

# Theology

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## **THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY**

Theological reflection is the most important activity a person can perform. This might be an astonishing statement, but if we understand what theology is, then the truth of this claim will become evident.

The word THEOLOGY refers to the study of God. God is the supreme being who has created all that exists and who now controls all that exists. Theology seeks to understand and articulate in a systematic manner information revealed to us by him. Theology is concerned with ultimate reality.

Since it is the study of the ultimate, nothing is more important. And because it is a study of the ultimate, it defines and governs every other area of thought and life. God is the ultimate being and the ultimate reality; therefore, theological reflection is the ultimate human activity.

When considered in a broader sense, theology can include all the other doctrines revealed in Scripture. A doctrine consists of a set of ideas or propositions on a topic, so a biblical doctrine is the biblical teaching on a subject. Theology refers to the study of the Bible or the systematic formulation of doctrines from the Bible. A biblical doctrine is binding, because it carries the authority of God. A system of theology is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teachings of the Bible.

Christians often think that it is wrong to study theology for its own sake. An anti-intellectual spirit has so captivated them that they refuse to accept that intellectual activity possesses intrinsic value. However, this implies that even knowing God must serve a greater purpose, probably a practical or ethical one. Although the knowledge of God ought to affect our conduct, it does not follow that the intellectual enterprise of theology serves a purpose that is greater than itself. Rather, since to study theology is to know God, and to know God is the highest purpose of man, theology possesses the highest intrinsic value.

As God said by Jeremiah, "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight."

There is no higher purpose for which the knowledge of God intends to reach, and there is no higher purpose for man but to know God. Theological knowledge can produce moral virtues and other effects in a person's life, but we should not regard them as higher purposes than the knowledge of God and his revelation.

## **THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY**

"God is spirit" – he transcends the spatiotemporal existence of man. Thus we ask whether man can know anything about God, or how man can know anything about him. The Bible's answer is that it is possible for man to have knowledge about God because God has revealed himself to man.

The universe displays God's glory. The magnitude and excellence of the things that God has created offer testimony to his power and wisdom. As the Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

However, man does not directly perceive this testimony, and he does not logically infer information about God from it. As Paul said, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." God has deliberately made it impossible for humans to know him by their own wisdom and ability.

Therefore, although the testimony of creation is strong and evident, man cannot gain knowledge about God by an observation of the world. Nevertheless, this does not mean that some people have no concept of God in their minds. In fact, the Bible asserts that every human being knows about God, but this knowledge does not come from observation.

Rather, Paul said that this knowledge about God has been "written" into the mind of man – it is an innate knowledge. He wrote, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, still by their own innate sense behave as the law commands, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."

Theologians refer to the testimony of creation and the innate knowledge in the mind of man as God's GENERAL REVELATION. It is also called natural revelation – God's disclosure of himself through nature, or God's mark in his creation. A system of theology supposedly derived from general revelation or natural revelation is called natural theology.

Notice the distinction between natural revelation and natural theology. Although many theologians claim to derive a natural theology from natural revelation, this is contrary to Scripture's position. Rather, the Bible teaches that there is a general or natural revelation, but it is impossible to derive a natural theology from this revelation.

All men know about God by natural revelation, but it does not mean that all men consciously acknowledge him. In fact, since all men are sinful, they refuse to acknowledge this God that they know, but they attempt to suppress the truth. Paul explained, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the

truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Although men suppress their knowledge about God, this knowledge remains indestructible and undeniable, so that it surfaces in distorted forms in non-Christian religions, philosophies, and ethical principles.

God has revealed his existence, attributes, and some of his moral demands to every person by including this information in the human mind. This knowledge is innate and is not derived by reasoning from sensation. Man does not infer from what he observes in nature that there must be a God; rather, he knows the God of the Bible before he has any access to empirical data. Interaction with creation, including the act of observation, stimulates the mind of man to recall this innate knowledge, which has been suppressed by sin.

Every person has an innate knowledge of God, and everywhere he looks nature reminds him of it. His every thought and every experience testifies to God's existence and attributes. The evidence is inescapable. Those who deny the existence of God are suppressing the truth because of their wickedness and rebellion. Although they claim to be wise, they have become fools. God's general revelation of his existence and attributes renders without excuse those who deny that he is and what he is, and so they are rightly condemned.

Every person has an innate knowledge of the existence and attributes of God, and the universe serves as a constant reminder. However, general revelation excludes much information about God and his creation, and in particular it does not contain information necessary for salvation. It does not contain the gospel. Therefore, God has decided to teach us by verbal revelation. He has given us the Scripture.

In other words, he talks to us and tells us what he wants us to know. The Bible says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." Theology is possible because God has revealed himself to us by the words of the Bible. Theology is possible because God speaks to us and teaches us theology.

This is called SPECIAL REVELATION. It contains rich and precise information about God and the things that he has decided we should learn. It is from the Bible that we obtain knowledge that is necessary for salvation. It is from the Bible that we come to know the message about Jesus Christ, that we need to be saved from sin and hell, and how we can be saved through him. As Paul said to Timothy, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you

have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

It is possible for man to know God through his revelation because God has made man in his own image, so that there is a point of contact between the two despite the transcendence of God. Animals and inanimate objects cannot know God the way man can even if they are presented with his verbal revelation, since they cannot receive and understand it.



## **THE FOUNDATION OF THEOLOGY**

God has chosen to reveal information to us through the Bible. He preferred words rather than images and experiences. He preferred to tell instead of to show. His revelation to us is rational and intellectual in nature, and not mystical or empirical. Verbal communication is superior because it can be precise, accurate, and extensive.

Since the Bible assumes this form of communication, a theological system must be derived from biblical propositions, and not from a non-verbal basis such as religious feelings and experiences. Moreover, a theological system cannot be derived from an irrational basis such as scientific theories. Science is irrational because it commits the logical fallacies of empiricism, induction, and affirming the consequent, or experimentation.

Every system of thought begins with a first principle. On this basis, it derives the rest of the system by inductive or deductive reasoning, or a combination of the two. Induction is a formal fallacy, since due to the form or structure of the reasoning process, the conclusion is never a logically necessary result of the premises. The fallacy occurs when one reasons from particulars to universals. Reasoning on the basis of empirical data requires induction, since sensations are particulars, and every worldview must contain universal concepts and propositions, such as man, car, red, size, and so on. Therefore, induction and empiricism are irrational, and a system that places any dependence on either must inevitably collapse into skepticism. Skepticism is the position that knowledge is impossible, but it is self-contradictory, since it maintains that we can know that we cannot know.

Deduction is the only valid form of reasoning. It proceeds from premises to conclusions by logical necessity. However, since deductive reasoning never produces information that is not already implicit in the premises, the first principle of a deductive system must contain all the information for the rest of the system. This means that a first principle that is too narrow will fail to provide a sufficient number of propositions to produce a comprehensive and coherent worldview, or a system of thought that is able to answer all necessary questions. Thus knowledge is impossible on the basis of induction, empiricism, or any inadequate first principle.

Even if a first principle appears to be sufficiently broad and contains enough information to construct a worldview, there must be justification for it, or some reason for affirming it over another. The justification for a first principle cannot come from a higher authority or a prior premise, for then it would not be the first principle. A lower authority or premise within the system cannot justify the first principle, since the lower authority or premise itself depends on this first principle. Therefore, a first principle of a system of thought must be self-authenticating. It must possess its own authority and stand on its own authority.

The Bible is the ultimate authority of the Christian system; therefore, our first principle is the Bible itself. It is our starting point, the foundation of our thinking. This may be expressed by a proposition that represents all the contents of the Bible, such as "The Bible is truth" or "The Bible is the word of God," or the Bible's own statement, "All Scripture is breathed out by God."

Regardless of how it is stated, our first principle is the entire Christian Scripture. And we derive our system of thought and our theology from the entire Christian Scripture by deduction.

Although empirical, inductive, and scientific arguments have been formulated in support of biblical revelation, and although they seem to be forceful given empirical assumptions, so that no empirically inclined non-Christian can refute them, the Christian must not be reliant on these arguments. This is because empirical, inductive, and scientific methods are irrational and prevent the discovery of truth.

Moreover, if we were to depend on empirical arguments and procedures to justify the Bible, the empirical assumptions would then stand as judge over the very word of God, so that Scripture would no longer be the ultimate authority in our system. As Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." God possesses ultimate authority, so that there is no higher authority by which one may pronounce the Bible as infallible and inerrant.

That said, not every system that claims divine authority has within its first principle the content to justify itself. A sacred text might contradict itself and self-destructs. Another might admit dependence on the Christian Bible, but the Bible condemns all other alleged revelations. In any case, if the Bible is true, and it claims exclusivity, then all other systems of thought must be false. Therefore, if one affirms a non-Christian worldview, any worldview other than strict biblical Christianity, he must at the same time reject the Bible.

This generates a clash between the two worldviews. When this happens, the Christian can be confident that his system of thought is impervious to the attacks from others, but the biblical system itself provides the content for both defense and offense. The Christian can destroy the non-Christian's worldview by questioning the first principles and the subsidiary propositions of the system.

Does the first principle of the system contradict itself? Does it fail to satisfy its own requirements? For example, a principle stating that every assertion must be empirically verified cannot itself be empirically verified. The principle self-destructs. Does the system crumble because it assumes the reliability of sensation, induction, and the scientific method? Does it contain subsidiary propositions that contradict one another? Does it borrow Christian premises not deducible from its own first principle? Does the system provide coherent answers to the ultimate and the necessary questions, such as those concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics?

The first principle, the starting point, or the foundation of the Christian system is the Bible. From this first principle, the theologian constructs a comprehensive system of thought. To the extent that his reasoning is correct, every part of the system is deduced by logical necessity from the infallible first principle, and is thus equally infallible. And since the Bible is the verbal revelation of God, who demands our worship and commands our conscience, a system of theology validly deduced from revelation is authoritative and binding. It represents what

Christians have pledged to believe and what all men ought to believe, because it represents universal and objective truths that God has revealed.

## **THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY**

Theology is necessary for all of thought and life. Since God is the beginning, the ultimate, and the omnipotent creator, he has the authority to address all aspects of our lives, and he has the power to enforce his commands and his wishes. Therefore, when he speaks, we must listen, believe, and submit.

Christian theology systematizes his verbal revelation, and it is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teachings of the Bible. The necessity of theology is a question of the necessity of communication from God and obedience to God. This is God's universe, so that divine revelation is the infallible and binding source of information and interpretation regarding all of thought and life. Since God has spoken, and since it is necessary to hear him, to believe him, to obey him, and to declare him, theology is necessary.

Theology is central to all of thought and life because it deals with the verbal revelation that comes from the supreme being, the essential reality that gives existence and meaning to everything. To illustrate, ignorance of musical theories has no direct relevance to one's ability to do algebra or to reason about ethical issues. A lack of athletic abilities is unlikely to hinder a person's performance in the kitchen. But ignorance of divine revelation affects all of thought and life, from one's view toward history and philosophy, to one's interpretation of music and literature, to one's understanding of mathematics and physics.

Since this is God's universe, only his interpretation about anything is correct, and he has revealed his thoughts in the words of the Bible. It follows that an ignorance of theology means that a person's interpretation of every subject will lack the defining factor that puts it into the proper perspective. When it comes to ethics, for example, it is impossible to derive or establish any universal moral principle without an appeal to God. The very ideas of right and wrong remain undefined without his verbal revelation. He must define these concepts for us, and only his definitions are authoritative, relevant, and binding on all people. And since the Bible is the only objective and public divine revelation, the only way to appeal to God's authority – the only way to construct a public theology or philosophy – is by an appeal to the Bible.

There is intrinsic value in knowledge about God. Whereas every other kind of knowledge is a means to an end, knowledge about God is an end in itself. We do not know God in order to know or to do something more important. Theology is the study of God, or the systematization and articulation of knowledge about God, so that in terms of its value, it is self-justified. Of course, the knowledge of God is the foundation for a right knowledge of all other things, and it is the foundation for right purpose, right action, and so on. But its value does not depend on the effect that it has on these other things. The pursuit of the knowledge of God is justified just because of what it is. To say that theology is not an end in itself implies the blasphemy that God is not the ultimate, as if God's own worth is in serving some higher purpose. And because God has revealed himself through the Scripture, to know the Scripture is to know God, and this is to study theology.

## **THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY**

Many Christians have succumbed to the anti-intellectual spirit of the world, and as a result they make a sharp distinction between knowing God and knowing about God. If to "know about" God represents the study of theology, then to them a person may know much about God but not know God, or he may know God but not know much about God. To them, a person's theological knowledge is disproportionate to how well he knows God, and some people even seem to think that the more one knows about God, the less one knows God. Knowing about God is not only distinguished from knowing God, but in cases where this distinction is emphasized, knowing about God may even hinder a person from knowing God.

This is anti-intellectualism. Another name for it is insanity. Yet in various forms, it is rampant among those who call themselves Christians, and even those who claim to oppose anti-intellectualism are often infected by this way of thinking. The assumption that poisons theology is that piety is largely non-intellectual and non-rational. This assumption is unbiblical and dangerous.

If it is possible to know God without knowing very much about him, then what does it mean to know God? If knowing God means to have some kind of fellowship with him, then it entails at least recognition. One must know that he is, what he is, and how he fellowships with us. A person who fellowships with God must know that there is a God, that God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and not Allah, or Buddha, or his neighbor's cat, or the tree in his backyard. He must know the conditions under which he must relate to this God, and he must know the means and methods that make this fellowship with the Deity possible. All of this entails knowing things – many, many things – about God. Fellowship also involves communication, which requires the exchange of thoughts, and this again entails knowledge about many, many things, and about many words and ideas. Communication is impossible without the exchange of information in the form of propositions, or in a form that is reducible to propositions.

How does a person know God, if not through knowing about him? Some people might answer that we know God through religious experience. But religious experience is defined and interpreted by theology, or knowledge about God. What is a religious experience? How does a person know he has received one? What does a particular feeling, sensation, or even apparition or encounter mean? Is the experience from God or Satan? The Bible warns that the devil can appear as an angel of light. Answers to these questions can only come by studying God's verbal revelation. And even if it is possible to know God through religious experience, what a person gains is still knowledge about God, or intellectual information reducible to propositions.

A person may claim to know God through prayer and worship. But what does this mean? Is this just another way of asserting that we know God by religious experience? We already know what knowing about God means. If knowing about God and knowing God can be sharply distinguished, then one must define knowing God in a way that avoids any overlap with knowing about God. If this cannot be done, then knowing God is only a pious-sounding way to

say the same thing as knowing about God, and the distinction adds nothing to our faith except confusion and false spirituality.

In fact, prayer and worship themselves are undefined until a theological formulation about them is established. Before a person can properly pray and worship, he must first determine to whom he offers prayer and worship. After this he must determine the way that he must offer prayer and worship. All this means that a systematic study of Scripture is necessary, because it is Scripture that informs and governs all aspects of Christian beliefs and practices. Thus knowledge of God comes from his verbal revelation, and not from non-verbal means of religious exercises. Most people who resist theological studies have not thought through these issues, but they perform prayer and worship while holding certain assumptions about them, often in error and without understanding.

Still another person might declare that we know God by walking in love. But again, love remains undefined until there is theological reflection on the matter. What is love? The Bible says that love is the fulfillment of the law. What law? And what does it say? You cannot "walk in love" if love fulfills the law and you do not know what the law says. The Bible says that the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," sums up the other commandments of God about how we must treat others. If you do not know what these commandments are, you cannot know what it means to love your neighbor. But in the same place, the Bible indicates that these commandments are "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," and other commandments like these. And now we know what it means to love our neighbor. You cannot gain knowledge by walking in love, because you must first gain knowledge in order to walk in love.

Even the relationship between knowing God and walking in love comes from the Bible: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Without such a biblical teaching, a person cannot justify the claim that knowing God and walking in love have anything to do with each other.

Moreover, the Bible indicates here that we are born of God and that we know God before we love one another. It is because we are born of God that we are able to love, and it is because we know God that we realize what love means. The ones who claim to know God through walking in love are often doing nothing other than being kind to others, and they define kindness according to non-Christian norms rather than according to scriptural principles. They possess only an illusion of knowing God.

Once a person attempts to address these questions about how one comes to know God, he is doing theology. Theology is unavoidable. The matter then becomes whether his theology is correct. False theology brings spiritual disaster. True theology leads to genuine worship and holiness.

There is a slogan that says, "Give me Jesus, not exegesis." The anti-intellectual attitude is evident. But it is the Bible that gives us information about Jesus, and our exegesis of the Bible is a deliberate effort to study what it says to us about Jesus. Therefore, we cannot know Jesus without exegesis. To say, "Give me Jesus, not exegesis," is another way to say, "Give me Jesus, not Scripture." Such an attitude is hostile to Jesus himself.

Ask the people what they know about Jesus. If what they say about Jesus differs from the biblical account, then this means that they do not know him after all. But if they offer an accurate account of Jesus, how did they learn it if not from the Bible? What we need to say is, "Give me Jesus through exegesis."

A repudiation of theology is also a refusal to know God through the way he has prescribed. Knowing the Scripture – knowing about God – takes priority over all of human thought and life. Theology is the systematic study and expression of the teachings of Scripture. It defines and interprets all that a person thinks and does. It ranks above all other necessities. No other task or discipline approaches it in significance. The study of theology is the most important human activity. And it is the foundation for every other human activity.

## **THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE**

The Bible is a collection of propositions. Although many people deprecate words in favor of images and feelings, God chose to reveal himself and to communicate with us in the words of human language. Words are able to convey information from God and about God in an exact manner. Scripture is a meaningful divine revelation, and we are able to declare the mind of God as set forth in the Bible by means of speaking and writing.

God speaks to us in propositions, in words and sentences. This refutes several errors about God and revelation, such as the claims that human language is inadequate to speak about God, that images are superior to words, that music is of greater value than preaching, and that religious experiences can teach a person more about spiritual things than theological studies.

Some people insist that the Bible speaks in a manner that produces vivid mental images. This supposedly shows that although the Bible consists of words, the intended effect of these words is to produce images, and this is implicit endorsement for images as the superior vehicles of communication. The argument is farfetched and desperate. First, its basis is not in the Bible itself, but a claim about the effect that it has in readers. Second, at best it describes the reaction of only some readers. Most readers may not respond in the way described. Third, thousands of passages cannot be accurately represented by images, such as those that refer to abstract and eternal ideas.

Fourth, if God wanted to communicate with us through images, he could have inspired the prophets and apostles to draw pictures into the Bible. But there is not even one image in all of Scripture. If images are superior to words, then how come there are no drawings in the Bible? If images are essential to theological communication, the inclusion of drawings would ensure that no one forms the wrong mental pictures when exposed to divine revelation. Even when mental images are intended, the fact that God chose to use words to produce these images demonstrates that words are sufficient and superior.

Suppose we show a drawing of Christ's crucifixion to a person who has no knowledge of the Christian faith. Without any verbal explanation, it would be impossible for him to know that Christ himself was innocent, that he died to satisfy God's wrath, and that he did this to save those whom God had chosen before the creation of the world. The picture suggests no relationship between the event to anything divine or spiritual. It does not show whether the event was historical or fictional. And there would be no way of knowing the words Christ spoke when he was on the cross. The image carries no theological meaning.

Unless there are at least several hundred words to explain it, no proper interpretation is possible. But once there are so many words to explain it, the picture has become unnecessary. A picture is not worth a thousand words. It cannot even replace one word. If there were ten million pictures to depict every detail of the life of Christ, there would still be no intelligible gospel. If there is no gospel, then there is no salvation, and the person who is shown these



pictures would remain in his sin and destined for hell, befuddled rather than enlightened by our massive art collection.

Any claim that exalts music over verbal communication suffers similar criticisms. It is impossible to derive any meaning or any religious content from music if it is performed without words. The Book of Psalms is a large collection of songs. It provides us with a rich heritage for worship, doctrine, and reflection. However, this whole heritage is a collection of words. The original tunes are absent. No musical notation is found in any part of the Bible. God's design in the inspiration of Scripture shows that the value of the biblical psalms is in the words and not the tunes. Music plays a secondary role in worship. Compared to the words of Scripture and the ministry of preaching, the tunes themselves are unimportant.

As for religious experiences, when it comes to communicating information, even a vision of Christ cannot replace a thousand words from Scripture. Without knowledge of the Bible, a person cannot evaluate any religious experience, whether it is a healing miracle or an angelic visitation. Religious experiences, without verbal communication, do not carry their own interpretation, so that the most spectacular supernatural encounters remain unintelligible without words to inform the mind with definite information. And just as ten thousand images cannot match the intelligibility of even one word or sentence, even a vision of God requires verbal interpretation. This is not an irreverent remark, since it is God himself who sends us his words and commands us to heed them. Rather, it is irreverent to assert that his words are unnecessary or that some other means of communication is superior to the one that he has chosen.

The Exodus could never have occurred if God had remained silent when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. When Jesus appeared in a bright light on the road to Damascus, Saul had to ask, "Who are you, Lord?" What if Jesus had refused to speak? But he answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul realized who was speaking to him only because Jesus used words to tell him. Religious experiences are meaningless unless they are accompanied or interpreted by intelligible words.

Another erroneous position is to regard the Bible as a mere record of revelatory events, rather than God's revelation itself. This heresy claims that the Bible is not revelation, but a record of revelation. It claims that revelation as such does not consist in words and propositions, but in God's creation, miracles, appearances, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, and his acts of compassion and sacrifice, and so on.

Now a miracle is revelation in a sense, but what does the miracle reveal? Does it reveal something about God, or the devil? What about God does the miracle reveal? Does it reveal that he is powerful and compassionate? Or does it reveal that he can help people but often refuse to help them? Does it reveal that God is arbitrary with miracles, or that he performs miracles to fulfill his promises and in response to faith?

What are we supposed to learn from a miracle? We need words to tell us how to interpret these events, and then we need words to state the interpretation of these events. Otherwise, one interpretation is just as invalid as its opposite, because if there is no standard of interpretation, no interpretation can be a necessary inference from any event. The events in themselves reveal nothing unless there is an abundance of words to interpret them. The words themselves constitute the revelation. Since they constitute what is revealed, they are identified with revelation. The words are the revelation.

Some people object that our devotion to Scripture implies that we prize the record of a revelatory event more than the event itself. However, if Scripture itself is revelation, then this concern is misguided. In fact, it is a blatant refusal to accept what God himself regards as revelation. Paul wrote, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." The words of the Bible were breathed out by God. They came directly from his mind and his being. If that is not revelation, then nothing is revelation. How can words breathed out by God himself be less of a revelation than a miracle or even the person of Christ? This way of thinking pits God against himself, and results in heresy and confusion.

Even if we regard the events recorded in the Bible as revelation, we have no direct contact with them. The only public and persistent revelation we have contact with is the Bible. When people refer to the events in the Bible, they are in fact referring to the Bible that talks about these events. It is self-defeating to deprecate a revelation that we do possess in favor of a kind of revelation that we do not. God did not only design and cause the events that the words of the Bible describe and interpret, but he also selected and caused to be written these very words that we find in the Bible. Moreover, thousands of statements in the Bible do not correspond to personal appearances, actions, or events, but the propositions alone constitute the revelation. For example: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

This high view of Scripture is the one that Scripture itself affirms, so that it is the only one that is rightly called Christian, and every person is required to agree with it. As long as a person denies that the Bible itself is divine revelation, it remains nothing more than an ordinary book to him, so that he would hesitate to offer it complete reverence, as if it is possible to excessively adore it.

There are preachers who declare that believers should look to "the Lord of the book, not the book of the Lord," or something to this effect. But since the words of Scripture were breathed out by God, and those words constitute the only public and explicit revelation from God, it is impossible to look to the Lord without looking to his book. In fact, since the words of Scripture are the very words of God, a person is looking to the Lord only to the extent that he is looking to the words of the Bible.

A person is identified with his thoughts and his words. Suppose someone tells me, "I agree with you, the person, but I disagree with your thoughts and your words." This would not be clever or respectful, but insane. He would be a stupid and confused person. To agree with me is to agree

with my thoughts and my words. There is no difference. Therefore, to believe God is to believe his words, and to love God is to love his words.

Our contact with God is through the words of the Bible. God teaches and commands humanity through the Bible. Therefore, our attitude toward the Bible is our attitude toward God. Anyone who loves God will love the words of God just as much, and he will not distinguish between the two. A person loves God only to the extent that he loves the Bible. Love for the Bible is the standard by which other aspects of spiritual life are measured.

## **THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE**

The Bible is the verbal revelation of God. It is God speaking to us. It is the voice of God. The nature of the Bible indicates that the best way to communicate divine revelation is by means of words. We know God by studying the words of God, that is, the words of the Bible. It is the most precise, accurate, and comprehensive source of information about God available to us.

The Bible says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." God directly breathed out the words of Scripture. This included causing the human writers to write down the exact words that he wanted to use in order to communicate his thoughts. This is the doctrine of DIVINE INSPIRATION.

Scripture, or the Bible, consists of the Old and New Testaments, sixty-six documents in total, functioning as an organic whole. Peter the apostle recognized the Old Testament as Scripture when he referred to the writings of the prophets. When he endorsed the writings of Paul, he called them Scripture as well, and placed them on the same level as the writings of the prophets.

Peter said, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." He explained that the ones who wrote Scripture were "carried along by the Holy Spirit," so that no part of it "had its origin in the will of man," or came by "the prophet's own interpretation." Likewise, the apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit.

The Bible is an exact verbal revelation from God. As Jesus said, "Scripture cannot be broken." And he said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." God exercised such control over the Bible's production that its content, to the very letter, is what he desired to set in writing. The Bible reveals God's nature and God's mind in an exact and univocal manner.

There is the objection that this high view of Scripture implies a dictation theory of biblical inspiration, and since the various documents in Scripture seem to reflect the different personalities, backgrounds, and literary styles of the writers, the dictation theory must be false, and so divine inspiration is excluded as well. Like every argument against the inspiration of Scripture, this objection is unintelligent, and it shows that those who use it against the Christian faith are stupid.

Christians rush to deny the dictation theory, but there is nothing inherently absurd or impossible about it. God could have dictated his thoughts to reflect a variety of personalities and literary styles to suit his purposes and to manifest his manifold wisdom. There is no need to

renounce the principle of dictation, since there is nothing wrong with it. And as indicated by the prophets themselves, significant portions of the Bible were indeed dictated and written down. Perhaps the most prominent example is the Ten Commandments. God wrote on the tablets as he spoke, and Moses also recorded the exact words that God said. Many dictated passages are found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the other prophets, and in other places where God's words are marked out as direct quotations.

Given the fact that God has all power and all wisdom, the argument against dictation becomes irrelevant. It is immediately defeated. Again, the fact that various styles and personalities are evident in the writings of Scripture does not refute the dictation theory, because God could have dictated his words in various styles and personalities. Even a mere man can do this, and assume a variety of styles and personalities as he writes or dictates.

Thus the objection is an unthinking reaction to the doctrine of inspiration based on prejudice and false assumptions about how God must reveal himself in words, or if he had chosen dictation, how it must have occurred. But God's ability defies human restrictions. It is a matter of interest as to whether divine inspiration happened this way or whether it happened in some other way, but there is no inherent problem with dictation.

In short, the objection is that inspiration implies dictation, and dictation is excluded, so that inspiration must be false. All three parts of the argument are false and stupid. Inspiration does not necessarily mean dictation. Dictation is not excluded by anything that we find in Scripture. And whether or not Scripture came by dictation, or whether all or part of it came by dictation, this has no direct relevance to whether inspiration is true or false.

A high view of Scripture does not imply that all of it was produced by dictation. And even when dictation occurred, God did not dictate his word to the prophets and apostles as a man would dictate his letters to a secretary. One might assume that dictation is the highest form of inspiration, since it is the most familiar human situation in which a writer records the exact words of another person. However, dictation in this human context does not model the highest form of inspiration.

A man may dictate his words to the secretary, but he has no control over the details of the secretary's life. He has no control over the secretary's birth, family, education, and personality. He has no control over the secretary's thoughts and movements as he dictates his words. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God exercises total control over every detail of his creation, to the extent that even the thoughts of men are under his control. The Bible denies that man has "free will." Although the will of man exists as a function of the mind, it is not "free" in the sense that it can operate apart from God's constant and complete control. God so created, ordained, directed, and controlled the lives and thoughts of his chosen instruments, that when the time came, their backgrounds and personalities were perfectly suited to write those portions of Scripture he had assigned to them. And then as they wrote, God exercised direct and constant control over them.

God did not find the right people to write Scripture, but he designed and created the right people to write it, and he shaped every aspect of their lives, and then he caused them to write Scripture and exercised direct and constant control over them as they wrote. Some people call this ORGANIC INSPIRATION, but others consider the term ambiguous or misleading. The point is that God did not merely suggest or dictate words to the writers, but he controlled all the details of their lives and thoughts. The biblical doctrine of inspiration is far more ambitious than mere dictation.

At the time of writing, the Spirit of God controlled the writers in such a deliberate and complete manner that they wrote down materials that were beyond what their natural intelligence could conceive. Scripture exceeds what men could produce without divine inspiration, but it is not beyond the ability of men to understand, because God wrote it for men to understand. The product was God's verbal revelation, and it was to the very letter what he desired to set in writing. And by his control of nature, history, and mankind, he has preserved his book to this day.

The inspiration of the Bible does not refer only to the times when God exercised special control over the writers, although he indeed exercised this control, but the preparation began even before the creation of the world. God controls all things, including all the writers of Scripture, and not only when they sat down to write. Even when God dictated his words to the prophets, he totally controlled their hearing and writing of his words. In comparison, dictation alone is weaker and implies a lower view of Scripture, since it ascribes to God less control over the process.

This view of divine inspiration explains the so-called "human element" in Scripture. The biblical documents reflect the various social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds of the authors, their different personalities, and their unique vocabularies and literary styles. This phenomenon is what one would expect given the biblical view of inspiration, in which God exercised complete control over their lives, circumstances, even their very thoughts, and not only the writing process. The "human element" in Scripture is not a defect, but God created it on purpose. It is part of what God intended to produce, so that it does not damage the doctrine of inspiration, but it is consistent with it and explained by it.

## THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

The inspiration of Scripture implies the unity of Scripture. The fact that the words of Scripture proceeded from one rational divine mind implies that it should exhibit perfect coherence. This is what we find in the Bible. Although the personality and literary style of each writer is evident, the unity of the Bible indicates a single divine author. Each biblical document exhibits perfect internal consistency, and all the documents are consistent with one another. The Bible never contradicts itself.

Jesus affirmed the coherence of Scripture. He assumed this in his teachings and applications of the Bible. For example, when Satan urged Jesus to jump from the temple, Satan cited a text in Scripture that said God would command his angels to lift up the righteous. But Jesus answered that the Bible also said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Satan's application of the verse from Scripture contradicted another verse from Scripture, and therefore he mishandled the text. The answer from Jesus assumed the unity of Scripture, and even Satan did not challenge it.

On another occasion, when Jesus confronted the Pharisees, his challenge to them assumed the unity of Scripture and the law of contradiction. He asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They replied, "The son of David." Then he said, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

David was speaking by the Spirit, so what he said was correct. But if Christ was to be David's descendent, how could Christ also be David's Lord? The fact that this was a problem meant that both Jesus and the Pharisees assumed the unity of Scripture and the law of contradiction. They agreed that the Scripture could not contradict itself, and they agreed that it was impossible for a person to affirm a contradiction. If they had believed that the Scripture could contradict itself, or if they had thought that a person could affirm two propositions that contradicted each other, then Jesus said nothing meaningful. But clearly they thought that what Jesus said was compelling. Of course, the answer is that the Christ would be both human and divine, and therefore David's "son" and "Lord" at the same time.

For any proposition that affirms X, the proposition that contradicts it is one that affirms not-X. This is what a contradiction means. Any proposition that affirms one thing is by necessity also a denial of its opposite. To keep this simple, let us say that X and Y contradict each other, so we refer to Y instead of not-X. Thus to affirm X is to deny Y, and to affirm Y is to deny X. Then, since to affirm a proposition is to deny its opposite, to affirm X and Y at the same time is the equivalent of affirming not-Y and not-X. Thus to affirm two contradictory propositions is in reality to deny both. But to affirm both not-Y and not-X is also to affirm X and Y, which again means to deny Y and X.

Consider the proposition, Henry is right. The proposition that Henry is right contradicts the proposition that Henry is not right, or that Henry is wrong. When I affirm the proposition that Henry is right, I deny the proposition that Henry is wrong. And if I affirm that Henry is wrong, then I deny that Henry is right. Now look what happens if I affirm two propositions that contradict each other. If I affirm that Henry is right and also affirm that Henry is wrong, then I deny that Henry is wrong and also deny that Henry is right. When I affirm two propositions that contradict each other, I deny both propositions in reverse order. When I affirm the first, I deny the second. When I affirm the second, I deny the first. So when I affirm the first and the second, I really deny the second and then deny the first. But it does not end here, because when I deny one proposition, I also affirm the opposite of that proposition. So when I deny two propositions that contradict each other, I affirm both propositions in reverse order again. But then this means I deny both propositions in reverse order once more.

If two propositions contradict each other, then to affirm both propositions is really to deny both propositions in reverse order, but to deny both propositions is really to affirm both propositions in the original order again. And this continues without end. The whole operation becomes meaningless. The upshot is that it is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions at the same time. When we affirm both, we deny both. When we deny both, we affirm both. And this means we deny both again. Therefore, there is no intelligible meaning in affirming two contradictory propositions. It is to say nothing and to believe nothing.

To illustrate, it is clear that divine sovereignty and human freedom contradict each other. If God controls everything, including man's thoughts, then man is not free from God. If man is free from God in any sense or to any degree, then God does not control everything. Nevertheless, theologians claim that the Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human freedom, and so they insist that we must affirm both. However, since to affirm divine sovereignty is to deny human freedom, and to affirm human freedom is to deny divine sovereignty, then to affirm both only means to reject both divine sovereignty and human freedom. But to deny both means to affirm both in reverse order, and to affirm both means to deny both in reverse order again. This is not piety, but insanity.

The necessary result is that the person who claims to believe both divine sovereignty and human freedom believes neither. In claiming to believe all of the Bible, the truth is that he believes none of it. In this example, since the Bible affirms divine sovereignty and denies human freedom, there is no contradiction – not even an apparent one. On the other hand, when non-Christians allege that the incarnation of Christ entails a contradiction, the Christian does not have the option to deny either the divinity or the humanity of Christ. Rather, he must formulate the doctrine as the Bible teaches it, and show that there is no contradiction. The same applies to the doctrine of the Trinity. In any case, if a person claims that he sees contradictions in the Bible, this means that he does not believe the Bible. He cannot believe the Bible.

A popular response is that these are only apparent contradictions; that is, the doctrines only seem like contradictions to the mind of men, but they are in perfect harmony in the mind of God. This answer is stupid and worthless. There is no difference between an apparent



contradiction and an actual contradiction when it comes to affirming it. It remains that to affirm one thing is to deny the other at the same time, so that to affirm both is to deny both, and that to deny both is to affirm both again. Thus the person who affirms an apparent contradiction really affirms nothing and denies nothing. Whether the contradiction is only an apparent one is irrelevant. As long as it appears real to the person, it is real enough.

Moreover, how can a person distinguish between an apparent contradiction from an actual contradiction? He can never know that a contradiction is only an apparent one. Unless he knows how to resolve the apparent contradiction, it will appear the same to him as an actual contradiction. And if he knows that a contradiction is only an apparent one, then he has already resolved it, and the term contradiction no longer applies. If we must tolerate apparent contradictions, then we must tolerate all contradictions. We often challenge non-Christian views on the basis that they contradict themselves. But if we tolerate apparent contradictions, then there is nothing to prevent non-Christians from claiming that the contradictions in their worldviews are only apparent ones.

Sinners may wallow in contradictions, but Christians must not tolerate them. Rather than abandoning the unity of Scripture or the law of contradiction as some sort of defense against those who assert that biblical doctrines contradict themselves, we must affirm and demonstrate the perfect harmony of these doctrines. On the other hand, Christians should expose the incoherence of non-Christian beliefs, and challenge their adherents to abandon them, but instead follow Jesus Christ, the Reason of God.

## **THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The inspiration and unity of Scripture imply the infallibility of Scripture. The Bible contains no errors. It is correct in everything that it asserts. Since God does not speak lies or errors, and the Bible is his word, it follows that everything written in it is true. As Jesus said, "Scripture cannot be broken," and "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law."

The INFALLIBILITY of Scripture refers to the impossibility of error or an inability to err, that the Bible cannot err. On the other hand, the INERRANCY of Scripture emphasizes that the Bible does not err. Infallibility refers to the potential, while inerrancy refers to the actual situation. The distinction is meaningful. It is possible for a fallible person to make a calculation or produce a text that is without error. This happens millions of times every day, all over the world. The possibility of error does not guarantee error. People who are capable of making mistakes do not constantly make mistakes. Thus infallibility implies inerrancy, but inerrancy does not imply infallibility. Therefore, infallibility is the stronger word, and it entails inerrancy, but sometimes the two are used interchangeably. In any case, our position is that the Bible cannot err and that it does not err, and so we say that it is both infallible and inerrant. In ordinary usage, when we refer to one, we also assume the other.

There are those who reject the inerrancy of Scripture, but at the same time desire to affirm, in some sense, the perfection of God and that the Bible is his word, and so they maintain the strange position that the Bible is infallible but errant. In other words, the Bible cannot contain error, but it does contain error. This is absurd and impossible. Sometimes what they mean is that the Bible is infallible in one sense, perhaps when it talks about spiritual things, while it contains errors in another sense, perhaps when it talks about historical matters. However, biblical statements about spiritual things are inseparably bound to biblical statements about history, so that it is impossible to affirm one and reject the other.

For example, it is impossible to separate what Scripture says about the resurrection of Christ as an event in history and what it says about the spiritual meaning of this event. If the resurrection did not happen as the Bible says it did, then what it says about its spiritual significance cannot be true. And if what it says about its spiritual significance is true, then one must also affirm that the resurrection happened as the Bible says it did. This is because the spiritual significance of the resurrection depends on its historicity, that Jesus Christ died in his physical body, that he was buried, but then he was physically raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God.

Those who reject biblical infallibility and inerrancy have no reliable principle of epistemology by which they can judge one part of Scripture to be true and another part to be false. Since the Bible is the only objective source of information from which the Christian system is constructed, a person who considers any portion of Scripture as fallible or errant must reject the entire Christian faith. Accordingly, we can reject his claim to be a Christian. We can condemn him as reprobate, destined to burn in hell.

