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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



THE FUNDAMENTALS:
Who Is God?



THE FUNDAMENTALS: Who Is God? Theology Proper



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Charles Spurgeon said,

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God who he calls his Father. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it.¹

The doctrine of God is the very foundation of all other theology and is therefore called “theology proper.” The word “theology” itself refers to speech about God. *Theos* means “God” and *logos* means “word.”

In a sense, if you call the doctrine of God “theology proper,” all the other subjects you’re going to talk about in Christian doctrine are, in some ways, improperly theology—that is to say, we just extend the notion of theology to cover all the other fields because we talk about all the other things in light of their relation to the doctrine of God.²

Theology proper is a systematic, theological approach to the biblical teaching concerning God’s existence, His attributes, His deeds, His Persons, and His interaction with mankind. It is a vast and overwhelming subject because God is transcendent above His creation and totally indescribable with the finite words of men. Psalm 145:5 declares that “his greatness is unsearchable,” while Romans 11:33 asserts that “his ways [are] past finding out.” Job’s rhetorical questions about God (“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” [Job 11:7]) demonstrate to us that only God is capable of revealing who He is.

Although the finiteness of men’s minds precludes their ever fully knowing God on earth, the fact that God has revealed Himself means that God is, in some way, knowable. God has revealed Himself generally through His creation (Acts 14:16–17; Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1) and more specifically through the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–2). His revelation of Himself, however, cannot possibly be comprehended apart from faith in His Word leading to genuine salvation in Christ alone (Rom. 10:17). This knowledge of God is not for intellectual purposes alone but rather to empower a life that is worthy of His Name.

The goal of the contributors to this issue of *FrontLine* magazine is to connect intellect with devotion. The deeper a believer’s understanding of theology, the greater his commitment should be to live in a way that honors God. The bookend articles in this issue, written by Dr. Matt Walker and Dr. Bryan Brock respectively, speak to the necessity and significance of theology proper. Two articles by Dr. Larry Oats and one by Dr. David Saxon speak concerning the historic trinitarian position of Christian theology. Dr. Preston Mayes’ article presents one key aspect of practical application of theology as seen in the Book of Job.

May God alone be praised as our understanding of Him grows. May each reader be motivated to greater awe and adoration for the great God who alone is worthy!

—Mark Herbster

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Immutability of God,” sermon from Malachi 3:6.

² F. Sanders, “The Doctrine of the Triune God,” in M. Ward, J. Parks, B. Ellis, and T. Hains (eds.), *Lexham Survey of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press).

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Is the Doctrine of God Passé?

Nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote “*Gott ist tot*” (“God is dead”). His point was not a tribute to atheism; it was a criticism of the Enlightenment. God died, Nietzsche wrote, because mankind killed him.¹ Of course, the problem is not that God is actually dead. It is just that He is no longer interesting. Modern man—including many Christians—has marginalized God to the outer fringes of his thoughts. Tozer’s observation, that the most important thing about us is what we think about when we think about God,² needs updating. Many go through their day without any thought of God because our culture has relatively little interest in Him (Rom. 1:28). He is not dead. He is passé, out of style. The bestselling *Christian* books of 2018 have almost nothing to do with God. Their focus is on being the right kind of person by addressing such subjects as how to manage money, speak loving words, and treat others with respect. While these are all important, their emphasis is not on God. He is almost entirely left out.

This is somewhat peculiar, because no one can actually “do” theology without beginning with God. The word itself, “theology,” is a God-word (Gk., *theos*). Every theological discussion, whether deep or mundane, must begin with God. Theology is not theology if God is not at the forefront. He is the center of all theology, which is why His name is part of the word. The “-ologies” that are taught in seminary and the systematics function only because God is at the center of them: bibliology is a study of the divine revelation of God; Christology is the study of God incarnate; anthropology and creationism are studies of the material works of God’s power and creative genius; pneumatology is the study of His Spirit; and ecclesiology is the study of His Church. Even the theological systems, so disparate at times, begin at the same starting point: there is a God, and He has revealed Himself. If man’s primary purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,³ what does the fact that we have so little affinity for God and almost no real knowledge of Him say about our society?⁴

God Is Greater

The psalmist marveled at God's creation (Ps. 19:1) before turning his thoughts to God's law. He writes that while creation is incredible in both its beauty and complexity, the law is without blemish, trustworthy, correct, and sincere (vv. 7–8). There is nothing on earth greater than God's Word. Do not let that truth, however, obscure the fact that God is still greater than both His creation and revelation. These things turn the mind to meditate upon God, but they do not supersede God's greatness. This is one reason that no scientific breakthrough or perfect exegesis of Scripture can fully explicate who God is. He is past finding out, too great for our comprehension (Rom. 11:33). Whatever glory there is in this life, true glory is in Immanuel's land.⁵ It is in God Himself.

Consider God's questioning of Job (Job 38–41). If God's questions had been a quiz in school, Job's paper would have been graded a zero. He did not answer any of them, simply because he could not (42:1–6). No one can hear the voice of the Almighty and respond in kind. A brief sighting of His angels causes the most hardened soldiers on earth to fall on their faces in fear (Matt. 28:4). The simple truth is that there is nothing greater than God. Moses' face shone brilliantly because of his time alone with God. Those who look into the Scriptures see God's reflection there (2 Cor. 3:18) and become a reflection themselves (4:1–4, 6). As great as God's creation and revelation are, the glory of God is greater still.

Contemporary Attacks on the Doctrine of God

Today, many scientists and philosophers reject the doctrine of God. The New Atheists present science as the real faith. Popular physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson argues that truth is found in science: "Science is an entire exercise in finding what is true."⁶ Bill Nye, "the Science Guy," states unapologetically that teaching God's works to children is wrong: "I say to the grown-ups, if you want to deny evolution and live in your world that's completely inconsistent with everything we observe in the universe, that's fine. But don't make your kids do it because we need them."⁷ These atheists argue against God's existence. Richard Dawkins, an obviously intelligent man, argues if Jesus had been presented with scientific "facts," He would have been an atheist.⁸ Penn Jillette, the pony-tailed half of the entertainment duo Penn and Teller, forcefully argues against God's existence.⁹ These are not just interesting quotes from notorious non-Christians. These are heroes among societal elites. It is fashionable to be an atheist.

Cults and false religions attack the uniqueness of God. Hinduism presents God as a multiplicity of gods as part of one larger deity.¹⁰ The Upanishads declare "Atman is Brahman," equating the individual's soul with the "world soul." Hindu pantheism rejects the biblical explanation of God: "Instead of drawing a bold line between God and his creation, . . . the Hindu text declares them to be one and the same."¹¹ Though operating through a completely dif-

ferent worldview, Mormonism has also declared that God and man are functionally synonymous. The famous statement by Lorenzo Snow, "As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be," has never been officially repudiated. In fact, Joseph Smith once declared God to be someone who was once "a man like us": "God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did."¹²

Liberal scholars attack the righteousness of God. Much of popular modern scholarship is just rehashed Gnosticism.¹³ These argue that the Old Testament God is different from the demiurge deity of the New Testament.¹⁴ They claim that the Old Testament God is angry and violent because He commanded genocide. They see a stark contrast with the New Testament God who is loving and nonviolent.¹⁵ After all, the New Testament God would never destroy the earth with a global flood.¹⁶

Feminists target the "maleness" of God. They reject the Bible's presentation of God as "patriarchal, monarchical, hierarchical, exclusive, and triumphalist."¹⁷ For example, Rachel Held Evans, feminist progressive evangelical, resists the idea of God's "maleness" by using the pronoun "her" when referring to Him. She supports this line of reasoning by arguing that God is a Spirit (John 4:24). While that statement is valid as it stands, the incarnate God is a human male and He referred to God as "Father" (Gk., *pater*) (John 17:1). Evans's feministic worldview skews her view of God.

Finally, some professed evangelicals attack the sovereignty of God. Greg Boyd argues for "open theism" and rejects the "providential blueprint worldview."¹⁸ He states that the future is "a realm of possibilities" that God knows because His "knowledge is perfect."¹⁹ If God had foreseen the atrocities of the Nazis, for example, and done nothing about it, then God is not as sovereign as we think.²⁰

Defending God's Glory

A few years ago I was yard-sale shopping in my neighborhood. One of the sales was in the garage of a huge house owned by some Hindus. Our community has grown significantly in the past decade with many Indians who have immigrated in order to work in the medical and technology sectors. An Indian man was standing in the garage watching me look over the items he had for sale. On one table in front of me was a large, ornate glass box. It was so beautifully crafted that I asked the man about it. "What is this box for?" He smiled a bit and replied, "I used to keep my god in that box, but I recently got a bigger god and now I need a bigger box." He asked me, "Do you want to buy it?" It was my turn to smile. "My God won't fit in this box. In fact, my God won't fit into any box." What a witnessing opportunity!

Theology proper, the doctrine of God, is not passé for Christians. It is at the core of our faith. Like Paul in Athens, we should be awakened to defend God's glory when

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The Trinity

The Uniqueness of Christianity

Christianity is unique. There is no other religion in the world that has a god like our God. Some religions are “polytheistic,” i.e., they have multiple gods. The pagans of the Old Testament and the religions of Rome and Greece in the New Testament era were polytheistic. Hinduism today has millions of gods. Other religions are “monotheistic”—i.e., they have a single god. Islam is monotheistic; Muslims claim just one god, Allah. The Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are also monotheistic, for they do not believe that Jesus is God nor do they believe the Holy Spirit is a separate person. Theological liberalism is often monotheistic—Jesus is not viewed as deity, and the Holy Spirit is seen simply as the presence of God in the universe.

Biblical Christianity is Trinitarianism. Trinitarianism is the belief that there is one God, but He exists in three Persons. While not explicitly declared in Scripture, biblical Trinitarianism obviously develops out of the truth of Scripture:

- There is one God.
- The Father is God.
- The Son is God.
- The Spirit is God.
- The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all identified as individual persons.
- The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are seen together at certain times.
- The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are seen as equals to one another.

Scripture teaches that each “Person” of the Godhead is indeed a person in His own right. At same time, the Trinity has a single “essence.” This is the core of the Trinity: “three persons in one essence.” The Trinity is studied in various ways. You can examine the various attributes of God to determine what He is like. You can study the names of God to learn some of His characteristics. You can study the acts of God (creation, salvation, etc.) to ascertain what is important to Him.

The Father and the Son

The doctrine of God the Father has been attacked throughout most of church history. Today there are several movements that deny the biblical doctrine of God. We have already men-

tioned some of the religions that reject the God of Scripture. In current Christendom there are other forms of attack.

Feminist theology, for instance, rejects the concept of “Father.” Use of the pronoun “she” is argued by these individuals to be more appropriate than “he” in order to reorient Christian thinking away from the “idolatrous implications of exclusively masculine God-language and the dominant effects of the father image in the churches and Christian practice.”¹

The radical environmentalist movement, while routinely rejecting Christianity, does have a god—“Mother Nature.” This movement is based on Darwinian evolution. Some environmentalists see God and nature as so intertwined that we cannot distinguish between the two. Damaging nature is viewed as harming God Himself. Most environmentalists, however, are atheists; they argue that the eternal “god” is energy. Philosophers and scientists consider the universe to be self-existent and eternal. In the place of God, they worship “autonomous energy.”² “The force” is not just a *Star Wars* invention; it is a popular philosophy (which is in reality also a theology). The underlying unity of the cosmos is the energy that links humans to humans and to the entire universe. Thus we are all one because we share the common energy of the universe.

The Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day viewed Him as a heretic, for He claimed to be God. They based that view on Deuteronomy 6:4, “The LORD our God is one LORD,” or “Jehovah our God is one Jehovah.” When Jesus claimed to be equal with God, and therefore God Himself, this seemed to be an obvious contradiction with Deuteronomy. Oneness, however, is a technical term that can either exclude diversity or refer to a unity that allows diversity. For instance, “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) includes two distinct persons, a husband and a wife. “One voice” refers to the voices of many individuals in Exodus 24:3. In the Old Testament, therefore, “one God” could refer to a unity which allows for a diversity.

In what way is God’s oneness to be interpreted then? This unity is not merely as genus or kind, for there are not three gods of the same kind. God is *substantially* or *essentially* one, but that does not rule out distinguishable attributes or persons. Scripture requires unity, but it also requires separate persons. A key passage to demonstrate the necessity of separate persons is John 1:33, where God the Father speaks,



God the Son is baptized, and God the Holy Spirit descends from heaven.

Three Persons, One God

There are several trinitarian declarations in Scripture—Romans 1:1–4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:4–6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4–6; and Titus 3:4–6. The order of names varies, implying equality of essence.

God's oneness is not a simple trinity of relationships. There are three Persons, each of whom possesses all the attributes of the Godhead and each of whom has the personal capacities of intellect, emotion, and will. Yet each of these Persons functions in perfect harmony with the others (John 17:5). This is based on the fact that each Person functions in accord with the same essence. This creates a bit of a problem, for when we read about "God" in Scripture, we are not always sure whether we are reading about the Trinity as a unity or a specific member of the Godhead (usually the Father).

The three Persons are equal in essence and enjoy perfect fellowship, but their interrelationships with one another reflect a distinctive ordering of activities. The Father is the creative source of ideas, the fountainhead of planning and goals, and the initiator of the mutual activities. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being (Heb. 1:3), the Word of the Speaker (John 1:1–2), and the Son of the Father (John 3:16). This is an eternal relationship, for the value of the Father's gift of salvation depends on Jesus' unique relationship to Him. The Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father (John 15:26) and puts God's will into operation. It is important to note that the Spirit is always *of* (or *from*) God or Christ, never the reverse.

This relationship between the Persons of the Godhead demonstrates the distinctive but harmonious ministries of the various members of the Godhead. In creation, the Father creates energy and matter. The Logos, Jesus Christ, aids in creation (John 1:2) and maintains its order (Col. 1:17). The Holy Spirit causes it to develop (Gen. 1:2). At the baptism of Christ, all the divine Persons manifested their presence. Only Jesus was immersed. Only the Father made an announcement. Only the Spirit descended on Jesus. In salvation, God the Father planned it. God the Son provided it. God the Spirit applies it.

The focus of our worship and service today is Jesus Christ. We even call our religion "*Christianity*." In the ages to come, however, it seems as if the focus will be more on God the Father; in 1 Corinthians 15:24 Paul states that after the millennium, Christ "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God." In Revelation 21–22, as John is given the wonderful vision of the New Jerusalem, he makes several statements that indicate the priority of the Father. The city comes down from God (21:2). The tabernacle of God is with men and God Himself shall be with them (21:3). God shall wipe away all tears (21:4). There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (21:22). There will be no sun or moon, for "glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." There is a river that proceeds "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1). In 22:9 we have one of those difficult uses of "God." John records the angel as declaring, "Worship God." Is he declaring that we should worship the Godhead, the Trinity? Or is he referring primarily to God the Father? Interestingly enough, we do not see a reference to the Holy Spirit until 22:17.

