to remember the end result of it all, what God is offering, so it's fresh in our hearts and minds when we offer it to others. Those who become members of God's family will live forever in a place of incredible beauty, a place with no need of the sun or stars, for God will be its light (Rev. 21:23). There will be no death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4). It's a place that is free from all evil (Rev. 21:27), a place where God will dwell with men (Rev. 21:3).—Forever!

As partakers of these eternal blessings, as His ambassadors, His messengers, we should do our very best to live in a manner which reflects God and His love, which lets people see God's light and feel His warmth through us, His

children. We are to be messengers of the divine invitation, inviting one and all to the feast, to the kingdom of God (Luke 14:23). We are to preach the Gospel, the good news that anyone can become God's child, that His free gift is available to everyone. Our job is to pass on the invitation, to share the good news, to tell the story, and to do so in a language that people can understand, through our words, our actions, and our love.

Knowing Him better truly is the heart of it all. Knowing more about Him—about His nature, His character, His creative power, wisdom and mercy, His plan, and how, out of love, He created us with free will, with the ability to choose Him or not—helps us to love, admire, and praise Him all the more, and to be better ambassadors and messengers, in word and in deed, to a world desperately in need of God, of His love, His forgiveness, and His mercy.

”

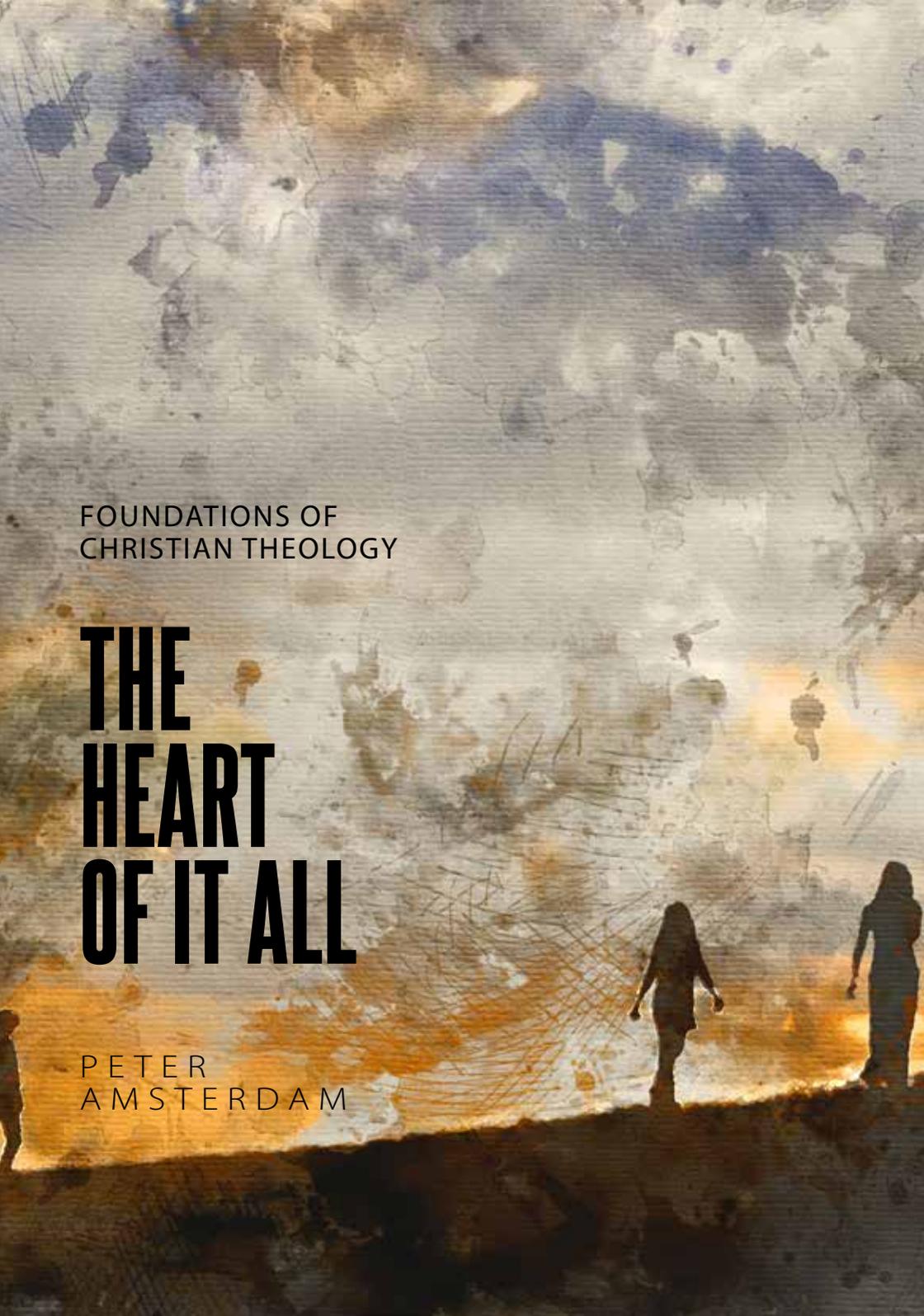
How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Rom. 10:14)

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The background is an abstract watercolor painting. It features a mix of colors including muted blues, greys, and earthy oranges and yellows. The texture is grainy and layered, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. In the lower right portion, there are dark silhouettes of three people walking away from the viewer towards a bright, glowing horizon line. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

FOUNDATIONS OF
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

THE HEART OF IT ALL

PETER
AMSTERDAM