No one can challenge or reject the ultimate authority of a system of thought and still claim allegiance to that system, since the ultimate authority in any system defines and produces the entire system. When a person challenges the ultimate authority of a system, it shows that he is not a follower of the system, but he is a follower of the principle by which he challenges the ultimate authority of the system that he has abandoned. To follow an authority other than the Scripture is to reject the Scripture, because the Bible itself claims to be the ultimate. Therefore, a person who doubts or rejects biblical infallibility and inerrancy assumes the position of a non-Christian, and he must justify his reprobate worldview against the Christian arguments for faith and truth.

God is infallible, and since the Bible is his word, it cannot contain errors and it does not contain errors. We affirm that the Bible is infallible in every sense of the term, and therefore it must also be inerrant in every sense of the term. The Bible cannot contain errors and it does not contain errors, whether it is speaking of spiritual, historical, or other matters. It is correct in everything that it says.

## **THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The extent of the Bible's authority determines the level of control that it has over our lives. The inspiration, unity, and infallibility of Scripture imply that it possesses absolute authority. Since Scripture is the very word of God, the necessary conclusion is that it carries the authority of God. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is identical to the authority of God.

The Bible itself sometimes refer to God and Scripture as if the two are interchangeable. For example, referring to an event in Genesis, the Letter to the Galatians says, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." The passage in Genesis says that it was God who spoke to Abraham, but the passage in Galatians says that it was the Scripture that spoke to Abraham, as if God and Scripture are interchangeable.

In another instance, God told Moses to confront Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me...But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." This passage in Exodus says that it was God who said this, but when the Letter to the Romans refers to this passage, it says that it was "the Scripture" that spoke to Pharaoh.

If we believe that the Bible is the word of God, then there are many situations where it would be natural for us to refer to God and Scripture interchangeably. We would personify the Bible as the Bible does to itself. We would say, "God commands us" and "Scripture commands us" as if these two propositions mean the same thing and carry the same force. We would say that the Bible ordains our ministries, that the Bible condemns the sinners, and that the Bible saves the lost. We would say that the Bible's verdict against non-Christians is God's verdict. We would say that the Bible's assurance of salvation toward those who have faith is God's own assurance toward us. We would say that Scripture can produce faith and work miracles, that it can heal the sick and cast out demons.

Since God possesses absolute authority, the Bible also carries absolute authority. Since there is no difference between God speaking and the Bible speaking, there is no difference between obeying God and obeying the Bible. To believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God. To disbelieve and disobey the Bible is to disbelieve and disobey God. The Bible is more than an instrument through which God speaks to us; rather, the words of the Bible are the very words that God speaks. There is no difference. The Bible is God's voice. The authority of Scripture is total.

## **THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The Bible is necessary for precise and authoritative information about the things of God. Since theology is central to all of thought and life, Scripture is the necessary foundation for human civilization. Those who reject the Bible nevertheless continue to assume Christian principles to govern their thought and life, although they refuse to admit this. As Christians, we have the duty to confront non-Christians and expose their implicit assumption of biblical premises despite their explicit rejection of them. Any worldview that attempts to exclude biblical premises must degenerate into skepticism and barbarism.

God has all knowledge and all power. He is the creator and sustainer of everything. He is the ultimate authority. He is the only true teacher about anything concerning himself or his creation. There is no one higher than God to approve of him or to vouch for him, so the ultimate evidence and foundation for knowledge is the revelation in which God approves of himself and vouches for himself. God has given us such a revelation in Scripture. Just as God is his own justification, Scripture is its own justification.

Biblical revelation is the only justified first principle from which we can deduce information about ultimate issues such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Knowledge belonging to subsidiary categories such as politics and biology are also limited to propositions deducible from revelation. Without revelation as the starting point, knowledge is impossible. Any other first principle fails to justify itself, and so a system that depends on any non-Christian principle cannot even begin.

Scripture is necessary for defining every Christian concept and activity. It governs every aspect of the spiritual life, including preaching, prayer, worship, and guidance. Scripture is also necessary for salvation, since the information necessary for salvation is revealed in the Bible, and it must be communicated to a person for him to receive salvation. Paul wrote, "The holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

All men know that the Christian God exists, and that he is the only God. Men are born with this knowledge, and they are repeatedly reminded about God by their environment and their experience, and even by their own thoughts and emotions. Although this knowledge is sufficient to condemn unbelief and disobedience, it is insufficient for salvation. A person obtains knowledge about the work of Christ and other details about the things of God from Scripture and from servants of God who speaks and writes about the Christian faith on the basis of Scripture.

Therefore, the Bible is necessary for knowledge leading to salvation, instructions leading to spiritual growth, answers to the ultimate questions, and for knowledge about reality. It is the necessary precondition for all knowledge and for any rational apprehension of God and the universe.

## **THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE**

God speaks to us through Scripture, and Scripture is God speaking to us. God speaks to be understood, to be believed, and to be obeyed. The Bible does not speak in riddles and mysteries. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture affirms that the Bible is direct and clear in its presentation, so that any typical person with a functioning mind should be able to obtain a basic grasp of its contents and doctrines, with sufficient information to believe God and follow Christ for salvation, holiness, and service. There is no excuse for a lack of comprehension. There is no excuse for major and stubborn errors. And there is never an excuse for unbelief and disobedience.

Christians must avoid two extremes regarding the clarity of Scripture. The first extreme maintains that Scripture is obscure to the average person, so that only an elite group of professionals can interpret it. The other extreme claims that Scripture is so simple that nothing in it is difficult to understand, and that no amount of training is needed to handle the text. If so, then a faithful theologian's exposition is no more reliable than an unlearned person's feelings and opinions.

The first extreme rejects the clarity of Scripture. It closes off Scripture from the general populace, and it prevents anyone from challenging the teachings of professionals. It prejudices someone who issues a biblical challenge against human orthodoxy. However, the other extreme is also dangerous. The Bible is not so simple that every person can handle every part of it with equal ease and accuracy. And it is not so flexible that the feelings and opinions of every person must be respected. Referring to Paul's writings, the apostle Peter said, "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand." Whether from professional theologians or ordinary readers, false interpretations usually occur partly due to the people's different self-serving agendas. Peter said that "ignorant and unstable people distort" the words of Paul "as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Many people consider themselves competent in important matters such as theology and exegesis, but instead of taking effort to pray and to study, they merely assume that they are equal to their pastors and theologians, or those who have devoted themselves to the things of God. This results in confusion and disaster. Anyone can be trained to understand the Bible better. Anyone can improve in doctrinal knowledge and theological reasoning. It is not necessary to be trained by professors and seminaries. It is even possible to be self-taught, and to learn from books. And it is possible, as Paul said, to be taught by God. One way or another, a person must receive training. A person's education, diligence, reverence, and divine calling and endowment will contribute to his ability to interpret and apply the Bible.

There are those who consider a seminary education the only adequate training, so that a regular Christian must defer to a seminary drone, especially when there is any sort of theological disagreement. Of course, many of these are seminary students and graduates, and this claim elevates their kind into a class of exclusive priesthood. But it is pure rubbish, and

there is no reason for anyone to accept it. In fact, the claim itself counts against the seminaries, since it shows that they can produce such arrogant and delusional frauds.

You might debate an issue with a seminary professor. He loses, and suddenly he wants to compare degrees. He is trying to find a way to bully you into submission. Do not fall into the trap. Talk about what he is doing in the open, then point your finger at him and laugh. Laugh louder and louder to draw attention from others around you, so that they may join you and mock him. Address him as "doctor" and "reverend" in the most mocking and condescending tone you can manage. Religious pride deserves to be trampled, especially when it is based on false doctrine and human approval. A seminary degree cannot save a false doctrine or a bad argument. The very fact that many of them do not realize this but elevate the authority of human institutions to a delusional level is evidence that seminary education is inadequate, and they often produce incompetent and unspiritual rubbish.

All the same points apply to ordination from men, or credentials from churches and denominations. The credentials of mere men are worth something only to other men. God scoffs at them, because his approval comes in the anointing of his Spirit. And Satan laughs at them, because only the shield of faith can stop his arrows of fire. The credentials of men cannot transform heresy into orthodoxy, or transform blasphemy against the Holy Spirit into a valiant defense against fanaticism. But this is what men will attempt to do when their faith is a sham and their education possesses no substance. Spiritual gaslighting is pathetic. Learn to see through it.

God is not dead. The Holy Spirit is active, eager, and full of power, and there is nothing in the Bible that requires God to teach his people through seminaries, or even through churches. Anyone who affirms the priesthood of believers, that Christ alone is the mediator between God and man, must also agree that it is possible for anyone to pick up the Bible and receiving training in the truth by God without any human teacher. God indeed ordained the church, but this does not make it another mediator between God and man along with Jesus Christ. It does what God says it does, and no more. In any case, no matter how it happens, a person must receive reliable teaching on the doctrines and the uses of Scripture. Anyone who asserts an interpretation of Scripture must be able to provide a sober, reverent, and logical explanation for it.

This is not to undermine the place of preachers and theologians, but to maintain their role as servants of Christ, and not as an elite class of believers. Although most of the time the Bible is readily understood, certain passages require extra diligence and wisdom understand with precision. It is possible for a person to read the Bible and derive understanding and knowledge for salvation, although sometimes one may need help from a reliable believer. For example, "Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet." Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man invited Philip to sit with him and to explain the text to him.

It is possible to learn the basic tenets of the Christian faith by reading the Bible without human aid, but some passages might present difficulties. In those cases, a person may enlist the assistance of preachers and theologians to explain the passages. Nevertheless, we insist that they are never necessary in any particular instance, because Christ is the only true mediator and teacher, and whenever he decides, he can always reach any of us without human mediation and lead us to the truth. Regardless of how a person comes to the knowledge of the truth, he must be able to offer an explanation of his doctrine and demonstrate its agreement with Scripture.

The Bible says, "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." The Bible affirms the ministry of preaching, but the final authority rests in the statements of Scripture, and not in the interpretations of scholars. The Bible is never wrong, although our understanding of it and inferences from it may sometimes be invalid. Nevertheless, this does not turn interpretation into a matter of mere opinion, since the validity of inferences from Scripture is an objective matter. Logic is objective. All interpretations can be proved or refuted with an objective definiteness. For this reason, every church should train its members in theology, hermeneutics, and logic, so that they may be equipped to handle the word of truth.

Therefore, although the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture grants every person the right to read and interpret the Bible, it does not eliminate the need for teachers in the church. The Bible itself states that God has established the ministry of the teacher, and that he has appointed individuals to fulfill the role. But it also warns that not many should be eager to take up this office: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." In another place, the Bible says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment." The office is a serious responsibility. It is dangerous to claim it out of pride or ambition. And the one who thinks that he is authorized just because he has a seminary degree or church ordination is delusional. God himself must call and equip a person for ministry.

As for those whom God has chosen to be ministers of doctrine and endowed with supernatural wisdom and power, they are able to handle the more difficult passages in Scripture, and they can extract valuable insights from Scripture that often elude others. The Bible refers to this office as one of Christ's gifts to his church, and therefore Christians ought to value and respect those standing in this a ministry.

This generation despises authority. People hate being told what to do or what to believe, although they think this way in part because they have been told to do so. Their worldview is democratic, not authoritarian. But the Bible commands Christians to obey their leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."



Every Christian has the right to read the Bible and follow God directly, and follow Christ as the only mediator. However, this must not turn into defiance against the legitimate teaching of scholars or the authority of church leaders. There is no need to regard them as more than mere servants of God. The teachers and leaders have no direct authority over the people, but believers comply with their directions for the sake of unity and order.

Since there is no difference between obeying God and obeying Scripture, and since Scripture is our direct contact with the revealed will of God, the immediate object of our allegiance is the Bible, by which we test the teachings and practices of those with learning and authority in the church. Therefore, teachings and practices that deny biblical doctrines constitute sufficient grounds to defy human authority. "We must obey God rather than men!"

## **THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE**

The Bible is not only divine in origin, but that it is also comprehensive in scope: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture affirms that the Bible contains sufficient information for a person to not only find salvation in Christ, but to also receive instruction and guidance in every aspect of thought and life, either by the explicit statements of Scripture or by necessary inferences from it.

The Bible contains all that is necessary to construct a complete worldview, a true view of reality. It conveys to us not only the will of God in the general matters of Christian faith and conduct, but by applying biblical precepts, we can also know his will in all areas of human life such as politics and economics, and we can also know his will when making specific and personal decisions. All the things that we need to know as Christians, and to please God and to achieve success, are found in the Bible.

The necessary implication is that extra-biblical means of guidance such as visions and prophecies are not necessary. Christians are able to learn right doctrines and make correct decisions on the basis of Scripture alone. However, since the Bible teaches that visions and prophecies are to continue and increase, Christians must consider them as valuable blessings and welcome them from the Holy Spirit. We condemn theologians and religionists who resist that idea that God performs signs and wonders, and that he speaks to people in special ways. Cessationism is a damnable heresy.

Scripture is clear and sufficient. It is clear that healing, prophecy, and all kinds of signs and wonders, are integral to Christian doctrine and experience. It is sufficient to ensure the working of miracles and speaking in tongues. It is sufficient to condemn any individual, religious heritage or tradition, seminary or denomination that disagree. The Bible is clear on the subject, and the Bible says enough on the subject, that there is no excuse for any doubt or debate.

The sufficiency of Scripture condemns cessationism and any doctrine that resists miracles for today and miracles for everyone. God should not need to say more before we obey him to heal the sick and speak in tongues. God has said more than enough to witness against the faithless and the cessationists. They have no excuse. The Bible is sufficient to damn cessationism to hell. Scripture is sufficient to infuse us with confidence for miracles and prophecies.

The satanic irony in the history of theology is that the sufficiency of Scripture is often used to undermine what the Scripture itself says. The Bible teaches that Christians can work miracles, but the theologians would say that the Bible is sufficient, so that Christians cannot work miracles. Rather, the correct conclusion is that the Bible is sufficient to settle the issue once for all, so that indeed Christians can work miracles. It is sufficient to end all debate. Faithless theologians and religionists exploit the sufficiency of Scripture to attack what the Scripture

teaches. They venerate the Bible only as an idea, but they attack its content. As God said, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that there is no need for miracles, but it means that Scripture is sufficient to produce faith for miracles and guidance for a ministry of signs and wonders. The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that there is no need for miracles of healing, but it means that Scripture is sufficient to heal our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. Scripture is sufficient to repair our bodies and renew our youth. Scripture is sufficient to open blind eyes and destroy cancer. Scripture is sufficient to heal all nations, if we will teach about healing from the Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that prophecy has ceased, but it means that there is a sufficient platform for prophecy, in fact, it is larger than ever before.

There are many who claim to be Christians and affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, but who reject much of what Scripture says. They are faithless religious hypocrites, and Scripture is sufficient to condemn them. On the other hand, there are people who claim to be Christians but deny that the Bible is sufficient to provide comprehensive instruction and guidance. Some of them complain that the Bible lacks specific information they need to make personal decisions. However, since the Bible itself claims to be sufficient, the deficiency is in these individuals and not in the Bible.

They lack the information they need because of their immaturity and ignorance. The Bible is indeed sufficient to guide them, but they neglect to study it. They are also rebellious, so that although the Bible clearly addresses their situations, they refuse to obey its commands and instructions. Perhaps they refuse to accept the very method of receiving guidance from Scripture in the first place, but they insist that God must guide them through visions, dreams, and prophecies, although he has written down what they need in the Bible.

When there is no extra-biblical guidance from God, some people seek information through forbidden methods, such as astrology, divination, and other occult practices. Their rebellion is such that if God does not provide the desired information in the way that they prefer, or if he does not agree with their desires, then they are determined to get what they want from the devil. They condemn themselves.

Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will." Change the way you think. Disengage your mind from the world. Stop following the way sinners think and the way sinners talk. Do not believe everything the non-Christians say. Conform your mind to God. Follow the way he thinks. Follow the way he talks. Believe everything God says. Then you will know what God wants you to do. Then you will know how a Christian should behave.

Christian theology must affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, that it is a comprehensive source of information, instruction, and guidance. The Bible contains the whole will of God, including the

information a person needs for salvation, spiritual development, and personal guidance. It contains sufficient information so that, if one were to fully obey it, he would fulfill the will of God in every detail of life, and he sins to the extent he disobeys. Whether we study it or not, and whether we obey it or not, the Bible contains the information required to know God, to receive salvation, and to live a perfect Christian life.

## **THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

Scripture declares, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Faith is necessary. It is impossible to please God without faith. And faith is not what we say it is, but it is what God says it is. When we have faith, we believe certain things about God.

This refers to something specific. It does not mean that we can choose whatever we want to call God, and then claim that we believe God exists. When Scripture refers to God, it refers to only the God of Scripture. So when it says we must believe that God exists, it means we must believe the God that Scripture describes is the one that exists. To say it another way, we believe what God says about himself in the Bible.

If someone worships a rock or a bird and calls that God, he does not really believe in God, because to him God means something different and contrary to what God says about himself. This person is merely using the same word, but a word is only a symbol that represents a meaning that we wish to communicate. If someone uses the same word to refer to something different, then we are not talking about the same thing. When we say that we believe in God, we refer to the being and the reality, and not the word itself. This being and this reality that we call God must be the same as what Scripture calls God, or what God says about himself.

So if someone claims that he believes in God, but this so-called God is not all-knowing and not all-powerful, this is not the being that we mean when we refer to God, because there is only one God, and only one true idea of God, and this God is all-knowing and all-powerful. If someone claims to believe in God, but this so-called God does not forgive all our sins and heals all our diseases, this is not God, because God's inspired word states that he forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases. Thus when we say we believe in God, or that God exists, this is what we mean. We believe in this being, this person, this God, as he describes himself in Scripture.

Among other things, God is a rewarder. If a person does not believe that God is a rewarder, or if he teaches against the idea that God is a rewarder, or if he teaches that God does not reward us with the things that Scripture says that God offers as rewards, then this person does not believe in God and he has no faith.

For example, the Bible teaches that God rewards faith with healing for the body. If a person does not believe this or if he teaches against it, then his idea of God is contrary to the God that is described in Scripture, and so he does not believe in God. He does not have faith. You say, perhaps he has faith, but he has been deceived. However, if someone has been deceived into calling Satan his God, it surely cannot mean that he has true faith. Why should we make farfetched excuses for people? In any case, we can test this by teaching him the truth. If he rejects it, then we have no right to say that he believes in God or that he has faith.

## **GOD AND CLASSICAL ARGUMENTS**

The doctrine of Scripture is the epistemological foundation of the Christian faith, and the doctrine of God is the metaphysical foundation. The two doctrines are important in themselves, and they are important because all other biblical doctrines depend on them. Christians must offer special attention to these aspects of theology.

The Bible says that he who comes to God must believe that he exists. Of course, a person who denies God's existence cannot develop a relationship with him or consciously serve him. Since God controls every detail of his creation, even those who deny his existence think and act as God decides, and in this sense they serve his purposes. However, they are unaware of God's control over them, and they think that they are autonomous. Their thoughts and actions, decreed by God, lead to damnation. On the other hand, the Bible says that God will reward those who believe him and seek him.

There are two kinds of arguments for the existence of God. The first may be called the classical or traditional arguments. The second kind of arguments are derived from Scripture itself, and so they may be called biblical arguments.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from the idea of God to his necessary existence. By definition, God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and since the being than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot be conceived as lacking the property of being, for otherwise it would not be the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, God must exist by necessity.

An initial objection is that just because a being is conceivable, or just because it exists in the mind, does not mean that it must also exist in reality. A person may conceive of a perfect car, but that does not mean it exists other than in his mind. A flying horse is conceivable, but this tells us nothing as to whether it exists in reality.

But this betrays a misunderstanding. The objection is irrelevant, because the argument refers to a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and not just any object conceivable by the mind. The ontological argument does not state that whatever is conceivable also exists in reality, but that God cannot be conceived except as one that exists; otherwise, what is conceived would not be God. If a person conceives in his mind a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, but that does not exist, then he is in fact not thinking of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

There is ambiguity concerning what it means for something to exist "in reality." What exists in the mind does not necessarily exist in the physical world, but this is irrelevant because God is incorporeal. God is not physical. When the ontological argument suggests that once the idea of God is present in the mind, he must also be understood to exist, it does not mean that he must be understood to exist as a physical object.

Thus the idea of existence itself poses a problem. In a sense, anything can be said to exist – even unicorns, dreams, and mathematical equations exist, although they do not exist as physical objects. However, unicorns did not create the universe, dreams did not ordain some men to salvation and others to damnation, and mathematical equations did not take up human flesh to die as a ransom for many.

Perhaps we should not be asking, "Does God exist?" A more intelligible question is, "What is God?" Even Zeus "exists," but only in mythology. The Christian God is not a physical object, but neither is he like dreams, equations, or Zeus. Rather, he is the creator and ruler of the universe, who decrees our history and decides our destiny, and who deserves and demands our worship. We should certainly say that God "exists" or that God "is" insofar as this represents an affirmation of all that the Bible says about him, and not that he is a physical object or mythological character.

THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from contingent effects to the first cause, or the creator God. The argument may begin from the existence of the physical universe, or it may begin from the existence of the self or self-consciousness, or the proposition, "I exist." Everything that has come into being has a beginning, and everything that has a beginning is an effect, and thus must have a cause. If the universe has a beginning, then it must have a cause. The universe indeed has a beginning, and therefore it must have a cause. An infinite regression of causes is impossible; therefore, there must be a first cause that is not an effect and that has no beginning, but that is necessary and eternal. This cause or being we acknowledge to be God. This is the gist of the argument. We will now discuss the premises.

The argument begins with the existence of the universe or with self-consciousness. It is self-refuting to doubt one's own existence, since a person must first exist before he can deny his own existence. One who does not exist cannot affirm the proposition, "I do not exist." Moreover, a person who denies his own existence withdraws from the debate, and therefore poses no threat to the cosmological argument.

Uncaused contingent beings and events are impossible, since something cannot come out of nothing. Since nothing is not something, it cannot produce anything. Only a being that has no beginning can be uncaused. Neither is it possible for there to be self-caused beings and events. A cause must precede an effect, at least logically, if not chronologically. Thus the cause exists before its effect. If a being or event already exists, then it does not cause its own existence, since it already exists. This being or event must then either be uncaused, or produced by a prior cause.

Although an infinite progression of causes is possible, an infinite regression of causes is not. An infinite progression can occur since causes can continue to lead to new effects without contradiction, and it is logically possible that this process will never end. However, if we were to assume an infinite regression of causes, then it would be impossible for us to have reached the present, since it is impossible to travel across an actual infinite. Just as it is impossible to reach the end of an infinite progression, our present is an "end" as seen from the past. Any particular

moment is an "end" or stopping point as seen from the past, so that if the past is infinite, we could never have reached the present. The fact that we have reached the present demonstrates that the past is not infinite.

To illustrate, if a person were to begin counting at noon on Monday and decide that he would stop at noon on Friday, he would reach the stopping point when the time arrives. But if there is infinite time between his starting point and his stopping point, then he would never reach the stopping point. Likewise, if a man runs toward a finish line, he would never reach it if there is an infinite distance between the starting point and the stopping point.

Therefore, an infinite regression of past causes is impossible, since if the past is infinite, we would never have reached the present. On the other hand, if the universe has a starting point in the finite past, then it would be possible to arrive at the present. But if the universe has a starting point, then it must have a cause. Why must this cause be God? God is just the name or title of this first cause. The argument shows that there must be a creator who made this universe.

If the immediate cause of the universe itself requires a cause, then we still have not arrived at the first cause. There must be a cause to explain every cause that is also an effect, but infinite regress is impossible, so there must be an uncaused first cause that is eternal, that has always existed. Since no effect can be uncaused, this first cause has no beginning, and is not an effect. The argument is invulnerable to the challenge, "If everything has a cause, then God must also have a cause." The argument states only that every effect, or everything that comes into being, must have a cause. God is not an effect, but is the uncaused first cause.

THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT may also be called the argument from design. The claim is that both ordinary observations and scientific studies indicate that the physical universe exhibits an intricate structure and complex order. It presents itself as a product of deliberate design. Many aspects of the universe seem fine-tuned to permit the existence of life. A large number of exact conditions must be simultaneously present. If these factors were to be slightly different than what they are, life would be impossible.

Since what is designed requires a designer, the design of the universe implies the existence of a designer. This being exhibits the characteristics of a rational mind, capable of thought and planning, and possesses such power to execute his intentions that he created the universe with no preexisting matter available. This is consistent with what Scripture teaches about God. The magnitude and complexity of his creation demonstrate his power and wisdom. As the Bible says, "God made the earth by his power. He founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding."

THE MORAL ARGUMENT argues from objective moral laws to a giver of moral laws. There are universal moral laws that define right and wrong. To make sense of the moral laws there must be justice. Since it appears that justice is often not served in this life, there must be an afterlife where exact justice is rendered. Moreover, for there to be justice there must be a Judge who



will deliver justice. But for this Judge to judge rightly, he must be omniscient, knowing every thought and deed. And to execute justice, the Judge must be omnipotent.

If a person denies that there is an afterlife in which everyone must face this all-knowing and all-powerful Judge, he can no longer account for objective morality. Yet men everywhere speak and behave as though there is objective morality. Even those who deny objective morality react as if such a thing exists, especially when their own standard is offended, or when their own welfare is threatened. A person cannot affirm objective morality, either by word or action, and reject its necessary precondition.

The classical arguments do not advance the entire biblical worldview. They argue for the truth of a small number of biblical propositions, such as God as the creator, God as the designer, and God as the legislator. Nevertheless, no argument can exist in a vacuum. Every argument is formulated within a worldview or intellectual system. The argument assumes the first principles of this worldview even when it does not declare these first principles. Thus the classical arguments might seem convincing those who share some of the assumptions of these arguments. They might even baffle or refute many unbelievers. However, to determine the truth of any argument, especially an argument that pertains to ultimate reality, it is necessary to examine the first principles on which the argument depends.

On the other hand, Christian rationalism is the main thrust of our conception of the Christian faith. It is comprehensive and perfectly rational. Christian rationalism simultaneously advances all biblical propositions and all their logical implications. Since the entire Bible is true, then of course God exists. He is as the Bible describes him, and all other ideas of religion and philosophy are refuted. Christian rationalism begins from first principles. Instead of depending on undeclared assumptions and making arguments as if they occur in a vacuum, it directly declares them. And instead of delaying a confrontation on first principles, it swiftly draws attention to them.

## **GOD AND CHRISTIAN RATIONALISM**

CHRISTIAN RATIONALISM is a biblical approach to advance the truth and necessity of the Christian faith. We can also call it BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONALISM. The Christian Bible is the revelation of God, and since God speaks by absolute authority, his revelation is the precondition of all of thought and life, and knowledge comes from valid deductions from it.

The Christian system takes biblical revelation as its self-authenticating first principle. By self-authenticating, we are not referring to whether the Bible verifies itself in our experience. It may very well be consistent with our experience, but if we regard the Bible as true because it is consistent with our experience, or because it is consistent with our interpretation of our experience, then it would not be self-authenticating. Rather, our experience, or the standard or principle by which we interpret our experience, would be the true first principle. We are not even referring to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is a revelation from God, although God's people indeed have this assurance. Rather, by self-authenticating, we mean that the Bible verifies and supports itself by the excellence and sufficiency of its own content, and that it has no need to depend on premises external to itself.

From this first principle of biblical revelation, the rest of the system follows by necessity through valid deductions. Since the first principle verifies itself to be true, all propositions validly deduced from it are also true. Since biblical revelation condemns all other systems of thought, and whatever it says is true, the Christian faith is therefore the only true system of thought, and the standard by which every proposition is judged.

The method is similar to rationalism, but there are important differences. Although the use of deduction in non-Christian rationalism makes it superior to non-Christian philosophies that favor induction, sensation, and experimentation, it fails like the others because its first principles are arbitrary and unjustified. On the other hand, the Bible possesses the content to justify itself as the infallible first principle of the Christian faith. We may call our approach Christian rationalism or foundationalism, or biblical rationalism or foundationalism.

Let us begin with the idea of a worldview. Every person has a worldview. A worldview consists of a network of interrelated propositions the sum of which forms a comprehensive conception or intellectual grasp of reality. A worldview may be called a "religion" or a "philosophy" because of its specific content, but it is nevertheless a worldview. By worldview, we refer to any religion, philosophy, or system of thought.

Every worldview has a starting point or first principle from which the rest of the system is derived. Some people claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without a first principle. However, even if a million liars vouch for one another, all of them are still liars. At least one reliable man would have to vouch for them. But if all of them are liars, a reliable man would not vouch for them, and their credibility falls apart. Likewise, a web of propositions would still need a first principle that supports them all. A true first principle would

not produce a web of false propositions, and a web of false propositions would not be supported by a true first principle. Therefore, the first principle remains the crucial issue.

In a web of propositions, some propositions are more central to the web, the destruction of which would also annihilate the propositions that are more remote. But even the most central claims require justification, and a worldview in which the propositions depend on one another in a way that lacks a first principle is in the final analysis exposed as having no justification at all. The claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without the need of a first principle is really an attempt at hiding the fact that all of the propositions in such a web lack justification.

Therefore, it remains that every worldview requires a first principle or ultimate authority. Since it is first or ultimate, such a principle cannot be justified by any prior or greater authority; otherwise, it would not be the first or ultimate. This means that the first principle must possess the content to justify itself.

For example, the proposition, "All knowledge comes from sensations," fails to be a first principle on which a worldview can be constructed. This is because if all knowledge comes from sensations, then this first principle must also originate from sensations. However, the proposition itself is not an object of sensations, so that according to the principle itself, the principle cannot be known. Moreover, the proposition not only is not an object of sensations, but it also cannot be derived from sensations. It is a claim about how all knowledge comes, and it claims that all knowledge comes from sensations. Thus the principle can only be derived from the sensations of all things in reality, including intangible ideas such as the laws of logic. The principle requires itself to have sensed all knowledge, even things like mathematics and hypothetical possibilities, but these things cannot be sensed. In addition, the reliability of sensations has not been established, and this first principle depends on sensations without the justification for sensations, so that the principle cannot justify itself, but it remains arbitrary and unjustified. Therefore, this proposed first principle self-destructs, since it cannot satisfy its own claim, but it is crushed under its own requirements. It does not matter what can be validly deduced from such a principle, because if the system cannot even begin, what follows from the principle is without justification.

It is also impossible to begin a worldview with a self-contradictory first principle. A contradiction is unintelligible and meaningless. The law of contradiction states that "A is not non-A." It refers to the fact that something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. A person must assume this law even when he attempts to deny it; otherwise, he cannot even distinguish between accepting and rejecting this law. But once he assumes this law of logic, he can no longer reject it, because he has already assumed it as true. If we say that truth can be contradictory, then we can also say that truth cannot be contradictory, because we have abandoned the distinction between can and cannot. If we do not affirm the law of contradiction, then dogs are cats, elephants are rats, "See Jane run" can mean "I am married," and "I reject the law of contradiction" can mean "I affirm the law of contradiction," or even "I

am a moron." If it is not true that "A is not non-A," anything can mean anything and nothing at the same time, and nothing is intelligible.

Since no legitimate first principle can be self-contradictory, skepticism is impossible, because it is self-contradictory. A skeptic, in the philosophical sense, refers to one who maintains that no knowledge is possible or that it cannot be known if knowledge is possible. The claim that it is impossible to know anything is itself a claim to know something. It is a claim to know that it is impossible to know anything. The claim that knowledge is impossible is a claim to have knowledge that knowledge is impossible. Likewise, the claim that there is insufficient evidence to claim knowledge about anything is also a claim to have knowledge that there is insufficient evidence to claim knowledge. Thus skepticism contradicts itself, and it self-destructs.

Since skepticism is impossible, it means that an adequate first principle must guarantee the possibility of knowledge. A first principle, in addition to making knowledge possible, must also yield an adequate amount of knowledge. To illustrate, "My name is Vincent," may be a true statement, but it does not tell me anything about the origin of the universe, or whether it is wrong to steal. It does not even provide the concepts of origin and morality. Moreover, although it might be a true statement, how do I know that it is true in the first place? The proposition, "My name is Vincent," does not prove that my name is really Vincent. It does not justify itself. A first principle is inadequate if it fails to provide information concerning epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and other necessary topics, and if it fails to justify itself.

For at least the above reasons, a first principle cannot be based on induction, and a worldview cannot proceed from a first principle by induction, in which the premises do not inevitably lead to the conclusion, such as reasoning from particulars to universals. For example, no amount of empirical investigation can justify the proposition, "Every human being has a brain." To establish a general proposition like this by empirical means, a person must examine every human being who has ever lived, who is now living, and who will live in the future. And while he is examining the humans in one part of the world or one period in time, he must continuously confirm that the nature of man has not changed in those parts of the world or those periods in time whose humans he has already studied.

In addition, how does he prove that he knows a certain human being has a brain just because he thinks he is looking at it? He must provide justification for the claim that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it. But it would be viciously circular to say that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it, because what he thinks he is looking at is really there, and he knows that it is really there because he thinks he is looking at it. Adding to the now already impossible situation, to prove this general proposition about human beings by sensation and induction, he must also examine his own brain.

The one who bases his system on induction faces this problem with every single piece of knowledge that he thinks he possesses. On the basis of induction, it would be impossible to define a human being in the first place, since the concept of a human being is also a universal.

Even if it is possible for him to examine every human being in history, he could not select one human being to examine, because he cannot define a human being on the basis of induction. Thus on the basis of induction, one can never establish any proposition.

One attempt to rescue induction claims that although induction cannot establish the truth or certainty of a proposition, it can establish the probability of a proposition. But this is false. Probability refers to the ratio of designated instances or outcomes to the total number of possible instances or outcomes. For example, if we have a hundred marbles and ten of them are red, the ratio is ten out of a hundred, or ten percent. In fraction, the numerator would be ten, and the denominator would be one hundred. Even if we assume that empirical and inductive methods can discover the numerator of the fraction, to determine the denominator still requires knowledge of a universal. Since these methods cannot know any universal, they cannot know any probability about anything.

Using the same illustration, to establish the probability that every human being has a brain or the probability that any given human being has a brain, it is necessary to know every human being. And to know every human being, it is necessary to know the number of all human beings, including those who do not yet exist. This also illustrates that it often requires omniscience to know a universal. In addition, it is necessary to know all human beings as distinguished from other objects, so that it is irrelevant if a rock lacks a brain or if a cow has a brain. But it is necessary to have knowledge of an infinite number of universals in order to distinguish between humans, rocks, cows, and an infinite number of objects, whether actual, potential, or hypothetical objects. Thus all the problems remain.

Methods that depend on sensation, induction, and experimentation can do nothing to even begin to answer the question. Now we have mentioned sensations several times along with induction, because the view that knowledge comes from sensations, or empiricism, necessarily depends on induction, and induction is always a fallacy. Both empiricism and induction fail by themselves, but they also fail together.

Since probability consists of a numerator and a denominator, and since the denominator is a universal, and since empirical and inductive methods cannot know universals, then it is nonsense to say that induction can arrive at knowledge of probability. For a moment we have assumed that the numerator can be known, but the truth is that empirical and inductive methods cannot even know the numerator. These methods cannot know that there are ten red marbles. To know any marble by our sensations require us to first establish the reliability of sensations. And of course, "red" and "marble" are themselves universals.

On the other hand, deduction is the way to truth and knowledge. Deduction produces conclusions that are guaranteed to be true when reasoning validly from true premises. Thus rationalism is a vast improvement over empiricism. Rationalism selects a first principle or a set of axioms, and then deduces the rest of the system from it. If the first principle is true and the process of deduction is valid, then the subsidiary propositions or theorems would all be true by

necessity. Nevertheless, non-Christian rationalism cannot succeed in establishing a true and coherent worldview.

Rationalism has been defined as an approach that rejects supernatural revelation from the start, and this is true of some systems of rationalism. But the approach of rationalism itself does not include an inherent rejection of revelation. Whether it accepts or rejects revelation depends on the first principle selected for a particular system.

The problem with non-revelational rationalism is how it selects a first principle. If the first principle is self-contradictory, then of course it must be rejected. But even if it is not self-contradictory, it must also be self-justifying. If it lacks justification for itself, then the system constructed upon it also lacks justification. And the whole thing is arbitrary.

Then even if there is a non-biblical first principle that is self-consistent and self-justifying, it must be broad enough to make knowledge possible, and it must be rich enough to offer the necessary knowledge. It must contain enough content so that an adequate worldview may be deduced from it.

Let us illustrate with the laws of logic. Logic is self-consistent. And logic is self-justifying. That is, logic must be assumed in order to be denied, so that any attempt to deny it self-destructs, and thus it justifies itself. However, logic itself contains no content, so that it is impossible to deduce anything from it other than the laws of logic. Therefore, no worldview can be validly deduced from logic itself or constructed upon logic itself. Rather, the laws of logic are the laws of thought by which knowledge is derived and applied. Logic is not knowledge itself. Again, this is to illustrate that a first principle must be self-consistent and self-justifying, and it must also contain sufficient content to produce a complete worldview.

As long as we do not begin from revelation, and as long as our foundation is not a definitive word from God, although the deductive rationalistic approach is far superior to the inductive empirical approach, both of them begin in failure and result in failure. And since any time a person uses either approach, he inevitably introduces the problems of that approach into his worldview, a mixture of rationalism and empiricism would only combine the fatal flaws of both methods. Then, the propositions within a worldview must not contradict one another. For example, the first principle of a worldview must not produce a proposition in ethics that contradicts another proposition in metaphysics, or politics, or economics.

By this point, having examined the necessary conditions for a first principle, the problems of empiricism and induction, and the problems of non-biblical rationalism, we have in effect destroyed all existing and possible non-Christian systems. We have the intellectual tools we need to confront and annihilate all non-Christian beliefs. They cannot satisfy the requirements that we have considered. This includes non-Christian religions that claim to be founded on revelation. Examine the actual content of what they claim to be their revelations, and they will crumble like any other non-Christian first principle.

Our strategy for biblical apologetics begins with the recognition that Christianity is the only deductive system with a self-consistent and self-justifying first principle that has been infallibly revealed by an all-powerful and all-knowing God, and that is broad enough to yield a sufficient number of propositions to construct a comprehensive and coherent worldview. This is the same intellectual structure of Christian theology, only that it is applied for the intellectual vindication of the Christian faith. Christianity is the only true worldview, and it alone makes knowledge possible. All other systems of thought collapse into skepticism, but since skepticism is self-contradictory, one cannot remain in such a position, and Christianity is the only way out of the epistemological abyss. In the context of debate, the Christian repeatedly kicks the unbeliever back into intellectual despair until the opponent surrenders and acknowledges the necessity and supremacy of God.