In the Old Testament the focus is on God the Father. While the Trinity is hinted at, it is not fully revealed until the New Testament. In the Gospels the focus is on God the Son. In Acts and the Epistles the focus is on the work of God the Holy Spirit. Throughout Scripture, however, we can see the presence and work of the Trinity as a whole. We cannot understand the Trinity. We cannot even really illustrate the Trinity, because every illustration fails at some point. The Trinity is unique; there is nothing like it in the universe. So we accept the Trinity by faith because it is the clear teaching of Scripture. And the Trinity drives all that we do for God, as we will see in the following articles.

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¹ Anne Carr, "Feminist Theology," in A. E. McGrath (ed.), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 223–24.

² M. Jammer, "Energy," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2:511–17.



I believe

Is Nicaea Still Relevant?

Humbly Seeking Wisdom from the Past

Two Examples

My relative was one of the godliest people I knew or had ever known. She was a prayer warrior who witnessed incessantly and had a practical wisdom from which I enjoyed drawing. It was disconcerting, then, when she related to me one of her contacts with an unbeliever. The person had asked her to explain the Trinity. My relative responded confidently, “Oh, that’s easy to understand. There is one God, and He is Father, Son, and Spirit, just as there is one me, and I am wife, mother, and daughter.” I then gently and, hopefully, graciously asked her how her analogy would work with Jesus’s baptism, in which Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven, and the Spirit descended like a dove. Didn’t that event distinguish the three persons in a way her analogy could not?

Although she was fully aware of the event, knowing her Bible quite well, she had not thought about its implications for the way in which she framed her understanding of the Trinity. Shortly, she responded, “But that makes it sound like there are three Gods, and I know that isn’t right.” At that point I suggested we set aside analogies and simply accept the truth that God is one being in three persons who have always lived in perfect fellowship with one another. Unfortunately, the conversation ended with her still rather confused and somewhat disappointed that we were leaving the matter at that level of mystery. Surely, we can clarify it by means of analogy or analysis beyond that point. How would an unbeliever ever accept *that*?¹

How, indeed? A couple of years before that exchange, I had an interesting series of exchanges with a couple of Jehovah’s Witnesses who enjoyed roaming our neighborhood. As usual in such situations, I drove the conversation to Jesus Christ, trying to convince them that only a divine Christ could provide atonement that actually saves sinners. Responding to their questions, I found it necessary to argue for the Trinity, that God is one in three and this mystery is beyond human comprehension. One of the Witnesses responded, “But why would God make it so confusing? Our view is so much simpler. There is one God, the Father, and the Son is a godlike being whom the Father sent to save us.” Interesting question: “Why would God make it so confusing?” Of course, among other things that needed to be said, I tried to explain that God is who He is. The mystery and complexity of the Trinity are not a reflection on His inability to communicate clearly but rather on our limitations as creatures to understand. A god who could be fully comprehended by mere men and women would hardly call forth the awe and require the humility that we see elicited by the God of the Bible. I’m sorry to say they left my living room unconvinced.

As a church historian, I was reminded by both exchanges of events in the early fourth century. By this time Christians across the Roman Empire had been worshiping and praying to Jesus Christ as God for three centuries. Furthermore, when a group of people called Him a mere man adopted by God as special, the church condemned them as heretical. When a slightly later group of people argued that the one God manifested Himself in the modes of Father, Son, and Spirit

(admirably expressed in my relative's analogy), they too were condemned. Neither adoptionism nor modalism was acceptable. How, then, should we explain the relationships between the three persons to whom we pray as God? The persecuted church had not yet established the boundaries of this conversation when Emperor Constantine largely ended the persecution between 313 and 324. Opportunity soon arose for clarification of these momentous matters.

Arius and Arianism

The spark that launched the greatest Trinitarian controversy in the early church was a Jehovah's Witness-like rationalist by the name of Arius, who served in a church in Alexandria, Egypt. When his bishop, Alexander, explained that the Son was coequal with the Father in all respects, Arius was outraged and complained that Alexander was teaching polytheism, the worship of multiple gods. He taught that the Son is *a* god—he exists before time and is the agent of creation and salvation—but he is not a necessary being; the Father caused him, and the Father is the only absolute, eternal being. Arius's effective rhetoric, his use of music to communicate his message, and the fact that his theology did not require descent into the murky regions of inscrutable ideas made him very popular, and Arianism quickly gained many adherents in the eastern Roman Empire.

The ensuing battle between Alexander, his assistant Athanasius, and their supporters against the Arians focused on the Scriptures. What does the Bible say about this question? It became obvious that the discussion revolved around how to correlate and render consistent scriptural ideas that appear to conflict. By the end of the century, seven scriptural concepts had been identified:

1. The Father is God. No one within the debate contested this statement.
2. The Son is God. This was the point of significant debate. The Arians wanted a category in which the Son is *a* god but not *the* God. For my Jehovah's Witness conversation partners, I drew a line on a piece of paper and argued that above the line are beings who are eternal, uncreated, absolute; below the line are beings that are finite, created, contingent on others for their existence. Then I argued that only God is above the line; all creatures are below it. "Where is Jesus?" I asked them. They didn't like the model, eventually—in a subsequent conversation—arguing that Jesus began below the line but was elevated later to being above it, clearly showing that they did not understand the significance of the line. One cannot get a promotion from being created to uncreated. Like the Gnostics before them and the Jehovah's Witnesses today, the Arians acknowledged one absolute being, and they defined the Son as considerably greater than mere men but, in the last analysis, not equal to that one absolute being.
3. The Spirit is God. Only later in the fourth century did theologians wrestle with the deity of the Spirit. That the Spirit is portrayed in Scripture as having divine authority and ability is hard to deny, so the debate revolved around whether or not He is a person or merely an impersonal force.

4. The Father is a different person from the Son.
5. The Father is a different person from the Spirit.
6. The Son is a different person from the Spirit.
7. There is one God. There was little disagreement on this point. It is, in fact, an easy point to establish from both testaments of Scripture. However, obviously it is very challenging to combine this statement with the first six without rational tensions.

When someone says that he or she does not believe in the "Trinity" because it is not a biblical word,² the question that should be posed to him or her is this: which of the seven statements above does he or she deny?

The Council of Nicaea

At the Council of Nicaea, assembled just outside Constantinople in 325, the church wrestled with how to understand the relationship between the Father and the Son. A few were Arians, who insisted that the Being of the Son was wholly unlike the Being of the Father (in the philosophical parlance of the time, they used the word *substance* rather than *Being*). A few stood with Bishop Alexander and his gifted young associate Athanasius, who insisted that the Son was of the same substance with the Father and thus wholly, entirely divine. A rather large party vacillated in the middle, apparently wanting to maintain the worship of the Son as God but uncertain that precise philosophical definitions, such as Alexander was insisting on, were really necessary. Isn't it sufficient simply to say that the Son is of similar substance to the Father and leave it at that? Throughout the controversy, Athanasius argued that only a divine Son could be a sufficient Savior. Mere similarity was no better than full-fledged Arianism. Remarkably, the orthodox position triumphed at the council.³

Emperor Constantine, who had in recent months finally quashed all political opposition in bloody warfare and united the entire empire under his authority, presided at the council. Episcopal polity had largely triumphed in the early church by this time, and 318 bishops assembled to decide the issue for the church. The government actively repressed the losing party, banishing Arius and some of his colleagues. Baptists find all of these facts uncomfortable and may be inclined to wonder what good could come of such proceedings. God, however, overruled all of this to lead the council to embrace the biblical position and advance with crystal clarity the absolute deity of Jesus Christ. Fifty-six years later a second council, this time meeting in Constantinople, substantially improved the statement on the Holy Spirit, and the Nicene Creed as we know it today resulted.

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was

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God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is co-eternal and co-equal in essence and power with God the Father and God the Son. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates, indwells, instructs, and fills the believer for productive service in this age. He is the Author of Scripture. He is the person of the Godhead who applies the will of the Father through the work of the Son to the believer.

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who is active within the lives of the believers in this dispensation. The Father's work was the most prominent in the Old Testament. The Son's work was the most prominent in the Gospels. But the work of the Spirit in this age is more prominent than the work of the Father or the Son.

There are some significant problems with a study of the Holy Spirit. There is not very much explicit teaching on the Holy Spirit. John 16:14 gives one reason for this, as Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit "shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." The goal of the Spirit is not to elevate Himself, but to place Jesus first.

Another problem is that there is a lack of concrete imagery. We have a concept of a father and of a son to which we can relate. We have no comparison for the Holy Spirit. In fact, the term "Holy Ghost" can be misleading.

A third problem is that our modern culture emphasizes experience. Positively, it is through the Holy Spirit that believers experience God. Negatively, some use experience to overthrow doctrine. There has been significant confusion concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit because of twentieth-century Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement.

A final problem is that the word "spirit" in the Old Testament is *ruach*, and the word "spirit" in the New Testament is *pneuma*. Both of these can mean "spirit" (either the Holy Spirit or the spirit of man) or "breath" or "wind" or "angels" (spirit beings).

The Holy Spirit Is God

The earlier article on the Trinity spoke of the movements that reject the Trinity. If someone does reject the Trinity, he will almost always reject the personality of the Trinity. He will almost always argue that the Holy Spirit is some kind of reference to the power or presence of God in the universe.

The Holy Spirit is God. He is given divine names. He is called the Spirit of Jehovah (Isa. 11:2; 61:1). He is the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:11). He is called the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20). He is called "My" (God's) Spirit (Acts 2:17-18). In Luke 4:18 He is referred to as the Spirit of the Lord, and in Romans 8:9 and Acts 16:7¹ He is referred to as the Spirit of Christ. Most importantly, He is called "another Comforter"

in John 14:16. The title used there is *parakletos*, which was frequently used in nonbiblical Greek for one who was called to help someone in a court of law. (This concept is seen in John 16:8–11.) *Parakletos* is used only by John. In 1 John 2:1 Jesus is called a *parakletos*, but in John 14:16 the word “another” (*allon*) means “another of the same kind.” Jesus was declaring that the Holy Spirit had the character (or “essence” in the language of theology) of Jesus Christ.

Numerous times the Holy Spirit is included in a list of the Godhead:

- Matthew 28:19
- Romans 1:1–4; 14:17–18; 15:16–18
- 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:4–6
- 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 13:14
- Galatians 3:11–14; 4:6
- Ephesians 4:4–6
- Colossians 1:3–8
- Titus 3:4–6
- 1 Peter 1:1–2

In addition, Peter declared that lying to the Spirit is the same as lying to God (Acts 5:3–4, 9). And in 2 Corinthians 3:17–18 the Spirit is called the Lord.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit’s ministry in the Old Testament involved creation (Gen. 1:2).

Absolutely none other than the Holy Spirit is here under consideration. . . . It may require the full light of New Testament revelation to enable us to discern that the Spirit of God here is the same as He who in the New Testament is seen to be the Holy Spirit; but having that light, we need not hesitate to believe that it sheds clear light back on the Old Testament usage of the expression.²

His ministry also included inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would reveal truth from Jesus Christ as the apostles wrote the New Testament (John 16:12–13).

Nondispensationalists often argue that there is no substantive difference between the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and in the New. The Scriptures, however, seem to indicate otherwise.

John 7:38–39 is given in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, the most popular festival for the Jews. This feast celebrated the salvation that God provided to the Jews in bringing them out of Egypt, recalling their lives in tents while traveling to the Promised Land. On the last day of the Feast, Jesus cried out to the Jews that if anyone would believe on Him, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” After Jesus’ teaching, John, the writer of the Gospel, added an interpretation (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). John identified the “water” of salvation as the Holy Spirit. He also indicated that the Spirit was not yet present because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In John 14 Jesus was explaining that He would soon be leaving the disciples behind on earth. Verse 16 indicates that

God would send (future tense) in Christ’s place another comforter. This is an action that had not yet taken place at the time of this statement. The Holy Spirit “is” (present tense) with (*para*) the disciples and “will be” (future tense) in (*ev*) the disciples.³ Jesus is, therefore, making a distinction between the current relationship between the Holy Spirit and the disciples and what that relationship would be after Christ’s departure.

John 16 is a context similar to that of John 14. Jesus is explaining that He is leaving the disciples behind. In verse 7 Jesus declares that if He does not leave, then the Holy Spirit cannot come. This clearly shows that there was some future relationship between the disciples and the Holy Spirit that was not currently present. This also teaches that this specialized coming of the Holy Spirit would take place after Christ’s ascension to heaven. Verse 13 speaks of the future coming of the Spirit and gives a list of things He will do (all these verbs are in the future tense) when He arrives.

John 20:22 is post-resurrection. Jesus has risen from the dead, He will soon depart, and He is giving to the disciples their future mission—“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (personal translation). These passages indicate that there would be some new ministry of the Holy Spirit after the glorification and ascension of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit was involved in the life of Christ (see Luke 1:15, 35; 2:25–31; 4:18; Matt. 3:16–17; 4:1, Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18). As in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was the agent of the inspiration of the New Testament. These are important truths, but the purpose of this article is to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit today.

The Holy Spirit has a ministry to unsaved people. He convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11). Conviction is the use of the Word by the Spirit to persuade the unregenerate of his need of repentance and faith. It is a legal term that refers to convincing or refuting an opponent so that he has the matter set before him in a clear light. He convicts of righteousness because Jesus went to be with the Father. The righteousness here is the righteousness of Christ. The evidence of the righteousness of Christ was His resurrection and ascension. If Christ were not who He said He was (was not righteous), why would the Father have raised Him from the dead and welcomed Him to heaven? The Holy Spirit points out man’s unpreparedness and inability to fellowship in heavenly places. Humans need the imputed righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). He convicts of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. The tense of the verb is present, implying that this is not referring to the future judgment. The death of Christ judged, or overthrew, Satan and removed the saved from Satan’s dominion. There is, therefore, a certainty of future judgment. If Satan has already been prophetically judged, what hope is there for those who join with Satan against the Holy God?

The Holy Spirit Today

The main interest in this article is today—what does the Holy Spirit do for us now? First, the Holy Spirit regenerates believers (John 3:3–6; 6:63). Some hold John 3:3–6 to be a defense for baptismal regeneration.⁴ Others see a parallel between physical birth and spiritual rebirth, for in Scripture

water was a “regular metaphor for various facets of procreation—insemination, the child in the womb, childbearing, and childbirth.”⁵ Only the person born physically can be born again spiritually. Others see water as a metaphor, with “born of water” synonymous with “born of the Spirit.” See, for instance, John 7:37–39, which uses “water” to refer to the Holy Spirit. This then would connect John 3 to the events of Pentecost. Others see water as a reference to Scripture (Eph. 5:26). However one interprets the “water” in this passage, there is no doubt that Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit is necessary to regeneration.

Another New Testament ministry is the indwelling of the saints (John 14:16–17; 1 Cor. 6:19). Many (especially nondispensationalists) believe that there was an identical ministry in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit empowered certain individuals for their ministries (judges, as in Judges 3:10; kings, as in 1 Sam. 10:6; and prophets, as in Ezek.2:1–2). In addition this ministry was selective; only certain believers were empowered with the Holy Spirit. I would suggest that this Old Testament ministry was what the New Testament calls the “filling” of the Spirit or the Spirit “coming upon” a believer. In the New Testament there is a new ministry of indwelling. As indicated earlier in this article, Christ prayed for the Father to send the Spirit (John 14:16, 26), and this coming of the Holy Spirit was something completely new. He now indwells all believers (John 7:39; Rom. 5:5). Even carnal believers are indwelt (1 Cor. 3:1–3; 6:19). In addition the indwelling ministry is a permanent work of the Spirit in the New Testament. If a person has the Spirit, he is saved; if he does not have the Spirit, “he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9).

Another New Testament ministry is the sealing of the believer with the Holy Spirit. A “seal” marked the ownership of property. Although some speak of the Holy Spirit sealing believers, it is actually God (and this is undoubtedly a reference to the Father) who does the sealing (2 Cor. 1:21–22). The seal indicates the certainty of the promise of full salvation; the Holy Spirit is the down payment assuring us of our final salvation (Eph. 1:13). The seal also indicates the certainty of God’s purpose to keep us until the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). The purpose of the “seal” is to give us confidence and security in our salvation.

The Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in the believer’s life (Gal. 5:22–25). It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the fruit fully, but the important point is that the Holy Spirit produces it. The believer must obey Scripture and has, therefore, a responsibility in his sanctification. But the impetus of the Holy Spirit is necessary for our sanctification in this age.

The Holy Spirit makes communion with God possible (Rom. 8:15–17, 26–27). Because the Holy Spirit indwells us, He brings us into a close relationship with Him.

The Holy Spirit also guides the believer (Rom. 8:14; Acts 13:2–4). We must be careful not to allow this concept to provide a way to disobey Scripture. Those who argue that the Spirit continues to give new revelation also sometimes argue that they are free to disobey the Scripture if the Holy Spirit guides them to do so. This we reject.

The Holy Spirit also fills believers. The words for “filled” in Luke, Acts, and Ephesians are different. In Luke and Acts

the phrase “filled with the Spirit” usually uses the Greek word *pimplemi* (Luke 1:15; Acts 4:8; 9:17; etc.). There is a different Greek word for someone being “full of the Holy Spirit” (*pleros*). This is used in Acts 6:3, 5, and 7:55 to refer to deacons who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom; in Acts 11:24 for Barnabas who was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith; and in Acts 13:52, where it refers to the disciples who were full of the Holy Spirit and joy. A similar phrase, “full of grace,” is used twenty-five times in Luke and Acts; in addition, Luke uses the phrases “full of wisdom,” “full of faith,” and “full of power.” The translation of two different concepts by the same word creates some confusion in a verse such as Ephesians 5:18, where Paul commands believers to be “filled with” (or perhaps better translated “full of”) the Holy Spirit. The filling in Luke and Acts refers to a special ministry of the Holy Spirit in which He sovereignly and temporarily empowers believers for a specific ministry.

The fulness of the Spirit in Ephesians refers to the long-term characteristic of a person’s life. Paul uses the concept of fullness throughout the book of Ephesians. In 1:23 the church is described as “the fulness of [Christ] that filleth all in all.” In 3:19 the prayer that introduces the latter half of the book makes a request that the believers “be filled with all the fulness of God.” The content of the filling here is God’s fullness, probably a reference to His moral attributes, which believers should emulate. In 4:10 Christ is said to be the agent of the filling or the “fulness.” He will “fill all things,” with verse 11 adding the specifics of that filling: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And in 4:13 the goal toward which believers are moving is mature manhood, defined by “the fulness of Christ.”⁶

The role of the Holy Spirit is critical to the believer’s salvation and sanctification. He is the Person of the Trinity who applies to us the work of God in our lives. Praise God for the Holy Spirit!

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¹ There is a textual problem here. Some manuscripts have just “spirit,” while others have the “spirit of Jesus.”

² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 49–50.

³ There is a textual issue here; a few Greek manuscripts have both verbs in the present tense, but the preponderance of evidence is for the present tense “is with you” and the future tense “will be in you.”

⁴ This is the sacramentalist view. Lutheran Richard Jensen states, “The giving of the Spirit stands in the closest possible relationship to baptism with water. To be baptized with Christian baptism (water and the Word) is to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Richard A. Jensen, *Touched by the Spirit* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975], 123).

⁵ Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 97.

⁶ See Larry R. Oats, “Filled with or Full of the Holy Spirit: Acts and Ephesians,” *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* 1.2 (Fall 2011): 197ff.

Job: How Not to Talk About God and Theology

Ask most believers what the Book of Job is about and they will answer, “Suffering.” And indeed suffering figures prominently in the story. The book concedes that, from a human perspective, suffering often seems unfair. A drunk driver kills a mother on her way home from work; he walks away unharmed. A tornado rips through a community, destroying one side of the town while leaving the other untouched. Such seemingly random events leave us asking the Lord, “How can You allow so much suffering?” Job’s contributions to a theology of suffering include the idea that the Lord’s justice will not be fully realized in this world. More importantly, Job demonstrates that the Lord must be trusted and revered even when I wish He were superintending the world differently at any given moment.

But are Job’s perspectives on suffering the primary contribution of the book? If so, one wonders: was it necessary to devote forty-two chapters to the development of those truths? Christ reached the same conclusions about suffering in an object lesson and a brief parable (Luke 13:1–9, 18:1–8). Other perspectives on suffering are developed in the Old and New Testaments (Psalms and Hebrews, for example), so Job should not be considered a comprehensive treatment of suffering. Does the Book of Job have other ideas that it develops? Yes, and the key contribution of Job becomes clear after an analysis of the speeches that comprise the book.

Retribution Theology

In the speeches dominating chapters 3–31, Job and his friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) attempted to assess the actions of the Lord and Job on the basis of the theology they all believed: retribution theology. This theology teaches that God rewards righteousness and punishes evil right away in this present world. And Job’s three friends never wavered from their conclusion that



retribution theology was the explanation for his plight. To them, the events of Job 1 and 2 proved that he had sinned. But at the end of all the dialogue, the Lord called the friends fools for the way they had spoken about Him (42:7–8).

Job, for his part, had come to the painful realization that retribution theology could not explain the way the Lord rules the world. But Job's attempt to arrive at a new theological paradigm ultimately failed as well. It is true that at the end of the book, the Lord commended Job for speaking what is right (42:7). But that commendation came only after Job recanted in a mere five verses (42:2–6) the legal action he had previously developed over six chapters (26–31).

The inclusion of so many speeches drawing incorrect inferences and conclusions about the Lord in a book of Scripture is surprising.¹ But analyzing those speeches sensitizes us to our limitations when trying to understand the Lord. It should not surprise us to discover we cannot understand all that God does. Can the finite creature fully comprehend the infinite? And our limited comprehension should not scare us. A God whom we could understand would not truly be God. Yet a God whom we cannot fully comprehend does scare us. In fact, He scares us so much that we will often bend the facts of Scripture to fit our notions of how the Lord should act and what He should do. So Job is actually addressing two areas of theology. First, the book teaches us something about theology proper and the doctrine of God. Second, it also teaches us something about how to do theology (in other words, it is a theological prolegomena). In its second role it alerts us to the pitfalls awaiting us as we seek to speak about the Lord in general or about any theological topic in particular.

The three friends illustrate the danger of attempting to explain God's actions based on one truth. Such a truth will be an undeniable and important one, but it will be inadequate to explain the nuances of the all actions taken by the Lord that are relevant to the subject under discussion. The men give eight separate speeches, but each speech comes to the same conclusion: Job suffers because he has sinned. Each speech offers the same remedy: if he will repent, then God will restore his former prosperity. The only major difference between the speeches is the way in which they try to convince Job they are correct. In the first round of dialogue, the centerpiece of Eliphaz's argument is either a personal experience or a misapplied revelation—it is difficult to tell which (4:7–21). Bildad uses illustrations and analogies designed to sway the emotions (8:12–19). Zophar uses name-calling, misrepresented arguments, and a host of logical fallacies (11:2–12).

The friends warn us that our godliness is no guarantee that we are speaking correctly about the Lord. Their wrong conclusions do not arise from obvious spiritual deficiencies, and there is no reason to doubt the character of the men. They think sin is terribly bad and must be repented of

The friends warn us that our godliness is no guarantee that we are speaking correctly about the Lord. Their wrong conclusions do not arise from obvious spiritual deficiencies, and there is no reason to doubt the character of the men.

immediately. They have a profound and commendable respect for the Person of God and believe Him to be all-powerful and all-knowing. Much of what they say *sounds* scriptural, reflecting statements in both Proverbs and Psalms. They should not be considered doubters and scorers from Job's era, people to be censured because they oppose God.

But in spite of the friends' piety, they misrepresented God. Their main problem was that they willfully ignored certain facts in order to defend God's holiness and justice. In their thinking, since God is holy and just, He must always deal with people *in this world* in accordance with that holiness and justice. Accordingly, they concluded that the wicked must be punished *now* for

their wickedness. The problem with their conclusion is clear. Though God's holiness and justice must be defended, one cannot ignore the injustice in the world to do so. Job's friends failed to see that the Lord often chooses to delay His judgment on men. If He did not delay, how would He offer His mercy and salvation? Rather than judging instantly, God has determined that He will give man roughly seventy-to-eighty years before the full weight of His judgment is brought to bear on them. In a general sense, God does enforce His moral standards and does communicate His displeasure with sin. So sin often leads to negative consequences, but not always and not on a set schedule. Examples of wicked people who lived long and prosperous lives are not difficult to find.

Today, it is possible for us to commit the same error as Job's friends: to conclude that some bad event resulted from a person's sin without adequate reason to think so. But we may commit similar errors in theological reason regarding other issues. Traditional debates over the sovereignty of God versus the will of man in salvation are one example. Scripture teaches that God sovereignly chooses to save some. Many are uncomfortable with that conclusion. Does it not make God seem arbitrary and unfair? So they overemphasize the will of man in salvation, undercutting the sovereignty of God. Scripture also teaches that men are responsible to repent. Many are uncomfortable with that conclusion as well, believing it undermines the sovereignty of God in salvation. The truth is that Scripture asserts that men are responsible to repent *and* that God's sovereignty extends to our salvation. It is frankly difficult for us to see how they can both be true; consequently, we unwisely argue for one to the detriment of the other. I will be able to reconcile that tension only if I am willing to conclude that some theology is beyond my full comprehension.

The Inspiration and Preservation of Scripture

A second example of misrepresenting the actions of God due to fear, discomfort, or just overgeneralizing a principle is the relationship of the inspiration of Scripture to its preservation. The doctrine of inspiration, along with the related

doctrines of canonicity and the inerrancy of Scripture, are truths of the faith that must be defended. Among the many passages of Scripture teaching inspiration, 2 Peter 1:21 indicates that the prophets did not speak in accordance with human ideas, but that their words were from God and that the Holy Spirit was the ultimate agent of revelation. So the inspiration of Scripture is clearly taught.

The problem normally comes when trying to determine how the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture is related to the doctrine of its preservation. In our thinking, the most logical course of action for the Lord to take would be to preserve Scripture in the same way that He inspired it—inerrantly through divinely chosen copyists who were guarded from error. And I think most of us wish that the Lord had preserved His Word in that way—in an identifiable fashion that would leave no debate about it right down to the individual words. Instead, the Lord has chosen to preserve Scripture in a more providential fashion.

Now, those arguing that preservation extends to copyists of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic manuscripts (or even an English version) are commendable in their desire to defend the inerrancy of Scripture. But they are approaching that issue in the same way Job's friends approached suffering. The friends sought to defend God's justice by arguing that He would never allow the things that happened to Job unless he had actually sinned. But all Job demonstrated is that God's mercy and justice operate in a way only fully comprehended by Him. Textual arguments joining inspiration to preservation are similarly motivated by a desire to defend a key doctrine: the inspiration of Scripture. But they do not fit the scriptural teaching on the subject. The KJV translators recognized that preservation is in fact different from inspiration in their preface, stating,

Partly to exercise and whet our wits, partly to wean the curious from loathing of them for their every-where-plainness, partly also to stir up our devotion to crave the assistance of God's Spirit by prayer, and lastly, that we might be forward to seek aid of our brethren by confer-

ence, and never scorn those that be not in all respects so complete as they should be, being to seek in many things ourselves, it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation . . . but in matters of lesser moment [consequence].²

Since the preface to the KJV reads very differently from assertions of Moses, David, Paul, and the other apostles and prophets regarding inspiration, should we not follow the lead of the KJV translators and other copyists of Scripture regarding preservation? An admission that the two operate differently probably makes us uncomfortable. But might not the Lord have good reasons for doing so?

In contrast with the friends, Job's speeches illustrate another possible error. Rather than trying to defend a principle by over-applying it while denying evidence, Job allowed evidence to subtly deny a theological principle. Job knew that he had not committed any sin worthy of God's displeasure. So he was faced with a theological dilemma, as his theology no longer helped him explain reality. After becoming frustrated with his friends and their advice and God for His refusal to address the situation, Job started to plan what he might do to salvage his reputation. He stated a lot of orthodox truth regarding God, but then effectively denied it all by his oath of innocence in chapter 31. Since oaths in the ancient world were taken very seriously, Job was indicating his absolute confidence in his innocence. The problem with the oath was that it also implied that God, in this case, had acted unjustly.

The most obvious example of behavior similar to Job's today comes whenever we allow some piece of evidence to trump the assertions of Scripture. It is true that Job pulled back from his course of action quickly when confronted by the Lord, repenting in "dust and ashes." Today, however, many do what Job did without ever coming to repentance. They allow their experiences to alter their theology. Some

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Our Desperate Need for the Doctrine of God

Deuteronomy 32

The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses) is a sweeping narrative of the origins of humanity which unfolds major themes and tells individual stories—over a span of three thousand years—in ways that are instructive and meaningful for us today. We remember the names and the narratives: Creation; Adam and Eve; the Fall of man into sin; God’s judgment and mercy in the Garden; Cain, Abel, and Enoch; the worldwide flood of Noah’s day, and the day that God confused the languages at Babel; God’s covenant with Abraham, and the key characters—Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac—and also Hagar and Ishmael. We remember Jacob, renamed Israel, his brother Esau,

and the twelve sons of Israel; God’s providence as Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and God’s provision as Israel’s family went down to Egypt. Then there’s Moses, an unlikely leader, who leads the now-mighty nation of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and toward the Promised Land of Canaan. Moses spoke with God (“face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend”), and God gave him the Law, a covenant with Israel, written on two tablets. And these are just the highlights of the highlights. But I don’t want us to miss that the point of these books has never been about Adam, or Abel, or Noah, Abraham, Jacob, or Joseph. The point of every narrative and every name in the Pentateuch is God!

Deuteronomy 32 is called the “Song of Moses,” but it could more accurately be titled, “The Song That Moses Wrote about God.” Moses’ goal was to teach the doctrine of God, but to do it in such a way that it had a practical, life-changing impact. In verses 2–3 he expresses this purpose: “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

God is the message of Scripture; He is the message of the Pentateuch; and He is the message of Moses’ final song. And as we examine Moses’ important final message, we must be moved by our desperate need for the doctrine of God along three lines.