The Bible is aware that there are those who deny God, and it says that they are stupid people. The non-Christian is a fool. He trusts in false principles and assumptions, such as the reliability of sensation, the validity of induction, the rationality of experimentation, the arbitrary axioms of non-biblical rationalism, and the texts of non-biblical religions. The non-Christian trusts in these things because he is stupid, and he wants to trust in these things because he is sinful. They lead him to arrive at false conclusions and to defend these conclusions. He thinks that his inferior intelligence and methodology can discover the truth about reality. He thinks that he does not need God to teach him. He is a fool.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT or THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL ARGUMENT, sometimes called an abductive argument, argues from a known or acknowledged Y to a necessary precondition X. One tactic in Christian apologetics involves showing that given any Y, the necessary precondition X is the biblical worldview.

For example, science assumes the uniformity of nature, the principle that nature is persistent and operates in regular ways. But science cannot prove this principle. It is irrationally assumed without proof and without argument. The biblical worldview is the necessary precondition to make this assumption intelligible. Now the biblical worldview in fact denies the uniformity of nature, but it affirms the doctrine of ordinary providence. It is God who controls the world, and he does it in a regular manner, although he is free to deviate from his usual practice whenever he wishes.

In any case, since the biblical worldview is the necessary precondition for the assumption of any regularity in the world, it is a necessary presupposition that makes science intelligible. This does not mean that science is rational or that its theories and conclusions are true, but it means that no one can even make sense of science unless biblical principles are presupposed. The implication is that science can never disprove God or Scripture or even attempt to argue against God or Scripture. This is because science cannot even maintain its own existence without God and without Scripture.

Biblical revelation is the basis for a transcendental argument asserting that the biblical worldview is the precondition for everything. Whatever is asserted as true or intelligible in the

context of debate, the biblical worldview is its necessary precondition. This is true even concerning arguments against Christianity. Without the biblical worldview as the presupposition, no objection against Christianity is even intelligible. This is because no argument can exist in a vacuum. Every argument is preceded by principles on epistemology, metaphysics, logic, linguistics, and so on. These are things that make the argument possible or intelligible in the first place. We argue that only the Bible supplies these necessary principles. But once the Bible is acknowledged as true, so that it provides the precondition even to utter an objection against it, then of course no objection against it can be true.

Christian rationalism is the foundation of a proper use of this kind of argumentation. The transcendental move in biblical apologetics is, strictly speaking, more of a strategy or method than a single argument. It complements our presentation of Christian rationalism and first principles. It is one way for us to illustrate the necessity of presuppositions and to interact with contrary views. It is a way to draw attention to first principles, so that we may advance our presuppositions as true, justified, and necessary, and also destroy all non-Christian worldview at the roots as we confront them.



## **GOD AND NON-CHRISTIANS**

The Bible declares that it is the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." This is what God thinks about those who deny him, and so this is also what we must think about these people. Although non-Christian religions might use the word "God," they refer to vastly different and contrary things by the word. The Bible refers to God in a specific sense. It refers to God as the Bible itself defines God. Anyone who rejects this God that the Bible talks about is a fool. Anyone is stupid if he rejects the God of the Christians, or God as the Bible describes him. By definition, all non-Christians reject the God of the Christians. The non-Christians have invented their own ideas about God, and what they believe in is not God at all. And so they also reject God. Therefore, the Bible declares that all non-Christians are stupid.

Paul wrote, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator." So although a non-Christian might worship something, as long as it is not exactly the same as the God of the Christians, he does not worship God at all, regardless of what he calls that thing he worships. Non-Christians worship themselves, or idols, or demons, never God himself. The Bible declares that all kinds of non-Christians are stupid, whether they are atheists or religionists.

On the other hand, Scripture says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding." And it says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Therefore, Christians have wisdom and understanding. Christians are intelligent people. But since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the Bible acknowledges only the God of the Christians, this means that non-Christians have not even started to have wisdom. They do not have even a little of it. They are completely unintelligent and uneducated.

Note that when the Bible refers to those who believe in God, it refers to only those who believe in God through Jesus Christ. Those who claim to believe in the revelation that came through Moses but refuse to believe Jesus Christ do not in fact believe in Moses, because Moses predicted Jesus and commanded people to follow Jesus. This is why Jesus declared that the Jews did not believe in Moses and that they were not children of God or of Abraham, but children of Satan.

People often refer to the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Judeo-Christian Scripture, or the Judeo-Christian God. However, there is no such thing, just as there is no atheist-theist tradition or atheist-theist God. The atheist and theist are incompatible. They do not share a tradition or a religion. There is only one God, the God who revealed himself to Moses, that is, to the Moses who predicted Jesus and who commanded people to follow Jesus. Therefore, whoever does not believe in Jesus does not believe in Moses and does not believe in God. Thus there is no Judeo-Christian tradition, but only Christian tradition, Christian Scripture, and the Christian God. The whole Bible belongs to Christians, and only Christians believe in God or the Bible. This is why we

refer to the God of the Christians when we wish to be specific or make a distinction from various false claims and religions about God. Among those who believe, we understand that there is only one God, and a simple reference to God ought to be sufficient.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with someone who begins as a Jew, as long as he believes in Jesus. But then we would just call him a Christian. He has no special merit or demerit just because he has been a Jew. Under the wrath of God, there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews. Both are condemned to hell. Under the grace of God, there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews. Both are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Christian faith does not share a common heritage with any other worldview or religion. God had declared himself as the God of the Christians even in the very beginning of the world when he predicted the coming of Christ. He said, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God had never pretended to be anything else. He had always revealed himself as the Trinity, and the Son of God would come to the world as a man to save humanity, that is, all those who would believe in him.

To continue, the Bible says that it is because of their "wickedness" that non-Christians "suppress the truth" about the existence and the attributes of God, even though he has put into their minds an inescapable revelation about himself, and even though the created world and the revealed word testify about him. Paul said, "They know about God, but they don't honor him or even thank him. Their thoughts are useless, and their stupid minds are in the dark. They claim to be wise, but they are fools." Again, he said, "Their stupid minds are in the dark." This is what the Bible says about non-Christians. This is what God thinks about those who do not believe in him, and who do not honor him, thank him, and worship him. All Christians are required to hold this opinion about non-Christians. Either we think that all non-Christians are stupid and in the dark, or we call God a liar and reject God ourselves.

The opinion of Scripture on non-Christians is that they are both stupid and sinful. They are intellectually and ethically inferior. They demonstrate their lack of intellectual aptitude in failing to agree with the Christian faith. Moreover, in denying the Christian faith despite the innate knowledge that God has placed in their minds, and despite the continuous reminders from God's created world and God's faithful people, non-Christians show that they are not only intellectual ostriches but that they actively suppress the truth about God. A wickedness founded on stupidity and ignorance is still wickedness, but this is a knowing and stubborn wickedness. This is wickedness at its worst. And Paul said, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

As Christians, we were at one time also "alienated from God and were enemies in our minds," but God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. In contrast, non-Christians are "separate from Christ...without hope and without God in the world." Paul said, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel, and

the preaching of the gospel is to "open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith."

The Bible describes non-Christians as contemptible, entirely worthless and pathetic. We were also in such a condition. If left to ourselves, we would have remained in ignorance and wickedness. It was only by God's grace in causing us to hear and to believe the gospel that we were enlightened to the truth, and brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Now we are no longer spiritual rubbish, but useful citizens of God's kingdom.

Therefore, when we say that non-Christians are fools, we do not mean that we have always been wise, or that we were superior to them in ourselves. We acknowledge that it is by God's purposeful grace that we have been saved from a state of stupidity and futility. We did not become Christians because we had the wisdom to know truth by our own ability, but we were given this wisdom because God chose us to become Christians, to be rescued from sin and hellfire through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Knowing this, there is no room for arrogance, but we are grateful to God for our salvation, and we labor so that others may be saved as well.

Nevertheless, the Bible declares that non-Christians are stupid and sinful. Christians must regard non-Christians as intellectually and ethically inferior. Of course non-Christians take offense at this assessment, but Christians must not think like them. Since the Bible teaches that non-Christians are stupid and sinful, and to be a Christian is to believe the Bible, then to be a Christian is to believe that all non-Christians are stupid and sinful. It is a sign of faith and wisdom to affirm what God says about non-Christians.

## **THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD**

God is infinitely greater than human beings. The KNOWABILITY of God addresses the question of whether we can know him and understand him. We answer that because God made man according to the divine image, then no matter the difference between God and man, there is a point of contact between them so that communication is possible. The fact that God has chosen to speak to us through the Bible means that human language is sufficient, and so it is possible to obtain reliable and detailed information about God from his verbal revelation.

It is self-refuting to argue that man cannot know God due to the vast difference between the two, because the statement itself assumes considerable knowledge about God. A person who says that God is unknowable is asserting a piece of information about the very essence of God. But if God is indeed unknowable, then no one can know that he is unknowable. The fact that we have the idea of God in our minds and that we can debate the question demonstrates that God must be knowable.

It is likewise self-refuting to say that human language is inadequate to communicate information about the things of God, because the statement itself claims to communicate a piece of information about the things of God. This piece of information is that the things of God are such that human language cannot adequately describe them or refer to them. But since this piece of information itself describes and refers to the very essence of the things of God, it refutes itself.

Language is always adequate. This is because language is anything you need it to be, and it can say anything you want it to say. You can invent any word to represent any idea you choose. We can refer to any idea or combination of ideas as X, and it will always be adequate, because words are only arbitrary symbols that can refer to anything. The question is whether human beings have the ability to think about God, not whether words are adequate to talk about him. Since God has made human beings in his own image, they can indeed think about God, talk about God, and understand God.

The Bible teaches that God has revealed himself through the words of Scripture. Nothing more is needed to settle the issue. It establishes that God is knowable and that human language is sufficient. God is able to tell us about himself, and we are able to understand what he tells us.

## **THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD**

God has revealed everything in the Bible, and in principle it is possible to understand all of the Bible and all its logical implications. This represents what we can know about God in this life. Add to this the fact that we will continue to learn more and more about God after this life. The result is that the extent of the knowledge of God possible to us is vast and endless. We denounce those theologians who seem so obsessed with imposing limitations on the knowledge of God on the rest of us.

The Bible indeed teaches the INCOMPREHENSIBILITY of God, but not in the sense asserted by theologians. Paul wrote, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" It is crucial to notice that Paul said this after he had answered every question he raised about God, man, and salvation up to that point in the letter to the Romans, including the topic of predestination. God is incomprehensible only in the sense that there is always more to know, and not that we cannot know. The standard view on the incomprehensibility of God is that we cannot even truly and fully know even what he has revealed in the Bible. This is absurd, and it comes from spiritual rebellion and retardation.

God is infinite. There will always be more about God for us to learn. In our context, to comprehend means to have an exhaustive understanding, so that there remains nothing more to know. In this sense, it is impossible for finite beings to comprehend an infinite being. No matter how much about God we come to know, there will always be more about him to know. However, just because we do not know everything about God does not mean that we cannot know anything about him, and to know him in an accurate and definite manner.

We can comprehend a vast amount of knowledge about God. We can know and understand everything that the Bible asserts and implies about him. Jeremiah said that a person can understand God's very character, that he is one "who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth." The doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God does not nullify the possibility of accurate and abundant knowledge about him by human beings. Rather, the more we think about his incomprehensibility, the more we are reminded of the wealth of information that he has revealed to us in the Bible, and this source of information will not be exhausted in this life, and we shall know even more after we have passed from this life.

Therefore, although we acknowledge God's incomprehensibility as a corollary to his greatness and immensity, it is not something that imposes any real limitation upon us. There is a difference between a library with too many books to read in a person's lifetime and a library with an infinite number of books, but there is no practical difference. It would be wrong and stupid to claim that the library is mysterious or that we cannot understand any of the books in the library because it has an infinite number of books.

What about the claim that each book in the library is too profound to understand? This represents the view that not only is revelation so extensive that there is no way to make

contact with all of it, but we cannot even understand what we do have contact with. The simple answer is that theologians have no right to speak for us. If they insist that they are too stupid to understand any part of the Bible, then that is their problem, but unless there is a biblical basis – a biblical basis that they can somehow understand – they cannot impose this limitation on the rest of humanity. If the Bible declares that man can never truly understand anything in revelation, then man cannot understand even this part of revelation that declares such a thing. Thus the claim of the theologians is arrogant and self-contradictory.

Since the Bible itself does not teach that its doctrines and propositions are too profound for finite minds to understand, such a claim is merely a human invention to flaunt one's false humility and to excuse himself from affirming what is written. Although this represents the traditional and orthodox doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, we must denounce it as false and damnable. It dishonors God and deceives his people. Instead, we affirm that God speaks to us in the Bible, and he speaks in a way that we can understand. If we had the time, the diligence, and the grace, in principle we could learn all of it. This is the only view that honors God and Scripture, and that liberates God's people to enjoy and worship him. It threatens sinners and believers alike to stop pretending that they cannot hear and understand God. It declares that the whole world is obligated to believe and obey his word, all of it.

We must overturn any theologian that appeals to God's incomprehensibility in order to negate God's knowability. It is a doctrine of rebellion, not a doctrine of humility. Although we cannot possess exhaustive knowledge about God, we can possess true knowledge about him, a vast amount of true knowledge. All the things that God reveals to us in the words of the Bible are true. We have true knowledge about God to the extent that we know and understand these words. And we can understand all these words and their implications.

I may know a person's name or age without knowing anything else about him, but this does not mean that my limited knowledge about him is false. It is true that the more that I know about a person, the better I will understand what I already know about him; however, what I already know about him is nevertheless true. By obtaining additional information about a person, I acquire a richer context by which to interpret and appreciate what I already know, but my knowledge was true before I obtained the additional information. Likewise, although we do not have exhaustive knowledge about God, what we know about him from the Bible is reliable and accurate, and complete as far as it goes.

Christians who fail to grasp certain biblical doctrines sometimes give up by calling them "mysteries," but the knowability of God warns us against doing this. This tendency to label biblical doctrines as mysteries exposes a defect in them. It stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of revelation, and a slothful and rebellious attitude toward Scripture. Perhaps the person indeed understands the doctrine, but he refuses to accept it. Since he cannot deny the biblical basis of the doctrine, he calls it a mystery so that he does not have to affirm it. He understands what God means, but he does not want to believe God, and he does not want to obey God. He uses the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as a humble-sounding excuse to reject the word of God.

A "mystery" in the Bible does not refer to something that is impossible to understand. Rather, it refers to something that had not been fully told in the past, but that is now more clearly stated and explained. The word has to do with the chronology of God's revelation instead of man's intellectual limitation. In fact, when the Bible calls something a mystery, it is a sure sign that we are now informed about it and that we can now understand it.

For example, many people regard the doctrine of divine election as a mystery. However, since the Bible teaches the doctrine and tells us what to think about it, we should not call it a mystery, but instead a plain doctrine that all Christians must affirm. A doctrine like divine election that has been revealed and explained is not a mystery. Since God has revealed a large amount of information on the topic, it is a clear teaching that demands universal acceptance. A person who closes his eyes to the Bible and insists on calling the doctrine a mystery is in blatant defiance against divine revelation. It is not that he does not understand it, but that he does not want to accept it, but he is too dishonest to admit it and too afraid to tell God to his face.

Refusing to understand or accept anything that the Bible teaches is to insult the God who has given us the priceless gift of revelation. The obsession with the incomprehensibility of God is not a sign of reverence for him, but it is a sign of unbelief and disobedience. This tendency should not be equated with piety, and should not be encouraged among believers, but it ought to be spurned, rebuked, and destroyed.

## **THE NECESSITY OF GOD**

The NECESSITY of God refers to the fact that God exists by logical necessity. When the Bible talks about God, it does not refer to some generic deity, but its idea of God is specific and clearly defined. And when a Christian says, "God exists," he should not have in mind a general idea of some supreme being, but he should have in mind the God that the Bible talks about, and he should believe that this God is as the Bible says he is. Christians do not affirm a general theism, but a definite biblical idea of God.

The truth is that there is no such thing as general theism, since any theistic outlook is always tied to a worldview. Each worldview disagrees on what God is like. A person cannot argue for theism alone to make all theistic religions possible, and then proceed to argue for other claims within a particular theistic worldview. Since each worldview has a unique view of God, one must argue for his own view of God, which of course means that he must argue for his worldview as a whole, and not a general God that several worldviews can accept, because there is no such thing. Therefore, to establish the existence of the God of the Christians does not serve the interests of non-Christian religions. In fact, establishing the existence of the Christian God automatically refutes all non-Christian religions, since their views of God are incompatible.

God exists in every possible world. A possible world is reality as it could be, in which any contingent being or event can be otherwise. For example, it is possible for a given person to be taller than he is, and it is possible for a certain car to be red instead of green. Any reality that does not contain a contradiction is a possible world. It is possible relative to the imagination, as in what is conceivable in the mind, and not relative to God's decree, as in what God has in fact determined. Since God's decree has determined all things, so that nothing can be different than what has been determined, from this perspective only one reality is possible. In any case, a statement like  $2 + 2 = 4$  is true in every possible world, and  $1 + 1 = 10$  is false in every possible world. To say that God's existence is a logical necessity means that the proposition, "God does not exist" entails a contradiction in this and every other possible reality. This conclusion is the necessary implication of the Bible's description of God's attributes and God's relation to his creation. God is such that it is impossible that God does not exist.

Some people maintain that God does not exist by logical necessity, but only by factual necessity in our reality. Since our claim is that he exists by logical necessity in every possible world, we agree that he also exists by factual necessity in this reality. However, given what we know to be true about God, it is inadequate to say that he exists only by factual necessity in this reality, and that he may not exist by logical necessity in other possible worlds.



## **THE SELF-EXISTENCE OF GOD**

God is an uncaused being, and since he is the creator, sustainer, and controller of all things, he existed before all things. God exists in and of himself. He sustains his own being. He is not dependent on anything outside of himself for his existence. God is self-contained, and exists not by some foreign power, but by his very own nature. This is the ASEITY of God, sometimes called his SELF-EXISTENCE or INDEPENDENCE.

The Bible says that "the Father has life in himself," but our existence is dependent on the will and power of God: "For in him we live and move and have our being." And it says, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Paul said that God "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything," but that he is the one who "gives all men life and breath and everything else."

The divine name that God revealed to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," points to his self-existence. It also suggests that God exists in an eternal state. He created time itself, and he is independent of it. This attribute of God's existence is called his ETERNITY or TIMELESSNESS. The Bible says that he is "the Eternal God." And it says that he is "from everlasting to everlasting," and that he is "from all eternity." Peter wrote, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."

God's eternal nature implies that all knowledge is an eternal intuition to him. There is a succession of ideas in the mind of man. He reasons from premises to conclusions, a process that occurs in time and as a succession of ideas in the mind. But since God is timeless, no proposition is chronologically considered before another proposition, so that all propositions are before his mind as one eternal intuition or thought. Therefore, God thinks without mental associations or a succession of ideas. He thinks by pure intuition, since all knowledge is simultaneously present before him, including facts that pertain to our future.

This does not mean that logic is inapplicable to God or that logic is different to him. Logic is the same to God as it is to us, but because he is eternal and omniscient, his thinking is not characterized by a succession of ideas. Since all his thoughts are simultaneously present, all premises and conclusions are simultaneously present before his mind. This does not affect the logical relations between these premises and conclusions. He knows these relations, and they are the same to him as they are to us.

When God translates his thoughts into words, as he does in the Bible, the thoughts that are simultaneously present in his mind are arranged into a succession of ideas, in their logical order, and written down. His presentation follows the principles of logic, which proceed from his rational nature. Logic is God's nature. Logic belongs to God. As the Bible says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word is logos, which means logic, reason, and wisdom.

Thus this view of logic is not based on speculation, because God calls himself Logic, Reason, and Wisdom. The Bible is the word of God, and the whole book shows us how God expresses himself in words. Moreover, the Son of God took on human flesh, entered the realm of time, and lived among us. The biblical account of him shows that he articulated his thoughts in intelligible speech, arranged in accordance with the principles of logic. Therefore, although God's thinking does not consist in a succession of ideas, we know that it can translate into propositions and arranged as a succession of ideas, so that even though his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, he can speak to us so that we may think his thoughts.

Some theologians have invented a distinction between human logic and God's logic, and they claim that human logic does not apply to God. However, there is no such distinction as human logic and God's logic. Logic does not consist of arbitrary or invented rules, but of the necessary principles of thought. Logic is not an optional feature of communication for convenience. If there is any thinking at all, and if there is any communication, the laws of logic apply by necessity. Man did not invent logic, but logic came from God. We have a grasp of logic and perceive its necessity because God thinks in accordance with the principles of logic, and he has made us in his own image.

God thinks in accordance with the principles of logic not because he is subservient to a set of rules that are higher than himself, since Logic is himself. He is Logic. He is Reason. He is Wisdom. The principles of logic describe the way God thinks. They are descriptions of his rational nature. Thus it would make no sense to complain that if God thinks in accordance with logic, then logic would be higher than God. This would be like saying that if God were to be omnipotent, then he would be subservient to omnipotence. It would be like saying that if God were to be omniscient, then knowledge would be higher than God. No, God is omnipotent, and God is omniscient. God is total power. Omnipotence is his nature. It is not something other than, external to, or contingent to him. The word is a description of his power. Likewise, God is logic, truth, wisdom, rationality, and so on. These things are not higher or lower than God, but God is these things. They are descriptions that emphasize the intellectual aspect of the divine nature.

Therefore, there is in fact no such thing as human logic, but God's logic is the only kind of logic, and when we think in accordance with the laws of logic, we imitate the operation of his mind. Besides, to argue that human logic does not apply to God is to use human logic to say something about God. This is self-refuting. If human logic is inapplicable to God, then nobody can say this and expect to make sense at the same time. Logic is of God, and it is either God's logic, or no logic at all.

## **THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD**

The IMMUTABILITY of God follows from his eternity. Since there is no "before" or "after" with God, he remains the same in his being and character. This attribute is also associated with his perfection. If God is perfect in every way, then any change in him must be for the worse. But since he is immutable, he cannot change for the worse. And since he is perfect in every way, he has no need to change or develop.

The Bible says that although the physical universe undergoes decay, God remains the same: "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." God said by the prophets, "I the LORD do not change" and "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do." And the Bible also says, "The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." God remains the same not only in his being and character, but all his thoughts and decrees remain the same.

The immutability of God implies the IMPASSIBILITY of God. This means that God is without "passions" – emotions or feelings. Less thoughtful individuals protest against the doctrine. They misapply biblical passages that seem to describe a God who experiences emotions such as grief, joy, and wrath.

Passages that appear to ascribe emotions to God are anthropopathisms. They ascribe emotions to God as figures of speech. Although opponents of divine impassibility resist this, these same people would agree that the biblical references that ascribe to God bodily parts such as hands and eyes are anthropomorphisms, or figures of speech. Those who think that God really has a physical body should not even be considered Christians. Anthropopathism cannot be dismissed without good reason.

Since some biblical passages directly assert that God is spirit and that he has no form, other passages that refer to God as if he has a body are obviously figurative. When they are understood this way, both kinds of passages make good sense, whereas to interpret them in the opposite direction would not. If it is thought that God has a physical body, then those passages that say he is spirit and that he has no form would not make sense. And this problem would arise because they are not supposed to be understood this way.

The Bible is consistent about this. When it talks about God's being, it teaches that he is spirit and that he has no form. When it talks about his ability and his work, it sometimes uses figurative speech, so that it refers to his hands, arms, eyes, ears, and so on. The former refers to what he is, and the latter refers to what he does. The difference is definite and obvious. In fact, given those passages that tell us about the being of God, it would be heretical to interpret the other passages as teaching that God has a body. Likewise, given what the Bible tells us about the being of God, it would be heretical to say that he has emotions that resemble human feelings and fluctuations.

The view that God experiences emotions like human beings appear to entail a number of contradictions. A man may become angry against his will in the sense that he does not choose to become angry, and he does not choose to experience whatever causes the anger, but that a trigger incites this emotion in him against his preference. This applies to human experiences of joy, fear, grief, and so on. Although one may develop a remarkable level of self-control by the power of the word of God and the Spirit of God, it remains that a person's volition and emotion do not maintain an exact relationship. His emotional state is not always exactly the way he wishes or decides it to be. However, this cannot be true with God even if he were to experience emotions, because such lack of self-control contradicts his omniscience, sovereignty, and immutability.

Since God is omniscient, he cannot be surprised, and this at least eliminates certain ways of experiencing emotions. Suppose I become angry because a man insults me at this very moment. It is unlikely that I would still be angry two thousand years in the future. And if I had known two thousand years in the past that he would insult me today, it is unlikely that I would become angry by the time he does it. In fact, if I have had two thousand years to consider his insult, by the time he does it, I would not react at all.

Perhaps the reply is that all facts are simultaneously present to God, so that the insult that angers him is always happening "now." But this would imply that God must be angry about this one insult throughout eternity, and not just when it happens. If so, then God's emotions would not offer us the kind of interactivity that proponents of divine emotions are after, because he would be continuously experiencing the full force of all his emotions anyway, so that whatever we do would not make any difference to his emotions. In any case, suppose something happens that alleviates this anger. Of course, the only way is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But since God knows Christ's sacrifice just as well as the man's insult, we are at a loss as to whether he is ever angry or not. The mental experiment results in absurdity, because the truth is that God is not like man, because he is not a man.

Then, if my action can cause anger in God in an almost identical way that I can cause anger in a man, then this means that I can cause anger in God by my power. To the degree that he lacks self-control, he is helpless against my efforts to cause anger in him. Likewise, if my action can produce joy in God in an almost identical way that I can produce joy in a man, then this means that I have the ability to produce joy in God at will. In this manner, I would exercise a significant measure of control over God. I could make him feel in way I wish him to feel. But this contradicts his sovereignty and immutability.

The matter becomes much more complex when we take into account that he knows all the thoughts and actions of his creatures in all of history simultaneously. But it is enough to consider all the billions of people who anger him at any point in time, and the thousands or at least hundreds of people who please him at the same time. How is it possible for him to be angry with two billion people in a sense like man's anger and pleased with two hundred people, also in the human sense, at the same time? If the answer is that God's mind is immense, so that

he is not subject to human limitations, then our point is also established. There is no warrant to say, within the same category of the operation of the mind, that God is extremely similar to man in some ways, as if bound by many of man's limitations, but that he is completely superior to man in other ways, as if he has none of man's limitations.

Therefore, some form of divine impassibility must be true by necessity. If God is angered by our sins, it is only because he wills to be angered by them, and not because his mental state is subject to our will or beyond his control. Even if God has emotions, they are under his control, and they will never compromise his divine attributes. And since they cannot compromise the divine attributes, this also means that even if he has emotions, he does not have them in a way that is similar to man. But then we wonder why we would still call them emotions. Thus at least in this sense and to this extent, we must affirm that God is without passions.

Christians who have been influenced by modern psychology and philosophy are eager to defend emotions, both in man and in God. Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible never says that the mind consists of the will, intellect, and emotion. This division originates from secular psychology, not biblical psychology. Under this scheme, the will, intellect, and emotion are distinct parts of the mind, so that the mind is only real as the aggregate of the three. Since they are related but independent, there is no necessary relationship between the development of each part. Thus Christians who assume this framework would often say that a person must not only develop his intellect, but that he must also develop his emotion. But if this framework is false, then the recommendation tells us to do something that cannot be done, since it assumes a division in the mind that does not exist. The result is a perverted spiritual development.

The Bible teaches that the mind is the inward part of man. The will and emotion are not things in themselves, but they are functions of the mind. To illustrate, digestion is not an organ apart from or within the stomach, but the stomach is the physical organ, and digestion is the function of this organ. Likewise, the mind is the inward and incorporeal part of man. Sometimes it becomes disturbed, and a disturbance of the mind affects how it thinks, often in a negative way. Therefore, the emotion is not good in itself. Although the Bible does not call all emotions sinful, many emotions can indeed be sinful, and sinful emotions often lead to other sins. As God said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Christians do not need more emotions. They need more self-control. The spiritual man is marked by self-control, and has achieved mastery over his emotions. The mind of God is so integrated that he does only what he wills. As we develop in faith and holiness, our emotion should increasingly come under our conscious control, so that we become excited because we decide to become excited, become angry because we decide to become angry, and we can stop when we decide to stop.

Jesus experienced emotions, but what can we infer from this? He also experienced hunger and fatigue, but this only proves that the Son of God took upon himself a human nature. Just as

Jesus in his divine nature did not experience hunger or fatigue, he in his divine nature did not experience emotions. Only his human nature experienced hunger, fatigue, and emotions. Since the Bible declares that Jesus never sinned, we conclude that emotions cannot be sinful in themselves. However, it is invalid to infer from this that emotions are good, or that it should not be controlled.

On the other hand, the Gospels show that Jesus was always in full control of himself. He was extremely disturbed before his arrest, but he never lost control. He was able to pray to God, to resolve to fulfill his will, and to rebuke his disciples for falling asleep. He was under intense pressure, but he retained full control of his mental and physical functions. Sometimes things happen that disturb us, but to be disturbed in the mind is not part of sanctification. A person is not holy or spiritual because his mind fluctuates like the waves of the ocean. Rather, Christ's self-control in the face of the most disturbing circumstances, his faith to walk on the stormy waters, is what his followers ought to emulate.

By implication, we have introduced the UNITY of God. God is not divided into parts, but he exists as an eternal whole with all of his attributes as one and inseparable. This is sometimes called his SIMPLICITY, because God is not complex or divided.

Although one portion of Scripture may emphasize a divine attribute, and another portion may emphasize a different attribute, this does not mean that God's attributes are separable. It does not mean that one attribute can override another, that one is more important than another, or that one attribute more closely expresses God's essence than another.

The Bible teaches that God is his attributes. The Bible says that "God is light" and it says that "God is love." And Jesus referred to God as "power." God is not a being who is love, but with power as an attribute. Christians often say, "God has power, but God is love." This is false. It is absurd and stupid. God is love. And God is power. And God is light. He is love and light, justice and mercy, power and wisdom, knowledge and grace.

Further, we must not think that God emphasizes one attribute during one period in history, and then a different attribute during another period in history. It is often assumed that God emphasizes his wrath in the Old Testament and emphasizes his mercy in the New Testament. This is slander. It is the Old Testament that says, "His love endures forever," and it is the New Testament that says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The unity of God means that he is both merciful and wrathful at all times, and that all his attributes exist in perfect harmony. He has always been merciful to his elect and wrathful to the reprobates, whether in the Old or New Testament.

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD**

The SPIRITUALITY of God is another metaphysical attribute. Jesus says, "God is spirit." He is incorporeal. He has no physical body. Moses said to Israel, "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman." God has "no form"; therefore, Moses forbids anyone from constructing an image that purports to resemble God's appearance, not even one that is in the form of a man.

If it is forbidden to construct a physical image of God because he has no form, then it is also forbidden to suppose that God has a form in our theology. We must think of him only as incorporeal spirit. More than a few people, who claim to be Christians, have succumbed to the teaching that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have bodies. It is heresy. It is a pagan doctrine. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have bodies. And although God the Son has taken up a human body, his divine attributes are not mingled or confused with the human attributes. To illustrate, God the Son is omnipresent in his divine nature, but his human nature is not omnipresent.

Since some biblical passages directly assert that God is spirit and that he has no form, other passages that refer to God as if he has a body are obviously figurative. When they are understood this way, both kinds of passages make good sense, whereas to interpret them in the opposite direction would not. If it is thought that God has a physical body, then those passages that say he is spirit and that he has no form would not make sense. And this problem would arise because they are not supposed to be understood this way.

For example, the Bible says, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." If we infer from this that God has physical eyes, that would contradict the passages that speak about the nature of his being, that he is spirit and that he has no form. Moreover, to say that God sees with physical eyes would compromise his omniscience, for then he would not see the things and places where his eyes are not looking. And physical eyes do not work by themselves. We assume that they would be connected through optical nerves to a brain that interprets reflected light. So if God has physical eyes, we assume that he must also have a brain and optical nerves, just like a man. This is indeed what some heresies affirm, but it contradicts what the Bible teaches about divine transcendence and invisibility. For God to gain knowledge by the interpretation of reflected light would also make it possible for him to be misled by optical illusions, mirages, and so on, as men often are misled. Thus this false interpretation of Scripture results in absurdities and contradictions. The verse is figurative, and the point is that God is proactive and that he is aware of all that happens on the earth, not that he has physical eyes.

In another example, God says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." Some people insist that we take a verse like this in the physical sense. But then God's legs would have to be just that long. The length of his legs would be the distance between heaven and earth.

How then could he say in another place, "I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling," since the tent would have been too small for him? Some versions of the heresy that God has a body assert that he is of a similar height as a man. But this would contradict the statement that heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool. It would be impossible to interpret all such verses as referring to a physical body. It would force them to contradict one another, because they were never intended to be read this way. Since God has already declared that he is a spirit and that he has no form, it is not more reverent to interpret these verses as referring to a physical body, but it is in fact an act of rebellion and sabotage to do so.

Consider the time when Jesus said, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." He said that he cast out demons by "the finger of God," and so some have claimed that God has a hand with fingers. However, in a parallel passage Jesus said that he cast out demons "by the Spirit of God." Thus one verse explains the other, and one verse restricts the way that the other verse can be interpreted. It is obvious that the finger of God is figurative of the Spirit of God, and not that God possesses physical parts like human hands and fingers.

The Bible is consistent in this. When it talks about God's being, it teaches that he is spirit and that he has no form. When it talks about his ability and his work, it sometimes speaks in metaphors, so that it refers to his hands, arms, eyes, ears, and so on. The former refers to what he is, and the latter refers to what he does. The difference is definite and obvious. And given those passages that tell us about the being of God, that he is a spirit without form, it would be heretical to interpret the other passages as teaching that God has a body.



## **THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD**

God possesses each divine attribute in an unlimited way and to an unlimited extent. This is the INFINITY of God. As the Bible says, "To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless," and "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." God's attributes are infinite and boundless.

For example, the doctrine of divine omnipotence indicates that God possesses unlimited power. What is infinite is not greater than the finite only in degree, but also in kind. A person who has a billion times the wealth of another still operates within human limitations and the monetary system, but one who has infinite resources operates on an altogether different level. A person who lives a thousand times longer than another person is still mortal, but someone who will live an unlimited number of years and who is immortal and indestructible is not greater only in degree, but also in kind. He lives a very different kind of life.

The fact that God is infinite means that he is not just a greater version of ourselves. God is not a mere super-man, because he is not a man at all. His power and wisdom are not only much greater than ours, but infinitely greater. This ought to ignite the fear of God in us, and eliminate the flippant attitude that many Christians have toward God.

Even those who claim to love God often challenge his words and his ways. However, a true Christian does not defy God. Those who truly know God and love him would also fear him. God rescued the people of Israel out of Egypt, but they murmured against him, so that God left them to die and did not bring them into the land of promise. As the Bible says, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Always speak words of faith and reverence.

The metaphysical attributes of God demonstrate his TRANSCENDENCE. Although divine transcendence means that God is "outside" of space and time, in fact it is not an idea that denotes his location, since God is incorporeal. Rather, the emphasis is that God is independent of space and time, and not limited by them. Nevertheless, the IMMANENCE of God reminds us that he is not distant from us in a way that reduces personal attention and communication from him. The Bible portrays a God who is involved in human history and individual lives. He is very different from and superior to us, but he is still able to interact with us. God is both transcendent and immanent, and these two attributes do not contradict or diminish each other.

Related to this is the OMNIPRESENCE of God. Although God is transcendent, his immanence is such that he is present everywhere. As the Bible says, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." This does not mean that God occupies every point in space, since he has no spatial dimensions. Yet God is indeed present everywhere in the sense that he knows all that occurs at every point in space, and he

can exercise his full power there. He is omnipresent because he possesses complete awareness and control of every location in existence.

## **THE TRINITY OF GOD**

God is a TRINITY. There is only one God, and this God is Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. All the divine attributes apply to each member of the Godhead. As Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He applied a definite article to each of the three, indicating a clear distinction between them, but he stated the word "name" in the singular, indicating the essential unity and equality of the three.

The doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says that God is one in essence and three in person. The proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we would have to say, "God is one and not one" or "God is three and not three." And we would have to say, "God is one in essence and three in essence" or "God is one in person and three in person." There is contradiction only if we affirm that God is one and not one or that God is one and three at the same time and in the same sense. However, the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three systems of consciousness. To illustrate, all three knew that Christ would die on the cross to save the chosen ones, but God the Father or God the Spirit did not think, "I will die on the cross to save the chosen ones." But they thought, "The Son will die on the cross to save the chosen ones." On the other hand, God the Son affirmed the same idea in the first person: "I will die on the cross to save the chosen ones." Although all three members possess omniscience, they could have different relationships to the propositions that are known.

The "essence" in the doctrinal formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God. All three persons fulfill the definition of deity, but this does not become a belief in three deities, because the very definition of deity involves all three members, so that each member is not an independent deity. The only idea of God in the Bible is the Trinity. The Bible never affirmed a God that is not a Trinity. When the Bible says that there is one God, it means that there is one Trinity.

The objections that the doctrine contradicts itself and that it contradicts monotheism can arise only when the biblical idea of God has been ignored. When an objection against a doctrine ignores what the doctrine teaches, it is an irrelevant objection. The Christian idea of God is bound to the Trinity. It affirms and assumes that God is a Trinity, and that there is only one Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christians often stupidly affirm that there is an apparent contradiction, and some seem curiously happy about it. But the idea of an "apparent" contradiction is subjective, so that it is useless except to expose the disturbed condition and the incompetence of the one to which such a contradiction is apparent. Either there is a contradiction or there is no contradiction. If a person sees a logical contradiction where there is none, this tells us nothing about the matter under discussion, but it tells us that the person is logically delusional. If the doctrine of the

Trinity contradicts itself, then it cannot be true. But if there is no contradiction, then there should not be an apparent contradiction. Contrary to common religious sentiment, to perceive an apparent contradiction is nothing to boast about, since it means that one perceives a contradiction where there is none.