We Must Be Filled with the Doctrine of God (vv. 1–2)

As Moses begins his song, he establishes that it will be grounded on “doctrine” or teaching (v. 2). This is a song with a message. Moses says, “Give ear . . . and hear.” He’s calling God’s people to be filled with an expanding true perspective of God! Three introductory verses teach us *how* to be filled with the doctrine of God.

We must listen comprehensively. “And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended” (31:30). Listening comprehensively is the opposite of listening selectively. Some truths about God are easy to embrace. We view them as positive or, they match our present assumptions. When Moses spoke to Israel, the text emphasizes wholeness of transmission. The people listened until his words were ended.

The challenge here is not to be “marshmallow Lucky Charm” listeners. Have you ever had Lucky Charms cereal? (You know—“They’re magically delicious!”) I remember when I was young, I would sift through my bowl just picking out the marshmallows and leaving the less-tasty cereal bits behind. If we’re not careful we can think of doctrine the same way and pick out the parts that we like the best.

We must also listen attentively. Moses begins his address with a call for attention, “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth” (v. 1). “Heavens” and “earth” are figures that represent everybody everywhere. This is a message for people everywhere with universal impact. “Give ear . . . and hear” is the imperative to openly and intentionally listen. You don’t hear by accident—you must give your attention.

Finally, we must listen appreciatively. Perhaps “appreciatively” is too weak a word and “desperately” would be better. Either way, you can sense in Moses’ poetic description that this instruction is good, necessary, pleasant—“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass” (v. 2).

We must not think of doctrine as a dusty body of cold, hard facts. Here, the doctrine of God is pictured as rain, dew, raindrops, and showers upon thirsty plants. Just as water refreshes and gives life, so truth about God refreshes our soul and gives spiritual life. I can’t help but think of Jesus’

description of His own teaching: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

We Must Be Faithful to the Doctrine of God (vv. 3–43)

As we heed the initial admonition to be filled with the doctrine of God, Moses’ song swiftly moves to the doctrinal teaching he promised. In this passage Moses lists fifteen clear teachings (doctrines) about God. These are not just truths to be acknowledged; they are immutable, indivisible realities of the one true God. We embrace these truths because they are facets of our awesome Creator and personal Father. God’s attributes are His features in composite that bring His personhood into focus for us, His creation and children.

Each of these realities could merit its own volume, or at least a lengthy explanation; however, we must remember that this song was recited without interruption to the nation of Israel. It probably didn’t take Moses any longer than five or ten minutes to recite the entire song. These doctrines help us to know our God:

- *God Is Personal—v. 3a:* “Because I will publish the name of the LORD.” Moses is passionate about making God’s name known. *Yahweh* (“LORD”) is the personal name for God. Have you ever tried Googling your first and last name or searching for your name on various social media or public-record formats? Be prepared for it to feel a little weird. Chances are that there are dozens or even hundreds of people who have your same name. Why does it feel weird to know others share your name? Because your name identifies *you*. It’s personal, and there’s even a sense where we view it synonymously with our identity. God also has a personal name. And Scripture points out that God’s personal name absolutely and distinctly identifies Him.

When Moses asked God what he should tell the people when they asked who sent him, God answered, “I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exod. 3:14). What we often overlook in this account is the next verse where God clarifies that Moses is to announce that *Yahweh* (translated as “LORD”) has sent him. God is not giving Himself two names; rather, He is giving two forms of the same name. “I AM” (*ehyeh*) is the first person, and “HE IS” (*Yahweh*) is the second person. God makes it clear that His name represents His identity: “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exod. 3:15).

- *God Is Great—v. 3b:* “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” When used of others, the word “great” is used in a comparative sense and typically about one part of a person’s life or character. (E.g., “Abraham Lincoln was a great president.” “Usain Bolt is a great runner.”) With God, however, greatness is ultimate and complete!

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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

Peace! Be Still!

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? Mark 4:37–40

Three recent works about the nineteenth-century British pastor/preacher J. C. Ryle have renewed happy interest in one of the greatest Christian writers bequeathed by Christ to His Church. If you've not yet treated yourself to them, I'd like to recommend that you begin with Iain Murray's *Prepared to Stand Alone* (Banner of Truth, 2016). Follow up with the photo-rich *Travel with Bishop J. C. Ryle: Prince of Tract Writers* by Alan Munden (Day One, 2012). And then, if you want to know still more, finish with Andrew Atherstone's editing of Ryle's *Autobiography* (Banner of Truth, 2016).

To be able to do what I want to with this column, I have no room for any longer introduction to the man. My desire is to encourage you with one of his more comforting "tracts." Ryle wrote some two hundred of these, their circulation eventually reaching an estimated twelve million copies! Eventually seventy-five were published as chapters in an eight-volume set titled *Home Truths*. The tract "Peace! Be Still!" is a truly stimulating tonic for beleaguered Christians, including anxious pastors. About half of it is included here with very light editing.

I wish professing Christians in this day studied the four Gospels more than they do. I do not wish to

exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it would be good for some, who are very familiar with the Epistles, if they knew a little more about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Now, why do I say this?

I say it because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself . . . to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King's own face, and to behold His beauty.

Come now, and let us study together a page in our Master's history. Let us consider what we may learn from the verses of Scripture which stand at the head of this tract. You see Jesus there crossing the Lake of Galilee, in a boat, with His disciples. You see a sudden storm arise while He is asleep. The waves beat into the boat and fill it. Death seems to be close at hand. The frightened disciples awake their Master and cry for help. He arises and rebukes the wind and waves, and at once there is a calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions, and all is over. Such is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Let us examine what we are meant to learn.

First of all, learn that *following Christ will not prevent your having earthly sorrows and troubles.*

Here are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety. The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. The deep water seems likely to go over their souls.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ's service would at any rate lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Perhaps they thought that He who could raise the dead, and heal the sick, and feed multitudes with a few loaves, and cast out devils with a word—He would never allow His servants to be sufferers upon

"The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits"
(2 Tim. 2:6)

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earth. If the disciples thought so they were much mistaken.

Reader, it is good to understand this clearly. It is good to understand that Christ's service never did secure a man from all the ills that flesh is heir to, and never will. If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these.

Above all, I want all Christians to understand what they must expect in other believers. You must not hastily conclude that a man has no grace merely because you see in him some corruption. There are spots on the face of the sun, and yet the sun shines brightly, and enlightens the whole world; there is quartz and dross mixed up with many a lump of gold that comes from Australia, and yet who thinks the gold on that account worth nothing at all?

I know well that many do not like these terms. They would prefer having Christ and good health, Christ and plenty of money, Christ and no deaths in their family, Christ and no wearing cares, Christ and a perpetual morning without clouds. But they do not like Christ and the cross, Christ and tribulation, Christ and the conflict, Christ and the howling wind, Christ and the storm.

Reader, is this the thought of your heart? Believe me, if it is you are very wrong. Listen to me, and I will try to show you that you have yet much to learn.

How would the great work of sanctification go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning-knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord's field is seldom ripened by sunshine only. It must go through its days of wind, and rain, and storm.

Reader, if you desire to serve Christ and be saved, I entreat you to take the Lord on His own terms. Make up your mind to meet with your share of crosses and sorrows, and then you will not be surprised.

Second, learn that *there may be much weakness and infirmity even in a true Christian.*

You have a striking proof of this in the conduct of the disciples here recorded. They awoke Jesus in haste. They said to Him in fear and anxiety, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?"

There was *impatience*. They might have waited till their Lord thought fit to arise from His sleep.

There was *unbelief*. They forgot that they were in the keeping of One who had all power in His hand. "We perish."

There was *distrust*. They spoke as if they doubted their Lord's care and thoughtfulness for their safety and well-being. "Carest Thou not that we perish?"

Poor faithless men! What business had they to be afraid? They had seen proof upon proof that all must be well so long as the Bridegroom was with them. They had witnessed repeated examples of His love and kindness towards them, sufficient to convince them that He would never let them come to real harm. But all was forgotten in the present danger. Sense of immediate peril often makes men have a bad memory. Fear is often unable to reason from past experience.

But, after all, let us understand this is only a picture of what is constantly going on among believers in every age. There are too many disciples, I suspect, at this very day like those who are here described.

Many of God's children get on very well so long as they have no trials. They follow Christ very tolerably in the time of fair weather. They fancy they are trusting Him entirely. They flatter themselves that they have cast every care on Him. They obtain the reputation of being very good Christians. But suddenly some unlooked-for affliction assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away; their own health fails; death comes up into their house; tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, and where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their resignation? Alas, they are sought for and not found! They are weighed in the balance and found wanting. I know that this is a sad description. I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true.

Reader, the plain truth is that there is no literal and absolute perfection among true Christians so long as they are in the body. The best and brightest of God's saints is but a poor mixed being: converted, renewed, and sanctified though he be, he is still compassed with infirmity. There is not a just man upon earth that always doeth good, and sinneth not. In many things we offend all. A man may have true saving faith, and yet not have it always close at hand, and ready to be used.

Why do I dwell on this? Do I want to apologize

for the corruptions of professing Christians, and excuse their sins? God forbid! Do I want to lower the standard of sanctification, and countenance anyone in being a lazy, idle soldier of Christ? God forbid! Do I want to wipe out the broad line of distinction between the converted and the unconverted, and to wink at inconsistencies? Once more I say, God forbid! I hold strongly that there is a mighty difference between the true Christian and the false! Between the believer and the unbeliever, between the children of God and the children of the world. I hold strongly that this difference is not merely one of faith, but of life—not only one of profession, but of practice. I hold strongly that the ways of the believer should be as distinct from those of the unbeliever, as bitter from sweet, light from darkness, heat from cold.

But I do want young Christians to understand what they must expect to find in themselves. I want to prevent their being stumbled and puzzled by the discovery of their own weakness and infirmity. I want them to see that they may have true faith and grace, in spite of all the devil's whispers to the contrary, though they feel within many doubts and fears. I want them to observe that Peter, and James, and John, and their brethren, were true disciples, and yet not so spiritual but that they could be afraid. I do not tell them to make the unbelief of the disciples an excuse for themselves, but I do tell them that it shows plainly that so long as they are in the body they must not expect faith to be above the reach of fear.

Above all, I want all Christians to understand what they must expect in other believers. You must not hastily conclude that a man has no grace merely because you see in him some corruption. There are spots on the face of the sun, and yet the sun shines brightly, and enlightens the whole world; there is quartz and dross mixed up with many a lump of gold that comes from Australia, and yet who thinks the gold on that account worth nothing at all? There are flaws in some of the finest diamonds in the world; and yet they do not prevent their being rated at a priceless value. Away with this morbid squeamishness, which makes many ready to excommunicate a man if he only has a few faults! Let us be more quick to see grace, and more slow to see imperfections! We are yet in the body; the devil is not dead. We are not yet like the angels. Heaven is not yet begun. The leprosy is not out of the walls of the house, however much we may scrape them, and never will be till the house is taken down.

Last, learn *how tenderly and patiently the Lord Jesus deals with weak believers.*

You see this truth brought out in His word to His disciples, when the wind ceased, and there was a calm. He might well have rebuked them sharply.

He might well have reminded them of all the great things He had done for them, and reproved them for their cowardice and mistrust, but there is nothing of anger in the Lord's words. He simply asks two questions. "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?"

The whole of our Lord's conduct towards His disciples on earth deserves close consideration. It throws a beautiful light on the compassion and long-suffering that there is in Him. No master surely ever had scholars so slow to learn their lessons as Jesus had in the apostles. No scholars surely ever had so patient and forbearing a teacher as the apostles had in Christ. Gather up all the evidence on this subject that lies scattered through the Gospels and see the truth of what I say.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble, and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no! It is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings, to make much of their weak graces, and to pardon their many faults.

Frequently you will see things in their spirit and demeanour which are not at all to be commended. One day we are told they disputed among themselves who should be greatest (Mark 9:34). Another day they considered not His miracles, and their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52). Once two of them wished to call down fire from heaven upon a village because it did not receive them (Luke 9:54). In the garden of Gethsemane the three best of them slept when they should have watched and prayed. In the hour of His betrayal they all forsook Him and fled, and worst of all, Peter, the most forward of the twelve, denied His Master three times with an oath.

But what do you see in our Lord's behavior

towards these disciples all through His ministry? You see nothing but unchanging pity, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and love. He does not cast them off for their stupidity. He does not reject them for their unbelief. He does not dismiss them forever for cowardice. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He leads them on step by step, as a nurse does an infant when it first begins to walk. He sends them kind messages as soon as He is risen from the dead. "Go," He said to the women, "Go tell *My brethren*, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me" (Matt. 28:10). He gathers them round Him once more. He restores Peter to his place, and bids him feed His sheep.

Let the entire world know that the Lord Christ is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. As a father pitieth his own children, so He pitieth them that fear Him. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will He comfort His people. He calls for the lambs of His flock as well as for the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of His fold as well as for the strong. He may correct him occasionally in love. He may gently reprove him at times. But He will never, never give Him up. The devil shall never pluck him from Christ's hand.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble, and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no! It is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings, to make much of their weak graces, and to pardon their many faults. Verily, the 11th of Hebrews is a wonderful chapter. It is marvelous to observe how the Holy Ghost speaks of the worthies whose names are recorded in that chapter. The faith of the Lord's people is there brought forward, and had in remembrance. But the faults of many a one, which might easily have been brought up also, are left alone, and not mentioned at all.

Who is there among the readers of this tract that has been converted, and desires to do his Lord's will? Take example this day by your Master's gentleness and longsuffering, and learn to be tender-hearted and kind to others. Alas, there is a painful absence of the Master's mind among many of His disciples!

Bear with me a few moments, while I say a few words to impress the things you have been reading

more deeply on your heart.

This will probably fall into the hands of some who love the Lord Jesus, and believe in Him, and yet desire to love Him better.

Reader, if you are such a man, suffer the word of exhortation, and apply it to your heart.

For one thing keep before your mind, as an ever-present truth, that *the Lord Jesus is an actual living Person*, and deal with Him as such.

I fear the personality of our Lord is sadly lost sight of by many professors in the present day. Their talk is more about salvation than about the Savior, more about redemption than about the Redeemer, more about justification than about Jesus, more about Christ's work than about Christ's person. This is a great fault, and one that fully accounts for the dry and sapless character of the religion of many professors.

Reader, as ever you would grow in grace, and have joy and peace in believing, beware of falling into this error. Cease to regard the Gospel as a mere collection of dry doctrines. Look at it rather as the revelation of a mighty living *Being* in whose sight you are daily to live. Cease to regard it as a mere set of abstract propositions and abstruse principles and rules. Look at it as the introduction to a glorious personal *Friend*; this is the kind of Gospel that the apostles preached. They did not go about the world telling men of love, and mercy, and pardon, in the abstract. The leading subject of all their sermons was the loving heart of *an actual living Christ*. This is the kind of Gospel which is most calculated to promote sanctification and fitness for glory. Nothing, surely, is so likely to prepare us for that heaven where Christ's personal presence will be all, and that glory where we shall meet Christ face to face, as to realize communion with Christ as an actual living Person here on earth. Oh, reader, there is all the difference in the world between an *idea* and a *person*.

For another thing, try to keep before your mind, as an ever-present truth, that *the Lord Jesus is utterly unchanged*.

That Savior in whom you trust is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He knows no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Though high in heaven at God's right hand, He is just the same in heart that He was 1900 years ago on earth. Remember this, and you will do well. ☞



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Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. You may listen to his sermons at mountcalvarybaptist.org/pages/sermons/default.aspx.

Bring . . . the Books

D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*

The *Overcoming Life* is a wonderful collection of seven sermons by D. L. Moody bound together to encourage the believer in his walk with the Lord. First published in 1896, this book was republished by Moody Publishers in 2010. Whether a person has been a believer for a short time or has lived a seasoned life with the Lord, this book will be a blessing. Moody has a way of getting right to the issues that confront all believers and touches those concerns with simple biblical principles.

What caught my attention about this book is that the concerns of believers over one hundred years ago are still the concerns of believers today. Biblical principles have not changed, reflecting the scriptural truth that since God has not changed, some things should remain constant.

The Overcoming Life

New believers need to know that once they enter the Christian walk they are entering Christian warfare. First John 5:4–5 explain the reality, the resolve, and the remedy. Salvation is a free gift. Once a person becomes a believer he is engaged in a battle with sin. Overcoming involves labor on the part of the believer.

This struggle comprises internal foes. Moody elaborates on internal issues that a believer may have to confront, such as appetite, temper, covetousness, jealousy, and pride. He readily states that “the worst enemy you have to overcome, after all, is yourself” (16).

The believer will also battle external foes. Here the author uses James 4:4 to remind the believer about the problem of looking for acceptance from unbelievers. Faith overcomes the world. He takes some time to give examples of what the world looks like. Every believer throughout time has had to deal with this issue of being pulled into conformity with the unbelieving culture. Moody ends this sermon by giving eight blessings to overcomers from the Book of Revelation.

Results of True Repentance

This sermon presents the importance of repentance. Repentance is not just for the unbeliever but also for the believer. In fact, the author states that a believer failing to deal with sin is a testimony to one who is not a believer: “When the ungodly see that Christian people do not repent, you cannot expect them to repent and turn away from their sins” (39). Moody discusses five results of true repentance: conviction, contrition, confession of sin, conversion, and confession of Christ to the world.

True Wisdom

Daniel 12:3 is the text for this exhortation. Moody first highlights men in the Bible who stood out and shined brightly in their day: Daniel, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Paul. Next, he states that all men want to shine out in their realm, “yet there are

very few who can really shine in the world” (56). Finally, he declares that God has left believers in the world to shine for Him. This can be accomplished only as one focuses on and follows the true wisdom found in God’s Word.

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

“Come Thou and All Thy House into the Ark”

Referring to the words of the Lord to Noah, Moody delivers a solemn message of coming judgment. His defense of the biblical account of Noah alerts the reader to the battle for the authenticity of the Bible one hundred years ago. No one likes to hear about coming judgment. This solemn message was not received in Noah’s day. He shares his observation that God always precedes judgment with grace. Moody reminds the audience that “the time is coming again when God will deal in judgment with the world” (77), and makes a strong appeal to do all you can do to make sure that your family is in Christ and will miss the coming judgment.

Humility

Christ’s appeal to learn of Him in Matthew 11:29 is the text for this sermon. Moody states, “There is no harder lesson to learn than the lesson of humility” (84). All men resist this, yet this is the path for usefulness. Using Christ as the example, this message displays what humility looks like and implores each to follow His pattern.

Rest

Matthew 11:28 relays Christ’s telling those who come unto Him that He will give them rest. The human heart is looking for rest, but it can be found only in Christ. There is rest from sin’s burden in the heart. And there is rest some day when the believer leaves this world. Moody ends this message by explaining that some would like to make it harder than it is, but rest is promised to those who simply come to Christ.

Seven “I Wills” of Christ

Man’s word may not mean much, but when Christ says He will do something, it is as good as done. This message takes seven statements that Christ made and applies them to salvation, cleansing, confessing before the Father, usefulness as fishers of men, comfort, resurrection, and glory.

As the reader absorbs the text of each message, he will get a feel for what it would have been like to hear the great preacher delivering these messages. The illustrations used in each message will also enlighten the reader to daily experiences of one hundred years ago. This book is easy to purchase and is worth the read. ☞

Dale Heffernan is the senior pastor of Midland Baptist Church in Wichita, Kansas.

In John 21:15–17 Jesus challenged Peter three times with the question, “Do you love me?” Why did Jesus ask this? Obviously Peter had a problem, but what was it?

Understanding the shepherd’s daily routine enables us to determine the point Jesus was making. The shepherd’s first task, performed early in the morning, is to feed and examine the health of the lambs that are too little to walk with the flock during the day (21:15). The second task is leading the flock from the fold to the field. This requires the shepherd’s constant attention, since sheep tend to wander into danger (21:16). The third and often most arduous task is finding enough green grass to feed the flock (21:17). Jesus’ point, and the nature of Peter’s problem, was this: the shepherd’s love for Christ is revealed by his treatment of the flock.

Peter was grieved due to his initial failure to understand Jesus’ *purpose*. Only later (see 1 Pet. 5:1–4) would Peter understand the nature of Jesus’ question. The test was not about Peter’s love for Jesus directly—loving Jesus was easy. The challenge was whether or not Peter loved Jesus enough to put up with the sheep.

Three things about the shepherd’s setting in Israel are vital to understand: the seasons, the geography, and tasks of the shepherd. *First*, think of Israel as having two major *seasons*: one *wet*, the other *dry*. The wet season begins in late October or early November. There are early, middle, and latter rains that germinate the seed, grow the crop, and enlarge the grain, respectively. And then there is the dry season, which begins in May or June. During this time there is little to no rain in most of the Holy Land.

Second, think of Israel as having two main grazing regions *geographically*—the *heart of Israel* and the *wilderness*. Once the wheat harvest is done in June and the dry season intensifies, shepherds are allowed to graze their flocks in and around farmers’ fields. But after crops are planted in October, shepherds and sheep are not welcome! So where do they go to graze their sheep? During the wet season, shepherds must lead and feed their flocks in the wilderness—a desert stretch of mountainous terrain running roughly ten-to-fifteen miles wide from east to west and about sixty miles long from north to south. The mountains are high in the west (up toward Jerusalem and Bethlehem) and run down to the lowest point on the face of the earth in the east (next to the Dead Sea). Many of the sheepfolds are caves at the tops of the mountains in the west of the wilderness.

Third, the job of the shepherd as outlined by Jesus contains three main *tasks*. He begins his day by getting up before the sheep and making his way to all the newborn lambs. Since little lambs can’t make the dan-

gerous and arduous journey to the green pastures, the shepherd wakes them individually, feeds them with flowers and grasses picked the previous day, examines their health, and loves on them. Fellow pastors, do you give extra time and special attention to the newborn lambs? “Do you love Me? Then feed My lambs” (cf. 21:15).

The next part of his day is spent leading the rest of the flock down steep mountains to places where there is enough grass to feed them. Since this is a steep downward path flanked on both sides with ravines into which a sheep can easily tumble to its death, this task requires the shepherd’s constant attention. And since sheep tend to wander over the crest of these mountains and are apt to get lost, the shepherd must sling a stone in front of a wandering sheep to warn it to come back to the proper path. Fellow pastors, are we diligently guiding, watching, and warning those under our care? “Do you love Me? Then lead My sheep” (cf. 21:16).

Finally, the outward and downward journey ends when the shepherd locates a fresh grassy area large enough to feed the whole flock. Since this is desert, grass grows here only during the rainy season—and even then, not much grass grows, so the job of finding a fresh patch of enough grass to feed the flock for the day necessitates a long, tiring journey. My brothers, the task of studying to feed our flocks is tiring. “Do you love Me? Then feed My sheep” (cf. 21:17).

When we think of our own flocks, we feel the weight of Jesus’ challenge. The real test of our love for Jesus is revealed by how we treat the sheep. It is easy for us to love Jesus. What He has done for us floods our hearts with gratitude. But how difficult is it sometimes to love the sheep? How much time are we willing to devote to discipling a new convert? Are we diligently guarding and guiding our flocks through ever-present dangers and confronting them when they begin to stray? And what happens to our emotions when one of the sheep bites us? Yes, that is when we need Jesus’ words “do you love me” the most! And how diligent are we in our studies? Are we willing to sit for hours at a time in order to produce a spiritually nutritious sermon? What happens to us when someone from the congregation criticizes our sermon immediately afterward? “Do you love Me?”

Ah, yes. Right. Now I get it. My love for Jesus is tested by my response to difficult people and circumstances in ministry. “Do you love Me?” ☞

“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)

Mrs. Willencot was frugal. When her husband died, she asked the newspaper how much his death notice would cost.

“Two dollars for five words.”

“Can I pay for just two words?” she asked. “Willencot dead.”

“No, two dollars is the minimum. You still have three words.”

Mrs. Willencot thought for a moment. “Cadillac for sale.”

Money, money, money. People can't live without it. They joke about it. Neglect family for it. Get ulcers. Risk jail. Even commit murder. Do you ever stop thinking about it? Does it keep you from falling asleep? Wake you up at night?

Your attitude toward money affects your ministry, your marriage, your family life. God warns that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10) and has much more to say about money than I can cover in one article. But please indulge me as I offer six principles I have observed since my dad taught me the first one sixty-one years ago.

Tithe All Your Income to God.

I was an eight-year-old in my hometown of Memphis. On a hot summer Saturday in our backyard, Dad reached into his pocket and brought out a quarter and a dime.

“David, I am going to start giving you a weekly allowance. Help your mom, do your chores, earn your keep, and give ten percent of your income to God. This is called tithing.”

Since I had recently joined our church, I proudly owned *official* offering envelopes. Tithing became my legalistic habit. I kept records and tithed my allowance, my yard-mowing money, and when I became a soda jerk, my salary. Years later when I trusted Christ as Savior, tithing was no longer an obligation. It became my joy. And honor.

John D. Rockefeller said, “I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week.” Whether you see tithing as a New Testament discipline or not, it's a good way to begin cultivating the blessed habit of giving back to God. After all, all we have comes from Him. He owns it all (Ps. 24:1).

If Possible, Live Only on Money Earned through Ministry.

This is irrelevant if you are not called to full-time ministry. But I am. First Corinthians 9:14 says, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the

gospel should live of the gospel.”

God may not apply this Scripture to your life as He has to mine. Yes, the apostle Paul made tents. It is not unscriptural to get an extra job to supplement your ministry income. Nor is it sinful to have a wife who sacrifices some time at home to help put bread on the table. However, early in my ministry I decided to let God supply my needs through ministry income *alone*.

Through the years I have had folks suggest that for personal income I sell some hobby things I have created or earn extra money in other ways. Maybe I will do that when I step away from full-time ministry. But until then, I work for the Creator of the universe. He takes care of His kids, especially those on the front lines of battle.

When we traveled in full-time evangelism from 1986 to 1995, we set up a table in each church and made ministry resources available—sermon and music CDs, photography, etc. That income helped buy food and diesel fuel our first year on the road. Then God spoke to me saying, “Trust Me. Use all that income for missionary outreaches.” I argued with God for a few weeks, then joyfully decided to trust my boss. The profit from that table took us on mission trips to South America, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Hungary, Europe, Africa, and Russia. If God calls you to preach the gospel, you can live of the gospel.

Never Try to Get Rich Quick.

“He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him” (Prov. 28:22). Scams abound. Buy into this pyramid scheme, get rich, live in Gumdrop Valley and eat ice cream all day. I have known preachers who tried to get rich quick and ended up losing much money.

Since I believe God honors honest labor and wise investing, I have never bought a lottery ticket or pulled a handle on a slot machine. Trust God and manage your money carefully. If He knows you can handle wealth, He will provide it. Let Him use your work, frugal living, and planned investing as part of His plan to conform you into the image of His Son.

When Facing Financial Reverse or Stress, Give!

As missionaries, we have occasionally had churches reduce or drop our financial support. Usually the cause is a lack of church growth that results in budget cuts. Whatever the reason, our first response is to thank God for that church's faithfulness in the past. Then we do

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

what Satan does not expect. We give money away and say, “Ha, ha, Satan! You thought we were going to get angry and stop trusting God!”

Any financial loss you suffer may reveal a spirit of hoarding, grasping, or even robbing God. Like Abraham, leave your secure nest and press on by faith to a promised city you cannot see. When money gets tight, give some away. Give until it stops hurting!

Your attitude toward money affects your ministry, your marriage, your family life.

What we give away, we keep. What we hoard, we lose. Sadie Sicker served many years as a house-parent for missionaries’ children in the Philippines. Sadie loved books. Though she gladly loaned out some, others she treasured in a footlocker under her bed. Once, in the quiet of the night, Sadie heard a faint gnawing sound. After searching all around her room, she discovered that the noise was coming from her footlocker. When she opened it, she found nothing but an enormous pile of dust. All the books she had kept to herself had been lost to termites (Larry Pennings, *In Other Words*, Wycliffe Bible Translators).

The Marquis de Lafayette was a French officer who provided invaluable assistance to George Washington and the struggling American army. After the war was over, he returned to France and resumed his life as a farmer on many estates. In 1783 the harvest was terrible, and many suffered as a result. But Lafayette’s farms were unaffected by the devastating crop failures. One of his workers offered what seemed to be good advice to Lafayette: “The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat. This is the time to sell.” After thinking about the hungry peasants in the surrounding villages, Lafayette disagreed and said, “No, this is the time to give” (Daniel Lioy, Lesson Commentary, Sept. 2008–Aug. 2009).

Invest in Eternity.

Financier J. P. Morgan offered these four rules for saving money:

- Start early. Today is the day to start your savings program.
- Save a definite amount.
- Save regularly and systematically.
- Employ your savings productively.

Wall Street is not entirely evil (as socialists suggest). Conservative, systematic investing with no get-rich-quick intent is not sinful (Matt. 25:23). It can be good stewardship of God’s gifts. However, since life is a vapor that is gone in a flash, wise investors also invest for eternity.

Missionary David Livingstone said, “I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to

the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time or eternity.”

I live for today but try to continuously see eternity on the horizon. I look forward to the Millennium, where Scripture seems to indicate that our place of service for God will be determined by how faithful we were to Him during our earthly lives. Investing solely for earthly “retirement” or pleasure is short-sighted. Give all to Him now and enjoy eternally compounding interest.

Confidently Challenge Your Flock to Invest in Eternity.

Are you afraid to preach on biblical stewardship because of the cry for “money, money, money” in some churches? In our first church plant in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, we did not pass an offering plate during worship services. We placed a wooden offering box in the lobby and invited folks to give as God led.

God met all our needs. However, after several years He showed me that my timidity about public giving was wrong—even sinful. I discovered Luke 16:11: “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [money, material things], who will commit to your trust the true riches [spiritual power and blessings]?” I had been robbing my flock by not emphasizing the blessings of biblical giving.