Moreover, the nature of a contradiction is such that to affirm one side of a contradiction is to deny the other side, and to deny one side is to affirm the other side. Thus to affirm both sides of a contradiction is to deny both sides in reverse order, and to deny both sides of a contradiction means to affirm both sides in reverse order again. So nothing intelligible is affirmed or denied. This means that it is impossible to affirm both sides of a contradiction. It makes no difference if it is only an apparent contradiction, since to the person, it still means that to affirm one feature of the doctrine is to deny the other feature of the doctrine. If he can affirm both features of the doctrine without denying either, then in fact he sees no contradiction at all. In other words, if a person says that the Trinity is an apparent contradiction, then he cannot affirm it, and therefore he cannot be a Christian. And if he cannot be a Christian, then he cannot be saved, and he is headed toward eternal hellfire. If he is a true Christian, then he affirms the doctrine of the Trinity and sees no contradiction in it, but he claims that there is an apparent contradiction only to add counterproductive religious flair to his theology.

If we take one "god" as defined by the pagans and multiply it, then we would have many gods, or polytheism. But if we consider the Christian revelation on its own terms, instead of accommodating it to the pagan definition, then we would see that Scripture does not define the oneness of God one way here and another way there. It teaches that there is one God, and only one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is what God means. What are we saying, then, when we affirm that there is one God? We mean that there is only one Trinity. A problem occurs only when we smuggle a non-Christian idea of God into the discussion and then attempt to make the Christian God fit into it.

The Christian God should have never been made to reconcile with some non-Christian idea of monotheism. Every idea of "God" comes from a worldview. If it comes from the Christian worldview, then we are already referring to the Trinity, and all other worldviews are contradicted. But if the idea of God comes from a non-Christian worldview, then it is different from the Christian view from the start, and the Christian view has no obligation to adopt this foreign definition in its self-description. If the Trinity were a community of three "gods" in the pagan sense, then it would be impossible to reconcile this with the pagan idea of monotheism. But the Trinity is one God in the Christian sense, and this Christian idea of God necessarily refers to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, whose very names acknowledge the Trinity and imply their relations.

There is a distinction of roles in the Trinity. The Bible portrays the Son as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as subordinate to the Father and the Son. However, since there is essential equality among the three members, this subordination is only functional and occurs

only by consent. Although the Son performs the will of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, the three persons are equal in essence.

This offers a basis to understand submission in human relationships. Although all people are equal as human beings, God commands us to obey our leaders. This is not because the leaders are inherently or essentially superior as human beings, but because God has established authority structures within legitimate institutions such as the family, the church, and the state. So there are situations in which God requires one person to submit to another, but the two are equal in essence, or equal as human beings. Since it is God who ordains authority structures, a person's submission to his leaders is indicative of his love and obedience toward God.

## **THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD**

The OMNISCIENCE of God is the doctrine that God knows all propositions. Some people add that he also knows the relationships between all propositions. This is redundant because the relationships between propositions can be stated as propositions as well. It is also unnecessary to say that God knows which propositions are true or false, and which refer to actual or potential situations, since these can also be stated as propositions. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that divine omniscience means that God knows all propositions, and this is to affirm that God possesses all knowledge.

For us to think through something involves a process, or a succession of ideas in our mind where one thought leads to another. And the fact that our minds are finite means that we can hold only a limited number of propositions in our immediate consciousness at any moment. But since God is timeless, all knowledge exists before his mind as an eternal intuition. And since he possesses unlimited intellectual power, he is able to hold all propositions in his immediate consciousness at all times. Thus the mind of God perceives all things with exhaustive clarity and depth, including things that pertain to our future.

The Bible says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." It declares that God is "perfect in knowledge," and he "makes known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." His complete knowledge of everything includes our thoughts and intentions. As the Bible says, "For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths"; "the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts"; and "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

The omniscience of God makes it possible for the Christian to turn his own mind into an altar of worship, continuously offering prayer and thanksgiving to God. As the Bible says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer," and "The LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him."

Another divine attribute related to omniscience is the WISDOM of God. To say that God is wise places emphasis on his exhaustive understanding of all things, his ability to make the best decisions, and the fact that he accomplishes his purposes through the best means. Paul called him "the only wise God." Jeremiah said that God "founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding." Like his knowledge, his wisdom is unlimited: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

## THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

Among other things, the OMNIPOTENCE of God refers to his unlimited power to create what he wills and to control his creation.

As an objection against the existence of God or the coherence of the Christian view, unbelievers demand to know if God can create something that amounts to a contradiction. But this is an unintelligent challenge because it suffers from a categorical fallacy, so that it is unintelligible and meaningless. To illustrate, it makes sense to ask "How big is your cat?" because size is a category that applies to physical objects like animals. It also makes sense to ask "How fast is your car?" and "How smart is your son?" However, it makes no sense to ask, "Is the color green fast or slow?" or "Is that rock smart or stupid?" Speed does not apply to color and intelligence does not apply to a rock. Green cannot be fast or slow. A rock cannot be smart or stupid.

Here is the problem with the challenge as to whether God can create or perform a contradiction. The challenge attempts to pose a dilemma to the Christian for affirming the doctrine of divine omnipotence. Perhaps the most popular example is: "Can God create a rock so large or heavy that he cannot lift it?" The challenge commits a categorical fallacy, and it betrays the non-Christian's lack of intelligence. God is incorporeal, so that physical forces do not act upon him or against him. There is nothing to make the rock large or heavy to God, since size and weight do not apply to him. Whether the object is large or heavy to man is irrelevant. When God creates a rock, he will always be able to do anything he wants with it. He is able to move any rock from below to above, but this would be an act of lift only from our perspective, because weight does not apply to God, and even space does not apply to him, so that it has never been a case of up and down to him.

Something like "a square circle" is a contradiction. So the non-Christian asks, "Can God create a square circle?" But the category of ability does not apply to the creation of a contradiction, because a contradiction is not something to be created. A contradiction is nothing. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask whether God can create a square circle, because it is nothing to be done at all. God does not act contrary to his own will or nature, and he does not perform contradictions, since contradictions are nothing to be performed.

Christians often rush to reply that divine omnipotence does not mean that God can do everything. For example, God "cannot" lie or die. Then they say that God cannot perform contradictions, and that it is not a problem or a defect. However, this accepts the confusion inherent in the challenge, and on that basis supplies a response that compromises God's majesty and ability. This attempt to defend God is itself blasphemy against God.

When it comes to creating a rock too heavy for God to lift, the category of weight does not apply to God, so that "heavy" is meaningless, and the category of space does not apply to God, so that "lift" is also meaningless. Therefore, when a person accepts weight and space as

applicable to "God" and then responds on that basis, he is no longer answering for the God of the Christians.

Again, a contradiction is nothing to be created or performed, because it is nothing and is meaningless, such that the idea of ability cannot apply. And so to say that God "cannot" create or perform a contradiction is to falsely state that God cannot do something, when it is really nothing to be done. Avoid silly and careless answers, such as the popular response, "God cannot perform contradictions because he is rational, and he cannot or will not act against his rational nature." This is stupid, as if an irrational God might perform contradictions.

When we say that God cannot lie, does the category of ability apply? Is it because God lacks the ability to speak falsehood, or is it because whatever God says becomes the truth? God's power and God's word are one.

Likewise, when we say that God "cannot die," are we saying that he lacks the ability to die, or should we rather say that death does not apply to the Eternal in the first place? Nothing eternal "can" die, but it has nothing to do with ability. The category does not apply. The eternal has no beginning and no ending, no before and no after. Since there is no before and after in the being of God, if God is alive now, he cannot die later, because there is no later. Thus the eternal does not die, and when we say that God "cannot" die, we are referring to the utter impossibility of it, the inconceivability of it, the inapplicability of it, and not his ability or inability.

God reveals himself as "God Almighty" to Abraham. The creation account is no doubt a testimony to his unique abilities. He is capable of creating inanimate objects, and he has also created living things. Humanity is the crown of his creation. As Scripture says, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." Job said to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted." And God said by the prophet Jeremiah, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"



## **THE LOVE OF GOD**

The LOVE of God is a favorite topic, but it is also one of the most abused and distorted Christian teachings. Although it is often said that "God is love," very few people understand what this means. An exposition of the doctrine will require corrections to common misunderstandings.

It is popular to assume that the love of God is universal. The Bible says, "God does not show favoritism." But this only means that God does not dispense his favor according to some irrelevant condition found in his creatures. The context is not that "God loves everyone unconditionally," as many people say, but that he condemns all sinners whether they are Jews or Gentiles: "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." As the Bible says in another place, "Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism."

Peter said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." This refers to a national or ethnic universality, that God has chosen some people to be saved from "every tribe and language and people and nation." It does not say that God accepts everyone no matter what, but that he accepts only those who approach him on his terms, and the Bible is clear that only those whom God has chosen for salvation are divinely enabled come to him in the prescribed manner, that is, through faith in Jesus Christ.

God chooses those whom he will save without consideration of any prior or foreseen condition in them, and then he supplies all the necessary things by which he makes them right with himself, such as faith in Christ. Therefore, it is accurate to say that God unconditionally loves the chosen ones, but he does not unconditionally love everyone. It is true that God does not show favoritism, but this means that he condemns all reprobates and that he saves his chosen ones regardless of their ethnic and social background, or any other condition in them. It does not mean that he favors every person.

God shows a natural benevolence to his creatures. Jesus said, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." He sends rain and supplies other non-spiritual benefits in his providential government over creation. This is a natural benevolence since the benefits included are given to both Christians and non-Christians, and no one can survive without this benevolence. Natural provisions such as air, light, food, and certain kinds of knowledge all come under this aspect of God's providence. The "love" of God is universal only when the meaning is restricted to natural providence. It includes no spiritual benefit, and none of the concern that a father would have for his children.

When Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, he referred to natural benevolence or some practical action, even including prayer, but he did not mean the kind of fatherly or brotherly love that is shared in the family of God: "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do

not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you." Thus Jesus said to do "good" to our enemies in the social and material sense. Just as the Father offers natural benefits to those who hate him, such as food and rain, to love our enemies is to "do good" to them, to offer them natural benefits. Likewise, Paul wrote, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

But if God cares only for his chosen ones, why does he provide natural benefits to the reprobates? And if non-Christians are so repulsive to him, why does he put up with them for so long before he sends them to hell to torture them forever? The Bible explains, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory?" In other words, God keeps non-Christians alive and functional so that they can provide an environment for Christians to interact with, to learn and practice the word of God, and to witness God's wrath against these people that refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

Suppose a man wishes to preserve some beer bottles to use as targets when he plays with his rifle, and to show off his marksmanship to his children. He would collect these bottles, clean them, and preserve them in a safe place. He offers to these bottles a natural benevolence, but he has no personal concern for them as he does his children. And when the time comes he will line them up and shoot them to a thousand pieces without any remorse, while his children praise him and rejoice with him.

Non-Christians are preserved by divine providence so that they can be used and discarded. Paul said that God has "the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use." "Common" vessels included receptacles for trash and feces. This is God's estimation of non-Christians. They are the toilets of creation. This also illustrates God's mercy toward those of us who believe in Jesus Christ. We were like toilets where the universe dump their excrements, but God transformed us into spectacular vases through which he displays the beauty of his wisdom, power, and glory.

God has determined to save the elect and to condemn the reprobates. The elect are those whom God has chosen to save from sin and hell by producing in them faith in the Lord Jesus. The reprobates are those whom God has chosen to damn. Like the elect, the reprobates are also created in sin, but unlike the elect, God hardens their hearts against the gospel so that they will never be saved through faith in Christ. In this sense, God loves the elect and hates the reprobates. As the Bible says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

We must participate in God's hatred against the reprobates. As the Bible says, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies." There are numerous other biblical verses on holy hatred against sinners.

Scripture refutes the teaching that "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." It contradicts the popular notion that Christians are to love the sinners but hate their sins, but it teaches that we must hate both the evil people and their evil deeds. A person is the sum of his thoughts, actions, and properties. It is nonsense to suppose that we can love a person without all his thoughts, actions, and properties, and then separately hate all his thoughts, actions, and properties. If we hate a person's thoughts, actions, and properties, then we hate the person. God hates both the reprobate and his evil deeds, because a person is the sum of his beliefs, thoughts, and actions.

On the other hand, God sovereignly decided to extend mercy to his chosen ones, and to impute to them the righteousness of Christ, who was "slain from the creation of the world." From the standpoint of time and history, the chosen ones also begin as sinners, and deserve to be hated by God. But God placed his love upon them in eternity, redeemed them through the work of Christ, determined to transform them by his Spirit, and foreordained the good works that they are to perform. The chosen ones are "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

God sent Christ to redeem the chosen ones because he loved them, but since the elect would also be sinners, and God hates sinners, how could he love those that he should hate? This is an insoluble problem under INFRALAPSARIANISM, in which the decree for the fall of all men occurs before the decree to redeem the chosen ones, so that the decrees follow a historical order. But the problem does not appear under SUPRALAPSARIANISM, in which the election of some men to be saved in Christ occurs before the decree for the fall of all men, so that the various decrees follow a teleological order. In other words, God loved the chosen ones and decreed their salvation before he decreed that all men would become sinners. But in order for some men to be saved and some to be damned, all men must become sinners, and therefore he also decreed that all men would become sinners. Under this scheme, God's love for the chosen ones is easily explained, even though in time and history they would first appear as sinners before they are made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, when we refer to the order of eternal decrees, we are considering a logical order and not a temporal one, since all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God.

In any case, the Bible says that God regards the wickedness of the reprobates as continuous. Since a person is the aggregate of his thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of a reprobate are continuously evil, the totality of his person is evil. It is nonsense to say that we should love the sinner and hate the sin, because one cannot be considered apart from the other. Sins do not occur by themselves. Sins do not murder and steal. Sinners commit sins. Sinners murder and steal. If we were to hate the sins of a reprobate person, there would be nothing left of the person for us to love.

In fact, the same is true about holiness. Holiness does not exist by itself and commit righteous deeds. It is necessarily associated with a person. God is holy. It is impossible to love holiness but

hate God at the same time. And it is impossible to love God and hate acts of holiness and righteousness. If you hate everything that God says and does, then you hate God. Again, this means that it is impossible to love the sinner and hate his sins. It is total nonsense. Sins do not float around in midair and commit wickedness. Only sinners commit wickedness. Sins do not exist by themselves. If you hate the sins, you hate the sinner.

Misconceptions about what it means to love our enemies have resulted in a loss of holy indignation and bold opposition against those who hate God. Christ's command tells us to do good to those who hate us. It is like the natural benevolence that God shows toward all men. But the Bible never tells us to think of the non-Christians as something that they are not. It still teaches that all non-Christians are fools and rebels, stupid and sinful. For a person to think of them as something better than this amounts to a rejection of divine revelation, and casts doubt on his own faith and allegiance toward Christ.

Therefore, although we are to exhibit a natural benevolence toward non-Christians, we must also be jealous for God's honor and imitate his holy hatred toward them. The way most Christians think of "love" toward their enemies amounts to rebellion against God. They should be admonished and disciplined. We "love" non-Christians in the way commanded by Christ when we offer to do them good and refuse to do them harm. But we should have "nothing but hatred" toward non-Christians in the sense that we oppose all of who they are, what they believe, and what they do. We strive to diminish their influence and undermine their agenda by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Contrary to popular belief, we are even to rejoice over God's punishments upon the non-Christians. As the Bible says, "The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked," and "When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy."

In this context, love and hate are not emotions, but volitions. They are policies of thought and action. Since God is impassable, and his mind does not fluctuate, it means that divine love is not a disturbance of the mind, but an intellectual disposition of favor and mercy. And hate is a disposition of disfavor and judgment. Likewise, when the Bible commands Christians to hate both the sinners and their sins, it is addressing our intellectual dispositions – our volitions, not emotions.

Thus Scripture teaches that we love the non-Christians in the restricted sense of natural benevolence, but we hate them in the broader and deeper sense, in that we are hostile to everything about them. The "love" that God and Christians show toward non-Christians is limited to natural and temporal kindness, but on the spiritual and ideological level, we are completely opposed to the non-Christians. Of course, Christians can pray for the non-Christians to be converted, but as long as they are non-Christians, it is impossible to show brotherly love toward them, because they are not brothers. Rather, the only "love" that God and Christians can show them is the kind that we show to animals. We feed them, house them, and clean up after them.

Complete hostility to another person's thoughts and actions, including his beliefs, desires, ambitions, preferences, values, lifestyles, habits, and so on, which is the same as hating the person himself, is hatred at the deepest level. This hatred is much deeper than the kind that would strip him of his natural welfare. By this definition, God and Christians hate non-Christians at the deepest level possible, and likewise, non-Christians hate God and Christians at the deepest level possible.

For someone to regard the Christian faith as false is to hate me at the deepest level possible, because the Christian faith permeates my thinking and behavior. If there is anything in my life that is not operating by biblical precepts, it is because I am imperfect in sanctification, and not because I oppose Scripture on the matter. Therefore, to a person who regards Christianity as false, there is nothing in me for him to love. He cannot love me and hate my beliefs. He cannot love me and hate everything that I am. I am my beliefs. I am a Christian.

Likewise, I may treat the non-Christian with kindness in speech and action, and in this sense I walk in the kind of "love" toward him that Scripture commands, but if I regard his entire worldview as stupid and his whole lifestyle as sinful, and if it is my mission from God to arrange all aspects of my life in opposition to the non-Christian's worldview and lifestyle, then I indeed hate him at the deepest level possible.

The reason we do good to the non-Christians even though we have "nothing but hatred" for them is that God has reserved for himself the right to avenge his own honor and to avenge his chosen ones. Paul wrote, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." This is why Christians must not spread their faith with violence or undermine non-Christians by unjust means. It is up to God to punish them.

Of course, Christians should endorse legal punishments against sinners, including the execution of dangerous criminals. God ordained the government for this purpose. On the other hand, the church must use spiritual weapons to advance its cause, so that we demolish the wicked mainly through the publication of the word of God in preaching, teaching, and writing. As Paul said, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

God's love applies to all people in the restricted sense of a natural benevolence. God sustains the lives of all creatures so that he may carry out his plans, including the display of his wrath. When applied to the chosen ones, God's love refers to his favorable disposition without restriction to the natural realm. As the Bible says, he who gave up his Son for us, how will he not also give us all things? God lavishes his sacrificial love upon those whom he has chosen for salvation. Whereas there is a natural benevolence extended to all men, there is a special

benevolence that is directed only to those whom God has chosen, an effectual love that results in their salvation.

This is the GRACE of God. The popular distinction between common grace and special or saving grace is unbiblical, because natural benevolence is not grace. This natural benevolence is called "love" because Jesus referred to it this way. It is a benevolence because it enables the natural survival of creatures. This "love" does not include a favorable disposition, since it is merely a policy for the provision of natural sustenance, even for the purpose of exploiting these creatures for the benefit of God and the chosen ones. It is different from, and even opposed to, the idea of common grace. Now that the topic turns to salvation, in which God justifies the believer and rescues him from hell, the benefits extended belong to an altogether superior dimension. This is not a natural benevolence akin to what a man shows to plants and animals, but the deep affection and commitment that a man shows to his family. This is divine grace.

Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," and "no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." And Paul explained, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Not everyone will be saved or can be saved. God accepts anyone who comes to him, but a person comes to him only because God causes him to come, and he does not cause everyone to come. One can be saved only if God chooses him and enables him to believe the gospel, but he does not choose or enable every person.

Therefore, God does not love every person. Concerning those whom God loves, Paul wrote, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This does not apply to the reprobates, or those whom God has created for damnation, since soon they will be separated from God's love, and even from his natural benevolence.

Christ died for the elect while they were still sinners. This implies that it is acceptable but imprecise to say that God loves the elect but hates all sinners, since he indeed loves the elect sinners who are not yet converted. Therefore, when precision is preferred, it is better to say that God loves the elect but hates all reprobates. Some of the elect are already converted, and others of this group who are still sinners will be eventually converted. On the other hand, the reprobates will never be converted and will forever remain the objects of divine hatred and wrath.

God's children ought to imitate the Father's love. Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love other people. Naturally, to understand these two great commandments, we must know what it means to love God, and what it means to love other people.

A common misconception about God's love is that it is a greater version of human fondness and courtesy. This is what many people mean when they claim that they love God – they are fond of

him. To the extent that a person has a distorted view of God, this means that he is fond of his misconception of God, so that he is not even fond of God at all.

False Christians would turn against God and hate him once they find out what he is truly like. God is the triune deity who judges every thought and intention, demands exclusive worship and obedience, condemns all those he created for damnation, redeems only those he has chosen for salvation, proclaims the Christian faith alone as truth, performs signs and wonders through his people, and does all that he pleases. Such a God is repugnant to faithless religionists and reprobates. Faithful biblical preaching decreases the number of false converts in the church, since reprobates would find the Christian faith intolerable once they realize what it teaches. The truth attracts the elect, but it repels the reprobates. If the church had been preaching the word of God, there would not be so many false believers in our congregations.

Again, a common misconception about the love of God is that it is an emotional fondness, and at best an element of selfless giving is added to it. When this concept of love is applied to what it means to love God, the result is a shallow spirituality. The Bible teaches a different definition of what it means to love God. As Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." And John wrote, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome," and "This is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands."

Love for God is not defined by fondness or admiration, but obedience. Only a true Christian can love God as defined by Scripture. He obeys the commands of God, and submits to him in thought and action. Of course a Christian is also fond of God, but it is a feigned fondness if he does not also obey the divine commands.

Since to love God means to obey biblical teaching, and to obey biblical teaching, one must first know about it, it follows that theological knowledge is the prerequisite for walking in love. This destroys the anti-intellectual notion that a person can love God without studying theology, or that loving God is superior to knowing about him. To love God is to obey his teaching, but to obey his teaching, one must first grasp it with the intellect, and this is to study theology. Theology makes love possible.

Therefore, rather than to divorce love for God and the intellectual life, or to regard them as antagonistic to each other, the Bible declares that love for God rests upon our intellect. Sinners hate God with their minds, but regeneration reverses this, and enables believers to fulfill the greatest commandment. God said concerning the new covenant, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."

As for love toward other people, in addition to what has been said, Paul said that "love is the fulfillment of the law." There is a misconception that love is the replacement of the law, and it renders the Old Testament moral commands irrelevant. But the Bible teaches that to walk in love is to fulfill the law, or to do what it says rather than to ignore it. Jesus even said that the

"more important matters of the law" included "justice, mercy, and faith." He did not introduce these concepts, as if they were not known before, but he reinforced them.

The ceremonial laws, or the rituals of the law, were fulfilled in Christ. The things that they foreshadowed have not been done away with, but have become reality in the person of Christ. Since the priesthood of Christ is continuous, the fulfillment of these laws are still in effect. There is now no need for such things as the animal sacrifices and purification rites.

On the other hand, God's moral laws remain relevant and binding. To walk in love toward other human beings is to obey the moral laws concerning how we should treat people. For example, we must not steal from others or lie about them. We are to uphold justice and show mercy to the poor. As Paul explained, "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Love is a summary of the moral laws, not a replacement. Therefore, since we are commanded to walk in love, the moral laws remain in effect.

To review: God exhibits a natural benevolence toward all his creatures, and it is called "love" in this restricted sense. The purpose is to preserve them for his use, including the display of his wrath when he punishes them for their sins. But to the chosen ones, God's love also means self-sacrifice and self-disclosure. Among other things, to love God means to devote our intellect to the worship and service of God, to acquire knowledge about him and his commands, and to obey all biblical precepts. As for love toward men, it means to obey God's moral laws in our relationships with people, and to treat them the way God tells us to treat them.



## **THE JUSTICE OF GOD**

The love of God is consistent with his JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS. Since God is the ultimate authority, and all propositions find meaning only in relation to him, all moral concepts are defined by his nature. To say that God is loving and just is to say that he always acts according to his nature, with specific emphasis on the type of actions that the words love and justice describe.

Justice is defined by the nature of God, and to say that God is just means that he always acts in accordance with his nature when it comes to matters of right and wrong or good and evil. He is righteous because he always does what he thinks is right. Likewise, we are righteous when we do what God thinks is right for us to do, and we sin when we do what he thinks is wrong for us to do. Jeremiah said that God is one who enforces and delights in justice, and Isaiah called him "a God of justice." God will one day "judge the world with justice."

Scripture teaches us the ways of God in making just and wise judgments. As the Bible says, "The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous," and "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal." Paul wrote, "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good." And Jesus taught us to "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." We can make a right judgment if we know how God thinks, and this is possible by studying the word of God.

Justice is the nature of God. He punishes evildoers. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," it means that he must punish all men unless there is a way to satisfy his justice without destroying those he wishes to save. To accomplish this, God sent Jesus Christ to die for the chosen ones, thereby saving those he had foreordained to have faith in him. On the other hand, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

God presented Christ "as a sacrifice of atonement" so that God "might be just and the justifier" of those who have faith in Christ. This explains how God can be the justifier of sinners if his own nature of justice demands that he punishes sinners. God sent Jesus to die for the chosen ones, to suffer the punishment that they deserved. Thus God maintains his own standard of justice in condemning the non-Christians, but he also upholds justice as he pardons the chosen ones, the Christians, because Jesus Christ has paid for their sins.

## **THE WRATH OF GOD**

Christians are the children of God, so that it is unnatural for them to be suspicious of or opposed to the WRATH of God, but many who claim to be believers speak and behave as if it is not a biblical doctrine, or as if the wrath of God is something to be ashamed of. The Bible teaches us to know both "the kindness and severity of God." The wrath of God is just as much a divine attribute as his love. Therefore, to have a proper understanding of God, we must know and embrace the doctrine of the wrath of God.

The reprobates are called "the objects of his wrath" and those who are "prepared for destruction." Among other reasons, God created them so that he may reveal this aspect of his nature to "the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." Since Christians have been "saved from God's wrath" through Jesus Christ, this is one divine attribute that they will never experience, and therefore it must be demonstrated to them in other people.

One benefit that God gives to the chosen ones is information about himself, and this demonstrates his commitment to make himself known to his people. He would create billions of non-Christians and throw them into a lake of fire to torture them with endless pain and agony in order to show his own children this wonderful aspect of his holy nature.

The wrath of God is his divine anger against all that is contrary to holiness and righteousness. It is his intense hatred toward sin and wickedness, including the sinful nature of man. Again, the impassability of God teaches us that his anger is a policy of thought and action rather than an emotion, or a disturbance of the mind. Unlike much of human anger, divine wrath is not emotional or petty, but it stems from God's holy nature, and it is good and justified. This divine anger and hatred is directed against all who reject Jesus Christ. As the Bible says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

People who have never heard the gospel are not exempt. Every person is born sinful with an evil nature. This alone is sufficient to incur the wrath of God. In addition, all the non-Christians who have not directly rejected Jesus Christ have nevertheless rebelled against the knowledge of God that is innate within them. As Scripture says, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."

Those who have access to the word of God transgress the word of God. And those who do not have access to the word of God transgress their innate knowledge of God. They show that they have an innate sense of right and wrong because their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes excuse them. This innate sense of right and wrong has been distorted by sin, but the point is that they transgress whatever standard that is within them, showing themselves to be sinners. Therefore, all non-Christians are under the wrath of God regardless of whether they

have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. No one can claim ignorance as an excuse. None of them can escape. God's intense anger will punish all non-Christians and make them suffer.

But the wrath of God will not come upon the elect: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." God appointed the reprobates to "suffer wrath," but he appointed us to "receive salvation" through Christ. We credit our salvation to God's appointment, and not to a person's choice to follow Christ. A person's choice to follow Christ does not come from himself, but God is the one who causes this choice by grace, so that no one may boast before him.

## **THE WILL OF GOD**

Theologians distinguish between the "secret" and the "revealed" WILL of God on the basis that Scripture says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." The secret things refer to God's decrees, as in what he would do. The revealed things refer to God's precepts, as in what we should do. Since the two do not overlap, there is never a conflict between them. There is no paradox or contradiction.

There are theologians who assert that there are "two wills" in God, and this is said in a sense that maintains a paradox in the doctrine. They would refer to it as a mystery, but this is a euphemism for contradiction. In other words, they allege that there is a contradiction in the very being of God. This is blasphemy, of course. Rather, the Bible refers to the "will" of God in two different senses. And when a word is used in two different senses, it means that two different words can be used instead. If we attach only one meaning to a word for the sake of precision, then even if we continue to use the word "will," it would refer to only one thing. It would refer to either God's decree or God's precept, not both. In fact, we can use the words "decree" and "precept," and avoid the word "will" altogether.

We would not say that there are two decrees and two precepts in God, because decree and precept refer to different things. It is just as ridiculous to say that there are two wills in God. There is a will and a precept, or a decree and a will, or there is a decree and precept, but not a will and a will. Once it is pointed out that there are two distinct ideas that can be expressed with two different words, all confusion disappears, and the blasphemy that presents God as insane disappears along with it. The Bible does not teach that there are two wills in God, but it uses the same word to refer to two different things. This would not be a problem if theologians were not so stupid or so eager to discover a paradox.

In any case, "the things revealed" include all that is recorded in Scripture – God's precepts, commands, doctrines, and predictions. Because Scripture has been revealed to us, it "belongs" to us. And it is the immediate object to which we owe our allegiance and obedience – "that we may follow all the words of this law." On the other hand, the "secret things" belong to God. People are disappointed when they attempt to discover God's secret will, and many of them fall into serious spiritual error as a result. The very nature of his secret will is that it is concealed, and those who try to penetrate it will always fail. Sometimes they even resort to forbidden means, such as various kinds of divination.

Christians affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, that "the things revealed" contain enough information to make all kinds of decisions. The Bible is able to equip a person "for every good work." Scripture contains all the information needed for perfection. Even though believers may not know or obey all of it, the information is there. It contains all the information a person needs to live a life that is fully pleasing to God. It may not show us everything that we wish to know in order to satisfy our curiosity, but it includes all that God wishes us to know for this life.

It is sufficient so that we will not require additional or personal directions about our lives and circumstances to make decisions that are pleasing to God.

As for God's secret will, it refers to things that we do not know until they happen, and it includes things that are not predicted in Scripture. The will of God – that is, his decree – determines every event, so that not even a sparrow can die unless he decides that it should happen: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father."

His will is one with his power. He declared, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." The statement, "I make known the end from the beginning," corresponds to the statement, "I will do all that I please." His predictions are more than mere forecasts, but they are also declarations of what he would do. For God to predict the time and manner of a sparrow's death is to reveal his decree concerning the time and manner of its death, or the time and manner of how God will cause it to die. For God to predict what will happen is to reveal what he will do. Anything that occurs must be willed and caused by God, or else all the power of the universe cannot make it happen.

Although the Bible directly teaches the doctrine of election, this doctrine concerning the will of God in itself implies that God must be the one who chooses those who would receive salvation and that he must be the one who causes their salvation. It is not dependent on the will or work of man, but on God's mercy. And he is not required to have mercy on everyone or on anyone, but "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

God's will determines all the choices and circumstances of his creatures, so that there is no such thing as "free will" in man. As the Bible says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be," and "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps," and "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." All things are decided and caused by God. The doctrine is repulsive to those who abhor the rule and honor of God, and so they oppose it. But the doctrine is a source of comfort and celebration to those who love him. Why would we want it any other way, than for God to rule over all things? And what better life can we wish for, than to be ruled by God?

The doctrine contradicts the religious tradition that God does not decree evil or that he does not cause evil. God is not insane, and he has only one will. Thus God does not make decrees against his other decrees. And God does not make precepts against his other precepts. However, it is no problem for him to issue decrees that cause his creatures to violate his precepts. Decrees are declarations of intentions about things that he would cause to happen. Precepts are declarations of definitions, not intentions. His decrees and precepts do not overlap, so that there can be no contradiction, no paradox, and no mystery in the idea that God can issue decrees for his creatures to violate his precepts. It must be true that God decrees and

causes events that are contrary to his precepts; otherwise, there could be no evil. If God had not actively decreed and caused the existence of evil, nothing could have overruled God and then created evil by its own power. But evil indeed exists. Therefore, God must be the metaphysical author of sin and evil.

This does not mean that God himself is evil. To metaphysically cause evil and to morally commit evil are two different things. One is a matter of ability to cause something, while the other is a matter of conformity to a principle. The Bible teaches that God is the one who defines right and wrong, and that sin is a transgression of God's law. Therefore, for it to be true that to cause evil is to commit evil – for this to be bad or wrong – God must declare a moral law that forbids himself to decree or to cause evil. He must forbid himself to decree or to cause his creatures to transgress his law. There is no biblical basis to suppose that God has declared such a law against himself. In fact, the Bible teaches that everything God says and does is right and good. If he says it, it must be true. If he does it, it must be good. Therefore, since God is sovereign and there is evil, God must be the cause of evil, and since he is the cause of evil, it must be right and good for him to be the cause of evil.

There is no divine law that says God would be wrong if he were the cause of evil. Then why do men assume that it would be evil for God to be the author of sin? What law would God transgress? He would transgress the law of men, or what men have imposed upon him to define what a righteous God must or must not do. This is the sinister truth behind the religious tradition that says God is not the author of sin, for if he were to be such, it would mean that he has transgressed a law that men has declared against him. The necessary conclusion is that the doctrine that God is not the author of sin, or that it is blasphemy and heresy to say that he is, is itself the real blasphemy and heresy. Unless God is the author of sin and evil, he is not completely sovereign, and he is not God. Therefore, to deny that God is the author of sin and evil is to deny God.

The Bible teaches that God's decrees and actions are always right and good. Since he is completely sovereign, and there is evil in this universe, this means that he is the one who decrees and causes evil in this universe. But since his decrees and actions are always right and good, then this means that it is right and good that he is the one who decrees and causes evil in this universe. The very fact that he decrees and causes evil means that it is right and good for him to do so. There is no authority or standard higher than God by which to condemn him. If he thinks that it is good for him to cause evil, then it is good for him to cause evil.

This does not mean that evil is good, which would be a contradiction. Sin is defined as a transgression of God's moral law, and when we say that God is the author of sin, we are saying that God is the metaphysical cause of a creature's transgression of God's moral law. God transgresses no moral law, since there is no moral law against what he does, but he causes the creature to transgress. Morality relates to moral law. But there is no moral law against sovereign metaphysical power. It is right and good for God to metaphysically cause evil, just because he does it, and because he has not declared himself wrong for doing it. It is wrong for man to morally commit evil, because God has declared man wrong for doing it, although it is

God who metaphysically causes man to do it. Therefore, God remains righteous, and the sinner remains evil. The distinctions are clear. There is no paradox or contradiction, and no biblical or logical objection against the doctrine.

## **THE HOLINESS OF GOD**

The Bible calls frequent attention to the HOLINESS of God. The two aspects of this divine attribute place emphasis on his moral perfection and metaphysical transcendence. Both aspects imply separation from that which is morally or metaphysically inferior. To be holy is to be pure and righteous, and also aloof and separated.

These two aspects of divine holiness mean that there is no one like God. He is altogether different and superior. In connection to his holiness, the Bible declares that God is unique, and that no one approaches his greatness. As the Bible says, "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" and "'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One."

In another place, Isaiah said, "For this is what the high and lofty One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" The holiness of God implies his "high and lofty" state of existence, referring to his transcendence, but still he is close to those who are "lowly in spirit," referring to his immanence.

Many people wish to stress the possibility of fellowship with God, and therefore they favor his immanence in a way that denies his transcendence. Detecting this distortion, others who desire to maintain a high view of God overcompensate by denying his immanence. However, divine transcendence does not exclude divine immanence, and divine immanence does not diminish divine transcendence. These two qualities are consistent with each other and with other divine attributes. God is indeed "high and lofty," and no one is like him, but by his own will, he is also close to his people, those who will humble themselves before him.

An understanding of divine holiness should move us to fear God. He is inherently worthy of extreme reverence, and it is a serious sin to deny him of proper worship: "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

God demands his people to imitate his holiness: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own"; "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

Of course, we cannot be transcendent in the metaphysical sense to the same extent as God himself. Nevertheless, in eternity, God has chosen us for himself and has set us apart in his mind. Then in time and history, we become a new creation in Christ Jesus, a new kind of humanity that is fundamentally different from and superior to sinners. We are able to fuse with the Holy Spirit himself, and even work miracles and utter prophecies in the name of Jesus. And we shall undergo further changes at the resurrection.



As he causes us to have faith in Christ and floods our hearts with love by his Spirit, we are also made morally transcendent, separated from the filth of this world. Moral separation from the world means that our lifestyles should be very different from the non-Christians. Christians who live in accordance with God's precepts and who are able to perceive that moral implications pervade all that we do cannot have much common with non-Christians in their beliefs, preferences, communities, reading materials, and so on. Christians hate "even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."

Jesus prayed that God would not remove Christians from the world, but that he would protect them from evil while they are in the world: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." This is sometimes used to criticize those who think that retreat from the world is necessary for holy living. They avoid contact with the world to avoid contamination. Given the foolish beliefs and the filthy lifestyles of the non-Christians, this is understandable. However, it is not what God commands, and this approach would lead to the neglect of our Christian responsibilities such as charity and evangelism. Non-Christians are indeed stupid, sinful, and repulsive, but this is why they need Christ to save them. We were like them before Christ saved us. Rather, Scripture commands Christians to invade the lives of non-Christians, and to engage these spiritual enemies with the word of God, and to be salt and light to them by our holy speech and conduct.

On the other hand, many people misuse what Jesus said by turning it into a license for unhealthy relationships with non-Christians and an excuse to pursue human interests and ambitions. When Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world," he meant that he would not ask God to physically remove Christians from the world, that God would not immediately take them to heaven once they come to faith in Christ. It is a distortion of what Jesus said to claim that he encouraged Christians to become involved in the world in the sense of befriending non-Christians, or attending parties, or devoting their time to the arts, to politics, and so on.

Instead, the Bible commands us to refrain from illegitimate and unprofitable relationships with non-Christians: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'"

Holiness entails separation from the world, mainly not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. There is no need to establish Christian communities and monasteries, and to live as hermits, but it is imperative that we distinguish ourselves in our words, actions, habits, priorities, friends, reading materials, and forms of recreation. It is not true that we may

associate with anyone we want. Paul warned, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"

Of course we should preach to sinners, and for this purpose we come into frequent contact with them, but whether we should associate with them as friends, let alone close friends, is a different issue. It is often argued that Jesus associated with sinners. This is true, and we should do the same if we are doing it in the same way and for the same purpose that he did it. However, Jesus associated with sinners not for social enjoyment, but he confronted them and demanded full conversion from them.

For example, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "I must stay at your house today." The people disapproved, and said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." And Jesus answered, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." Then he added, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Jesus did not associate with sinners for social enjoyment, but "to seek and to save what was lost."

The wedding at Cana is often cited to show that Jesus participated in social activities even when there was no spiritual agenda. This is a gross abuse of the passage, because his purpose was not social but acutely spiritual. There he worked his first miracle, manifested his glory, and instilled faith in his disciples: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." It was not a manifestation of his human and fun-loving side, but a manifestation of his divine and messianic glory by a display of supernatural power. The passage provides no justification for a lust for recreation or useless association with sinners. But there is no objection against a Christian who participates in social events or who associates with sinners if he draws their attention to Jesus Christ.

There are additional examples, and the biblical pattern is that although Jesus associated with non-Christians, his purpose was not social or recreational, but spiritual. He demanded spiritual change from sinners, and he remained only with those who were willing to hear his teaching and to repent of their sins. He instructed his disciples to avoid endless association with sinners who refuse to accept the Christian faith: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces," and "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town." Sometimes persistence is not a sign of love, but an excuse to remain in a relationship that Jesus commanded the Christian to discard.

Many Christians have succumbed to the popular notion that when people of different worldviews and religions come together, there ought to be a free exchange of ideas, so that we may show respect for one another and learn from one another. This is unbiblical. Instead, we are commanded to resist the non-Christians and to destroy their beliefs. Jesus and the apostles never had an exchange of ideas with non-Christians, because they believed in the absolute and exclusive truth of the Christian faith, and that it was to completely dominate. All their dealings

with non-Christians were one-sided – they preached to the non-Christians, refuted their beliefs and traditions, and taught them the only truth.

We may have conversations with non-Christians, but an exchange of ideas implies that we respect their beliefs, that some of their beliefs might be true, that we might learn from them, and that we might even consider adopting their beliefs. However, for a Christian to suggest any of these things is treason against the kingdom of God. Anyone who respects non-Christian beliefs and who thinks that some of them might be true is probably not a Christian in the first place. Just as Jesus has nothing to learn from the devil, Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians. He commanded us to teach the nations, not to learn from them. We learn from God himself, who teaches us by the words of Scripture.

Even Christians often regard this high view of the Christian religion as arrogant. Of course, it is debatable whether these people are genuine Christians, but in any case, the accusation is unintelligent, because it is a biblical teaching and not a private invention that the Christian faith alone is true. To teach God's word as exclusive truth is a mark of faith and obedience, not arrogance. It is the position that only God is right, and that anyone who contradicts God is wrong. There is nothing more humble than this. On the other hand, it is more than arrogant to suggest that the Christian faith needs modification or improvement through an exchange of ideas with non-Christian worldviews – it is blasphemy. The offender should face church discipline for it, and if he is a minister, he should be removed from office.

Some may argue that although the Christian worldview requires no modification or improvement, a dialogue with non-Christians will increase mutual understanding. This is fine as long as the motive for understanding the non-Christian viewpoint is to refute it. The purpose is to gather information in order to destroy their religions and philosophies, and not to develop respect for them. We must never allow the non-Christians to think that we are prepared to accept their beliefs or to make the slightest adjustment to the Christian worldview.

Christians must "demolish" all non-Christian ideas and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Scripture forbids us to respect or learn from non-Christian worldviews and religions. It condemns all non-biblical worldview and religions, and to suggest that we have one iota of respect for non-biblical beliefs is spiritual treason. We must continuously declare our disdain for any thought that "sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Unless we are truly willing to consider non-biblical ideas, in which case we are non-Christians, it is dishonest to allow others to think that we are open and respectful to their beliefs.

People who associate with non-Christians on the basis that Jesus did it distort the biblical account. Jesus indeed associated with sinners, but he did it to actively advance the kingdom of God. He always produced concrete actions to achieve spiritual purposes when he interacted with sinners. If those Christians who wish to associate with sinners follow this model, then there is no objection. If they do not, then they are deceiving themselves and others, abusing the example of Jesus to justify their own lusts for non-Christian company.

Of course, "the whole world lies in wickedness," so that to function in human society will entail interaction with non-Christians. Paul admitted that we must interact with non-Christians because this is unavoidable – sinners are everywhere – but he did not say that it is a desirable thing in itself. As for those who claim to be Christians but who practice immorality such as idolatry and fornication, the Bible teaches that we ought to shun them. Aside from necessary contact with them, the issue is whether we should associate them on a personal level. Few Christians who befriend non-Christians on the basis that "Jesus did it" are effective in ministry to sinners, assuming that they have ministry in mind in the first place. Many of them are liars. They have no intention of demanding conversion from the non-Christians. As Scripture says, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" And it says, "I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked." We must not be so deceived as to think that our associations make little difference. It is foolish to assume that no tragedy will befall those who enjoy the company of non-Christians.

Most people become involved with the world because they are in love with the world, and not because they are determined to change it with the teachings of Jesus Christ. But the Bible says, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Therefore, although it is wrong to retreat from the world and its social, economic, and political structures, we must evaluate our motive for associating with sinners, and make sure that we remember our spiritual mission.

The Bible also instructs us concerning relationships among Christians. Although there are not as many restrictions, and intimate and permanent bonds are possible, it remains that the main purpose and content in these relationships among Christians ought to be spiritual, dominated by prayer, worship, and theological discussions. Whereas Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians, it is profitable to interact with faithful believers in order to develop in knowledge and in holiness. Christians enjoy the kind of fellowship in which God remains the center of our thoughts and conversations, even during social and recreational activities. Although Christians befriend other believers, it remains that their priorities consist of spiritual and theological concerns.

## **THE WORKS OF GOD**

Although the Bible presents us with a transcendent God, it also teaches us that he is directly involved with the universe and humanity, beginning with its doctrine on the CREATION of the universe. Genesis contains the historical account about God's creation of the earth, the stars, the seasons, plant life, and all kinds of animals. The crown of creation is man, whom he made in his own image.

God created the universe "out of nothing." There were no preexisting materials out of which God created the universe, but he created all things by his omnipotence. God had always existed, and he had existed before he created anything. And then all things were created by him. John wrote, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." Anything that exists outside of God owes its existence to him.

God does not leave the universe to exist on its own, and indeed it cannot exist on its own, but he continuously sustains its existence and directly causes all its events. It is unbiblical to say that God created the universe with certain laws that govern its operation. The biblical teaching is that God holds the universe together, and controls even the smallest event within it. The universe is ruled by a divine mind instead of natural laws and powers. This entails the rejection of theories that ascribe control of human lives and world events to impersonal forces, so that astrology, karma, and so forth are denied. So-called scientific and natural laws are also excluded.

This is the doctrine of the PROVIDENCE of God. Theologians distinguish between GENERAL PROVIDENCE and SPECIAL PROVIDENCE. General providence, also called ordinary providence, refers to God's regular causation of events, including the thoughts and actions of men. This is often falsely attributed to natural laws and forces. Special providence, also called extraordinary providence, refers to God's irregular causation of events, as he deviates from the usual pattern that he exhibits under ordinary providence. God's general providence and special providence together embrace every event that occurs.

The Bible teaches that God the Father, through God the Son, created not only all things "visible and invisible," but that the Son "is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Jesus Christ is before all creation, and he holds together the universe. God created the universe by his word, and even now he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word." "For in him we live and move and have our being." God created all things, and only God is uncreated. And only God is self-existing and self-sustaining, so that all things continue to exist only because he sustains them. Since all things are dependent on God's continuous sustenance, no creature possesses autonomy. God controls and sustains all things. There is no freedom from him in any sense and in any degree. God causes every event in creation. Even seemingly insignificant events cannot occur apart from his will. Scripture declares God's exhaustive control over creation.

The fact that God exercises such extreme control over creation is disturbing to many people, including some who claim to be Christians. Therefore, they attempt to distort Scripture to

endorse a false theology that allows them to maintain a sense of freedom and dignity, which they treasure above the truth and honor of God. But it is wicked to seek freedom from God. Those who love God are happy that he possesses absolute control. They say with Scripture, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us," and they would not have it any other way. They are bold to say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!"

Although God directly controls and causes all things, sometimes his involvement is especially evident, as when he deviates from his usual pattern. These instances are often called divine interventions. Although this is understandable, it can be misleading because it seems to suggest that God has little to do with the regular pattern of events, whereas even the regular pattern is caused by God just as much as the special events that deviate from it. These special events are sometimes called signs, wonders, and miracles.

God reveals himself as one who often performs spectacular things. He is eager to work miracles. His nature is to work signs and wonders. Although miracles is considered a deviation from the usual pattern, this does not mean that miracles are rare. Since the regular pattern of creation is continuous, even if God performs ten billion miracles a day, these events would still be a deviation from the usual pattern of creation, because there are many more than ten billion events a day in his creation. The regular pattern of creation provides the background for the other works of God.

Jesus performed so many miracles during his time on earth that the supernatural was recognized as a prominent feature of his ministry. His disciples also performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus commanded all Christians to be witnesses for him through the preaching of the gospel accompanied by signs and wonders. He even promised that anyone who has faith in him would be able to perform greater miracles than the ones he performed. It is, therefore, a direct rejection of Jesus Christ to even slightly undermine the ministry of miracles.

The enemies of Christianity reject the supernatural in Scripture, and many of them deny the very possibility of miracles. Every opinion comes from a worldview and not from a vacuum. Based on what principles of knowledge and reality do they formulate their arguments against biblical miracles? Can they defend these assumptions? They cannot come from the biblical worldview itself, because the biblical worldview endorses miracles. We maintain that the Christian faith is the only true worldview. This means that every argument or opinion that presupposes another worldview is without justification, and every claim that contradicts any biblical proposition must be false.

## **THE CREATION OF MAN**

God created man after he created the earth, plant life, and the animals. He created the former things simply by commanding them into being. He said, "Let there be light" and there was light. He said, "Let the earth produce vegetation," and that was what happened. As for the creation of man, Genesis records what seems to be a conference between the members of the Trinity, who agreed to create man in the image of God: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." There was a more intimate relationship between God and man, and special care was given to his creation.

Perhaps the most popular objection against the Genesis account is the theory of evolution. It denies God's direct creation of man, and proposes that life originated from non-life, and that man is the product of mutations from lower species. This contradicts what Scripture teaches about man's origin: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being...So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

God created the man before the woman, and then God took materials from the man to create the woman. When God created the man, he did not use materials from the animals that he had already made. Instead, he went directly to "the dust of the ground" and then directly "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Therefore, the Bible teaches that God created man by direct action, and not by a process of biological evolution. The theory of evolution contradicts biblical revelation. The two are incompatible.

All of Scripture is divine revelation. It is God's very breath. So it speaks with one authority and it cannot be divided. Therefore, to reject any part of the Bible is to reject that authority. Since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is inspired by God, the rejection of any proposition in the Bible entails the rejection of the Bible's claim about itself, that all of it is inspired by God.

Since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is true, to judge any part of it as false requires an appeal to a standard or authority that is outside of the Bible. If a person rejects the Bible's claim about itself when he judges that one of its propositions is false, then he cannot accept the Bible's claim about itself when he judges that another one of its propositions is true. That is, if a person appeals to a non-biblical standard or authority to reject one biblical proposition, then he must continue to appeal to a non-biblical standard or authority when he agrees with another biblical proposition.

To illustrate, since the Bible affirms the deity of Christ, a person who rejects the deity of Christ can do so only if he assumes a non-biblical standard or authority by which he judges that the Bible is false. But then, if this same person agrees with the biblical teaching that murder is immoral, he cannot do so just because the Bible teaches that murder is immoral. Instead, he

must again appeal to a non-biblical standard or authority to justify his belief that murder is immoral. Since he rejects the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he rejects its teaching about the deity of Christ, he cannot now appeal to the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he affirms that murder is wrong. However, if the non-biblical standard or authority to which he appeals is itself unjustifiable, and our position is that every non-biblical standard or authority is unjustifiable, then he can justify neither his rejection of the deity of Christ nor his affirmation that murder is wrong.

If a person accepts one part of the Bible and rejects another part of the Bible by a standard or authority that is outside of the Bible, then to him, the part of the Bible that he accepts is not true because the Bible says so, but because that standard or authority to which he submits tells him so. Therefore, he cannot justify his belief in the part of the Bible that he accepts because the Bible says it, but he must justify this belief by the standard or authority by which he evaluates the Bible. However, if this standard or authority itself lacks justification, then his verdict on any part of the Bible also lacks justification, and what he says is worthless.

Therefore, a person who rejects one part of the Bible cannot claim to accept another part of the Bible on the basis that the second part is the revelation of God, since he has appealed to another standard or authority to judge that the first part is not the revelation of God. Likewise, to accept any one of the Bible's propositions because it is a part of the Bible obligates a person to accept the entire Bible as true, because the authority behind the Bible is one and not many.

Again, a person who rejects even one biblical proposition can only do so because he trusts a non-biblical standard or authority. Thus he cannot then appeal to divine authority or biblical revelation to sustain his other beliefs. However, if only divine authority or biblical revelation can justify any proposition or sustain any belief, then this person who trusts in a non-biblical standard or authority has lost justification for all the things that he affirms. The Bible claims that it is ultimate and infallible, and this applies to all its propositions, so that a person who rejects any part of the Bible must reject all of the Bible, and a person who accepts any part of the Bible must accept all of the Bible.

In our context, this means that a person who rejects the biblical account of the direct creation of man cannot at the same time affirm the creation of the universe by God on the basis of Scripture. If a person accepts the creation of the universe by God because Scripture teaches it, then he must also affirm the direct creation of man by God because Scripture teaches it. This is an essential principle. Once a person rejects any part of the Bible, the whole Bible is taken away from him.

The theory of evolution deals with what became of preexisting materials. Since no evolution could have taken place if there was nothing to evolve, the theory of evolution presupposes the existence of the universe. Biology presupposes cosmology. And both biology and cosmology presuppose the possibility of knowledge, or epistemology. Thus epistemology comes before cosmology, and cosmology comes before biology.



It has been established that evolutionary biology is a non-biblical biology. It is a rejection of biblical biology. And it has been established that a person cannot reject one part of the biblical worldview and then accept another part of the biblical worldview. Thus a non-biblical biology presupposes a non-biblical cosmology, and a non-biblical cosmology presupposes a non-biblical epistemology. However, if all non-biblical theories of epistemology are demonstrably false, then all non-biblical theories of cosmology are destroyed. If all non-biblical theories of cosmology are destroyed, then all non-biblical theories of biology are also destroyed, and this includes the theory of evolution.

The theory of evolution presupposes a non-biblical epistemology, and this results in the destruction of the entire worldview. But to presuppose a biblical epistemology in which the infallibility of the Bible is affirmed rules out the theory of evolution from the start. Therefore, even without a direct examination of evolutionary biology, we can know that it is impossible for it to be true. On the other hand, biblical biology, which affirms the direct creation of man by God, is a valid implication of divine inspiration.

In the context of debate, we may temporarily assume the presuppositions of science for the sake of argument, and on that basis refute the theory of evolution. This is not because the scientific case against evolution is weak, but because science itself is unable to discover any truth. However, the approach that destroys the non-Christian's entire worldview at the starting point is incomparably superior.

To summarize: One must either accept or reject the whole biblical worldview, and not only a part of it. The theory of evolution contradicts the biblical worldview. Therefore, the evolutionist cannot borrow any premise from the biblical worldview. The universe must first exist for life to exist in it. Therefore, any theory of biology presupposes a theory of cosmology. Knowledge must be possible before a theory of cosmology can be formulated. Therefore, any theory of cosmology presupposes a theory of epistemology. Only biblical epistemology is true and justified. Therefore, only the biblical worldview is true and justified, and thus only biblical cosmology is true and justified, and thus only biblical biology is true and justified. Biblical biology affirms the direct creation of man by God. Therefore, the doctrine that God made man by direct creation is true, and the theory of evolution is false.

The evolutionist must tell me how a non-Christian can know anything before he presents his theories on cosmology and biology. He must first present an epistemology, and defend it against me. Only once he is successful, he must then present a cosmology, or metaphysics or ontology, and defend it against me. Only after all this does he have the right to present his biology, and then defend it against me. But he will never get beyond epistemology. He will hardly be able to begin before I annihilate him.

Since he cannot find an epistemology to support his cosmology, and since he cannot find a cosmology to support his biology, he has no universe in his worldview to allow his biology to be true. His biology can exist only in his imaginary world, and it is just as much a fantasy as his

universe. Thus he does not even have the right to present his case on the theory of evolution unless I choose to hear it.

Life does not exist in a vacuum. We cannot just agree that the universe exists and argue only about biology, because the kind of universe assumed determines what is possible within it. If non-Christian epistemology is impossible, then non-Christian cosmology is impossible, and if non-Christian cosmology is impossible, then non-Christian biology is impossible. To say it another way, for non-Christian biology to be true, first a non-Christian cosmology must be true, but how do we know the non-Christian cosmology is true? First a non-Christian epistemology must be true and then applied to formulate a cosmology. If no non-Christian epistemology can be defended against us, then the whole thing falls apart. However, once we accept a Christian epistemology, and thus a Christian cosmology, then the direct creation of man by God follows by necessity, and all non-Christian theories of biology are ruled out.

The Christian must grasp the structure of his intellectual system as that of Christian rationalism, or biblical foundationalism. And on that basis, this is one way to apply the presuppositional argument against the theory of evolution. The power of the presuppositional argument is such that it establishes the Christian faith as true, and simultaneously refutes non-Christian ideas. Since the presuppositional argument establishes that all of Scripture is true, and since the theory of evolution contradicts Scripture, then the theory of evolution is false. The Bible is right, and evolution contradicts the Bible; therefore, evolution is wrong. Again, we do not say this in a vacuum, but this makes sense when we draw attention to first principles and settle the dispute on that level. Biology itself has never been the real issue. Christians should never be hung up on the topic. We can engage sinners on subsidiary issues for a while in order to illustrate the importance of first principles, but we are delaying the inevitable until we draw attention to foundational presuppositions.

God made man by a direct act of power through which man was created complete. There was no evolution. God created the universe, and apart from any process, he directly formed man's body with the materials from the earth, and not from the animals. Then, God imparted life into him, again by a direct act of power, and man became a living and thinking person: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

## THE PURPOSE OF MAN

When it comes to the purpose of man's creation, some people suggest that God's nature of love compelled him to create objects of affection to satisfy a need in him to express himself in fellowship, generosity, and sacrifice. However, it is heretical to say that God needs anything. As Paul said, "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." God is eternally self-existent, and therefore also self-sufficient. Since man is not eternal, but has a time of origin before which he did not exist, and since "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day," if ever God could exist without man, he could have continued to exist without man. Therefore, the creation of man was not due to any need in God. Moreover, even before the creation of man, God had created the angels, and before that, the members of the Trinity loved one another. Even if love needs expression, God still did not need to create man.

Rather, Scripture teaches that man was created by the will of God for the glory of God. Among other things, the elect and the reprobates would both reveal the glory of God in different ways: "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" God created the elect and the reprobates because he willed to manifest himself and to be glorified through them. Although the reprobates do not consciously glorify God, he glorifies himself through them by what he causes them to do and what he does with them. He is glorified by the elect in their salvation and by the reprobates in their damnation.

This leads us to consider the order of the eternal decrees. If the items in God's plan were to be set forth in the order in which he decided them, what would this order be? Of course, God is eternal and omniscient, so that there is not a point in his thinking when he does not know everything or when he has not decided everything. When we speak of order in the mind of God, we are referring to logical order and not chronological order.

The decree for God to be glorified comes first, and to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would subdue all things and deliver them to the Father. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would save a chosen people out of fallen humanity to become his fellow heirs. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that fallen humanity would be divided into the elect and the reprobates. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that humanity would fall into sin. Then, in order to achieve this, the decree is made that God would create humanity. This is the order of purpose and design. The order is reversed in execution, so that it begins with creation and culminates in God's glory.

We can illustrate this with an analogy from human life. Suppose my purpose is to arrive at the office. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should drive my car toward that location. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get into my car. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of my house. In order to achieve this, the

decision is made that I should get dressed. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of bed. The final purpose comes first in the order of decisions, and the first thing that I must do in order to achieve this purpose comes last in the order. The order is reversed in execution, so that the last item in the order of purpose and design now becomes the first item. Thus I must first get out of bed, and then get dressed, and then get out of my house, and so on. The final result is that I arrive at the office, and my purpose is accomplished.

The nature of purpose and design necessitates a supralapsarian scheme of the eternal decrees, in which the decree of election and reprobation appears before the decree for the fall of humanity, and in which the decree for the fall of humanity appears before the decree for the creation of humanity. The infralapsarian scheme places the decree of election and reprobation after the decree for the fall of humanity. One reason for this is to arrange the decrees so that the decree for reprobation applies to actual sinners, whereas the supralapsarian would say that God decrees the fall of humanity so that he would accomplish the decree of reprobation.

Supralapsarianism is the biblical and rational order. Infralapsarianism confuses logical conception with historical execution, so that not only is it contrary to fact, but it makes nonsense of some of the divine decrees. For any given decree, it leaves the purpose of the decree unspecified until the next decree. But then there is no reason for the present one, so that it becomes arbitrary. Thus infralapsarianism is blasphemous, because it insults God's intelligence and denies his rationality.

Infralapsarians retort that supralapsarianism undermines God's justice, but to assert this they smuggle in a private and unbiblical standard of justice, one that rejects God's absolute sovereignty and violates strict logical inference, and then evaluate the eternal decrees by it. Their attempt to defend God's subservience to a human standard of justice turns out to be a subversion against his sovereign and divine justice, and a denial of even a simple ability for logical planning and arrangement in the mind of God. Hence their objection commits another act of blasphemy.

Supralapsarianism acknowledges that God causes evil by his direct decree and power. To deny that God is the cause of evil would be to say that some other power has the ability to generate and control sin independent of God's direct control. Handing over divine power to humans and demons, this is the blasphemy of dualism. Contrary to creeds and scholars, God declares that he is the sovereign and righteous author of sin. To deny that God is the author of sin results in some form of dualism, and this amounts to a rejection of biblical theism. Again, the outcome is blasphemy.

One response is that supralapsarianism makes the divine decrees refer to human beings who do not exist. For example, the decree for humanity to fall into sin comes before the decree for humanity to be created. This is an astoundingly stupid objection. Indeed, it is evidence that humanity has fallen, that some people can be so stupid. In a logical arrangement, the final purpose is first conceived, and then each succeeding decree is made to accomplish the one that comes before. Thus of course the decree that concerns the creation of men would come after a

decree that requires the creation of men. If the decree for the creation of men comes first, then this decree would be without purpose when it is made.

To illustrate from human life again, suppose I decide that I would like to live in a house next to a lake. It is only after I have decided this that I would decide to buy a piece of land next to a lake. Then it is only after I have decided this that I would decide to find a piece of land next to a lake. When I decide to live in a house next to a lake, the house, the lake, and the land are mere possibilities in my mind. I have not discovered the land. I have not seen the lake. I have not built the house. None of these things exist in my life. But once I have decided the final outcome, I make decisions to work toward that outcome. So I find the land, buy the land, and build the house. This is supralapsarianism. This is how logical decisions are made.

In contrast, under infralapsarianism, I cannot decide that I want a house or what I want to do with a house or where I would like the house to be until the house exists. I have to build it before I decide that I want it or before I decide what to do with it or before I decide where to put it. Thus I would attempt to find a piece of land without knowing why. I would happen to decide upon a piece of land with a lake with no thought about building a house next to the lake. I would buy the land without knowing what I would do with it. And then I would build the house for no reason. And hopefully, for no reason at all, I would place the house next to the lake. Then when everything is done, suddenly I am pleased with the outcome. This is infralapsarianism. This is how insane people make decisions. And this is how stupid scholars think that God makes decisions, because they think that God is insane.

It is easy to multiply illustrations, because any decision can be an illustration. Suppose I decide to eat pancakes for breakfast. I am making a decision about pancakes that do not yet exist. But it is because I decide to eat pancakes for breakfast that I then decide to make pancakes. The decision to make pancakes comes after the decision to eat pancakes for breakfast. This is supralapsarianism. On the other hand, under infralapsarianism, the pancakes must first exist before I decide what to do with them. So I would find myself making pancakes for no reason. And it is only after I have made the pancakes that I then decide to eat them for breakfast. So of course God's decision on what to do with humanity comes before the decision to create humanity. He decided on what to do with humanity before humanity existed. He made decrees on objects that did not exist. And this is the case with every rational and purposeful decision. It takes a religious idiot to make this into something wrong and complicated.

Infralapsarianism confuses the order of purpose and design with the order of execution. It complains that in supralapsarianism, God decrees the identities of the reprobates without a view to their sinfulness. However, the Bible explicitly asserts this view, that reprobation is unconditional, and that God created some people for salvation and all others for damnation "out of the same lump." The reprobates did not create themselves. God created them, and he created them as reprobates on purpose.

Under infralapsarianism, since the decree of election and reprobation comes after the decree for the fall of humanity, this means that at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he

does so without knowing why he decrees it or what he would do about it. If he has redemption in mind, and thus the distinction between the saved and the damned, so that he knows why he is decreeing the fall of humanity, then at that point he has already decided on redemption, and thus this becomes supralapsarianism. This means that under infralapsarianism, at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he does it just so he wishes humanity to fall into sin, without any thought of redemption.

Infralapsarians hide behind their human standard of justice, that God must designate as reprobates only those who are already guilty. But how is it better for God to decree that all of humanity should fall into sin without any reason for it and without any thought of redemption? On the other hand, although supralapsarians would say that God could indeed decree the fall of humanity just because he wishes it, in their scheme, God decrees the fall of humanity so that there would be sinners for him to save and to damn.

The major objection against the supralapsarian scheme amounts to an opposition to the idea that God could designate the identities of the reprobates before he decrees their fall into sin. In supralapsarianism, God first decrees that there would be reprobates, and then he decrees the fall so that these reprobates could materialize. Again, the objection is against unconditional reprobation. To put it another way, the objection is against God's absolute sovereignty, or the fact that God is God. But if infralapsarians affirm a God that is not truly God, then they do not believe in God at all. To them, God is only a word or a symbol, and he is whatever he wishes to make him.

Then, the objection against unconditional reprobation is that it is unjust. That is, it is unjust not according to any standard stated in Scripture, but according to man's sinful intuition. He is uncomfortable with the idea! In any case, by the time God executes punishment upon the reprobates, they have already fallen into sin, so that God does not in fact punish anyone who is sinless and innocent, that is, except when he caused the suffering of Christ. Even then, the punishment inflicted was just in God's mind because Christ was bearing the guilt of those chosen for salvation.

The objection against supralapsarianism amounts to a denial that God is God. It is against the idea that God is not a man or a mere creature. It is against the idea that God is the sovereign standard of justice. Many people claim that they believe in God, but they do not believe. This is a major culprit behind false theological systems such as liberalism and cessationism. There is no biblical or rational objection against supralapsarianism. They simply refuse to allow God to possess sovereignty over his own creation. Once we abandon false assumptions, the offense of absolute divine sovereignty vanishes.

As with many such controversies, the real question in this disagreement between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism is whether we are willing to "let" God be God on his own terms. A consistent supralapsarianism is the only position that is rational, and that honors God and Scripture. One of the things that we learn from the doctrine is that God actively decreed and caused the fall of humanity as one of the steps by which he would fulfill his eternal

plan. Sin was not an accident. God was not surprised by sin, and redemption was not a mere reaction on his part. Everything was planned. Everything was within his control. And all those who would believe in him had been protected and treasured all along. As Scripture says, "The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster." Thus supralapsarianism results in praise and reverence toward God.

## THE NATURE OF MAN

God made man in his own image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him." The image of God cannot refer to something that God is not or something that God does not possess. Since God is spirit and has no form, his image must be unrelated to man's body. Nevertheless, because some people assert otherwise, we will address the issue. In what way is man like God? What constitutes man's point of contact with God? And in what way is man superior to the animals?

If the image of God is in man's body, or if the image includes the physical aspect of man, then it is arguable that some animals also bear this image, since the physical differences between man and some animals are not so vast. This is unacceptable because Scripture indicates that it is the image of God that distinguishes man from the animals. Of course, similarities between the human body and that of the animals indicate common design, not common descent.

In any case, Scripture declares that God has "no form," and therefore it is unlawful to make any idol or image to represent God, even if it is in the appearance of a human person: "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below."

Anything with a physical form or appearance cannot be the image of God. Since God himself has "no form," the body or the physical aspect of man cannot be the image of God. The idea that the body can be part of the image of God goes against the whole point of God's law against making an idol of him. To say that the image of God includes the body is to teach idolatry, because it would acknowledge as divine something that is not divine. It is an attack on the nature of God, and anyone who affirms it should face church discipline for heresy.

The Bible teaches that the image of God is defined in terms of the intellect. Although man has some advantages as an upright biped with opposable thumbs, the bodies of many animals are superior in various ways. Some are stronger. Some are faster. Some can survive severe weathers. When it comes to reproduction, many are more prolific. Some can breathe in water. Of course, some of them can even fly. However, all the animals combined cannot compare to man in intellectual abilities.

Animals cannot understand syllogisms and equations. If they sometimes appear to perform tasks that require thinking or design, such as building elaborate nests or navigating complex routes, we discover that their creativity and ability to adapt are limited, and that they are able to do these things only by instinct, and not by deliberate and rational thought. Their skills are innate. God built into them what they need to survive. So birds cannot teach cats how to make nests, and spiders cannot teach elephants how to play dead when attacked. The most important difference is that animals cannot perform theological reflections. God made man in



his own image. This means that man is a rational mind, whose chief purpose is to fellowship with God and to worship him.

Man's rational mind is the likeness of God and his point of contact with God. His intellectual qualities are evident from the beginning. God blessed him and gave him dominion over nature by a verbal pronouncement that he understood. Adam cared for Eden not by instinct, but in obedience to God's verbal instructions. God gave man a moral command, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but allowed him to eat from all the other trees. Man was warned that to violate this command would result in his death. Only a rational mind could understand concepts such as duty, sin, and death. And Adam understood these things without any prior experience of them.

The Bible distinguishes man from the animals on the basis of his intellectual powers. It says that God breathed into man the breath of life, and in another place it says that "But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding." It says that "God teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the air" and "He did not endow the ostrich with wisdom or give her a share of good sense." Then it also says, "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you." Referring to the Christian, the Bible says, "The new self...is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

The mind of man is the image of God. This is impossible to deny, but some people wish to add other elements to it, such as morality and dominion. This is consistent with the biblical position. Paul wrote that Christians are "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." However, rationality remains the basic element in the definition of the image of God.

Man's moral nature distinguishes him from the animals, and so it seems that it is a part of the image of God. But what is the basis of this moral nature, and how does it operate? Even animals obey God's commands, but instead of doing this on the basis of understanding and volition, they are compelled by instinct. On the other hand, man receives and understands a divine command, and then decides to obey it or defy it. He can comprehend the concepts of good and evil, and he can discuss them by the use of language. This means that man is moral because he is rational. Morality is a function of intelligence or rationality. Therefore, although to have a moral nature is part of what it means to be a human person, it is not necessary to include it as part of the basic definition for the image of God.

Man's dominion over the animals is also an extension or result of his intellectual superiority. Dominion is a function of rationality. James wrote, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man." Although man is physically weaker than many animals, his understanding and knowledge enable him to devise methods, tools, and weapons to tame and exploit them. Man's rule over nature is made possible by his intelligence.

The strong interest in animal rights justifies a brief digression. A "right" is something to which one is entitled. Since God is the creator and owner of all things, only he has the authority to assign rights to his creatures. Humans and animals do not have intrinsic rights. Only God has intrinsic rights. Humans and animals have rights only in the sense that Scripture commands that they should be treated in the manner it prescribes. Such rights exist only in relation to other creatures, because God is free to treat his creatures in any way he desires or promises.

The Bible teaches that humans are more valuable than animals and that humans may eat animals for food. God said, "The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." And Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" and "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!" He also said, "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!"

God's priority is humans, not animals. Since the Bible teaches that humans possess superior value, we should allocate resources to promote the cause of Christ among humans, even at the expense of the comfort and the survival of animals. Much of what is done in the name of animal rights takes from resources that should be used for humanity. This is a denial that man is made in the divine image, that he is special among God's creatures, and therefore it is a rejection of Scripture.

God has granted humans permission to consume "everything that lives and moves." Scripture states that we are not restricted to eating plant life: "Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." Therefore, it defies the command of God to abstain from eating meat for religious reasons or as an acknowledgment of "animal rights."

Although animal rights fanatics are in error, this does not mean that man may abuse and torture animals as he pleases. Scripture instructs us on how we should treat them. For example, animals are to benefit from rest, and they are allowed to eat while they work. The Bible says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." Thus it is wrong to torture animals for sport or to cause them any unjustified suffering. However, it remains that we may freely slaughter them for food, because Scripture declares that this is legitimate. Given the contemporary tendency to favor animals at the expense of men, we must make a special effort to prefer humans when thinking about the treatment of animals.

God always puts humans before the animals. After citing the biblical command that says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," Paul added, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" That is, even a command about the treatment of animals has in view the benefit of men. Paul explained, "Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us,

because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest." Therefore, we should say with God, "Kill and eat!"

Now some who admit that the image of God is the intellect of man nevertheless argue that since the body is necessary to express our intelligence, whether in speech or in action, it must be a part of the image of God. However, the prohibition against making images to represent God eliminates this possibility. It would condemn the suggestion as idolatry, blasphemy, and heresy. The body is not any part of God's image. In any case, the argument is stupid. It confuses the image of God with the equipment that expresses it in the physical world. And it is arbitrary. Why must the body be part of God's image even if it is needed to express our intelligence and rationality? As a man, I have the intelligence to subdue a tiger, but if I employ tools to do it, are those tools also part of the image of God? Moreover, the assumption is also false. The mind can communicate with God without the body. The mind can communicate with itself without the body. We only need the physical body to interact with the physical world. Indeed, "to be away from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord." The Bible regards the body as important, and it even says that the Christian's body is the temple of God, but the body is not part of the image of God.

Another objection against equating the image of God with the intellect of man is rooted in the view that man is a TRICHOTOMY consisting of spirit, soul, and body. Proponents of this doctrine assert that the Bible portrays man as a trichotomy, and since "God is spirit," the image of God must therefore be man's spirit and not his soul or body. This being so, the image of God is not the intellect of man, but it is a non-intellectual part of man called the "spirit." The problem with this view is that the Bible does not endorse trichotomy, but instead teaches that man is a DICHOTOMY consisting of spirit and body, or soul and body.

Now the Bible says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Trichotomists argue that although it is difficult to distinguish between the soul and the spirit, the verse says that they can be divided by the word of God. Therefore, the soul and the spirit are two different parts of a person. Thus they claim that Scripture supports their view, but a proper reading of the verse renders this position impossible.

The verse does not say that the word of God can divide the "soul and spirit and body," but that it can divide "soul and spirit, joints and marrow." Since both "joints and marrow" belong to the body, or the physical part of man, the obvious interpretation is that "soul and spirit" also belong to the same part of a person, or the spiritual part of man.

Moreover, the verse does not in fact refer to any dividing power in the word of God, but its ability to penetrate. The word of God is so powerful that it reaches and transforms even the deepest regions of a person's mind. "It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The next verse reinforces this: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is

uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Nothing about us is hidden from God, not even our thoughts and intentions.

Then the trichotomists refer to the place where Paul wrote, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Since Paul referred to spirit, soul, and body separately, this is taken to mean that the whole man consists of three parts. However, Jesus made this interpretation impossible. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." He mentioned four items with which we must love God – heart, soul, mind, and strength. If Paul's statement implies that man consists of three parts, then Jesus' statement implies that man consists of four parts. Thus the trichotomist argument fails.

Scripture uses repetition for emphasis. The fact that it uses different words to refer to man does not necessarily mean that each word designates a different part of man. The intention is to use multiple words to emphasize that it is referring to the whole person. This kind of pattern is seen even in ordinary human speech, and should not be controversial.

Popular Christian preaching often assumes a sharp distinction between the spirit and the soul. It claims that the spirit is the "heart" of man, and the soul is the mind of man. However, Scripture uses the word "heart" to refer to man's inner being, or to the seat of man's knowledge, understanding, and volition. This is the case in both the Old Testament and New Testament. The word "heart" includes a range of meanings in Scripture, but except when it is speaking of the physical organ, it refers to the mind, while the context stresses its particular functions. Since both the emotion and the will are functions of the intellect, or the mind, except when it refers to the physical organ, the word "heart" means the mind in the Bible.

It is unbiblical to distinguish between "head faith" and "heart faith" or "head knowledge" and "heart knowledge." In the first place, the mind of man is not his "head" or his brain. The mind is incorporeal, made in the image of God. It is not part of the body at all. Thus the contrast between the "head" and the "heart" is wrong on more than one level. In any case, the trichotomist distinguishes between the spirit and the soul, or the heart and the mind. Therefore, the contrast is between faith in the spirit and faith in the mind, or knowledge in the spirit and knowledge in the mind. But since trichotomy is false, this contrast is also false. And since the words spirit, soul, heart, and mind all refer to the same incorporeal part of man, faith in the spirit is faith in the mind, and knowledge in the spirit is knowledge in the mind. They are different words for the same part of man. This also means that faith and knowledge are intellectual. And faith and knowledge are spiritual. False doctrines poison the spirit. And sound doctrines heal the mind and soul.

We can say it several ways: A human being consists of spirit and body, or mind and body. A human being consists of an inward part and an outward part. Depending on the context, sometimes they can emphasize different features and relations in man's inner being, but the terms spirit, soul, heart, and mind are generally interchangeable. For example, Jesus said, "Do

not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." And Paul said, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." One referred to soul and body, and the other referred to spirit and body. But both intended to specify an inward part and an outward part. And Jesus said in another place, "For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." There he referred to the heart and the body. The heart is the inward part, or the spirit, soul, or mind.

The Bible teaches that man consists of two parts – the corporeal and the incorporeal, the physical and the spiritual. Man is a soul and a body, or a spirit and a body. The spirit is the actual human person or identity, and the body is only a house for the spirit, so that a man is a spirit that lives in a body, and he remains a human person with the same identity and personality even without his body. The spirit entered into man's body when God breathed life into it, and it is this breath of God that created man as a person and that gave him his intellectual powers. Thus the conclusion remains that the image of God is the intellect of man. Man is made in the image and likeness of God in the sense that man is a rational mind.