Not only did we then insert the public offering into worship services, but I also occasionally said, “You don’t need to give to pay the bills of the church. God will take of that as the leaders walk with Him. You need to give freely because *it is a key to your spiritual life and growth.*”

When you go to a doctor for your annual check-up, he or she will often begin to poke, prod, and press various places, all the while asking, “Does this hurt? How about this?” If you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity, or more likely, there’s something wrong. The doctor will say, “We’d better do some more tests. It’s not supposed to hurt there!”

So it is when pastors preach on financial responsibility, and certain members cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message and the messenger. Either the pastor has pushed too hard, or perhaps there’s something wrong. In that case, I say, “My friend, we’re in need of the Great Physician because it’s not supposed to hurt there” (Brian Kluth, *Christian Stewardship Magazine*, Fall 1997).

Money and stuff are ultimately from God. Be grateful. Be a faithful steward. ☞

Dr. Dave Barba has planted and pastored churches in Wisconsin and Tennessee. Since 2001 he and his wife, Claudia, have helped plant Baptist churches in the USA through Press On! Ministries.

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Our Desperate Need for the Doctrine of God: Deuteronomy 32

Continued from page 19

Reflecting again on God's name, I AM (the self-existent One) reveals His incomparable greatness.

- *God Is the Rock—v. 4 a:* “He is the Rock.” “Rock” speaks of His steadfastness and unchangeableness and is used three times in the Song of Moses as a name for God. The unchangeable character of God is a great comfort for us. In Scripture, God often comforts His people with his trustworthy stability, “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).
- *God’s Work Is Perfect—v. 4b:* “His work is perfect.” Although “perfect” speaks specifically of God’s works, it dovetails wonderfully with His trustworthiness as our Rock. Perfect has the idea of “complete and without defect.” At times God’s people might profess that although they trust God, the circumstances that He has allowed are suspect. We wonder if God’s plan is always as perfect as He is. The answer is yes. He has not missed any detail or failed in any way. God can be trusted in all His works!
- *God’s Ways Are Just—v. 4c:* “For all his ways are judgment [i.e., justice].” This verse tells us that God is a God of Justice. God is a God who has revealed “his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes” (Deut. 8:11). He does not wink at sin or sweep it under the rug. He is a just God. God can be trusted in all His judgments!
- *God Is Faithful—v. 4d:* “A God of truth.” This word is usually translated as “faithful,” “steady,” or “reliable.” What God says, He will do. He always keeps His promises. He always tells the truth.
- *God Is without Sin—v. 4e:* “without iniquity.” “Iniquity” is a common Hebrew word for sin that can also be translated “perversity” or “dishonesty.” The theme of God’s upright character is primarily emphasized through the positive statements that surround this word, but it is also important to qualify that all of the positives come without a hint of compromise, wrongdoing, or subterfuge.
- *God Is Righteous—v. 4f:* “Just and right is he.” Not only is God without sin, but He is perfectly righteous and upright. The word “righteous” includes the idea of “lawful,” and the word “just” includes the idea of “straight” (the opposite of crooked; see v. 5, “a perverse and crooked generation”).
- *God Is the God of Salvation—v. 15:* “But Jeshurun [a term of affection for Israel, “the upright”] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” In the context of Israel’s rebellion God is again characterized as the Rock—but with the added qualification—of His salvation. In the context of His people’s unfaithfulness,

God’s steadfastness in salvation stands. As David would later exult, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death” (Ps 68:19–20).

- *God Is God of Creation—v. 18:* “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.” The truth about who God is does not exist in a vacuum. Not only does God exist in all His perfections, His person pervades His universe and should be personally acknowledged. Not only did God create the world, He created you! Have you forgotten?
- *God Is Unique—v. 39a:* “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.” Skeptical unbelievers will commonly try to dismiss the Lord God by assuming He is simply one god in a crowded pantheon of gods of many religions. “How do you know which one is true?” they say. “You reject all the other gods, other religions reject yours, we agree with both of you.” While their logic might seem compelling, they are forgetting (or are ignorant of) two truths. First, the universe is full of truths with one right answer and countless wrong ones (e.g., mathematics), and second, that the one true God has made an exclusive claim for uniqueness as part of His identity: “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me” (Isa. 43:10).
- *God Is Sovereign—v. 39b:* “I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.” For those that say, “God makes alive, but He doesn’t kill, God heals, but He doesn’t wound,” I would ask, “How come there is death and injury?” Bad luck? Are those things out of His control, or are they too a part of His plan? The sovereignty of God over all aspects of life is a consistent refrain in Scripture. From Job 5:18 (“For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and his hands make whole”) to 1 Samuel 2:6 (“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up”) to Ephesians 1:11 (“[God] worketh all things after the counsel of his own will”), God’s sovereignty is affirmed over life, death, and all that is between.
- *God Is Eternal—v. 40:* “For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.” The final five doctrines of Moses’ song are found in a stanza that could be aptly titled, “The Vindication of Yahweh” (vv. 39–43). These verses are reminiscent of God’s speech to Job, as the Lord—as it were—takes the stand to exhibit His unrivaled divine qualifications. Among His credentials is His eternity, thus giving assurance to all that God is and does (Isa. 57:15; Rev. 22:13).

We must not think of doctrine as a dusty body of cold, hard facts.

- *God Is the Judge of the Wicked—vv. 41–42:* “If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.”

Earlier we saw that God is just, but now here the focus is on the promise of God to enact justice to its full and final measure. Some might recoil at the vengeance of God, but three truths must always accompany our thinking on this matter: the truth that God withholds His judgment to allow all people an opportunity to repent (2 Pet. 3:9); the truth that God’s ultimate judgment removes the sword of vengeance from the hands of individuals (Rom. 12:19); and the final truth that God’s wrath is merited by those who will receive it (“[I] will reward them that hate me”; Rom 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death”).

- *God Is Merciful—v. 43:* “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.” Mercy is when God withholds the judgment that we all deserve. This is the ultimate truth (overarching the three given above) that puts the justice of God in context. Some argue that God is unfair to judge some and not others, but if God were implacably fair, what would it accomplish but to condemn all without hope? God’s mercy is not an undermining of justice but a freely offered alternative to justice through the justice-satisfying death of Jesus Christ. Peter beautifully encapsulates this beautiful exchange when he rejoices, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

The reason I say, “We need to be faithful to the doctrine of God,” is because not everyone wants to admit that these fifteen doctrines accurately describe God. But we must be faithful to the doctrine of God that we find throughout the Bible and specifically in this passage. If you try to change God, no matter how good your motives might seem to you, you are in danger of creating a false god (Jer. 6:13–14; Rom. 3:3–4).

We Must Be Fruitful in the Doctrine of God (vv. 44–47)

Truth about God was never intended to be merely interesting or novel or mentally stimulating. As we learn about God, the truth should arrest our attention, change our thinking, and radically alter our behavior. What’s interesting is that while the core of Moses’ song deals with the doctrine of God, he spends most of chapter 32 dealing with the actions of God’s people. He is pleading with the people to be obedient to God, to align their life with who God is, which is the essence of true relationship.

Immediately after Moses finished reciting his song, he gave the people three points of personal application for the doctrine of God that he had just spoken. These points of application are very present for us as we pursue a growing personal relationship with the God who has shown us mercy through His Son.

First, allow the doctrine of God to change your heart—v. 46a: “And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day.” The word “set” has the idea of “to appoint or make.” The idea is, “You take these truths into your heart.” This reminds us of Psalm 119:11: “Thy word have I hid [treasured] in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Second, allow the doctrine of God to change your family—v. 46b: “Which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.” What do you discuss at your family dinner table? What about when a national tragedy appears on your news feed? Might I suggest the doctrine of God? How could the truths that *God is the Rock, that His work is perfect, that He is faithful, sovereign, and that He will judge the wicked* impact the perspective of our families as they process life? The opportunities are countless. Never forget that our solutions, perspective, and purpose are found in God.

Finally, allow the doctrine of God to change your Life—v. 47: “For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” The “thing” that Moses says is not vain is the teaching he just shared in his song. Sometimes Christians can view “doctrine” like a middle-school child views math—“How am I ever going to use this in *real* life?” Moses concludes by saying this doctrine “is not a vain thing.” For Israelites in the economy of Law, *blessings* were conditioned on their obedience, but *the basis* of their Levitical obedience was the doctrine of God. Their right standing began with a knowledge and relationship with Yahweh. This doctrine, Moses said, “is your life.” Then he said, “Through this” you will be blessed as you live out covenant obedience.

Today, as gospel believers, we have the same standing that begins with our knowledge of and relationship with God. So, is the doctrine of God pointless? No! “It’s your life.”

Moses begins and ends the Pentateuch with God. From the first verse of Genesis (“In the beginning God”), to the end of Deuteronomy, God is central! (Ch. 32 is considered Moses’ last words. The common phrase we use today is “swan song.”) This is the eternal message of Scripture. Even at the end of the age, as believers—including us!—stand before the throne of God, “they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest’” (Rev. 15:3–4).

Dr. Bryan Brock is a professor of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha Baptist University, Watertown, Wisconsin.





Filtering Feminism

Reaffirming God's Good Plan for Women

"All Americans can be proud that we have more women in the workforce than ever before,"¹ President Trump boasted during his 2019 State of the Union Address—in one of his only statements that night that won applause from both sides of the aisle. Given the rise of feminism within our culture, it is no surprise that Americans everywhere commended this "accomplishment." But as a Christian and a mother of four daughters, I was reminded that, while our nation congratulates itself, believers must be more intentional than ever about providing perspective to the next generation of Christian women about why they should think twice before joining in the applause. We are living in a progressively secular culture that is being reflected in mainstream evangelicalism. What perspective can we offer those coming after us to counter the allurements of feminist ideals?

I believe that, above all, Christian women must reaffirm to the next generation that Scripture is sufficient to guide our thinking about our role in the home and in the church. "What does the Bible say?" must still be the filter through which we run our philosophy. Otherwise we have nothing to offer.

So what *does* the Bible say? In his letters to the early church, Paul gives instructions for how men and women are to function within the body, instructions that reflect God's creative order since the beginning of time.² By God's design, men in the home and in the church bear a heavier burden than

women—the burden of leadership. We women do well to acknowledge and appreciate that, since doing so guards us from self-pity and petty complaining. But the role God has assigned to men does not diminish the important complementary role He has given to women. According to Titus 2:3–5, God's plan is for *older* women in the church to earn a hearing by their godly lifestyle and then to intentionally teach the younger women to imitate it, implying that *younger* women need to willingly learn, knowing that they are gradually becoming the older women who will teach the next generation.

One of the instructions in this well-known passage is for older women to teach younger women to be "keepers [managers] at home" (v. 5). Though specifically directed to married women, applications for single women can be inferred. For example, we see in the Book of Acts that much of the early church's ministry took place in the homes of individual believers. Hospitality within the body should be happening regardless of a woman's marital status. But this passage obviously has the most implications for married-with-children women since they have the most concentrated responsibilities at home. If you are in this category, just think—you have the privilege of using *all* your skills and talents to benefit the people who matter most! But with that privilege comes a sobering responsibility. The stakes are higher than a paycheck

or an advancement at work: “that the Word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:5). Here are a couple of considerations from my own experience:

Managing your home well must be intentional. Being a stay-at-home-mom does not automatically equal being a good manager of your home. If you are blessed to spend most of your time at home, *be careful* how you use that time. Too much social media, blogging, texting, TV, Netflix, etc., can steal more valuable time than an outside job ever would. View your role as a full-time profession. Get up, get ready, and get organized! Be purposeful in the way you interact with your children, and use extra time to serve others. Establish a predictable routine. Though there will always be interruptions (ask any mom of infants or toddlers), a routine quickly gets everyone back on track.³ Avoid extremes and pray for balance. Be careful not to neglect your home for the sake of your children, but also be careful not to make your home an idol—an object of worship rather than a means of worship.

Managing your home and another job or ministry calls for much consideration and prayer. Your family needs one hundred percent of you, especially during certain seasons. During those seasons, perhaps you could consider reworking the budget or going without some things for a while so you won't have to spread yourself too thin. If the need to take another job becomes unavoidable, pray for grace and strength, and then trust God! You may feel divided and extra tired at times, and you will need to be a little more organized

to fit everything in. Establishing a predictable routine may be even more important for you than for a mom who is home all the time. Take time to regularly reevaluate with your husband whether you are fulfilling your primary role and adjust accordingly.

Though our culture tells us otherwise, God's design for believing women to prioritize the management of their homes is still relevant and will be until the end of time. We can trust His plan! When we do, we will reap the blessings of obedience and will “rejoice in time to come” (Prov. 31:25).

Amy Herbster traveled with her husband, Mark, in the ministry of evangelism for seventeen years, participating in music and children's ministries and speaking for various ladies' events. Most recently, God has moved their family to Watertown, Wisconsin, for Mark to be the dean of the Bible Department and Seminary at Maranatha Baptist University. Amy homeschools their girls while enjoying new ministry opportunities with university students.



¹ President Trump's 2019 SOTU Address (www.cnn.com).

² For an in-depth treatment of this concept as well as the topic of evangelical feminism, see *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (2014) by Andreas and Margaret Kostenberger, Crossway (www.amazon.com).

³ For practical help on this topic, see *Managers of Their Homes* (1998) by Steven and Teri Maxwell, Communication Concepts, Inc. (www.Titus2.com).

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Job: How Not to Talk about God and Theology

Continued from page 17

FROM the CALL TO THE FIELD

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theological changes result when the Lord does not answer some request. Those facing an unanswered prayer conclude that God is mistreating them or that He is not worth serving. They would, like Job, be able to recite true biblical doctrine about God, but will in some sense believe themselves to be the exception to it. Sadly, others begin to change their theology based on real-world observations. For example, the growing prominence of many accomplished people who seem like productive members of society while adopting an LGBTQ identity has caused some to rework their theology. Those reformulating their theology are willing to entertain the notion that God has indeed made some exceptions to the two biblically outlined genders and the four biblically sanctioned lifestyles (single, married, married with children, widowed). Though personal identity and lifestyle are very different from the issues facing Job, the argumentative process used by Job to argue for his innocence in chapters 26–31 is eerily similar. In both Job and the modern world, an argument for human integrity is being made at the expense of the Lord's integrity.

So if the friends' error was to embrace an improperly nuanced theology and Job's error was to nuance his theology in a way that misrepresented the Lord, does the Book of Job teach us anything positive about theology? The answer is a resounding yes, and it comes in the Lord's speeches. These speeches contain a series of rhetorical questions that Job cannot answer. In Job 38, God questions Job about the inanimate creation. The Lord asks Job, "Where were you when I created the earth? Where is its cornerstone? Who has created the sea? Who causes the sun to shine? Who causes rain, ice, and snow? Who placed the constellations in the sky?" Job 39 continues God's questioning of Job about the animate creation. The Lord asks, "Who provides food for great (the lion) and small (the raven's young)? Do you know where goats give birth? Who created all manner of unusual creatures (the wild donkey, the ox, the ostrich, the horse, the eagle)?" Finally, the Lord questions Job about

two powerful creatures: behemoth and leviathan, both dangerous and beyond the ability of any human to control. Yet God designed them and has no fear of them. And the point of all these questions is obvious—if Job cannot understand how God has created the universe and then populated it with all manner of unique and fascinating creatures, is it not possible that Job cannot understand certain aspects of the way God manages human beings as well?