God created male and female human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." He made both male and female in the image of God. Both male and female are in the category of man, mankind, or humanity. The dominion that God gave to man belongs to both the male and the female. God said to both of them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

One gender is not intrinsically superior to the other. That said, although the ontological value of men and women are the same, God has imposed an authority structure upon them to define their roles within society. The Bible does not teach that every woman must submit to every man in every context, but it teaches that women are to submit to husbands in the home and leaders in the church.

This submission is imposed not because women are inferior in their being, in their ability, or in their value, but it is imposed as a matter of God's design and order. God the Son submits to God the Father, but the two are equal in power and glory. Just as we do not think less of God the Son because of his submission to the Father, we do not think less of women because of their submission to men in the contexts specified by God.

This is essential. The oppression of women in the home and the church is just as prevalent as the rebellion of women against authority, and it is just as evil. To suppress the rebellion but maintain the oppression is to double the oppression, and to double the evil. Both the oppression and the rebellion must be addressed. And men often rebel against authority themselves. When a husband demands submission from his wife, he should examine himself to see if he cherishes her and sacrifices for her as Christ does the church. And when a wife

demands such love from her husband, she ought to examine herself to see if she submits to him as the church ought to submit to Christ. As Jesus said, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

God said to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Some people assert that man and woman had equal authority in marriage before the Fall, and it was after mankind transgressed God's command that man was given rule over the woman as part of the curse upon humanity. According to this view, the subordination of the woman was only a result of sin, and it has been negated after the death and resurrection of Christ. This theory is attractive to those who wish to overturn the authority structure that God has prescribed, but there are obvious problems with it.

The resurrection of Christ has not immediately eliminated all the effects of the Fall. There are some things that must await the consummation of our salvation at his second coming. Even if the subordination of women resulted from sin, it does not follow that it has been negated after the resurrection of Christ unless the Bible teaches it.

But in the first place, the authority of man over the woman did not originate because of the Fall. Even before God created the woman, he said that she would be the man's "helper." Paul explained that the authority of the man over the woman did not originate because of sin, but that it was a creation ordinance. The man has authority over the woman by the nature and order of creation: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man...For Adam was formed first, then Eve."

Man was created to have authority over the woman, and the woman was created to submit to man's authority. This was established entirely apart from sin and the curse. And it is only natural that any ordinance of God instituted because of the very nature of creation remains in effect as long as we are human beings or until God declares otherwise. In fact, both Paul and Peter commanded Christian wives to obey their husbands, even non-Christian husbands. Thus the work of Christ and the teaching of the apostles did not abolish the authority structure instituted by God at creation, but rather reinforced it as an absolute moral law. The Bible teaches that the husband has authority over the wife at the creation of man, after the fall of man, and after the work of Christ.

The fall and the curse did not establish the subordination of women. Creation established the subordination of women. Rather, the fall and the curse produced the desire for women to usurp men's authority, and it declares that women's attempt will fail. This statement concerning their failure is not what instituted the authority structure, but it is a declaration that the existing structure shall remain despite women's rebellion. Here is the curse: sinful women will continue to desire that which is against God and nature, but they will never attain it.

Christ removes the curse on women when he removes their desire to usurp the authority of men. When the work of Christ is applied to women by the power of the Holy Spirit, they learn to accept the authority of men as instituted by God at creation. There is no longer a demonic

compulsion to rebel. Thus for women to submit to male leadership in the home and the church is a sign of righteousness and regeneration, and the rejection of male leadership in the home and the church is a manifestation of sin and wickedness, and the curse. Instead of abolishing male leadership in the home and the church, the work of Christ restored and reinforced the original divine design.

This also means that all teachings and arguments that oppose the authority of men in the home and the church, including those that attribute the subordination of women to the fall and the curse, are themselves effects of the fall and the curse. In other words, the doctrine that attributes women's subordination to the curse, and claims that this has been removed because of the work of Christ, is itself a manifestation of sin, rebellion, and the curse.

It would make a strange doctrine to say that people ought to worship idols because Christ has set them free from sin and the curse. The opposite is true. People worship idols because they are under the curse, and because they are possessed by sin and driven by the devil. When Christ sets them free, they cease their idol worship and turn to the true God instead. Likewise, women do not throw off men's authority because they are free from the curse, but because they are free from the curse, they are free from the sinful desire to rebel, and they now gladly submit to men's authority according to God's original design and command.

Just as Satan deceived Eve into disobedience by suggesting that God placed an untruthful and unreasonable restriction on her, now he deceives women into thinking that happiness is attained through rebellion. Satan certainly has a low opinion of women's intelligence to think that they could be deceived again by the same trick. Christ is the hope of humanity, and obedience to God is happiness. This is the truth. Which one will women believe?

Man's leadership in the family has been a controversial topic, both within and without theological circles. The reason for much of the debate is not because Scripture is unclear on the topic, but because of the ideological climate of the day and the sinful tendency of people to resent authority. Paul wrote, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." Here the authority of Christ over the church dictates the meaning of the authority of the husband. Wives must submit to their husbands as the church must submit to Christ.

Wives may protest that this is difficult to do, but it is arguable that the husbands face an even greater challenge: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Notice that the main relationship in the home is between the husband and the wife. Children have no place in the analogy. The command is not for the husband to merely show affection to his wife, but to love her to the death, and to cherish her more than his own life and welfare. To the extent that a man lacks this love for his wife, he is less than a biblical man. Christ used his authority over the church to die for the church. The authority that a man possesses in the home is for the purpose of enforcing his protection and sacrifice for the benefit

of the woman. Our estimation of a man should never rise higher than his love for God, the Bible, and his wife.

Many men are difficult to obey. They can be unspiritual, unteachable, unaffectionate, and unreasonable. But many women are difficult to love. However, just as God empowers Christian men to love their wives as Christ loves his church, he empowers Christian women to obey their husbands as the church ought to obey Christ. In any case, each person is accountable to God regardless of what the other does. The husband's failure to love does not excuse the wife's failure to obey, and of course, the wife's failure to obey does not excuse the husband's failure to love. Regardless of the wife's shortcomings, the husband must love her to the death.

A most popular objection against the biblical authority structure in the home comes from something that Paul wrote. He said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is argued that this statement refutes all gender "inequality" or distinctions. Since there is "neither male nor female" in Christ, it is argued that there should be no distinction of role or authority within marriage. However, this is an impossible application of the statement, because Paul himself repeatedly reinforced distinctions of role and authority between husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and other relationships. He said things like, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" and "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ." Therefore, his statement does not abolish all gender distinctions, and it does not cancel the biblical teaching on male leadership in the home.

When Paul's statement is studied in context, it is obvious that it refers only to the equality of every person's access to justification by faith. He said, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The verse does not teach social or gender equality, but a spiritual equality among those who have faith in Jesus Christ. God's people are all equally justified by faith, whether they are men or women, Jews or Gentiles, masters or slaves. Gender, race, and status are irrelevant to a person's access to salvation or to the person's standing as a believer. The verse carries no reference to gender equality in any other setting, and it has no relevance to role distinctions among men and women.



## **THE FALL OF MAN**

Adam was created in the image of God, and in the beginning he was good and upright. Then God placed him in Eden to work the land, and commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" But Satan came in the form of a serpent. He deceived the woman into eating from the tree, and she in turn gave Adam fruit from the tree to eat. In this manner, both of them sinned against God. Then God pronounced a curse upon them that included pain, toil, and death, and he expelled them from Eden. Thus man fell from his original estate.

The FEDERAL HEADSHIP of Adam refers to his role as the representative of all mankind. Scripture teaches that when he sinned, he acted on the behalf of all his descendants in the mind of God. To be more precise, Adam represented every member of the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, and this included every member of the human race except Christ. Christ was Adam's descendant in the sense that he took on a human nature at his incarnation, but he was sinless, born without imputed guilt or inherited corruption. The effects of Adam's sin are sovereignly imputed to his descendants, and not passed on by his physical relation to them. Christ himself was the federal head of the chosen ones, and Scripture calls him another "Adam." When Adam fell into sin, all of humanity fell with him: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men."

Adam represented the human race as a "federal head" and not an "organic head." All of humanity is condemned by his sin not because of its physical relation to him, but because Adam represented humanity in the mind of God. That is, God sovereignly determined that Adam represented all of humanity. He did not require anyone's assent to do this. Since God is the sole moral authority, anything that he does is righteous by definition. As a result, every person conceived after Adam is condemned by inherited guilt even before the individual has an opportunity to commit personal sins. When Adam sinned, all of humanity sinned. When Adam came under condemnation, all of humanity came under condemnation.

The term ORIGINAL SIN refers to this inherited guilt instead of the sin committed by Adam, thus it is misleading. Alternatives include "original guilt" and "inherited sin," but "original guilt" might be misunderstood as referring to the sin of Adam, and "inherited sin" might be misunderstood as referring to a transmission of guilt based on a physical relation to Adam. But as Adam was our representative in the mind of God, so is his guilt imputed to us in the mind of God. Thus IMPUTED GUILT is a more accurate term, and makes a good parallel to the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS that the chosen ones receive by faith in the work of Christ.

Then, not only did we inherit from Adam the guilt of sin, but we also inherited from him a sinful nature. This means that not only are we guilty in God's sight because of Adam's sin, but we also possess a disposition to sin and to rebel against God's laws. We may use the term INHERITED

CORRUPTION to designate this sinful disposition that we received from Adam. Scripture contradicts the popular claim that men are born with a disposition toward good. The Bible says that we followed our "sinful nature" before God regenerated us, and that "we were by nature objects of wrath."

It is common to resist the biblical teaching on imputed guilt and inherited corruption. There are even people who claim to be Christians, but who deny that they have ever sinned. Of course, these are not genuine Christians. They may admit that they have done a number of things out of their "human weaknesses," and that they have made "mistakes," but they insist that we cannot label what they have done as "sins."

The problem is that their definition of sin is false. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's moral law: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." A person sins when he fails to do what God commands him to do, or when he does what God commands him not to do. Since sin is a violation of God's moral law, then whether a particular action is sin must be defined by its relation to this law, that is, in order to determine whether a violation has indeed occurred. And since God's law addresses all areas of human life either by explicit declaration or by necessary inference, our thoughts and actions are never morally neutral.

Jesus declared that each moral command from God does not govern only a person's actions, but also his thoughts and his words. By thoughts, of course we also include his feelings, desires, and attitudes. Murder is the physical act of killing another human being without biblical justification. To kill with biblical justification is not murder. An example would be the execution of a violent criminal. In any case, murder is also committed by thoughts and words. As Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." Likewise, the moral law that forbids adultery indeed applies to the physical act of sexual infidelity, but it is also a sin of the mind: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Jesus explained that sins proceed from the mind: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly." Even greed, envy, and folly are sins. Sins committed in the body are first conceived in the mind. Although not all sins of the mind are expressed in the body, all sins in the body imply sins of the mind. Some people commit fewer sins in the body than others, but we frequently offend God in our minds. Even a fearful thought or a second of worry constitutes the sin of unbelief. And Jesus said, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." Even one careless word demands an account on the day of judgment.

Paul said that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and John wrote, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." The Bible declares that unless God forgives us, no one is justified in his presence: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." No one can claim that he is sinless. Every person is guilty from birth because of the imputation of Adam's sin, and in addition to this, every person has inherited from Adam a sinful disposition, which causes him to defy God in thought and in action throughout his life. The result is that every man is headed for damnation unless there is a way of salvation.

Sin devastated humanity. Nevertheless, God's image remained intact in man. Generations after the time of Adam, God said to Noah that murder was punishable by death because "in the image of God has God made man." Likewise, James reasoned that it would be wrong to curse other men because they "have been made in God's likeness." It was legitimate to appeal to the image of God in man because the image of God remained intact in man. In fact, since man is defined by God's image, then man would no longer be man if this image had been so marred or distorted from its original form that it could no longer be called God's image. The conclusion is that man continues to exist as the image of God.

Nevertheless, the image of God in man was not unharmed by sin. After the fall of man, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." This is an apt description of man's sinful nature, that it is the "inclination of the thoughts" toward evil. Paul said that to gratify "the cravings of our sinful nature" is to follow "its desires and thoughts." Likewise, Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

Thus the Bible defines the sinful nature in man as the evil disposition of the mind, or the disposition to think and then behave contrary to the precepts of Scripture. All the descendants of Adam except Christ have inherited such a disposition. As Paul said, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." He also said, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds" and "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

The Bible associates sin with a lack of intelligence or rationality. It mentions "the stupidity of wickedness" and it also says, "one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense." Referring to non-Christians, Paul wrote, "Their thoughts are useless, and their stupid minds are in the dark. They claim to be wise, but they are fools." It makes no sense to rebel against God. A person who disbelieves or disobeys Scripture is deficient in judgment and understanding. The Bible describes him with a word that is translated "moron." Every non-Christian is a moron. On

the other hand, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding."

Although the intellectual equipment of the non-Christian remains in existence, sin has nearly devastated his intelligence. The non-Christian is still counted as human, and he still has a human mind, but his mind is biased against God and truth. He constructs his worldview with impossible axioms and false premises. The result is a comprehensively delusional view of reality. Even if the non-Christian were given true premises, such as biblical propositions, his sinful and stupid mind would still blunder in reasoning, and he would still produce false conclusions through fallacious deductions. This means that the non-Christian can never discover truth by himself, and even if given the truth, he will fail to understand it or acknowledge its implications.

All non-Christians are intellectually defective and inferior. Their thinking is controlled by biases and fallacies so that they form conclusions that are hostile to God. It is the rational mind of man that reflects his likeness to God; therefore, the fact that evil has affected the intellect of man means that it has penetrated the core of his being. Although man still retains his likeness to God in that he still retains his mind, it has been so damaged that man is now born with a disposition toward evil, a bias favoring falsehood and absurdity. The destructive consequences of sin on the mind are called the NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN.

We need to grasp the extent to which man has fallen in order to understand the redemptive plan of God. Sin's effect on the spiritual aspect of man is more than that of a crippling blow, but a fatal one. Non-Christians are more than spiritually sick and blind, but they are spiritually dead. Since they are spiritually dead, they are helpless when it comes to spiritual operations. As the Bible says, "The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives," and "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." Paul said to his readers that before they became followers of Jesus, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." They were not just weak or sick, but they were dead. Man in his unregenerate condition is described as evil, insane, and incurable. Just as a dead person cannot request or respond to any assistance, a sinner cannot attain salvation by his own will or effort. He cannot even desire it, ask for it, or prepare for it. In himself, he cannot decide to repent or accept mercy from God.

Thus the Bible teaches what is called the TOTAL DEPRAVITY of man. It means that the effect of sin in man is pervasive, so that every part of man has been damaged and poisoned by evil. It is popular to say that there is good in every person, but the Bible insists on the opposite. Until a person becomes a Christian, there is no good in him at all. The non-Christian is spiritually dead, so that he is unable and unwilling to even cooperate with God when it comes to salvation. This means that unless God sovereignly regenerates the non-Christians – unless he decides to grant them spiritual resurrection – they will never perceive the truth of the gospel, and they will never believe in Jesus Christ. They will die in sin, and God will throw them into hell, where they will suffer extreme pain and agony forever.

## **THE PERSON OF CHRIST**

God alone determines human destiny by choosing to save some people and to damn all others, and he saves his chosen ones by causing them to have faith in Jesus Christ. This means that a person's destiny is revealed by what he thinks about Christ, so that depending on the nature of the error, to believe the wrong theology may result in everlasting damnation. Therefore, we must study the biblical doctrine with care and reverence, and reject any position that compromises or distorts what the Bible teaches about him.

Christ possesses two natures – he is both divine and human. He is God the Son, and he took up a human nature in the INCARNATION. The result neither confused nor compromised the two natures, so that Christ is fully God and fully man, and he will remain in this condition forever. The two natures of Christ subsisting in one person is called the HYPOSTATIC UNION.

There is no contradiction in this doctrine. To understand how it is self-consistent, we will first recall the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says that God is one in essence and three in person. The proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we would have to say, "God is one and not one" or "God is three and not three." And we would have to say, "God is one in essence and three in essence" or "God is one in person and three in person." There is contradiction only if we affirm that God is one and not one or that God is one and three at the same time and in the same sense. However, the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense.

In a similar way, the doctrinal formulation for the personhood and incarnation of Christ states that he is one in one sense, and two in a different sense. He is one person who possesses two natures. To ensure the clarity and coherence of this doctrine, we need to define the terms and relate them to the doctrine of the Trinity. The way "nature" is used in the doctrine of the incarnation is similar to the way "essence" is used for the Trinity. They refer to the definition of something, and the definition of something refers to the attributes or properties of something. A "person" is again defined by the consciousness or intellect.

In the incarnation, God the Son took up a human nature, or human attributes. The divine and the human natures did not combine or mingle, so that both sets of attributes remained separate. His divine nature was not diminished by his human nature, and his human nature was not deified by his divine nature. Since the divine nature was not modified by the human nature, as indeed the divine nature could not be modified, this doctrinal formulation reaffirms the immutability of God the Son. And indeed, a human nature cannot be deified, and neither can deity be conferred. Since deity is eternal, if a person is not deity to begin with, he can never become deity.

God the Son took up a human nature, and a human nature must include a human soul or mind. Although a "person" is defined in terms of the mind or intellect, the doctrine is that Christ remains one person even though he possesses two natures. This is so because of the definition

of a person as a system of consciousness, and because of the nature of the relationship between the divine mind and the human mind.

We insist that Christ is one "person," because the Bible never refers to him as "they," as it sometimes does the Trinity. Based on the way that the Bible refers to him, the way that he refers to himself, and the way that he behaves, there is no reason to think that he is not one person. Thus there is a need to arrive at a formulation that retains the view that Christ is one person even though he has two centers of consciousness. This need is not arbitrary, but it is necessitated by the biblical data.

The proper formulation is to state that God the Son took up a human nature, including a human mind, in such a manner that the human mind is contained by the divine mind, although the two are not in any way mingled or confused. Whereas the divine mind has complete control over the human mind, the human mind does not have free access to the divine mind, but it receives special insights and capabilities only as granted by the divine mind.

In the Trinity, there are three systems of consciousness working in unison, each fully participating in the divine attributes. When God the Son took up a human nature, he also took up a human center of consciousness. But there remains only three centers of consciousness in the Trinity, because the human nature of Christ was not deified. It was not added to the Trinity as such, since what is human cannot become divine.

Any objection based on the assumption that divine and human attributes necessarily contradict one another when possessed by the same person fails to take into account that the two sets of attributes remain separate in God the Son, in the sense that they are not mingled. For example, although Christ's divine nature is omniscient and omnipotent, his human nature is not. And this remains true today. His divine attributes have not deified his human attributes, and his human attributes have not diminished his divine attributes. There is no point where the two sets of attributes clash, and there is no place or occasion for contradiction.

The Bible teaches the DEITY of Christ. The Gospel of John begins by referring to Jesus Christ as the logos, or the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

The passage asserts the preexistence of Christ, that he had existed before creation. Jesus himself confessed this and said, "I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!" Christ is called "the Word," so to say "the Word was with God" indicates that Christ is not identical to the Father in his person. However, he is not less than God in terms of his attributes, because the passage continues to say, "the Word was God." This is an explicit statement on the deity of Jesus Christ. The words, "He was with God in the beginning," again refer to his preexistence and the fact that he is distinguishable from the Father.

The passage credits Christ as the agent of creation: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." As Paul said, "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." Then Paul added that "in him all things hold together." Christ created the universe, and even now he sustains its existence. Elsewhere it is said that God "made the universe" through Christ, and that Christ is now "sustaining all things by his powerful word."

In other passages, the Bible says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" and "We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." One place declares, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." The verse is an application of something said before, where God said to the Messiah, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." God the Father himself declares that Jesus is God, and that his rule will "last for ever and ever." Paul wrote that Christ, "being in very nature God," took up a human nature.

The Bible also teaches the HUMANITY of Christ. Soon after the Gospel of John asserts the deity of Christ, it declares, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The Letter to the Hebrews says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death." And Paul wrote, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Various passages confirm that Jesus had limitations in his human nature, that he could become tired, hungry, and thirsty. The most significant thing is that "he suffered death" to purchase salvation for his people.

The Bible sometimes affirm or imply both the deity and the humanity of Christ at the same time. For example, it says that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." They saw him as a man, but they realized that he was claiming to be God. In another confrontation with the Jews, Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." The Jews scoffed, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" But Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" When he said this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus slipped away. They recognized that Jesus was not yet fifty years old in his human life, but he claimed that he knew Abraham. They did not dispute his humanity, but they perceived that his words amounted to a claim to deity.

Jesus taught that the Messiah had to be both God and man when he referred to the passage in Scripture where David said, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." It was acknowledge that the Christ would be the son of David, and if the son of David, then Christ would be human. However, while he was "speaking by the Spirit," David referred to Christ as "Lord" as a designation of deity. Therefore, the Christ would be both the human descendent and the divine Lord of David. Christ would be both God and man.

## **THE LIFE OF CHRIST**

Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived in the virgin Mary. As Scripture explains, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." She was not impregnated by a man, but the child was "from the Holy Spirit." Christ was "born of a woman," but rather than being conceived by the union of a man and a woman, he was conceived by "the power of the Most High." And so the person born was both divine and human.

Unlike all other human beings after Adam, Jesus had no imputed guilt or inherited corruption. The Bible does not say that imputed guilt and inherited corruption come only from the human father, and we know that Mary was sinful like the rest of humanity. Although the virgin conception indicates that he was not an ordinary man, by itself it was insufficient to protect the child from all contamination, including contamination from Mary, a sinner. Therefore, the sinlessness of Christ could not be due to the virgin conception alone, but it was by God's sovereign decree that no guilt was imputed on Christ and that no corruption was inherited by him. The "power of the Most High" did not only cause Christ's conception without a human father, but also kept the child from both the judicial guilt of Adam and the corrupt nature resulting from his sin. This is so that the child could be called, "the holy one."

The tendencies to commit sins and make mistakes are not intrinsic to what it means to be human. Humanity now exists in a depraved state that is different from the original condition of man. Adam and Eve were not created sinful, and yet they were fully human. This means that sinfulness is not an essential human attribute. Sin has become a universal factor of human life, but it is not an original and necessary aspect of humanity. It is possible to be human without imputed guilt and inherited corruption. Nevertheless, only Adam, Eve, and Jesus were born without sin. And only Jesus never committed sin.

Paul called Jesus the "last Adam" or the "second man." The "first man" Adam as a federal head represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the human race. The "second man" Jesus was also a federal head, and represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the chosen ones.

As for the ministry of Jesus, it was characterized by preaching, teaching, and healing. As the Bible says, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." His preaching and miracles incited increasing hostility from his enemies. He ministered for several years, and then he was betrayed by his disciple Judas into the hands of those who wished to kill him. After a time of severe and unjust treatment by the Jews and the Romans, Pilate surrendered to pressure from the Jews and sentenced him to death by crucifixion. He died on the cross, and even his death testified to who he was: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'"



Jesus had a human body, and his death was literal and physical. The Gospels make it clear that he had in fact died: "The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." The Roman soldiers were well-trained, and had performed numerous crucifixions before this one. They were proficient enough to determine whether their victims were dead or alive. When they found that Jesus "was already dead," they saw no need to break his legs to quicken his death. But just to be certain, one of the soldiers ran a spear into his side, which brought a "sudden flow of blood and water," proving that he was dead.

Just as his death was literal and physical, his resurrection was also literal and physical. The Bible testifies that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. He took up the same body, but it was changed and enhanced. Paul said that Christians will also receive such a body when Jesus returns and raises the dead: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable." In any case, the resurrected or "glorified" body could still manifest and function in the physical realm, so that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he said to them, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times over a period of forty days, showing them "many infallible proofs" that he was alive. Then, he ascended up into heaven and received a position of authority from God the Father. As the Bible says, "He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" and "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God."

## **THE WORK OF CHRIST**

The work of Jesus Christ is characterized by the ATONEMENT that he performed for his people. The nature of the atonement is one of penal substitutionary death. Paul wrote, "the wages of sin is death," but God did not require the death of the chosen ones; instead, he sent Jesus Christ to pay for their sins by bearing their guilt and dying on the cross in their place.

One question regarding the atonement is whether the substitutionary death of Christ was necessary to redeem sinners. Two significant answers offered are the HYPOTHETICAL NECESSITY and the CONSEQUENT ABSOLUTE NECESSITY views of the atonement. Hypothetical necessity claims that God could have saved his people without the atonement, but that the atonement was God's chosen way. Consequent absolute necessity claims that God could have allowed all men to perish, but once God decided to save sinners, then the atonement was the only way.

If only these two options were available, consequent absolute necessity would be preferred. The atonement was not necessary in the sense that God did not have to save anyone. Peter wrote, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell." Just as it was not necessary for God to save the fallen angels, there was nothing that required him to save fallen men. Nevertheless, because God decided to love the chosen ones, he sent Jesus Christ to save them.

Although it was not necessary for God to save sinners, once he made the decision to save some of them, the death of Jesus Christ became necessary to pay the price for their sins. Jesus said, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." He prayed that, if it was possible, God would let the effects intended by the atonement to be accomplished another way, while he insisted that God's will was to be done. Then, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him." The Father's will was for Jesus to proceed with the work of atonement, affirming that his death was inevitable in order to achieve the intended results. Of course, Jesus himself knew this, but it was a prayer of dedication to reinforce his resolve to follow the plan of God. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" It was the only way.

The death of Christ was necessary because, if there were no atonement, then every person would have to die for his own sins. And since the debt of sin is too great for any mere man to fully pay, the punishment would be endless. This is everlasting damnation. A person is set free from punishment only if another were to die in his place. However, one sinner cannot die to redeem another, because each person owes an infinite debt for his own sins, so that any sinner who suffers divine wrath does so only due to his own sins. He can never pay his own debt, so still less can he pay the debt of another. Therefore, an atonement demands a perfect and innocent sacrifice of an infinite value. Although God had instituted animal sacrifice, it was only to anticipate the death of Christ, seeing that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Christ was the only acceptable and sufficient sacrifice.

Although consequent absolute necessity is the traditional orthodox position, there is a more accurate position on the necessity of the atonement. When it comes to the order of the eternal decrees, we have established supralapsarianism and refuted infralapsarianism. And from the perspective of supralapsarianism, the decree to redeem the chosen ones is logically prior to the decree for the fall of man. Thus the work of Christ in redemption was not a reaction to the fall of man. Rather, God first decreed atonement for the chosen ones, and then he decreed the fall of man so that the atonement could happen.

Christ was "chosen before the creation of the world" to be the lamb of God, that is, an atoning sacrifice. Paul wrote that "eternal life" was "promised before the beginning of time" to "God's elect," and that God selected the individuals that he would redeem "before the creation of the world." God selected Christ as the redeemer and decided to redeem the elect before the creation of the world. In God's mind, he saved the elect before they sinned. This means that the possibility never existed that God would not redeem his chosen ones by the death of Christ. According to the logical order, the salvation of the elect was a certainty before the fall of humanity. Therefore, assuming the supralapsarian order of the eternal decrees, the atonement of Christ was an ABSOLUTE NECESSITY. This necessity is meant in a different sense than when the other positions are asserted, since our answer has made a correction to the original question.

There is a tendency to associate the redemptive work of Christ solely with his death and resurrection. However, we must not ignore the other events of his life, because the things that he performed to save his people were not limited to the events after his arrest, but also include those that went before it. His whole life contributed to the salvation of those whom God entrusted to him.

Some theologians distinguish between the ACTIVE OBEDIENCE and the PASSIVE OBEDIENCE of Christ on our behalf. Both suggest that he came to succeed where Adam failed, namely, to live in perfect obedience toward God. As Paul said, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross." These terms designate the two aspects of obedience through which Christ paid for the sins of the elect and attained for them a perfect righteousness.

Christ's active obedience refers to his perfect adherence to God's laws as the federal representative of the chosen ones. He completely satisfied the moral demands of God, who credits this perfect righteousness to those who would believe in Christ. The Bible says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Christ did more than offering himself to die for the sins of the elect in order to redeem them. He also did many other things, such as obeying God's laws, enduring temptations, performing works of charity and of power, and living a uniquely righteous life. Christ did not only rescue us from condemnation by his death, but he also merited for us a perfect righteousness by his life. This aspect of Christ's

redemptive work tends to be neglected, but it is a necessary part of the salvation that he attained for the elect.

This is part of the explanation as to why Jesus devoted only a short period of his life to public ministry, while before that he lived in obscurity. Before his public ministry, he was in preparation, waiting for God's appointed time, but that was not all that he was doing. Redemption depended not only on his final years or days, but also on the righteousness that he demonstrated throughout his life as the federal head. By the way that Jesus lived before and during his ministry, and by his death and resurrection, he secured a perfect righteousness to be credited to those who would believe in him.

Christ's passive obedience refers to his suffering of punishment in the place of the chosen ones. Sin demands punishment, and the proper punishment for defiance against God is endless torment in hellfire. Since the punishment is endless, there is no escape or restoration for those who would come under the wrath of God. In order to rescue a sinner and satisfy divine justice at the same time, someone else would have to die in the sinner's place. However, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," so that if any sinner were to suffer under divine wrath, he would only be receiving the proper punishment for his own sins.

Therefore, no sinner can suffer in the place of another sinner. The only solution is for a sinless and perfect man to take the place of a sinner, and so to truly suffer punishment that he himself does not deserve. This is what Jesus accomplished for his people: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And God in turn imputed his perfect righteousness to those he represented in his suffering.

Jesus suffered many things during his life on earth. These include temptations from Satan, opposition from religious leaders, and human limitations and difficulties such as weariness and hunger. Isaiah said, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." And the Letter to the Hebrews states: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

His suffering intensified from the time of his arrest to his death on the cross. Most people have this period of time in mind when they refer to his suffering: "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him." Jesus suffered tremendous humiliation, and he endured all of it to rescue the chosen ones. But it was not over, for after this, "They led him away to crucify him." Crucifixion, as it was meant to do, inflicted extreme pain on the victim.

The spiritual and psychological torment of bearing the guilt of sinners was even more terrible than the physical agony. Jesus lived in a state of perfect holiness, and had never felt the effects of sin upon a person's consciousness. But at that time God imputed upon him the entire weight of the guilt of the elect: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors...He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Some people wonder why one person's death was sufficient to pay for the sins of many. The Bible explains, "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many...Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

Just as Adam represented the human race when he sinned, Jesus represented the chosen ones in his perfect righteousness and atoning sacrifice. As for why a brief period of suffering could take away the sins of so many people, and was accepted as a substitute for the endless punishment of sinners, consider the value of the sacrifice and the intensity of the suffering. The value of Jesus Christ was such that God accepted his sacrifice as sufficient to have obtained an eternal redemption for the chosen ones. The Bible says, "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption," and "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

In any case, it was God's sovereign acceptance of the atonement that determined and demonstrated its sufficiency. Just as Adam was an appropriate federal representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God, Jesus was an appropriate federal head of those who were identified with him in the mind of God. The atonement was sufficient and efficacious because it satisfied God's own standard of justice. No other argument is required or permitted.

As for the extent or scope of the atonement, it is popular to assume that Jesus died for every human person; however, the Bible teaches that he died only for those whom God has chosen for salvation. The doctrine is often called LIMITED ATONEMENT, but the term can be misleading, because what is "limited" is not specified, so that it might be taken to suggest imperfection. Although only some individuals have been chosen for salvation, Christ saves these chosen ones to the uttermost, and in this sense there is no limitation in the atonement, and there is certainly no imperfection. Some theologians maintain that the biblical doctrine is more properly called PARTICULAR ATONEMENT or DEFINITE ATONEMENT. But I consider the term EFFECTIVE SPECIFIC ATONEMENT even more descriptive.

The popular challenge to this biblical doctrine maintains that Christ made salvation merely possible for every person, but actual for no one. Salvation is applied when a person appropriates for himself the benefits of the work of Christ. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Christ has achieved actual salvation for every person for whom his work was intended, and that he only intended to secure salvation for the elect. The doctrine of definite atonement is closely connected to God's election of individuals for salvation. God has chosen to save some people and has chosen to damn all others. Definite atonement teaches that Christ came to die for only those that God has chosen for salvation.

If Christ had paid for the sins of every person, then why would anyone be condemned? Indeed, there are those who teach that the atonement of Christ ensures that no one will suffer damnation. This doctrine of UNIVERSALISM is obviously false, because the Bible teaches that there is a hell, a lake of fire, and that God will send many people there to punish and torture them forever. All the non-Christians that have died are already there. As the Bible says, "Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life," and "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

It appears most of the people who oppose the biblical doctrine of definite atonement do not affirm actual universalism, but they affirm HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM. They maintain that Christ has made salvation possible for all men, and all of them could be saved if they would believe in the gospel. But the problem remains: if Christ had indeed paid for the sins of every person, then why would anyone go to hell? What is left for God to punish? The usual answer is that a person must accept what Christ has done, or else God would still condemn him even though Christ has fully paid for his sins. However, this means that God would punish the same sins twice – once on Christ as he suffered on the cross, and a second time on the person who has committed those sins. A debt is either paid or unpaid. If someone else paid my debt, I owe nothing. If a debt is paid twice, then an injustice has been done.

One attempt to escape this problem suggests that the only sin for which God sends people to hell is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. This is obviously false, because the Bible teaches that God will punish all the sins of the reprobates. For example, it says, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient," and "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming." The Bible does not say that the rejection of Christ is the only remaining sin that incurs the wrath of God, but it says that every sin incurs the wrath of God. Jesus himself said that God will demand an account of even "every careless word" on the day of judgment.

Moreover, this view implies that Christ failed to atone for the basic and common sin of unbelief, and thus renders his work desperately incomplete. In addition, since the imputed guilt of Adam alone is a sufficient basis for condemnation, this attempt to rescue hypothetical universalism implies that no one is born with imputed guilt. This attempt acknowledges that the atonement made an actual payment for sins, and not merely a potential payment; however, when it insists that the atonement was universal, that it was done for every person, it becomes inconsistent and unbiblical. It refutes itself. Thus we perceive that an actual atonement and an universal atonement are incompatible. Either Christ made an actual atonement and he did it only for some individuals, or he did it for all individuals but it was not an actual atonement. He either paid for only some individuals, or he paid for no one.

Actual universalism is undeniably heretical, but hypothetical universalism is attractive to many people because it is more consistent with their sense of justice. It appeals to their human idea of fairness, a feeling that originated out of their sinful hearts. This is where every person somehow gets a chance to be saved, although no one has actual atonement. This is not divine justice.

Humanity is in a state of total depravity and spiritual death. If left to himself, a sinner will never believe in Christ. Unless God chooses those who would receive salvation and redeems them by a definite atonement, no one would be saved. Those who oppose definite atonement claim that although all are spiritually dead in sin, some people do come to faith in Christ, not because they have been chosen for salvation, but because they decide to be saved by their own will. However, the very meaning of spiritual death makes this impossible, because a dead man cannot respond to or cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. Accordingly, the Bible teaches that faith and repentance are God's gifts to his chosen ones, but he does not grant them to every person, and so "not everyone has faith." Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, and God is the one who chooses those who would receive faith and repentance, this means that God is the one who chooses those who would receive salvation, and not the individuals themselves.

The biblical doctrine is that God chooses the individuals that he wishes to save, and he changes them and causes faith in them by his divine power. This is done apart from their desire and decision, for while men are non-Christians, they do not wish to be changed or to be given faith.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose the false teaching that some non-Christians would believe the gospel by their own willingness even though they are in a state of spiritual death and are enemies of God in their minds. This would mean that people who are spiritually dead and are hostile to God can somehow make the most important and the most positive spiritual decision of their lives, even a decision that directly opposes their own evil nature.

The contradiction is sufficient as a refutation, but even if we disregard it for now, there is another problem. If non-Christians can believe by their own willingness, then how do we explain why one spiritually dead person would believe in Christ, when another spiritually dead person would refuse to do the same? Does it not follow that those who are able to make this

spiritually positive decision are more righteous than those who do not? If so, then we will have to say that Christ came to save only the relatively righteous, and not the relatively sinful. The most evil men are never saved. But this contradicts the biblical record and the nature of the gospel, which can save even "the chief of sinners."

It might be suggested that God exerts an amount of influence on individuals to incite them to faith, but this only delays the problem. Some people would appear to need a stronger influence from God than others. But if he exerts a stronger influence on some people than he does on others, then he is in fact choosing who would be saved, especially if the amount of influence exerted is not always proportional to the degree of wickedness in the individuals. On the other hand, if God exerts approximately the same amount of influence on individuals, then once again only the relatively righteous will respond, which again means that Christ came only to save the relatively righteous, a notion that contradicts the teaching of Scripture.

The necessary conclusion is that UNLIMITED ATONEMENT or UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT is impossible because it can never fit into a system of biblical doctrines. Since the atonement provides actual and complete payment for sin, universal atonement necessarily provides universal salvation. However, Scripture teaches that many people will never be saved, and they will suffer endless torment in hell. The only possibility is that God had selected a definite group of individuals to be saved. Then in his work of atonement, Christ died for only these individuals, and he secured actual salvation for every one of them. This is why the redemptive work of Christ is an effective and specific atonement.

The nature of the atonement is one of penal substitution, so that the death of Christ made an actual and complete payment for the sins of those he represented. The Bible says that Christ "bought with his own blood" the church of God. And it says, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." Paul wrote, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price." We have said that in the atonement our debt was paid, and a debt cannot be paid twice. But the atonement was more than a payment of debt. It was also a purchase. Jesus Christ bought his people with his own blood as payment. This reinforces the fact that the atonement did not secure a merely possible salvation, but it was a finished transaction. Since Christ was "slain from the creation of the world" in the mind of God, and by this he obtained ownership of those for whom he died, this means that the identities of all those who would be saved had been determined from eternity. He then came in history to die for only those individuals.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep...I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."



He said, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and then he said to some people, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." He came to die for the sheep, but some people were not his sheep; therefore, he did not die for every person. Those who are his sheep belong to him because the Father has given them to him, and all of them will believe the gospel, since he said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." On the other hand, since the identities of the sheep have been determined in eternity, those who are not his sheep would never believe. So he said, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." All those whom God has chosen will be saved, and once they are saved, they will never lose their salvation, since Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Within several sentences, Jesus confirmed not only the doctrine of definite atonement, but also the doctrines of election, reprobation, and preservation.

The opponents of definite atonement claim that some biblical passages appear to teach that the redemptive work of Christ was universal rather than specific. For example, the Bible says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance," and "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time."

However, only the most unthinking reader would assume that the words "all" and "everyone" in the Bible always refer to all human beings in the history of mankind. There are endless examples in our daily speech in which the scope of these universal terms are limited by the context. But we can demonstrate this with biblical illustrations.