In conclusion, Job contributes perspectives both for the doctrine of God and for the doing of theology (prolegomena). It sensitizes us to the fact that we will not always understand the Lord. Of course, we should always attempt to understand the Lord's revelation to us as fully as possible. And with study we can understand much of what He says to us. But at some point, we will all be faced with an unresolvable theological puzzle. In such cases, rather than forcing a bad answer that either ignores data or misrepresents God, would we not be better off to say that we have reached the limits of our understanding? The Lord has done something that does not meet our expectations. And though we do not understand Him fully at this point, we need a God whom we cannot fully understand. The moment we make such an affirmation is a moment where true worship occurs, for we have affirmed that only the Lord is God.

Dr. Preston Mayes is professor of Old Testament at Maranatha Baptist Seminary, Watertown, Wisconsin.



¹ Due to length constraints, I have omitted any discussion of the role of Elihu's speeches in chapters 32–37. Though the interpretation of his role is debated, I would conclude that unlike the other friends, he was somewhat helpful for Job. For a discussion of this interpretation of Elihu's role, see Layton Talbert, *Beyond Suffering* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007), 163–75. Also see John Walton, "Job 1: Book of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 338–39.

² In the quote I have retained the original wording of the preface but have updated the spelling.

Central Regional Fellowship

This year's Central FBFI Regional Fellowship was hosted by the congregation of Harvest Hills Baptist Church in Yukon, Oklahoma, pastored by Dr. Larry Karsies. Pastors from Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas had a wonderful time of fellowship. The members of Harvest Hills Baptist Church went way above the call of duty to provide an excellent time for all who attended.

The theme of the fellowship was "God's Word: A Burning Fire Within." Jeremiah 20:9 states, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." As Dr. Karsies explained, "I thought surely, that's where some of God's men are today—tempted to just give up and be silent yet being unable to do so because of the Word of God that burns in their hearts." Therefore, Dr. Karsies effectively coordinated twelve speakers to give fifteen-minute messages emphasizing the burden that was burning within each preacher's heart. Those messages spoke to many needs. Not only was the preaching exceptional, but the music was soul-stirring. The food and fellowship were truly a blessing. God certainly met with us during this time.

Next year's fellowship in the Central Region will be with Pastor Scott Kliewer on October 19–20, 2020, at Meridian Baptist Church in Newton, Kansas.



New England Regional Fellowship/New England

On Saturday, September 21, 2019, Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire, hosted its fourth New England Foundations Conference, which also functions as the regional FBFI fellowship. Roughly 150 people, from five of the six New England states, were in attendance, representing about thirty different church families. The purposes of this conference include: (1) to *encourage* believers in New England that we do not stand alone for the cause of Christ, and (2) to *equip* believers in New England to think biblically about important subjects so as to minister more effectively in their local churches.

The day featured Mike and Mark Herbster as the guest speakers. Together with host Pastor Taigen Joos, the three preached messages on the theme of "Standing on the Foundation of Holiness." Mike Herbster opened with a wonderful message on the need for holiness in our families. Taigen Joos preached a needed message on holiness in our worship. Mark Herbster closed the day



Foundations Conference

with a message emphasizing our need for holiness in our personal lives.

Also included during the day were workshops provided by Mike Herbster, Taigen Joos, and Mrs. Brenda Love; a question-and-answer time with our guest speakers; prayer time for churches in New England without pastors; and plenty of time for fellowship and mutual edification of the greater body of Christ in New England.

The day was an encouragement to all who came. One of the highlights of this conference was the music. Mike and Mark Herbster also provided musical selections during the day, which, along with the choir and congregational singing, provided great encouragement to the saints.

We look forward to next year’s conference on October 17, 2020, with Dr. and Mrs. Carl Herbster, focusing on the theme of “Standing On and For the Foundation of the Christian Family.” If you are in New England next year, we’d love to have you join us for this day.



New Mexico Regional Fellowship

The **New Mexico FBFI Regional Fellowship** met for their yearly meeting, Monday and Tuesday, September 23 and 24, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at Manzano Baptist Church. The host pastor was Mark Zahn.

Keynote speakers were Dr. John Vaughn and Dr. Les Ollila. We were encouraged by their preaching and by the fellowship with the other nine pastors from all over the state who attended.

Manzano Baptist Church was the consummate host and provided breakfast and lunch on Tuesday.

A day of refreshing fellowship in the spring is being planned for Friday, April 17, 2020, and will begin at 10:00 AM and conclude by 3 PM. Pastor Keith Skaggs and the Charity Baptist Church family in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, will be hosting this fellowship.

If you would like to attend or have questions, please contact Dan Mauldin at Grace Baptist Church in Farmington, New Mexico (505.325.7802 or pastordan@gbcfarm.com).



threatened by assaults on His person and character (Acts 17:16). Theologians need to defend God's glory against satanic attacks from unbelieving scientists, philosophers, and theologians. Pastors must preach this doctrine to their congregations. Believers must regularly refresh themselves in this doctrine. Nietzsche was wrong. "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth good-will to men."²¹

Matthew Walker (PhD, Piedmont International University) is church planter/pastor of College Park Baptist Church in Cary, North Carolina. He is adjunct faculty at Maranatha Baptist University and Seminary online.



¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book 3, Aphorism 125, http://nietzsche.holtof.com/reader/friedrich-nietzsche/the-gay-science/aphorism-125-quote_e4828eb63.html.

² A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

³ Westminster Confession, <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LargerCatechismwithScriptureProofs1.pdf>.

⁴ *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 1963.

⁵ Taken from "The Sands of Time Are Sinking" by Anne Ross Cousins, adapted from *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*.

⁶ Neil deGrasse Tyson, "Neil deGrasse Tyson on Science vs. Denial," <https://skepticalscience.com/science-in-america-neil-degrasse-tyson.html>.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHbYJfwFgOU>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ5QG3MUTtg>

⁹ Penn Jillette, "There Is No God," <https://www.npr.org/2005/11/21/5015557/there-is-no-god>.

¹⁰ <https://www.blueosa.com/10-hindu-deities-everyone-know-pilgrimage-india/>

¹¹ James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), KL 1655.

¹² *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. by Joseph Fielding Smith (Deseret Book, 1993), 356.

¹³ Bart Ehrman has simply repackaged Walter Bauer's theory that Gnosticism was the true Church and that Christianity that exists today is the false view. See the interview with Michael Kruger with Andres Köstenberger, "The Heresy of Orthodoxy," <https://www.biblicalfoundations.org/heresy-orthodoxy-overview-bauer-thesis/>.

¹⁴ Robert Creech, "Old Testament vs. New Testament: A Tale of Two Gods?" <https://www.explorethegod.com/old-testament-vs-new-testament-a-tale-of-two-gods>.

¹⁵ See Adam Hamilton's argument about the Old Testament in "God's Violence in the Old Testament," <https://www.adam-hamilton.com/blog/gods-violence-in-the-old-testament-part-3-possible-solutions#.XTDO4ZnKiBt>. Hamilton is a United Methodist pastor who struggles with the supposed differences between the two Testaments' presentations of God.

¹⁶ Bodie Hodge, "The 'Harsh' God of the Old Testament," <https://answersingenesis.org/who-is-god/god-is-good/the-harsh-god-of-the-old-testament/>.

¹⁷ Eric Johnson, "Can God Be Grasped by Our Reason?" *God under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 90.

¹⁸ Gregory Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic,

1997), 56.

¹⁹ Gregory Boyd, "How People Misunderstand Open Theism," <https://reknew.org/2019/06/how-people-misunderstand-open-theism/>.

²⁰ Gregory Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997), 36–37.

²¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

I remember when I first noticed, about fifteen years ago, that the word “evangelical” was being used in places where I would have chosen “evangelistic.” Here’s a random example, from an article critical of tattooing by the inimitable conservative Theodore Dalrymple:

The tattooed have a vested interest in ensuring that the fashion continue, and will even become evangelical on its behalf.

When I first saw this sort of thing, I blamed secularism. I thought, *These people are so ignorant of religion that they mix up our terminology. “Evangelical” means “of or pertaining to the branch of Christianity known as evangelical Protestantism.” “Evangelistic” is the word you want when you’re describing someone’s zeal to spread a particular viewpoint.*

But here’s the thing: Dalrymple (actually a pseudonym for British doctor Anthony Daniels) is unquestionably an excellent writer. I’ve read two books of his that were penetrating and witty and edifying. And when I stumbled across his article on tattoos, I didn’t actually notice the author’s name—but figured it out in the middle of the first paragraph. He has one thing every writer has to have in order to be great: a voice. When writers of this stature make an apparent error, readers probably ought to pause and question whether they are so sure that the error is in fact an error.

When I saw that Dalrymple himself had used “evangelical” instead of “evangelistic,” I officially changed my mind. I’ve now seen this “error” so many times in edited prose that I give both up and in. It’s not an error.

Etymologically speaking, “evangelistic” isn’t any better—that word itself contains the New Testament word “gospel” and, in a way, is owned properly by biblical Christianity. So if I’m okay with using the word “evangelistic” to describe someone promoting a non-Christian viewpoint, I suppose I should be fine with “evangelical” serving the same role.

As is often the case, I found that the harmless drudges at the various major English dictionaries had noticed this phenomenon before I was born. Sure enough, my *New Oxford American Dictionary* offers this as one of the senses for “evangelical”: “zealous in advocating something.” And the *Oxford English Dictionary* found a use of this sense in 1952.

This is the way of things. No human or group “owns” any English words, even Christian ones. Language is a common property of English speakers. As Ammon Shea says in *Bad English*, “There are two things that have remained constant: The English language continues to change and a large number of people wish that it would not” (x).

When I see writers of great stature repeatedly committing what I consider to be error, I may instead be collecting evidence to refute my own opinion.

Mark Ward, PhD, is an academic editor at Lexham Press, a division of Faithlife, makers of Logos Bible Software. His most recent book is *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



Layton Talbert

A Visit with

We don't know their names (though tradition has supplied some), their number (three is an assumption), nor their country of origin (Persia?). Most suggest that they were Gentile priest-sage-astronomers—which is particularly intriguing, since they are the first in the Gospels to identify Jesus as the “King of the Jews.” Many link their Messianic understanding to an awareness of Israel's ancient religious texts, particularly Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:17).

Their words (Matt. 2:2) indicate a confident connection between a celestial sign and the birth of the Jews' long-awaited Messiah. Their actions (Matt. 2:1, 11–12) indicate a remarkable commitment not only to the international relevance of this birth (hence their long journey) but also to its spiritual magnitude (hence their costly gifts and their obeisance).

But when did they arrive? Matthew never specifies. The conventional view is that they arrived long after the birth of Christ. That conclusion is based on several inferences. Let's explore them briefly.

The Timing of Magi's Visit

First, Matthew uses the term “young child” (*paidion*) rather than the normal word for “infant” (*brephos*) when he refers to the child that the wise men saw (Matt. 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14). But the term *paidion* is chronologically relative. Luke uses the term to describe the eight-day-old John the Baptist (Luke 1:59) and the one-month-old Jesus (Luke 2:27). So Matthew's use of the word *paidion* rather than *brephos* is irrelevant to proving a late visit of the magi.

Second, the family was in a “house” when the magi arrived, not in the stable (Matt. 2:11). But neither Matthew nor Luke tells us how or when the family came to be in a “house.” Any explanation rests on a degree of speculation. So, consider. The very night of the birth, the shepherds received the stunning angelic announcement that the Messiah had just been born (Luke 2:11). Where do they discover the infant King of Israel? In a feeding trough?! And not one of them offered the family immediate shelter in one of their own homes nearby? That seems unthinkable. The scenario is speculative, but it is surely a far more realistic explanation than the assumption that they spent their entire time in Bethlehem living in the stable.

Third, Herod's decision to murder male children up to two years old (Matt. 2:16), based on his interrogation of the wise men regarding when the star first appeared (Matt. 2:7), suggests to many that the magi may have arrived as much as two years later. This assumes, however, that the star had to

appear in the east for the first time on the day that Christ was born—as if there were some necessary connection between the star's appearance and the *day* of the *birth*. Clearly there was a supernatural connection between the star and the birth. In the text, however, *the purpose of the star was not to mark the day of Christ's birth, but to lead the magi to the place of Christ's birth* (Matt. 2:9). It makes more sense to assume that the star appeared long enough *before* Christ's birth to give the magi time to make the journey. So, when did it appear? We're not told, but Mary's miraculous *conception* is a reasonable assumption, given God's penchant for complex orchestration of multiple events with flawless timing.

Finally, at least one positive argument further supports an early visit of the magi. Luke reports that after seeing the one-day-old infant, the shepherds *immediately* began spreading the news that Israel's long-awaited Messiah had finally arrived (Luke 2:17, 38). And yet the arrival of these foreign magi asking the whereabouts of Israel's newborn king caught Herod and his court completely by surprise (Matt. 2:3–4). This was clearly the first they'd heard of it. It seems impossible to imagine that news of Messiah's birth had been sweeping the countryside for weeks or months, and yet no one in Herod's court had caught wind of this. That would imply that the magi must have arrived *very* shortly after Christ's birth—before the rumors of a potential rival had reached Herod's ears, and probably before those rumors were confirmed by those who witnessed the prophetic proclamations of Simeon and Anna in the Temple barely one week after Jesus was born (Luke 2:22–38).

The Theology of the Magi's Visit

I suspect Matthew really expected his account of the magi to wow his readers. But the story has become so familiar that it has all but lost its shock value. Tradition tells us that there were three of them (because of the three gifts), and at least one Christmas song tells us they were kings (a tradition that traces as far back as Tertullian around AD 200.) We even know their names (at least since the sixth century): Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar.

Scripture, however, is considerably less forthcoming about these individuals, and other historical sources are inconclusive. Over the centuries questions about the magi have hopped about like fleas on a camel. What, exactly, *did* they do for a living? How many of them came? Were they, in fact, “kings”? Did they come from Babylon? Persia? Arabia? How

the Magi

did they know what they knew? Was the nature of the celestial phenomenon that led them providential or miraculous? If you're looking for definitive answers to those kinds of questions, you won't find them. Anywhere.

Instead, I want to raise a biblical-theological question: How does this incident fit into Matthew's larger literary-theological purpose?

Matthew's Theology. Matthew has long been recognized as the most intentionally **Jewish** of the Gospels. Besides beginning with a genealogy identifying Jesus racially (son of Abraham) and royally (son of David), Matthew includes far more references to David (17) than the other Gospels (22, combined) and OT citations (51) than the other Gospels (66, combined).

Matthew, however, counterbalances the distinctive Jewishness of his Gospel with the most explicit **Gentile** emphasis of all the Gospels. He uses *ethnos* and *ethnikos* 18 times, more than all three other Gospels combined (17). And he includes numerous incidents featuring Gentile references that are entirely unique to his Gospel—such as the story of the Gentile magi.