Jesus said in one place, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." He could not mean that all human beings in the history of mankind would hate those Christians, since not all human beings in the history of mankind would be aware of those Christians. And many human beings would not exist yet to hate them. And he could not mean all human beings living at the same time as those Christians, because not all human beings living at the same time would be aware of those Christians. Then he could not even mean that all human beings who would be aware of those Christians would hate those Christians, because at least the Christians would not hate themselves for being Christians.

Rather, the meaning becomes clear when we respect the context. He was saying, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

The words "all men" are defined and restricted by the surrounding statements. Here "all men" is a reference to all kinds of people, such as the unbelievers in the family and those who reject the gospel message. The meaning of "all men" narrows even more when we respect the

historical context. Jesus was addressing Christians in the first century, and he said that they would not have finished preaching to the cities of Israel before he would come to destroy Jerusalem. All kinds of people would hate the Christians at that time and in that context.

Paul said, "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem." Did he claim that every Jew without exception knew him? What about those who lived in the past and those who would live in the future? He continued, "They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee." He meant only those Jews who knew him at that point in history, and limited to those who were close enough to the situation that they could be brought to testify about him.

Concerning Christ, the Bible says, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." If universal terms are always universal in the absolute sense without regard to context, then this would mean that God the Father himself has been placed under the feet of Christ. And since the church has been seated with Christ, this interpretation would mean that God the Father has been placed under the church. He is placed under all Christians. This blasphemy, of course, is severe enough to warrant excommunication. But this is the necessary outcome of following the way supporters of universal atonement interpret the universal terms in Scripture. Paul applied the statement to Christ, but he restricted the meaning of the word "everything." He wrote, "For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ."

Even with the most elementary understanding, one would assume that God would remain supreme, and any statement in Scripture would be interpreted with that in mind. Such a general background is enough to provide context for a universal term. No one can argue that we refuse to take Scripture seriously because we do not take a universal term in the absolute sense, when it is undeniably defined by the context. As in this case, even a general theological context is often sufficient. In fact, we would be making a mockery of the word of God if we were to ignore the theological context and insist that the statement means that God the Father himself has been placed under Christ and under the Christians. This is what the supporters of universal atonement have done. They have made a mockery of the word of God by pretending to take the Scripture seriously, while rejecting both the immediate context and the theological context of various biblical verses.

Consider another verse. Paul wrote this to the Romans: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" The opponents of definite atonement would like to interpret "us all" to mean all human beings, but we must allow the context to dictate the scope of "us all." What is this context?

Paul indicated that he addressed this letter to the Christians: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." This introduction offers another illustration. When he said that the letter was

written "to all," he did not mean all human beings in the history of mankind, but he said, "to all in Rome." And he did not mean all human beings in Rome, but he said, "to all in Rome who are love by God and called to be saints." The context defines and restricts the meaning of the word "all." He addressed the letter to all the Christians in Rome.

Within the letter, he would say certain things that applied to the people in Rome at the time. He would say other things that applied to all human beings, such as when he said that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And then there are things that applied only to Christians. In every instance, the context makes the meaning clear. It is necessary to consider both the immediate and literary context, and also the larger theological context.

In any case, unless Paul later widened the scope to include all human beings, this is our context for understanding the statement that God "gave him up for us all." He was addressing Christians. The immediate context of the statement confirms this: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies." It is explicit and undeniable that the words "us all" refer only to "those whom God has chosen." Therefore, Paul's statement offers no support to universal atonement, but favors definite atonement.

Another example comes from Peter. When he stood up to preach on the day of Pentecost, he cited the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people." He was speaking about the Holy Spirit's mighty manifestation on that day, but the scope is restricted by the surrounding verses: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven," and "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The words "all people" are said in the context of addressing people "from every nation under heaven," so that an ethnic universality was intended, not the absolute universality of every human being in history. God would begin to pour out his Spirit upon people from all ethnic backgrounds, and not only the Jews. This promise is further defined when he said that it was for "all whom the Lord our God will call." This restricts the promise of the Spirit to a select group chosen by God. Peter's emphasis was that this group would consist of people from each gender, every class and background, and from all over the world.

God did not pour out his Spirit on "all people" before this day. That was the point of Peter's announcement in the first place. The significance of the statement hinges on the fact that "all people" did not mean all human beings, because it was a new development. It was a fulfillment of a prophetic promise. God would begin to do something for "all people" that he did not do before. And so the very point of the statement would mean "all people" could not refer to all human beings, since it was not fulfilled for "all people" in the past.

With the above in mind, it should take us only a short time to address two of the favorite passages cited by the opponents of definite atonement.

The first one comes from Peter, who wrote, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The letter was addressed to "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours." Peter referred to the "beloved," a term to designate Christians, right before the verse in question. And then he said, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Given the context, the word "you" must refer to a group that belonged with the Christians but included some who had not yet become Christians. Thus Peter meant that the Lord would tarry so that the chosen ones would have time to become Christians.

The second passage comes from Paul. He wrote, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time." Again, the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, and we have also established the doctrine of definite atonement as the theological context. There is no basis to assume that this passage teaches universal atonement. In fact, since other considerations have made universal atonement impossible, we must assume that this passage teaches something else.

Nevertheless, there is direct evidence from the context indicating that Paul did not mean all human beings when he said "all men." Immediately before this, he said, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." He said that Christians should pray "for everyone," and proceeded to explain that by "everyone," he meant even "kings and all those in authority." Therefore, by "everyone," he was referring to kinds or groups of people – believers are to pray for all sorts of people. He was still speaking on the same topic when he said God wanted all men to be saved, that is, including "kings and all those in authority," and that Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all men," again, including "kings and all those in authority," and indeed all other kinds or groups of people.

As the Bible declares, "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'"

Scripture teaches that the atonement is universal in the sense that Christ died for people from every ethnic and social background. The gospel has been preached all over the world, such that even Christians have forgotten how paradigm shattering this was at the beginning. By distorting the gospel message and shifting the emphasis from the universality of groups to the universality of individuals, Christians have committed a gross injustice to God and to humanity. The gospel

was a message of inclusion and acceptance of all kinds of people from all over the world. And it still is, if only we would acknowledge it for what it is. Nevertheless, no one is included, and no one is accepted, except through faith in Jesus Christ.

The atonement is not a potential payment for sins, but an actual payment for the sins of God's chosen people. The good news is that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men," and not just to the Jews. The "good news" has never been that Christ died to save every human being, but that he died to save people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." The greatness of this salvation is that its effects are unlimited by ethnic and social borders: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is the good news, and this is how we should understand the biblical passages that say Christ died for all. Christ came to make an effective and specific atonement. He was successful. He saved his people.

## **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST**

Jesus Christ suffered extreme humiliation in his mission to save his people. Afterward God exalted him to the highest place. The Bible explains that Christ, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to cling to, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And the Bible says, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Christ is in a state of exaltation under the Father, unequalled by anyone else. As Paul said, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." An early Christian confession was, "Jesus is Lord," and Jesus himself declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The supremacy of Christ implies the sufficiency of Christ. Paul wrote that in everything Christ has "the supremacy," after which he added, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." This "fullness" includes "every spiritual blessing" and "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There is no blemish or lack in him: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

The sufficiency of Christ implies that through him we have "everything we need for life and godliness," and there is no need to seek other sources of spiritual power and guidance. Outside of Christ there is no other true source of spiritual power and guidance. Nevertheless, many of those who claim to follow Christ seek help from illegitimate sources when the solutions to their problems are available through knowledge of the Scripture and prayer in the name of Jesus. They claim to be Christians but become involved with occult practices such as astrology, horoscopes, necromancy, and all varieties of divination.

God condemns such things. He said, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD." On the day of judgment, no astrologer or

medium can save his followers from hell, and he himself will be condemned. Scripture promises a place in hell for every person who becomes involved with the occult, just as if this person is a murderer or idolater: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

Those who seek spiritual assistance or counsel from sources not endorsed by Scripture are spiritual prostitutes, and they commit adultery against God. The Bible reserves some of the strongest terms of condemnation against these people. Christians have no business getting involved with non-Christian spiritual activities, and those who wallow in them contradict their profession of faith. As Isaiah said, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" People practice the occult and consult psychics and mediums because of their wickedness. They must be condemned and expelled. Failure to enforce church discipline allows these abominations to foster and spread.

Christians have entrusted their lives to God. The purpose of seeking guidance is to follow his will in the first place. Why should they consult the agents of Satan on how to follow the will of God? Christians must seek guidance only from the sources approved by Scripture. They may seek counsel from mature church leaders, but even their authority and direction are legitimate only to the extent that they are derived from Scripture. Thus in this sense, the Bible alone is sufficient.

Christ is sufficient for all of life. People commit spiritual adultery not because they have studied the Bible and found it lacking, but they have never made the effort to receive God's wisdom. Peter said that it is by knowledge about the things of God that we walk in the provisions of God: "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." This reaffirms that the study of theology is the most important human activity.

The exclusivity of Christ follows from the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Christianity is the only true worldview and the only legitimate religion. Scripture is insistent on this point: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Jesus called himself "the way" – there are not many ways to God. Jesus called himself "the truth" – truth is not relative, changing, or progressive. There is one eternal being who is truth. Christ is the eternal immutable principle of reason and order in the universe. Therefore, Jesus called himself "the life" – no one who is without Jesus Christ can have God and life. Apart from him there is only despair, death, and damnation.

Let us join our voices with the apostolic declaration: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a

gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned," and "If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!" Let anyone be damned to hell who affirms a religion or worldview that disagrees with the Christian faith. Let non-Christians be damned to hell.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have no tolerance for falsehood, but we must destroy it. We do not accomplish this by physical violence, but by aggressive intellectual discourse and rational argumentation, and by miracles, prophecies, and signs and wonders. As Paul said, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." We are full of boldness and determination from the Lord. We challenge sinners and heretics in open spiritual combat. The Christian faith will be the only one that remains.



## **CHOSEN BY GOD**

The doctrine of ELECTION teaches that God has chosen a definite number of individuals to receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The exact identities of these people have been determined and are unchangeable. God has chosen these individuals without any consideration of their decisions, actions, and other conditions in them. The basis of his choice was his will alone. He chose these people for salvation just because he wanted to choose them, and not because he foresaw anything that they would decide or perform.

Although national Israel was supposedly God's chosen nation, most of its people had rejected Christ, and they did not obtain salvation. Did God's promise fail? Was God's plan thwarted? Paul addressed this in his letter to the Romans. He wrote, "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'"

Although "Israel" was God's chosen nation, not everyone born a natural Israelite was a genuine Israelite. God never made the promise of salvation to national Israel, but only to spiritual Israel, consisting of the true descendants of Abraham. When the opponents of Jesus claimed that they were the descendants of Abraham, Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things." Although they were Abraham's natural descendants, Jesus said that they were not his real children. He said their father was the devil.

On the other hand, Paul said, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The true children of Abraham are those who have the same faith as Abraham. God's promise was made to the spiritual descendants of Abraham, not to the natural descendants. Of course, the natural descendants of Abraham who believe in Christ are also his spiritual descendants, but they are heirs only because of their spiritual heritage and not their natural heritage.

Then Paul continued with the example of Jacob and Esau: "Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Both Jacob and Esau were natural descendants of Isaac, but God treated them differently. He favored Jacob, the younger son. This decision was not based on "anything good or bad" that they had done, but it was so that "God's purpose in election might stand." The choice was unconditional, meaning that it was "not by works but by him who calls." Jacob was favored

because of the sovereign will of God, not because of something that he had done or would do. God's choice was independent of any condition in him. As the passage says, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion,'" and "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Paul insisted that God saved us "because of his own purpose and grace," not because of any condition that he saw in us, and he gave us this grace "before the beginning of time." "He predestined us," Paul wrote, "in accordance with his pleasure and will," not because of what he knew we would decide or perform. God called us "according to his purpose." To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "He has chosen you," and not, "You have chosen him." He repeated this in his next letter to them and said, "God chose you to be saved," and not, "You chose to be saved." Election does not depend on man's decisions or actions, but on the mercy of God that is dispensed by his will alone.

Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." Everyone that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus, and no one else can come to Jesus. Everyone will be saved whom the Father gives to Jesus, and no one will be saved whom the Father does not give to Jesus. Since not everyone will be saved, it is evident that the Father does not give every person to Jesus to be saved.

The word translated "draw" also means "drag," "pull," or "compel," so that it may read, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him, pulls him, and compels him." For example, the word is translated as "dragged" when the Bible says, "The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut." The word can depict a forceful and even a violent action.

Man is in a state of total depravity. He is spiritually dead and cannot request any assistance. He cannot respond even if assistance is offered. Jesus meant that no one can have faith in him unless chosen and compelled by the Father. Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, and since it is the Father alone and not the human individuals themselves who chooses those who would come to Christ, it follows that it is the Father who chooses who would receive salvation, and not the human individuals themselves.

Jesus was emphatic about this and repeated the teaching: "'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.' From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." No one can come to Jesus unless enabled by the Father. No one has the ability to accept Jesus unless the Father gives it to him.

Jesus contradicted the common assumption that responsibility presupposes ability. This is the assumption that if a person is unable to accept the gospel, then he should not be blamed for failing to accept it. But Jesus stated that all human beings are unable to accept the gospel unless enabled by God, but all who do not accept the gospel will still be punished for their sins. Therefore, responsibility does not presuppose ability. This same passage shows that the Father does not give everyone the ability to believe in Christ, since many of the people did not believe and "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." He said, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." He also said, "For many are invited, but few are chosen," and not, "For many are invited, but few accept." Many people may hear the preaching of the gospel, but only those "appointed for eternal life" can believe. The elect are those "whom he has chosen." Christians have been "chosen by grace," and they are those who "by grace had believed."

A person does not choose himself for salvation by believing in Christ, but he receives salvation by believing in Christ because God has chosen him first. Faith is not the cause of election, but election is the cause of faith. We believe in Christ because God first chose us to be saved and then caused us to believe in Christ. We are saved because God chose us, not because we chose him.

The Bible does not paint the picture of humanity as a group of people drowning in the sea of sin, and as many as would cooperate with Christ would be rescued. Instead, it paints a picture in which all human beings are dead in the water, and have sunken to the bottom. Since they are dead, they are unable to cooperate with any assistance, or even to request it. In fact, if they could choose at all, they would choose not to be rescued. Against this situation, God the Father has chosen some of them to be saved by Jesus Christ and he drags them out of the water, purely by his own decision and power. And then he raises them from the dead into new life in Christ.

The biblical doctrine of election teaches that although all human beings deserve endless torment in hell because of their sins, God has chosen to show mercy toward some of them. God chose them before the creation of the universe and before the fall of man, and he chose them without consideration of any condition in them, whether good or bad. Having chosen some for salvation, God sent Christ to die to make complete payment for their sins, so that God may credit the righteousness merited by Christ to them. On the other hand, those who are not chosen for salvation are appointed for damnation, and they will receive the appropriate punishment for their sins, which is endless torment in hell.

Many of those who reject the biblical doctrine of election argue that even if God has chosen some people for salvation, the basis for his choice was his FOREKNOWLEDGE. They claim that God knew beforehand which individuals would freely accept Christ, and on this basis they were chosen. But this destroys the meaning of election, because it means that God does not choose

people for salvation at all, but that he only accepts the decisions of those who would choose themselves for salvation.

Proponents of this view defines divine foreknowledge as prescience. When the word "foreknowledge" is used in this manner, it refers to God's awareness of future facts, such as the decisions and actions of individuals. Furthermore, it is implied that this knowledge is passive, so that it is not God who causes the future events that he knows, but he passively grasps what his creatures will cause to occur. However, to define "foreknowledge" as passive prescience generates insurmountable problems. In addition, although the Bible mentions the foreknowledge of God, it means something different by it.

First, we have shown that every person in himself is both unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation. He can and he will come to Christ only if the Father enables and compels him to do so. We have also established that the Father does not enable and compel every person to come to Christ. This alone is sufficient to refute the attempt to use divine prescience to destroy divine election.

Since a person comes to Christ only because the Father causes him to come to Christ, then to say that election is based on God's prescience of man's future decisions is only an awkward way to say that God knows whom he will cause to accept Christ, but such prescience would not be passive. Again, if God chooses a person because he knows that this person will accept Christ, but if this person will accept Christ only because God will cause him to do so, then to say that God knows this person will accept Christ is the same as to say that God knows that he will cause this person to accept Christ. God's election of this person is still based on his own decision to choose this person for salvation, and not based on a passive knowledge that this person will accept Christ without God causing him to do so.

This is what the Bible teaches, but then it means that divine prescience is not a passive knowledge of what a person will decide or perform, and that it is a knowledge of what God will cause the person to decide or perform. Divine prescience is a form of God's self-knowledge – a knowledge of his own plans, and a knowledge of what he will actualize in the future. Therefore, to say that election is based on prescience cannot challenge our position, because God's knowledge of the future is never passive, but he is the one who causes everything that he knows will happen in the future.

Second, the Bible states that divine election is not based on man's decisions or actions in the first place. God does not choose someone for salvation because of what this person will decide or perform: "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy...So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses." Divine election is not based on a passive prescience, and divine prescience is not passive in the first place. God chooses a person because he wants to choose that person, and he knows who will believe the gospel because he knows whom he will cause to believe the gospel.

Third, to define God's foreknowledge as passive prescience makes nonsense out of the biblical passages that associate divine election with divine foreknowledge. It can even result in damnable heresies.

To illustrate, Paul wrote, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

And Peter wrote, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

Opponents of the biblical doctrine of election claim that these passages teach that divine election is based on passive prescience. They claim that God has chosen those whom he passively knew would accept Christ.

The passage from Paul teaches that all the individuals included in one phase of salvation would also enter into all the subsequent phases, and that all the individuals in any phase of salvation have also been included in all the previous phases. Thus all those foreknown are also predestined; all those predestined are also called; all those called are also justified; and all those justified are also glorified.

Therefore, whatever foreknowledge means, everyone who is foreknown by God is also justified by God. However, the passage does not say that it is the people's faith or choices that are foreknown by God, but that it is the people themselves that are foreknown. Our opponents assume that foreknowledge means prescience. This produces an unexpected result for them: since it is the people that are foreknown, since divine omniscience means that everyone is foreknown by God, and since everyone that is foreknown is also justified, then it follows that if a person defines foreknowledge as prescience, he must also say that this passage teaches universal salvation.

If foreknowledge refers to prescience, then God's foreknowledge includes every person, because God knows all things. Then since this passage refers to foreknown persons, not their decisions and actions, and since it says that all who are foreknown are saved, this means that all human beings are saved. However, the Bible insists that not everyone is saved or justified. Therefore, foreknowledge cannot refer to prescience, especially a passive prescience, in this passage or in the context of divine election. Foreknowledge must mean something else.

In the context of salvation, the "knowledge" of God refers to his sovereign choice and purposive affection for persons and not to a passive awareness of facts. For example, Jesus said, "Then I

will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Since Jesus as God is omniscient, "I never knew you" cannot mean that he has never been aware of these people's existence, thoughts, and actions. In fact, he knows that they are "evildoers." Therefore, the denial of knowing someone here is a denial of a positive relationship, and not a denial of an awareness of facts. Accordingly, foreknowledge refers to a positive relationship God establishes in his mind with his chosen individuals before the existence of these individuals. Foreknowledge means foreordination.

The Bible often refers to foreknowledge in the sense of foreordination. For example, God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Of course God would know a person that he intended to create. He knew his own plan. The main sense is that before Jeremiah was conceived, God had chosen him. God did not mean that he was pleased with what he passively knew about Jeremiah, but that God had foreordained Jeremiah. God did not discover Jeremiah and made him a prophet. God designed and created Jeremiah to be a prophet.

Consider the parallelism in what God said. When one line or expression parallels another line or expression, one part expands on or clarifies the other part. For example, the Bible says, "For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." This does not mean that in addition to "founded it upon the seas," he also "established it upon the waters." Rather, "established it upon the waters" carries a similar meaning to "founded it upon the seas," and clarifies the sense. Then, Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." It is not that we are to ask God to "deliver us from the evil one" in addition to "lead us not into temptation," but "deliver us from the evil one" is what is meant by "lead us not into temptation."

The parallelism in God's call to Jeremiah clarifies the meaning of "I knew you." Again, God said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Or we may translate the verse as, "I knew you before I formed you in the womb; I consecrated you before you were born; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." The words "I knew you" correspond to "I consecrated you" and "I appointed you," and the three expressions carry similar meanings. For God to "know" Jeremiah is to consecrate and to appoint him for God's own purpose.

Now Paul's passage says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Although "foreknew" means foreordained, the word "predestined" is not redundant. Here foreknowledge refers to God's election, or his choice of the specific individuals that he would save. Then, the verse says that these individuals whom God has elected, he has also predestined, not to repeat the idea of election, but to say that he has set forth a destiny or purpose for them. And their destiny is "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son."

Peter also defined foreknowledge as foreordination, not as something that God passively detect, but as something that God actively decide. He said, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to

death by nailing him to the cross." He did not mean that God was passively aware of what men would do to Jesus, but he meant that his suffering was God's "set purpose." Referring to the same topic, the disciples said together with Peter and John, "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." The terms "foreknowledge," "set purpose," and "decided beforehand" carry equivalent meanings. Foreknowledge refers to the "set purpose" of God. It does not refer to what God has detected beforehand, but to what he has "decided beforehand."

Again, Peter wrote, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance." Without further argument, we must conclude that the foreknowledge in this passage cannot mean a passive prescience. It must refer to what God's "power and will had decided beforehand should happen." It says that we are, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Of course we are – the verse means that Christians have been individually chosen and foreordained for salvation by the will of God.

The Christian doctrine of election contradicts the humanist doctrine of free will. Although it is often assumed that human beings possess free will, this is a pagan notion that is refuted in the Bible. The human obsession with autonomy was first introduced to Adam and Eve by Satan. He enticed them to defy God and to begin to decide for themselves. This was the root of the fall of humanity. And of course a doctrine that comes from this root of evil would reject the doctrines of divine sovereignty and predestination.

People are imprecise on the topic of free will. There is often a strange conflation of the will and free will, as if to think that if the will exists at all, then there must be free will. There is no reason to assume this. In fact, it is rather stupid to make this into an argument to defend free will. Just because there is such a thing as milk does not mean that all milk is chocolate milk. Milk is the general term, and chocolate is the modifier. It would be stupid to say that if there is no such thing as chocolate milk, then there is no such thing as milk. Likewise, the will is the general term, free will refers to a specific view about the will. The idea of freedom is a modifier to the idea of the will. It is not necessary to the idea of the will. The concept of the will is intelligible without assuming that it is free.

The will is a function of the mind. When the mind makes a decision, this is an exercise of the will. However, this mental action is never determined by the mind itself, but by something other than the mind. Suppose we say that the mind is subject to innate propensities and outside factors, and these innate propensities and outside factors combine to determine what the mind decides. But the mind still decides. The decision still happens. The will exists even if it is not free from these things.

It is said that the mind is free because it decides according to its own nature and it is uncoerced. This misses the point. First, the mind itself does not decide that it would decide

according to its own nature. Second, the mind itself does not create or decide these innate propensities and outside factors. And third, the mind itself does not create or decide the fact that it would be subject to these innate propensities and outside factors. God is the one who has determined these things. Moreover, God is free to act on the mind apart from these innate propensities and outside factors. And God is even free to cause the mind to decide against its own nature.

On the other hand, no one can determine God's propensities and environment. No one can determine how God relates to his propensities and environment. And no one can act directly on God's mind to determine his decision. He said, "I AM WHO I AM." He is self-existent, self-sustaining, and self-determining. Therefore, it follows that only God possesses free will. God is the only real cause of all events and conditions, whether physical or mental. Human decisions are not self-caused or uncaused. They are caused by God, man has no free will.

Man has no free will whether or not we are talking about salvation. When it comes to salvation, no one under the dominion of sin can simply decide to be free from it unless God causes him to be free. And before God does this, the person would not want to be free from sin. Salvation is wholly the work of God. No one may boast of his works or his good sense in choosing Christ and believing the gospel. After a person has become a Christian, he still has no free will. As the Bible says, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." God, not the man, is the one who causes the decisions and the actions. And he causes the decisions and actions according to God's purpose, not man's purpose.

God is the one who determines the thoughts and decisions of man. He exercises immediate control over the mind. He determines the innate propensities and external factors, and he determines how the human mind relates to them. God is the one who forms a person in the womb, who determines the inward dispositions, and who arranges the outward circumstances. The doctrine of election indeed contradicts the free will of man, but free will is a human invention. It is a sinful assumption or aspiration, and not a biblical teaching. The "free will" objection against divine election fails because free will does not exist.

God's people should consider this a comforting doctrine, and not a disturbing one. This is because God causes good things in his chosen people, things that lead to salvation, healing, and prosperity. The faith in our hearts is evidence that God has chosen us and has decided to cause good things for us.

Another objection against the doctrine of divine sovereignty is that it appears to contradict human responsibility. The assumption is that human responsibility presupposes human freedom, that man is responsible only if he is free. But if God exercises complete control over human decisions and actions, then man has no freedom, and therefore divine sovereignty and human responsibility seem to contradict each other. And this is a problem because it is insisted that human responsibility must be maintained.



However, responsibility has no direct association with freedom. By definition, to be responsible is to be required to offer an answer or an account. Apart from any consideration as to whether man has freedom, God indeed demands man to offer an account for his thoughts and actions. As the Bible says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Human responsibility is established apart from any discussion on human freedom.

Man is responsible precisely because God is sovereign, because to be responsible means to be held accountable. It means that a person must explain and justify his thoughts and his actions, and that he will be rewarded or punished according to a certain standard of right and wrong. Moral responsibility has to do with whether God has decided to judge man and whether God has the power and authority to enforce his decision. It is entirely dependent on divine sovereignty and has nothing to do with human freedom. Man is responsible because God will reward obedience and punish rebellion, but this does not suggest that man has freedom to choose between obedience and rebellion.

The Bible says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Man is responsible for his sins not because he has the freedom or ability to abstain. This verse says that he cannot abstain from sin. He has no freedom and no ability to stop himself from committing sin. Rather, man is responsible because God has decided to judge him for his sins. Therefore, human responsibility does not presuppose human freedom, but human responsibility presupposes divine sovereignty. Thus divine sovereignty indeed contradicts human freedom, but divine sovereignty is the very thing that establishes human responsibility. Man is responsible precisely because he is not free.

Another attempt to reject the biblical doctrine of election is to distort it into a doctrine of corporate election. The claim is that God indeed elects some for salvation, but that election is corporate in nature. It is denied that God chooses specific individuals. Now the Bible says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." The text says that God's election is in Christ, and so this objection against the biblical doctrine claims that the object of election is Christ, and whoever comes into Christ becomes one of the elect.

However, the text does not say that God chose Christ, and it does not say that God chose Christ to receive salvation, as if Christ needed it. The text says, "he chose us." It does not say, "he chose him." Then it says, "He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ." God predestined us – not Christ, but the individuals – to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. And then it says, "He has freely given us in the One he loves." God gives salvation to us in Christ. He does not give salvation to Christ and then wait for us to come into Christ by some sort of self-election.

Christ is the chosen one to achieve salvation, not to receive salvation. Election in the context of receiving salvation refers to the individuals that God has chosen to save through Jesus Christ. Christ is the one chosen to save, and the elect are the ones chosen to be saved. The words "in him" in the text corresponds to "through Christ Jesus" and "in the One he loves." All three expressions refer to Christ as the means of salvation, and not the object of salvation.

Paul said to the Corinthians, "But God chose...so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." God was the one who made the choice in election so that "no one may boast before him." Contrary to the assertion that Christ is the object of election, and that whoever comes into him becomes God's elect, the passage says, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus." God chooses who becomes "in Christ," and therefore divine election is a selection of individuals.

When Paul addressed the issue of Israel's unbelief, he appealed to the doctrine of individual election. Although national Israel was supposedly God's chosen nation, most of its people had rejected Christ, and they did not obtain salvation. Paul's answer was that God's promise and election applied to only specific individuals. His answer depended entirely on the idea that election to salvation is individual, not corporate.

He added two illustrations to emphasize individual election. First, he said that Abraham's true children would come through Isaac. He meant that they would come through God's supernatural power to fulfill his promise rather than by natural generation. "It is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." God made the promise to Abraham, but he distinguished the individual of Isaac against the individual of Ishmael. So God's grace did not apply to the "children of Abraham" in a corporate sense, but in a selective and individual sense.

Second, he made the same point again with Isaac. Two children, even twins, came from the same father, but God chose to love one and hate the other. As if to stress individual election even more, God defied custom and tradition, and he chose the younger instead of the elder. Paul's explanation for Israel's unbelief was successful only because he asserted individual election against corporate election. God's promise to Israel did not fail because the promise was only to chosen individuals within this Israel, and these individuals form the true Israel.

Corporate election fails to explain why anyone would come into Christ without having been individually chosen and then "dragged" to Christ by God. It destroys all sense of divine election with a view of salvation that amounts to self-election, since the sinner must choose Christ without first being chosen and enabled by God. Corporate election must face all the problems associated with self-election and human freedom, which we have thoroughly refuted. God selects individuals for salvation. Scripture says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." According to what we have established about the depravity of man and his bondage to sin, if Christ were to be the only object of election, no one would enter into him, and no one

would be saved. For a person to be saved, God must first choose and then act on his mind. Divine election must consist of God's choice of individuals for salvation.

Some people complain that if God has predetermined the identities of those who would be saved, this would render the work of evangelism meaningless. They claim that the doctrine destroys the reason or motive for evangelism. However, the doctrine has been established by biblical evidence. In other words, these people claim that God himself destroys evangelism. This is blasphemy. Certainly, they would like others to think that their objection arises from a pious and noble concern for evangelism. However, the assumption behind the objection is that the only sufficient reason or motive for obedience to God's command on evangelism is that disobedience to it would result in the damnation of multitudes. Instead of piety, the objection betrays their unmatched arrogance and wickedness.

Someone who makes this objection must assume that obedience to God is meaningful only if disobedience would result in an inconceivable and permanent disaster for billions of people. If not, he finds no reason or motive to obey God at all. He has zero respect for God himself, but he is only concerned about consequences. Although God has commanded him to preach the gospel, this carries no weight with him whatsoever! He has no incentive to make any effort unless he knows that other people will be forever damned for his disobedience. Unless his role is so essential that it determines the salvation or damnation of other people, he thinks it is useless to pay attention to God. Thus this objection poses no threat to the biblical doctrine of election, but it exposes the person as a disgrace to humanity and to the church.

God's command to preach the gospel is sufficient to infuse meaning and purpose to evangelism. His commands are inherently meaningful, and demand obedience. In addition, God controls both the means and the ends. He determines not only what he wants to happen but also how it will happen, and he has decided that Christians would participate in bringing the chosen ones to faith in Christ. We should be grateful that God would use our effort as the means by which he summons those he has chosen for salvation. It is astoundingly evil to declare that if our role is not pivotal enough, then we have no reason or desire to make any effort at all.

God does not need us. As the Bible says, "He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." His commands never reflect his need, since he has none, but they reflect his prescription for our faith and life. We preach the gospel so that, in obedience to God's command and foreordination, those who are "appointed for eternal life" will come to Christ, and not because they will be damned without us. But some people insist that it is more important to be needed by God than to be obedient to God. And if God does not desperately need them, then the whole thing is meaningless. Such is the depravity and foolishness of sinners.

The other side of the doctrine of election is the doctrine of REPROBATION. Just as God has created and chosen some people for salvation, he has created and chosen all others for damnation. Just as he has determined which specific individuals would be saved, he has

determined which specific individuals would be damned. As the Bible says, "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction?"

Theologians attempt to dilute this doctrine by suggesting that God merely "passes over" the reprobates. He merely refrains from choosing them for salvation and leaves them in a state of damnation. However, the Bible not only teaches that God specifically designates individuals as reprobates, but he directly creates them as reprobates. He designs and creates specific individuals for damnation. Then God even actively hardens their hearts against himself and the gospel: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

The Bible teaches that God routinely hardens the hearts of men against himself, so that they would continue in sin and God could damn them to hell. This is repeated over and over again in Scripture: "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go"; "For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses"; "Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance"; "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them"; "What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.'"

God creates the reprobates as sinners. He designates them as reprobates for damnation. And he hardens their hearts to ensure that they remain in sin. Then he holds them accountable for their wickedness and damns them to hell. The chain of events is biblical, intelligible, and logical. We have established that creatures have no free will, and that human responsibility does not assume human freedom. God controls all things, including the thoughts and actions of man, but man is still responsible for his thoughts and actions precisely because God sovereignly holds him accountable. Responsibility presupposes accountability, but accountability does not presuppose ability or freedom. Rather, accountability presupposes someone who demands accountability. Since God demands accountability, man is accountable. Since God is sovereign, he decides what he wants to decide, and whether or not man has free will has no place in the discussion.

For many people, now the question becomes one about justice. They insist that it would be unjust for God to punish those whom he has predestined to damnation, and who could not decide or perform otherwise. Paul anticipated this objection and wrote, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" This reinforces our understanding of the doctrine, because otherwise this objection would not have come up against Paul. He replied, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say

to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Paul did not attempt to clarify the doctrine, as if the objection had misunderstood it. He affirmed the doctrine of reprobation as we have stated it, and his answer was that mere humans had no right to protest. God rules by absolute authority – no one can hinder him, and no one can question him. This is true because God is the creator of all that exists, and he has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"

The apostle continued, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" God is sovereign. He has the right to create some people destined for salvation, and some destined for damnation. Of course, those who are created and chosen for salvation rejoice in this doctrine, and those who are created and chosen for damnation detest it. But there is nothing that anyone can do about it.

God is the standard of justice. His words and actions reveal what justice means. The issue of justice is brought up against the doctrine of reprobation because people assume their own standard of justice and attempt to hold God accountable to it. They wish to dictate how God must dispense his mercy. This is evidence of the utter depravity and insolence of sinners.

God demands us to accept what he teaches about human depravity, and to understand election and reprobation. The Bible says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every man is a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death"; therefore, justice demands the damnation of every man.

The Bible does not say that the elect receive mercy while the non-elect receive injustice. All human beings are sinners. If anyone is saved, he is saved by mercy. Thus the ones whom God has chosen for salvation would receive mercy. And the ones whom God has chosen for damnation would receive justice. The reprobates receive justice, and that is why they receive damnation. They are in fact sinners. There is nothing unjust about it. God has no obligation to show mercy to anyone, and the fact that he shows mercy to anyone does not mean that he must show mercy to everyone.

Once it is claimed that God is somehow required to show mercy to someone, we are in fact no longer speaking about mercy, but justice. It is a contradiction to say that it is unjust to withhold mercy. It is not mercy that grants what is required, but justice. But justice results in the damnation of humanity and not salvation. What is "fair" is for everyone to be damned, since this is the proper punishment for sin. We should be thankful that God shows mercy to anyone at all, rather than to accuse him with the blasphemous charge of being unjust or not showing enough mercy.

Although we have no right to demand an explanation, the Bible tells us why God's work of reprobation is both good and necessary: "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" God has "prepared for destruction" certain individuals, so that he may "show his wrath and make his power known." And "he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." In other words, God damns the reprobates so that the chosen ones can witness his glory and his wrath. Since the chosen ones have been "saved from God's wrath" by Christ, they will never experience his wrath. But wrath remains a divine attribute, an essential aspect of his nature. God's love toward his chosen ones is characterized by his eagerness to reveal himself to them, and therefore he has prepared the reprobates for such a purpose.

God has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation just as a potter has the right to do whatever he wishes with a lump of clay. No one can accuse God of being cruel or unjust for creating the reprobates. God is the sole moral authority, and God calls himself just and good. Therefore, whatever he says and does is just and good by definition. It follows that his work of reprobation is just and good by definition, and no one can accuse God of unrighteousness. There is no standard of right and wrong outside of God by which to accuse God of wrongdoing. God is his own moral standard. He is righteous because he calls himself righteous.

The doctrine of reprobation does not incite us to challenge God's justice, but it enlightens us about God's great love for his chosen ones. God controls the reprobates to serve his own ends, and he "causes all things to work together" for the good of the chosen ones. He manipulates the lives of the reprobates in ways that promote the good of his own people. Even the damnation of sinners is for the benefit and edification of Christians, for such is the love of God toward those who worship and follow him in faith and sincerity.

## **SUMMONED BY GOD**

The Bible teaches that for those whom God has chosen for salvation, he has also foreordained a destiny, and this destiny is to conform to the likeness of his Son. And to those whom he has foreordained this destiny, in due time he also issues a call to them so that they may come to Christ. And so the Bible says, "Those he predestined, he also called."

All who are included in one phase of redemption also enter into the next phase. All whom God has selected, he has also predestined, and all whom God has predestined, he also calls to Christ. But the Bible continues to say, "Those he called, he also justified." Thus all whom God calls will also attain justification. And since justification is by faith in Christ, this means that all whom God calls will obtain faith in Christ. Therefore, God's calling toward the elect is bound to be effective, and so theologians call this act of God an EFFECTUAL CALLING.

Since the effectual calling is one whose result is guaranteed, it is not like an "invitation" that the elect may accept or reject. Rather, it is more like what we mean by "summon." When God calls his elect, he does not merely invite them to do something, but God himself does something to them. As he calls his people, whom he has chosen before the creation of the world, he also enables and compels them to come. Those whom God has selected and predestined in eternity, he also summons to Christ in history.

Preaching is not the only way God summons his chosen people. Hosts of individuals have come to faith in Christ by reading the Bible or Christian literature for themselves. And there are still other means through which God issues his effectual calling. God can even preach the gospel to sinners by visions and dreams. As long as the content of the message is true, it is a legitimate message and able to save anyone who believes.

Nevertheless, God often summons the elect through the preaching of the gospel. Although God has chosen only some people to receive salvation, and only those people will believe the gospel, Christians do not first learn the identities of the elect, and then preach the gospel only to them. They preach the gospel to all creation, and whoever believes will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Whether it is in the form of public oration, private conversation, written literature, or other means, the gospel is declared to both the elect and the non-elect. The elect will come to faith in Jesus Christ and receive salvation. The non-elect will either explicitly reject the message, or they will inwardly reject the message but produce a temporary and false profession of faith.