In addition, Matthew's designation as the Gospel of Jesus as **King** is based on more than mere tradition. Matthew uses the terms "king" and "kingdom" with direct or parabolic reference to Christ some 70 times. (The next highest frequency is only 48 in Luke; Mark has 25, and John has 21.)

Another motif that Matthew distinctively emphasizes is **worship**. The verb *proskuneo* surfaces 13 times in Matthew. (That may not sound like a lot but, again, the word shows up only 5 times in Luke and Mark combined.) And the first three appearances of the word show up in the account of the magi (Matt. 2:2, 8, 11).

The Magi in Matthew's Theology. All these distinctively Matthean emphases converge in the story of the magi. In fact, Matthew uses the visit of the magi to introduce some of these themes that will shape the rest of his Gospel.

Matthew opens with a bolt out of the Eastern blue. A retinue of **Gentile** dignitaries arrives unexpectedly in the royal court of the Judean capital inquiring the whereabouts of the newly born **king** of the **Jews**. They've traveled hundreds of miles with the express purpose of **worshipping** him (Matt. 2:2, 11), having followed a celestial anomaly that they somehow linked to the birth of this unique monarch. Israel's own royal leaders, religious rulers, and legal scribes

have their long-awaited Messiah in their own backyard. It takes the arrival of foreigners to bring it to their attention, and even when they hear the news they are not joyful but "troubled" (Matt. 2:3).

J. C. Ryle observed that "it is not always those who have the most religious privileges who give Christ the most honor. . . . How often the persons who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them most" (*Expository Thoughts on Matthew*).

Matthew seems to be telling his Jewish audience up front: "Your King has come, O Israel; if you will not own him and worship him, others will" (cf. Matt. 27:37). Even as the Gospel to the Jews, Matthew's theology incorporates a global dimension precisely because *OT Judaism was originally created with an international intent* (Gen. 12:1–3; Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 4:5–8; 2 Chron. 6:32–33).

The Significance of the Magi's Visit

What does Matthew—and more importantly, the Holy Spirit—intend us to conclude about these mysterious, meteoric visitors? Were they believers? I don't mean did they understand that this child would live a sinless life and one day die for their sins. But in the context of their culture and the light they possessed, did they believe what they had knowledge and opportunity to believe? I don't know how we can conclude otherwise.

Consider what they did.

It's one thing to deduce the birth of a distant king from studying the stars. And presumably prophecy. (Did they know about Numbers 24:17 or Isaiah 60:3 from remnants of the Jewish captivity still living among them?) It's quite another thing to take the time and trouble and expense and danger of a long and arduous journey to bring expensive gifts in order to worship a newborn monarch to whom you have no natural or national obligation.

They knew as well as anyone that Rome ruled, not Israel. So, what would prompt them to give this level of recognition to the birth of the reputed king of a tinpot little Middle-Eastern country under the heel of mighty Rome?

And yet the remarkable fact is that the first people in the NT to bow their knee to Jesus and call Him "King" were not the Jewish religious leaders, or the shepherds, or the disciples, or even His own family; they were the magi (Matt. 2:2).

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of Theology and Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

Is Nicaea Still Relevant?

Continued from page 11

incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.⁴ I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;⁵ and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We Baptists are Bible-only people, right? Do we need ancient creeds? To answer that question, let me pose some counter-questions:

- Are we still facing challenges to any of the seven scriptural statements listed above? We certainly are.
- Do the people in our churches still have any confusion about how the seven Bible truths can be shown to be coherent? I'm afraid some of them do.
- Do we trust in the sovereignty of God as He worked in church history to cause orthodoxy to triumph over heresy? We ought to.
- Is it possible that turning back to the Nicene Creed and other key symbolic statements of the early church, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Formula of Chalcedon, shows not dependence on human wisdom but rather humility on our part?

Scripture is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, and, relative to the triune nature of God, ultimately our faith is in the seven scriptural statements listed above. But in affirming all seven at once, we need not reinvent the wheel. As Baptists, we should freely acknowledge that God used the unlikely vessels of Emperor Constantine and a bunch of bishops to help us as we converse today with false teachers and confused relatives.



Dr. David Saxon serves as a professor in the College of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin.

¹ In fairness to her, the relative was a senior citizen at the time and not thinking as clearly as she might have in years gone by.

² A claim, for instance, recently made here: <https://www.theberean.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Home.showBerean/BereanID/9483/1-John-5-7-8.htm>. This article is a good example of contemporary cultic thinking.

³ The convoluted history over the next forty years, during which Arianism often appeared to have gained ascendancy in the Eastern empire, makes this Nicene decision appear even more unlikely and providential.

⁴ Recall that "catholic" at this time had none of the Romanist associations it would later receive. Baptists rightly emphasize the predominantly local-assembly usage of the word "church" in the New Testament, but this Nicene language is trying to do justice to the unities in Ephesians 4:4–6 and to the cosmic church language of passages such as Ephesians 1:22–23 and Colossians 1:18.

⁵ Such language eventually contributed to deep misunderstanding regarding the ordinances and their relationship to salvation, but the wording is a simple echo of Acts 2:38 and need be no more objectionable than Peter's words at Pentecost, which, properly understood, do not support baptismal regeneration.

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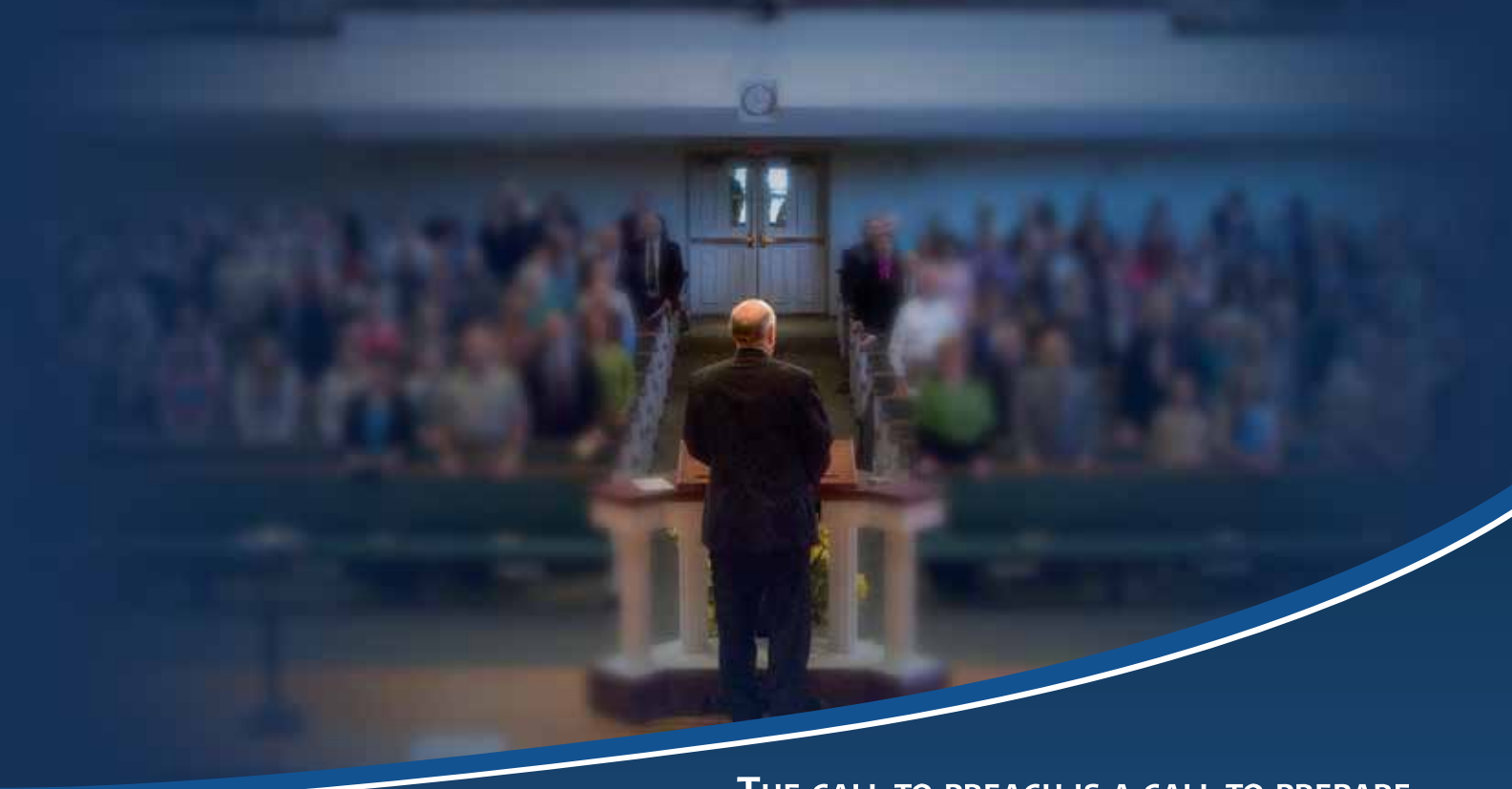
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Trenten Long

Chaplain Ministry to the United States Coast Guard



“Does the Coast Guard have chaplains?” I’ve heard this question on several occasions, but the answer can be a little complicated. The answer is really yes and no. The Coast Guard does *not* have chaplains that are organic to the Coast Guard organization, but they do have chaplains who serve them. Every chaplain who wears the Coast Guard uniform is a Navy chaplain serving with the Coast Guard. This assignment is temporary, and it is rare. It is temporary in the sense that most chaplains serving with the Coast Guard will serve one tour with them before going back to an assignment with the Navy or Marine Corps. It is rare because most Navy chaplains never get the opportunity to serve the Coast Guard. In fact, of the approximately 850 active-duty Navy chaplains, only forty-one serve with the Coast Guard at a time.

Did You Know . . . ?

The Coast Guard has a unique role that differs from other military services. The Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), yet the Coast Guard is still a military service and could realign under the Department of Defense (DoD) during wartime. While the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force are governed by US Code Title 10, the Coast Guard is governed by US Code Title 14.

For the past two years I have had the distinct privilege of serving with the Coast Guard. I am currently assigned to Sector St. Petersburg (with additional responsibilities to Air Station Clearwater and a portion of Sector Jacksonville), which falls within the United States Coast Guard District 7. Each day I have the chance to offer the opportunity to worship with those of like faith through Bible studies or services. Of course, many are not of like faith, and I have the chance to facilitate their First Amendment right to worship according to their faith tradition. In addition to these two responsibilities, I offer relevant counsel with absolute confidentiality to all service members and their families regardless of their faith background. I also provide advice to commanders when asked or when I believe it to be necessary.

Did You Know . . . ?

The Coast Guard is broken down into nine Districts (five in the Atlantic Area and four in the Pacific Area). District 7, spanning 1.7 million square miles, includes South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Puerto Rico, and thirty-four foreign nations and territories.

I recently had the opportunity to deploy to the Bahamas in support of the aircrews who were tasked to fly missions into the northern islands of the Bahamas. These islands were devastated by Hurricane Dorian. Aircrews, tasked with medical evacuations, were able to assist 87 lives and save an impressive 163 lives. I was honored to observe the Coast Guard within their element, doing what they do best, all with zero mishaps! However, my highest honor was introducing a spiritual meaning to everything these aircrews were doing. After observing such a great deal of death and destruction—naturally—many Coasties (a nickname given to Coast Guard members) began to think about their purpose in life. Many Coasties already have an understanding of the sovereignty of God, yet still struggle with accepting the destruction they observed in the Bahamas. For others, I had the opportunity of sharing with them a biblical understanding of God’s sovereignty.

Did You Know . . . ?

On August 4, 1790, President George Washington signed the Tariff Act authorizing the construction of ten vessels, referred to as “cutters,” to enforce federal tariff and trade laws and to prevent smuggling. The Revenue Cutter Service expanded in size and responsibilities as the nation grew. Today, the Coast Guard has eleven statutory missions. Some of those missions include drug and migrant interdiction; ice operations; search and rescue; and ports, waterways, and coastal security. On average, the

Coast Guard saves ten lives a day.

Serving with the Coast Guard has been the honor of a lifetime. I am very thankful to have the opportunity to participate in the mission of the Coast Guard. Serving those who commit their lives to help others is a great honor.

Chaplain Trenten Long is currently the Command Chaplain for USCG Sector St. Petersburg, Air Station Clearwater, and Sector Jacksonville’s southern area of operations. He is married to Ashton, and they have four children. Chaplain Long’s other assignments have included ship’s chaplain aboard the USS *Kearsarge* (LHD-3); Command Chaplain at 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division; and Command Chaplain at Officer Training Command Newport. Next year he will be reassigned to Marine Corps University, where he will be enrolled as a student in Command and Staff College.





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A Biblical Focus When Facing Difficulties

Oswald Chambers stated, “The real test of spiritual focus is being able to bring your mind and thoughts under control.” This is a tremendous biblical truth! Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” We must have our minds stayed upon our powerful Lord. A. W. Tozer wrote, “How satisfying to turn from our own limitations to a God who has none.” So often our focus is on the circumstances or crises of our lives. Someone has said, “Glance at your crisis, gaze upon Christ.”

I know for a fact that many who are reading this article are going through difficult circumstances. Some ladies are widows; some men are widowers. Some have cancer or other diseases. Others are going through a financial crisis; some have recently experienced the death of a loved one. The list is endless! Catastrophes, derailed plans, and disappointments plague many of the Lord’s people. What is the answer? How do we cope with these things? Are we to despair and give up? No—a thousand times, no! It is my sincere desire that what you are about to observe from Scripture will be a source of encouragement and help to you.

In Deuteronomy 31 we find Moses giving his final instructions to the children of Israel and to Joshua, who was about to become their new leader. In verse 3 Moses says, “The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.” Then in verse 6 Moses states, “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” Moses wanted the children of Israel to have the right spiritual focus, and the same truth must be grasped by God’s people today.

First, we must focus on the promises of the Lord during difficult times. I am going to share several passages of Scripture with you that I encourage you to memorize.

Psalm 55:22: “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

Psalm 60:11: “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.”

Psalm 71:12: “O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.”

Psalm 91:15: “I will be with him in trouble.”

Psalm 118:5: “I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.”

Psalm 118:14: “The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.”

Psalm 125:2: “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.”

Nahum 1:7: “The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

I can personally testify to the truth that in difficult trials the Lord’s promises in His Holy Word have been my source of calm, peace, and comfort. When my father died, it was the comfort of God’s promise in Psalm 18:30 that strengthened me: “As for God, his way is perfect.” I knew that this was the Lord’s ideal time to take my dad home to heaven.

Second, we must focus on the Lord Himself during difficult times. In the latter part of Deuteronomy 31:6 Moses said, “He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” We must ever keep our eyes upon God! Your spiritual focus must be locked on Him, the One who will never fail or forsake you. When Jehoshaphat was facing the armies of the Moabites and Ammonites, he cried out to the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20:12, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.” Notice that last phrase, “our eyes are upon thee.” The psalmist said in Psalm 25:15, “Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD.” Psalm 27:8 reads, “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.” Psalm 141:8 says, “But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.”

I trust that this article will help, encourage, and strengthen you. Keep God’s promises in your heart and your eyes upon Him. This should be our spiritual focus during difficult times.

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