For this reason, theologians distinguish between the OUTWARD CALLING and the INWARD CALLING. The outward calling refers to the preaching of the gospel by men, and it is presented to both the elect and the non-elect. On the other hand, the inward or effectual calling is a work of God that accompanies the outward calling to cause the elect to come to faith in Christ. The preaching of the gospel appears as an outward calling to all men, but it also becomes an inward summons to the elect. The outward calling is produced by men, but the inward calling is a work

of God that occurs only to the elect. And this inward calling is usually concurrent with the outward calling. In other words, many people may hear the gospel in a given setting, but God will cause only the elect to believe what is preached, while he hardens the non-elect against it. Many receive the outward call of the gospel, but relatively few are among God's chosen ones. Only these people will respond with genuine and permanent professions of faith.



## **RECREATED BY GOD**

The sinful nature of man is the mind's strong disposition toward evil. His heart is filled with wickedness. His spirit is rooted in rebellion. REGENERATION is a work of God in which he changes this evil disposition into one that delights in the laws and precepts of God, and this results in what amounts to a spiritual resurrection. Regeneration is a drastic and permanent transformation at the deepest level of one's personality and intellect, which we may call a RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION. It is radical in the sense that it occurs at the very root of a man's personality. The person's most basic commitments are turned to God, away from the abominable objects and principles that he once served. This change in his first principle of thought and conduct generates a rippling effect that transforms the entire spectrum of his worldview and lifestyle.

Regeneration, or being "born again," occurs in conjunction with God's effectual call toward his chosen ones, and enables them to respond in faith and repentance toward Christ. This means that regeneration precedes faith. A person is not born again by faith, but he is enabled to believe because God has first regenerated him. Faith is not the precondition of regeneration, but regeneration is the precondition of faith.

The reason Christians often think that regeneration occurs by faith is because they have confused regeneration with "salvation" in general, and they have confused regeneration with "justification" in particular. Salvation is a general term that entails a number of things, including conversion, justification, sanctification, and so on. In justification God confers upon the elect the righteousness merited by Christ. He credits the righteousness of Christ to their account. The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith, and not that we are regenerated by faith. Confusion results when one considers justification and regeneration as referring to "salvation" in the same sense.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." The word "see" refers to the ability to understand, or "see into." Paul wrote, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." If they cannot "see" the gospel, they cannot accept it, which makes it impossible for them to be saved. In another place, the Bible says, "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." And, "otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" Only when one is able to see will he understand, and only when one understands will he be able to turn, or be "converted." If it is necessary to "see" before one has faith, and if the ability to "see" is only possible after regeneration, then regeneration must come before faith.

God has chosen a number of individuals to receive salvation. Christ came to this earth and paid the price of sin for these chosen ones. Each of the elect is summoned to believe the gospel at specific times appointed by God. However, since the elect are born sinners, there is present within them a strong disposition toward evil, which makes them unable and unwilling to

respond. Therefore, God regenerates the elect sinners as he summons them, and places in each of them a new nature that is disposed toward God and righteousness. Regeneration is a MONERGISTIC work. It is a work of God that produces its effects without any cooperation from the one being saved.

John acknowledged the monergistic nature of regeneration when he wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The passage indicates that regeneration does not occur by belonging to a particular bloodline, and it does not occur by "human decision." Scripture teaches that regeneration is a work of God that he performs in his chosen ones, and that it does not occur by the will of man: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." A man does not become born again by a decision for Christ, but his decision to follow Christ happens because God has caused him to be born again.

If man is spiritually dead before regeneration, then regeneration must precede faith. Before regeneration, the mind is hostile toward the things of God. By themselves, the chosen ones would never come to faith in Christ when presented with the gospel. God is the one who acts first. He changes their disposition from evil to good, and from darkness to light. Then they respond to the gospel by faith in Christ, and they are revealed as justified before God.

## **CONVERTED BY GOD**

After God has regenerated him, the elect individual perceives the truth of the gospel and responds to the effectual call as he undergoes CONVERSION, which consists of repentance and faith. The message of Jesus to the people was, "Repent and believe the good news." And he reprimanded "the chief priests and the elders of the people," that they did not "repent and believe" under the ministry of John the Baptist.

The word "conversion" signifies a turning, and includes both repentance and faith. Repentance is the part of conversion in which a person turns away from sin, while faith is where he turns toward Christ for salvation. The Bible affirms the close connection between repentance and faith. It says that the "elementary teachings about Christ" consist of "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God." The writer calls this the "foundation" or beginning of the Christian life.

In REPENTANCE, the sinner first comes to a true realization of his sinful condition. Since God has already regenerated him, he finds this sinful condition repugnant and determines to turn from both the lifestyle consisting of sins and the individual acts of sins.

Repentance is volitional and not emotional. Although intense emotions may accompany the turning of the mind, it is not a necessary or defining element. Of course, a mental state that consists of nothing more than an emotional upheaval over one's sins and shortcomings without a volitional act of turning does not constitute repentance, and therefore is not associated with faith and justification.

Conversion does not result only in a negative change, in which a person turns from sins and idols, but the Bible says that the individual also turns "to serve the living and true God." Moreover, a definite and biblical system of theology has been added to the person's thinking, and replaces the former unbiblical worldview. This aspect of conversion is called FAITH.

Theologians often propose that faith consists of three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. However, the truth is that faith consists of only knowledge and assent, and trust is only shorthand for assent.

KNOWLEDGE in our context refers to the intellectual retention and comprehension of biblical propositions. This is a necessary element of faith since it is impossible to believe something without knowing what to believe. Faith is impossible without knowledge.

God grants knowledge to an individual as the first element of saving faith often through the preaching of the gospel. As Paul said, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Knowledge also implies understanding in this case. Just as it is impossible to believe in something while it remains undefined, a person cannot believe in something while the definition is not understood. Since the gospel is always presented in propositional form, the knowledge and

understanding necessary for faith refer to the retention and comprehension of the gospel propositions.

ASSENT is agreement to the understood propositions. Although anyone may gain some understanding of the gospel message, not everyone will agree with it. It is easy for a person to explain the biblical teaching on the resurrection of Christ, but whether the hearer will agree that it really occurred is a different matter. The evil disposition of the unregenerate mind prevents a person from assenting to the gospel regardless of the preacher's persuasiveness. Therefore, one must first be regenerated by God, so as to gain a new disposition that is favorable to the gospel, after which he will readily assent to the gospel.

Since many theologians think that the non-elect can truly assent to the gospel without "personal trust" in Christ, they also argue that knowledge and assent are insufficient to save. Rather, one must add to knowledge and assent the third element of TRUST, which they define as a personal and relational reliance on the person of Christ. Whereas trust entails commitment, somehow assent does not. They say that although the objects of knowledge and assent are propositions, the object of trust must be a person, namely, Christ. That is, saving faith believes in Christ as a person, and not only a set of propositions.

Although not all theologians divide faith into these three elements, many of them define it in ways that amount to claiming that saving faith must move from the intellectual to the relational, the propositional to the personal, and from assent to trust. To them, assent corresponds to a "believe that" faith, while trust is a "believe in" faith. Assent believes that certain things about Christ are true, but trust goes beyond that to believe in the person of Christ. They claim that faith is belief in a person, not facts about the person. They point to biblical passages demanding a faith that believes in the gospel, such as, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved," and "This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."

However, there are conclusive reasons to reject this distinction between assent and trust, and instead to affirm that faith consists only of knowledge and assent.

First, the Bible does not exclusively use the "believe in" type of language when referring to faith. For example, it says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." The verse demands that someone who comes to God must assent to two propositions. He must believe that "God exists," and that "God rewards those who earnestly seek him." The writer says that this kind of faith can "please God," and that "the ancients were commended for" having it. This "believe that" faith is true faith.

Second, the New Testament indicates that to believe in Christ means to believe that certain propositions are true. Paul wrote, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the

Twelve." The apostle indicated that the gospel consists of a series of "that" statements. Faith in the gospel leading to salvation consists of believing "that" Christ died for our sins, "that" he was buried, "that" he was raised from the dead, and so on. True faith is a "believe that" faith. To "believe in" Christ is to "believe that" certain propositions about him are true.

Third, an analysis of language demonstrates that to "believe in" a person is nothing other than shorthand for to "believe that" certain propositions about him are true. What theologians call trust is nothing other than a shorthand for what they call assent.

To illustrate, there are two ways to understand the question, "Do you believe in the devil?" It may be asking whether one believes that the devil exists, or whether he believes that the devil is worthy of our worship and reliance. That is, the question implies one of the two propositions, and it asks a person to affirm or deny it. A Christian would affirm the first and deny the second. However, unless the context of the conversation establishes the meaning of the question, or unless the person makes an assumption as to the meaning of the question, it is impossible to tell which proposition is intended.

Thus the proposition, "He believes in the devil" is nothing more than a shorthand for one of the two propositions: either "He believes that the devil exists" or "He believes that the devil is worthy of worship." By itself, the "believe in" proposition is ambiguous. In fact, it shows that a "believe in" proposition requires a "believe that" proposition to define it.

We used the devil as an illustration because when we refer to faith in God, people tend to allow false piety to obscure the plain meaning of language. But we see the same issue when we return the focus to faith in God. The meaning of "I believe in God" is undefined unless it is explained by one or more "believe that" propositions. For example: "I believe that God exists" and "I believe that God is a rewarder." The Bible demands this "believe that" kind of faith, and no one can approach God without it.

We have used two "believe that" propositions as examples of what a "believe in" proposition might represent, but the "believe in" proposition can in fact represent an infinite number of possible "believe that" propositions or even a combination of "believe that" propositions. For example, when I say "I believe in God," I mean I that God exists, that God is omnipotent, that God is omniscient, that God is loving, that God is holy, and many other propositions. This is why a "believe in" proposition is a shorthand, because in itself it tells us almost nothing, but it represents one, or two, or five, or ten thousand "believe that" propositions. And without these "believe that" propositions, we have almost no idea what is meant by the "believe in" proposition. If we are able to list all the "believe that" propositions, then we will not need the "believe in" proposition, of course, except for the sake of brevity. The "believe in" proposition is not a higher dimension of belief, but it is only a summary of all the "believe that" propositions that it represents.

Therefore, when preachers and theologians declare that it is not enough to "believe that" certain things about Christ are true, but that we must "believe in" Christ, they are speaking

nonsense. When they say you must believe in Christ, in the sense that Christ died for your personally or some such thing, this is represented by a "believe that" proposition. You "believe that" Christ died for your personally. You "believe that" Christ is not a savior in some general sense or only for other people, but you "believe that" he is your personal savior. Whatever they demand, it is easily represented by a "believe that" proposition.

To believe or have faith in something or someone is to believe or have faith that certain propositions about that something or someone are true. To have faith in God and in Christ is precisely to believe something about them – to have a "believe that" faith. Some people might consider it more pious or intimate to say that faith must go beyond the intellectual and that faith is belief or trust in a person instead of assent to propositions, but this idea of faith is meaningless. A faith that does not "believe that" certain propositions are true does not believe anything at all. The content of this so-called faith is undefined. There is, in fact, no faith.

One statement from the Letter of James is often used to oppose the truth that faith is belief in propositions. The verse states, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." The objection claims this verse indicates that although it is good to believe "that there is one God," in that this is a true proposition, but it is not a saving faith. Even the demons believe this, and therefore a mere agreement with the gospel does not amount to the kind of faith that saves. However, this interpretation ignores the teaching of the passage. It shoves James aside completely. It kidnaps the words of a text, severs it from its context, and reintroduces it to assert something different.

Just before this verse, the letter says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James asserted that some people claimed to have faith, but there was something missing from their faith, and this missing thing was action or good works. It was the entire point of this section of the letter. If our verse is used to show that assent to propositions is an insufficient faith, then the same verse would teach that the missing ingredient is good works. The verse never suggests that the missing thing is trust, or personal commitment, or any such thing. This means that those who use the verse to define saving faith must repudiate justification by faith. If they do this, then they are not Christians themselves, and they would have no right to instruct anyone about true faith. The verse does not support the point that they wish to make.

Paul explained that justification is by faith alone apart from works. James did not disagree, but he had a different emphasis. True faith results in behavior that is consistent with this faith. The demons believe that there is one God, but their behavior is not consistent with a faith that follows and worships God. Instead of worshiping him as God, they shudder and continue to resist him.

James never suggested that the alternative to the belief of demons is some sort of personal trust, whatever that means. Theologians have arbitrarily introduced it into the verse. But James taught that true faith would produce actions that correspond. Our idea of faith, therefore, ought to include obedience to the teachings and implications of the propositions that we

affirm. This obedience can also be represented in propositions, such as, "I believe that I will worship God," "I believe that I will help the poor," and "I believe that I will pray for the sick." The demons do not agree to these things.

To believe that "There is one God" also implies that "I should worship him alone," because God is the ultimate being that is inherently worthy. The fact that demons do not worship God implies that they either refuse to acknowledge the full meaning of the word, or they, fully aware of its implications, refuse to grant complete assent to the proposition.

So the nature of faith is assent to knowledge. This knowledge denotes an understanding of certain propositions. And the source of these propositions is revelation, or Scripture. Therefore, the Christian definition of faith is voluntary and intelligent assent to biblical or revealed propositions. This assent entails obedience to the demands inherently present in the propositions. While saving faith consists of assent to certain propositions related to the redemptive work of Christ, biblical faith in general continues to abide and develop in the Christian as he assents to these same propositions along with other ones in the Bible, and in this manner he grows in spiritual maturity.

Instead of using the word "trust" to distinguish true and false faith, we need to distinguish true assent from false assent, or distinguish true faith from false faith. A person can physically say that he believes something, but he does not truly believe it. This is not assent without trust. There is no assent. It is an outright lie. Anyone can say that he believes anything, but he might believe something different. This is how God himself distinguishes between true and false faith. As he said, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." God did not say that the people had genuine assent to the truth, only that they lacked the additional ingredient of trust. No, God said they lied. They pretended to honor God. On the inside, they did not worship him, they did not believe him. They did not assent to the truth.

Faith is true assent to revealed or biblical propositions. Since God knows the heart, he directly knows whether it is true or false assent. But true assent to biblical propositions will produce the outward evidence of obedience to these propositions. On the other hand, a person with false assent to biblical propositions claims that he agrees with them, but he does not produce the thinking, speech, and conduct implied by such an agreement.

Salvation by grace through faith is a gift from God: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Faith cannot be manufactured by man, but it can only be given to him. This is consistent with the monergistic nature of salvation. From election to regeneration, and now to repentance and faith, salvation is the work of God and not of man. No one may boast about his conversion and his faith in the gospel.

God's work of regeneration changes the disposition and volition of man. Without this, no one can truly assent to the biblical propositions about God and Christ. Our definition indicates that faith has a volitional element, in that it is a voluntary assent to the gospel. The will of the

unregenerate man cannot assent to the gospel, but a person who has been regenerated by God has been made willing to believe in Jesus Christ. God has changed his will. Therefore, God does not "compel" a person to faith in the sense of forcing him to believe what he consciously refuses to accept, but God "compels" a change in the person's will by regeneration so that his assent to the gospel is indeed voluntary. Faith is voluntary in the sense that the person indeed decides to accept the gospel, but he does this only because God causes him to so decide. Without God's power to "compel" or to change the will, no one would decide to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." But it also says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Since the sinful mind cannot submit to God, it must mean that the person who "chooses to do God's will" has been changed by God, so that his disposition is no longer sinful but righteous. Then he willingly chooses to do the will of God, and he becomes able to discern that the gospel is true. Again, this means that regeneration must precede faith, and that faith itself is a gift from God.



## **JUSTIFIED BY GOD**

Christians are accustomed to the idea that "salvation" comes by faith, especially in opposition to works. Although faith is applied to every aspect of the Christian life, it has special relevance when it comes to the justification of God's people. JUSTIFICATION is an act of God by which he imputes the righteousness of Christ to the elect person, and declares that this elect person is righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. It is a forensic righteousness credited to the believer as a gift, and not a righteousness achieved by the person's own good works.

Since justification refers to Christ's righteousness credited to the elect, and precedes many of the other items in the application of redemption, in a sense, it is not wrong to say that faith leads to the subsequent items in the order of salvation to which justification is the precondition. And faith is applied to all these aspects of salvation as well. For example, the Bible says that we are "sanctified by faith." Nevertheless, regeneration precedes both faith and justification. It is never said to follow from faith or to be the result of faith, and it is never confused with justification. The logical order is regeneration, then faith, then justification.

God had chosen certain individuals to receive salvation, and he sent Jesus Christ to die for them and to pay for their sins. He has appointed a time for each of these chosen ones to be summoned and converted. This is when he changes their sinful disposition to one that delights in his will and laws. Along with this new nature, God causes them to respond with faith toward the gospel, and he declares that they have been made righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. God is the one who regenerates us, who summons us to faith, who creates and causes faith in us, and who then declares us righteous. Salvation is wholly a work of God.

Justification is by faith and not works. As the Bible says, "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness," and "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

The forensic nature of justification means that the righteousness credited to Christians is an IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS rather than an INFUSED RIGHTEOUSNESS. God sent Jesus Christ to pay for the sins of his people, then he grants faith to them as the means by which he credits the righteousness of Christ to them. The righteousness bestowed is not one that they have produced by themselves, but one that has been achieved by Christ and given to them as a gift. Therefore, when we affirm that justification is by faith alone, we do not mean that faith as such saves or justifies us, but we mean that justification is not by our own efforts, which can never attain righteousness. Rather, we mean that our justification is by Christ alone, who has attained righteousness for us.

Since justification involves a forensic declaration, it is an instantaneous act. A person is either justified or unjustified. He does not gradually become justified, but he is revealed as justified through Jesus Christ when he professes faith in the gospel. Therefore, the concept of justification excludes the process by which the Christian grows in knowledge and holiness, which comes under sanctification. Christians who affirm justification by faith alone sometimes still confuse imputed righteousness and infused righteousness. Justification is imputed righteousness, and sanctification is infused righteousness. Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness, but sanctification, when used in the progressive sense, refers to one's spiritual development after justification.

## **ADOPTED BY GOD**

ADOPTION is an act of God by which he inducts the elect into his family. Recall that Jesus called the elect his sheep even before they believed in him. In this sense, God thinks of the elect as his people before the elect themselves are awakened to faith and righteousness. So when we refer to justification, adoption, and so on, as if these are things that occur in history, we do not deny that God has already decided them in eternity.

People often think that every human being is a child of God. The Bible contradicts this error. It declares that every non-Christian is a child of Satan. On the other hand, those who are saved by Christ have been made the children of God: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

Perhaps this doctrine has been so diluted and abused in Christian circles and in the world that we are not as in awe with it as we should be. But it is no small matter to be called the children and heirs of God: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."

An important implication of adoption into the family of God is that we may now relate to him as our Heavenly Father, and that we may now have fellowship with other Christians as true family members. In fact, the bond between Christians is stronger than the one between natural family members. We have been bound together by the will of God, the blood of Christ, and a common faith.

It is often assumed that the Bible teaches us to treat other people in an impartial way. For example, a person should not offer special treatment to a rich man just because he is rich. However, the Bible does not teach that we must treat all people alike, but we ought to give Christians the priority: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Christians come first when receiving charity and other forms of assistance.

Avoid confusing adoption with other items in the benefits of redemption. For example, regeneration is spiritual resurrection, which enables the individual to respond positively to God, but a person does not become a child of God by it. It is possible for a rational creature to be spiritually alive without being a member of God's family in the sense denoted by adoption. Angels may be an example of this class of beings.

In addition, adoption is not justification. It is possible for God to declare that a person is righteous without also making this person a son by adoption. One who has been regenerated

and justified stands righteous before God, and will never be condemned. The doctrine of adoption further enlightens us as to the extent of God's love toward his chosen ones, that in addition to saving them from sin and hell, he would make them his children and heirs.

Several items in the benefits of redemption have been distorted to denote deification. The doctrines of regeneration and glorification are especially prone to abuse. Jesus is God's "one and only Son." He has a unique place before God and a unique relationship with God. We are God's adopted children, and regeneration did not make us part of the Trinity! Salvation is not deification. The fact that Jesus is also referred to as the "firstborn" denotes his preeminence among God's creation and his elect. The term refers to rank. It does not imply that we are God's subsequent children in the same sense and in the same order of God the Son. For example, Scripture says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." This does not mean that the universe and the planets are also God's children.

## **SANCTIFIED BY GOD**

Theologians use the word SANCTIFICATION in two senses. DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION refers to the Christian's instant and decisive break from the dominion of sin when he comes to faith in Christ. God has consecrated and separated him from the world. But here we are interested in PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION, which refers to the Christian's gradual growth in knowledge and holiness, so that having received forensic righteousness in justification, he may now develop personal righteousness in his thought and conduct.

It is a mistake to think that the whole of sanctification is like justification in the sense that it is an immediate act of God whereby he causes us to achieve perfect holiness in thought and conduct, so that true Christians no longer commit sins. Although sanctification begins at regeneration, the Bible describes it as a growth process, so that a person increasingly thinks and behaves in a way that pleases God, and that conforms to the likeness of Christ.

When taken out of context, some passages in the Bible might give the impression that a person completely ceases to sin after regeneration. For example, John wrote, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." But this verse is saying that one who is born of God does not persist in a life of sin, and not that he does not sin at all. In fact, earlier John wrote, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." A regenerated person should exhibit a definite transformation in his thought and conduct. Perfection is not in view, but a turn from evil thinking and living toward holy thinking and living.

John said in the same letter, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." The atoning work of Christ has paid for not only those sins we had committed before regeneration, but also those subsequent to it. However, John did not say this to grant us the liberty to sin, but instead he said, "I write this to you so that you will not sin." The verse shows that he did not assume that the Christian has achieved sinless perfection, since he made provision for one who does sin, saying, "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense."

The Letter to the Hebrews presents sanctification as partly a "struggle against sin," but the Bible also tells us it is one that we can win. As Paul said, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Sin is not our master. We do not need to obey it. We have been set free from sin so that we may now live righteous lives.

As with all the areas of our spiritual life, the way we grow in holiness involves the intellect and volition, or the understanding and the will. Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us

everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." We grow in spiritual maturity first through knowledge. It would be impossible to shun wickedness and pursue righteousness without a clear conception of what wickedness and righteousness mean, and what thoughts and actions belong to each. As for our volition, Paul instructed, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Sanctification is a work of God. However, theologians often characterize sanctification as SYNERGISTIC in nature. This means that it is also a work of man. It involves his conscious decision and effort. The term implies that man also contributes his "energy" to the work of sanctification. This is not wrong if it is taken to mean that man is conscious of his thoughts and actions in the Christian life. But the term can be misleading.

Paul wrote, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." He said this to people who were already justified by faith. They had salvation, and they are to live out this salvation in their lives as God moved through their will and action.

The Christian actively takes part in his sanctification. He deliberately pursues a life of obedience to God. Nevertheless, the passage explains that even the working out of our salvation is in fact a work of God: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Thus even though we say that sanctification is synergistic, the effort that we put into the process comes from God. He works his will through our will, and he works his energy through our action. Therefore, although a person is conscious of his efforts in sanctification, God receives the honor, and the Christian still has no basis to boast of his achievements.

## **PRESERVED BY GOD**

The Bible says, "Those he justified, he also glorified." All those who receive justification will also receive glorification. No one who is justified will fail to be glorified. Glorification refers to the consummation of God's saving work in his people. So this means that once a person has been justified, his forensic righteousness will never be lost. Since all those who are justified will also be glorified, true Christians will never lose their salvation.

This doctrine is often called the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, and also ETERNAL SECURITY in some circles. These terms are accurate, since true Christians indeed consciously persevere in faith and the elect are indeed eternally secure in their salvation. However, the Bible emphasizes that it is God who actively preserves the Christian from the beginning to the end of his salvation, that Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith." This being the case, PRESERVATION is a better term. It reflects the fact that God is the one who maintains the Christian's salvation, and not the believer himself.

The perspective of preservation does not deny that the Christian must consciously improve and persevere. It is unbiblical to say that since it is God who keeps us, then there is no need for us to exercise any conscious effort in our spiritual development. However, the perspective of preservation reminds us that it is God who grants and causes any improvement and stability in our growth in knowledge and holiness, even if we are very aware of our efforts.

There are many biblical passages teaching that God preserves those whom he has chosen, regenerated, and justified. For example: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me"; "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day"; "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand"; "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The doctrine of preservation does not say that anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is saved and will never be lost. The person's profession of faith may be false. Rather, the doctrine teaches that true Christians will never be lost. They will never permanently turn away from Christ, although some of them may fall deeply into sin for a time.

A true Christian is one who has given true assent to the gospel, and whose "sincere faith" becomes evident through a lasting transformation of his thoughts, speech, and behavior in conformity to the demands of Scripture. John says that one who is regenerated "cannot go on sinning." On the other hand, a person who produces a profession of Christ out of a false assent to the gospel may last "only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."

Sometimes even a true Christian may fall into serious sin, but such a fall is never permanent. Nevertheless, as long as a person persists in a sinful lifestyle, we have no reason to believe his profession of faith, and therefore should think of him as an unbeliever. Jesus said that a stubborn refusal to repent is sufficient reason for excommunication: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Since he is regarded as an unbeliever, he cannot be a candidate for marriage by a Christian, he cannot participate in communion, and he cannot hold ministerial responsibilities. He may indeed be a true Christian, but there is no way to be certain of this while he remains in sin. Instead, he should be treated as a non-Christian, along with all the implications of such an assumption. "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure."

Those who permanently fall away and refuse to repent have never been saved. John said, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." Moreover, some people have spoken against the Holy Spirit. For example, the Pharisees claimed that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons by the power of demons. So they indirectly said that the Holy Spirit was a demon. Thus they committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Many people have spoken against healing the sick, speaking in tongues, and other works of the Spirit. In fact, they have said worse things than what the Pharisees said. Those who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit have never been saved, and they can never be saved. Their profession of faith is false. They will never be forgiven regardless of what they say and what they do. They are damned. They will burn in hellfire.

Judas appeared to follow Jesus for several years, but Jesus said, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" And Scripture explains, "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him." So it was not that Judas had true faith, and then fell into sin and lost his salvation. He never had true faith at all. Jesus chose Judas knowing that he would be the traitor: "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled." This statement presupposes divine election, and teaches the doctrines of preservation and reprobation. Jesus preserved the eleven, who were among the chosen ones, but Judas was lost because he was never saved in the first place. He was among the reprobates, "doomed to destruction."

On the other hand, those among the chosen ones who appear to fall from their faith nevertheless retain their salvation, and they will return to Christ according to God's power to preserve them. For example, even before Peter denied Christ, he was told, "Simon, Simon,



Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." If a person's faith is truly lost, then he has lost his salvation; however, this does not happen because God himself preserves the faith of his chosen ones. Either a person never had faith in the first place, or his faith can never be lost.

Just as Jesus prayed for Peter, now he prays for all Christians, so that no matter what spiritual problems they face, their faith will not fail. As Scripture says, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message," and "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Jesus made no such prayer for Judas, but he prays for his chosen ones: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours."

One objection states that if it is true that a Christian cannot lose his salvation, then this constitutes a license to sin. The Christian may sin all he wants, and he remains secure in Christ. The answer is that a true Christian does not wish to live in sin, although he may sometimes stumble. He detests sin and loves righteousness. A person who sins without restraint is not a Christian at all.

Numerous passages in Scripture command Christians to pursue righteousness and shun wickedness. Some of these passages are so strong in expression and contain warnings so ominous that people often misinterpret them to teach that a true Christian could lose his salvation.

For example, the Letter to the Hebrews says, "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

First, the passage does not say that the elect individual will in fact renounce his faith. Suppose the passage indeed means that if a person falls away from faith after reaching a certain stage of spiritual development, he would lose his salvation. This does not challenge the doctrine of preservation. In fact, we heartily agree with it. If a person sincerely and permanently renounces Christ, then he loses his salvation. However, the Bible repeatedly declares that this will never happen, that the true believer will never sincerely and permanently renounce Christ, and the passage from Hebrews says nothing to contradict this. Those who depart from the faith have never been truly with the faith.

Second, several verses later, the Bible states that what the passage describes will not happen: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation." In other words, "Although we are talking this way, I am sure that when it comes to salvation, this will not happen to you."

Third, God uses various means to accomplish his plans. For example, although he has determined the identities of those who would be saved, he does not save these people without means. He saves his people by means of the preaching of the gospel, and by means of the faith that he places within them. God uses various means to accomplish his ends, and he chooses and controls both the means and the outcomes.

Just because the chosen ones will persist in faith does not mean that God never warns them against apostasy. His warning about the consequences of renouncing the faith is one of the ways by which God prevents them from falling away. The reprobates will ignore his warning, but the chosen ones will listen, and so they will persist in faith and continue to pursue sanctification. Concerning the words of God, Scripture declares, "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

## **EMPOWERED BY GOD**

After a person has been born again and has believed in Jesus Christ, a vital next step is for him to receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls this the baptism of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, or receiving the Holy Spirit. The Faithless have resisted this teaching. They claim that what happens to us at conversion, when we believe in Jesus Christ, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they claim that when we receive Jesus Christ, we also receive the Holy Spirit.

However, the Bible contradicts this. Although the new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible does not say that this is to receive the Holy Spirit. It reserves this type of expression to a separate and subsequent experience. Regardless of how much the Holy Spirit is involved in regeneration when we receive Jesus Christ, it is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it is not being filled with the Holy Spirit. It does not matter in what sense one claims to "have" the Holy Spirit after conversion, the Bible does not say that this person has received the Holy Spirit.

The Bible describes regeneration as something performed by the Holy Spirit, but it refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as something performed by Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, convinces us of our need for Jesus Christ and creates faith in us to follow him. At this point, we are saved from the wrath of God. We are the children of God. When we receive Jesus Christ, we receive forgiveness and salvation. God credits the righteousness of Christ to our account.

After this, Jesus Christ baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. This is not for regeneration, not for forgiveness, and not for salvation. Rather, Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon us to give us power -- power to live this new life, power to speak for him, and power to perform miracles in his name.

The Faithless distort the letters of Paul to supplant this doctrine of Spirit baptism, but Paul himself asserts this doctrine of Spirit baptism in the Acts of the Apostles. In his letters, Paul would often assume that his readers have the Holy Spirit. False theology exploits this and claims the apostle thought that all those who had converted to Jesus also received the Holy Spirit at the same time.

However, we must remember that Paul's letters were written years after the baptism of the Holy Spirit had become the norm. He also assumed that his readers had received water baptism. Are we to assume that everyone who receives Jesus Christ is automatically baptized in water? Are we to think that when someone believes in Jesus, water supernaturally appears and drenches the person without delay? Nobody makes this absurd claim about water baptism, but they say this about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Of course we could assume that those who were saved by faith in Jesus had also received water baptism, because it was the standard teaching. Likewise, Paul could speak to Christians as if they had received the Holy Spirit, because it was the standard teaching that those who had

received Jesus should afterward also receive the Holy Spirit by faith. But it was a separate event, just as water baptism was a separate event.

The distinction is vital to the health of believers and churches, and to the progress of the gospel in the world. The conflation of receiving Jesus Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit has effectively eliminated the baptism of the Holy Spirit in those circles that insist on teaching this error. Suppose a church claims that the baptism of water is what happens when a person receives Jesus Christ. What would happen? It would effectively eliminate water baptism, since anyone who confesses Jesus Christ is declared as baptized with water, even when the reality is that it is a separate event.

For centuries, this error and heresy about the baptism of the Holy Spirit has existed in most church and seminary circles. And since the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the thing that confers power from God, many generations of people who claimed to follow Jesus Christ had lived without this power that he commanded his disciples to receive before they were considered equipped to be his witnesses. As a result, this error and heresy has done incalculable damages to the cause of the gospel.

This is a main reason believers and churches have been weak and defeated. And it is a main reason the gospel has not made more progress through the centuries. It is a main reason that religious leaders have resorted to carnal methods, and to cultural and political activism. Faithless doctrines and human traditions are directly responsible. If something is meant to provide salvation, but it is absorbed into another thing so that it disappears, then no one gets saved. And if something is meant to provide power, but it is absorbed into another thing so that it disappears, then no one obtains power.

Refer to this doctrine as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, or even receiving the Holy Spirit. Opponents would protest that this implies those who are saved have never "received" the Holy Spirit in any sense. However, regardless of the role of the Spirit in conversion, it is something else to "receive" the Holy Spirit. This is the way Scripture itself refers to this doctrine and experience, and this is the way Scripture itself distinguishes it from conversion. And so this is how we will proceed. There is no need to compromise on how we refer to it.

The Bible says that if anyone confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in his resurrection, then he is saved. The apostles received the Holy Spirit many days after they acknowledged the resurrection of Christ. The people in Samaria received the Holy Spirit days after they believed the preaching of Philip. They received the Holy Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on the people – no one receives salvation by the laying on of hands. They were already saved by the preaching of Philip days earlier.

God is sovereign and generous, so that sometimes he would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and cause them to speak in tongues and prophecies the moment they receive Jesus Christ in their hearts. Moreover, some people are simply quick to believe, and so they receive the Holy

Spirit in a matter of minutes after they receive Jesus. However, sometimes there is a delay between the two events.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul assumed that a certain group of people were disciples of Jesus, and so he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. He knew that not all those who had received Christ would afterward immediately receive the Holy Spirit, since these are two different things. Paul himself received the Holy Spirit days after he witnessed and confessed the resurrected Christ.

The Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles devote far more attention and emphasis to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the supernatural effects that it produces than the Lord's Supper and water baptism. As important as these two things are, they are only mentioned in passing, practically ignored in comparison. I speak relatively, for Jesus said that we should obey all the commands of God. But he also said that even among the commands of God, some matters are more important than others.

In contrast to Scripture, faithless traditions and churches emphasize the Lord's Supper and water baptism rather than receiving the Holy Spirit. This is because they have no faith and no power, and faithless and powerless people tend to embrace traditions that perpetuate their faithlessness and powerlessness, so that they could justify themselves and not embarrass themselves. However, this is not good for them, and not good for the world. This is why Christians are so foolish, so weak and defeated.

We need to wake them up, even if it means we must offend them. And then there are those who are not saved in the first place. They hold on to faithless doctrines and traditions because they have never believed in Jesus. They pretend to believe in Jesus and hide among us. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit involves power that can be experienced and demonstrated. This is difficult for them to pretend, and so it is difficult for them to accept the biblical doctrine. We must speak the truth and expose them, so that we can remove their power to deceive, and so that we might save some of them.

Satan is the one who orchestrated the false doctrine that merges receiving Jesus Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what confers power to the Christians, and this is the power that can overwhelm all demonic forces. It is said in the Acts of the Apostles that the Christians turned the world upside down. This is the power that did it. And we need this same power if we wish to do this again in our generation.

This is the key to revival in our churches and to the progress of the gospel in the world. Since this doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit has been neglected even among those who claim to believe in it, it is all the more urgent to revive it among believers and to repeat it often. More people need to know about this, and those who have received the Holy Spirit need to understand what God has given to them.

In the centuries before the coming of Jesus, God would put his Spirit upon chosen men and women to fulfill special roles. They would receive supernatural insights and powers. There were such people as Moses, Samson, David, and Elijah. However, their spiritual operations were limited and sporadic, and the people of God were reliant upon them. Thus they looked forward to a day when all of God's people would be like them, and even better than they were.

Moses did not say, "How I wish all God's people would be saved!" But he said, "How I wish all God's people would be prophets!" Joel did not say, "God would save all kinds of people." But he said, "God would pour out his Spirit on all kinds of people, and give them all kinds of supernatural powers and experiences, and whoever calls on him will be saved." In a number of biblical passages where both salvation by faith and the baptism of the Spirit are mentioned, it is remarkable that this Spirit-baptism receives stronger emphasis than salvation, as if to be saved is only a means to an end.

Preach this to unbelievers along with faith in Jesus Christ, even before they are saved. Tell them, "Believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, so that afterward you can receive the Holy Spirit." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not an optional part of the gospel or even an important part of the gospel – it is the gospel. It is the good news that God would give his own Spirit to anyone who would follow his Son, and that he would infuse his very self and power into anyone without regard to the person's gender or status. This person takes on God's character and dominion. He receives revelations and performs miracles. He becomes full of theological insights and arguments to speak for the Lord. This is the good news that changes everything.

Paul met some people that he assumed were Christians, and he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. We should also ask this question: "After you believed in Jesus, have you received the Holy Spirit?" Since this remains one of the most neglected issues in the history of the church, we must make it a priority to speak about it. Teach it repeatedly and assertively. Many people will not grasp it the first time you mention it. Tell them, "You have received Jesus Christ by faith, and this means you are saved. But this does not mean you have received the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that his disciples ought to receive the Holy Spirit so that they may obtain power to be his witnesses."

If you have received the Holy Spirit after you believed in Jesus Christ, then you have received the power of God. Although this power makes you a witness for Jesus Christ, it also enhances your personal faith and life. You cannot be full of boldness and power for the gospel ministry without it also affecting your personal confidence and behavior. You cannot have power to heal the sick and speak in tongues and still see your world the same way. Now you have power to live your life as a disciple of Jesus. You have power to heal the sick. You have the power to receive visions and dreams and prophecies from God. You have power to preach with boldness, to make arguments with deep insight, to refute objections with wit and profundity.

This power comes from another world. It transcends human wisdom and ability. It is spiritual and supernatural power. It is far beyond political power. You will see that in groups that have

no faith and no power, or in groups where the baptism of the Spirit has fallen into neglect, they will turn to political power as a substitute for God. They will disproportionately emphasize politics and ethics in their preaching. Mark a minister that is constantly talking about politics, who pretends to be insightful and indignant. He has given up on God even as he preaches about God's commands and standards. God never wanted his word to be enforced by the power of man.

If you are certain that you have received the Holy Spirit, do not worry if you have not been experiencing everything that you are entitled to experience. The baptism of the Holy Spirit gives us the potential to experience and perform spectacular things, but none of us have lived up to this potential. This is partly because of the centuries of neglect on both the individual and corporate level. The church needs to emphasize faith, miracles, and the Holy Spirit more and more. And we need to do this as individuals, in our own time, as well.

Sometimes our lives do not afford us with all the opportunities to see the works of God. If you do not meet many sick people, naturally you are not going to see many people healed by your hands. It does not mean you lack the power to do it. If you have faith, and especially if you have received the Holy Spirit, you can do it. When you do something that demands the power of God, the power of God will appear.

Stir up the gifts and powers of God by prayer, by thinking and talking about these things, by action, by finding opportunities, and you will experience more of these things. Speak in tongues to edify yourself. You will be doing this the most, because you will be doing this even when you are not in ministry or with other people. God is with you. Be happy, and never give up.