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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



THE FUNDAMENTALS: Creation and Its Implications



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When Darwin's theory of evolution appeared during the latter half of the nineteenth century, American Christians were not prepared to respond. Theological liberals, having already abandoned their commitment to Scripture, quickly adopted the new theory. Some conservatives also thought that perhaps the biblical language of Creation could accommodate some form of evolution, just as it had previously accommodated a heliocentric solar system. They tried to find ways to make the Bible fit evolution. This effort, however, was doomed from the start. Biblical language was simply too clear to get around. By the 1920s the most conservative Christians were becoming known for their defense of Creation against all forms of evolution.

The geological clock, which called for an ancient earth, remained a problem for conservatives. They made several attempts to fit the biblical timeline around it. The "Gap Theory" was one such effort; the "Day-Age Theory" was another. The problem with these theories was that they could not explain the presence of sin and death before Adam's fall. Eventually conservatives noticed that Noah's flood could explain the geology while still permitting them to affirm a young earth, a historical Adam, and a historical fall that introduced death into the world. Not long after mid-twentieth-century, conservative Christians began abandoning other theories in favor of flood geology and a young earth.

Biblical creationism remains important for at least three reasons. First, the presence of sin and death must be grounded in the historical Adam. Second, the redemption

secured by Christ as the second Adam mirrors the damage done by the first Adam. Third, the Bible bases its teaching about human nature upon the narratives of Creation, Fall, and Flood. For example, a true ecology, political theory, and economic theory must be informed by these early narratives. Furthermore, the Bible appeals to the early chapters of Genesis to establish an understanding of sex, gender, marriage, and even church leadership.

The articles in this issue of *FrontLine* divide into two series. The first series revisits the debate over Creation versus evolution. Jeff Straub compares the debate among evangelicals today to the conflict with liberals a century ago. Michael Riley points out the connection between Creation (first things) and eschatology (last things). Mark Snoeberger asks whether the biblical timeline allows any flexibility at all in calculating the date of Creation.

The second series of articles draws out the implications of creation for the currently-debated problems of sex, gender, and marriage. I have written an article that provides a miniature theology of sex and gender. Ryan Martin proposes a biblical definition of marriage and explains why we must defend that definition. Brett Williams argues that "homosexuality" is a new label for an old disorder of the affections that does not define the person who experiences it.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This opening verse of Scripture is as relevant today as it ever was. It is the bedrock upon which the entire system of biblical faith and practice rests.

—Kevin Bauder



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A Question of Origins

Evangelicalism's Love Affair with Evolution

In recent years a plethora of books, articles, and papers has been presented by evangelicals arguing for the necessity of accepting the evolutionary hypothesis as the only legitimate explanation for the way things are. Several years ago, at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Bruce Waltke argued before a large crowd that if evangelicals did not accept the evidence of science, then they were obscurantists and would be dismissed as backward. The evidence for evolution was overwhelming, he argued, and those who still hold to a literal understanding of the Genesis narrative are perceived as ignoramuses by an educated audience. Organizations such as BioLogos claim that “God created the universe, the earth, and all life over billions of years. God continues to sustain the existence and functioning of the natural world, and the cosmos continues to declare the glory of God.”¹

The problem with this affirmation and others like it is that it flies in the face of the biblical narrative found in Genesis 1–3. The question is not whether God *could* have used evolution to bring the world into existence. The issue is whether He *did* bring the world into existence through a process of billions of years of animal predation, disease, death, and mass extinction. Scripture (e.g., Gen. 1, Psa. 33:6–9) indicates that He simply spoke and produced a “very good” creation without sin, death and other moral and natural evils. It may sound like a rather simple question, but if God didn’t mean what He said, then why didn’t He say what he meant? He said He created a “very good” world in six twenty-four-hour days and not through a process of billions of years.² Why is this hard to believe?

Young-Earth Creationists, Old-Earth Creationists

Why does this matter? In fact, who cares? Both young-earth creationists and some old-earththers (the common tags for the opposing sides in the debate) claim to accept an inspired Bible, though BioLogos adds the caveat that “properly interpreted, Scripture and nature are complementary and faithful witnesses to their common Author.”³ This caveat is revealing: some wish to appear to accept both Christianity and the conclusions of modern science.

Not that the young-earth camp opposes science. It includes some very fine Christian geologists, biologists, chemists, and other scientists who both appreciate the right use of science and accept the biblical narrative. These young-earth scientists have produced a good bit of scholarly literature, but it is dismissed out of hand by the “scholarly” evolutionist community simply because it argues for a young-earth view.

This rejection reveals that the debate is not a difference about science. Neither evolution nor creation is “scientifically verifiable” in the accepted senses of the term. To be scientifically verifiable, something has to be observable and repeatable. Neither evolution nor creation was observed (outside the divine witness), and neither is repeatable.

No, the debate is a difference about belief. Both evolution and creation are positions based upon faith. Years ago, when I lived in northern Alberta, someone discovered a rock that was estimated to be 4.5 billion years old. That is old, but how would anyone know this? Talk about accepting a conclusion by faith. To accept the evolutionary model, one must trust or believe many assumptions about what is possible.

Evolution, Creation, and the Intellectual Elites

From a philosophical standpoint, belief in evolution is necessary only in a world that does not accept the reality of God. If a personal-infinite deity exists, one who reveals Himself and one who could create the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), then the biblical narrative of Creation can be accepted at face value. In the nineteenth century, as rationalism and naturalism came to dominate the intellectual world, the theistic commitment of the intellectual

elites waned. Therefore, an alternate explanation for the existence and present condition of the world became necessary. The theory of evolution was developed as this alternate explanation. Most of those who affirmed evolution were at minimum agnostics, and some were confirmed atheists. (Philosophical atheism is really a construct of recent vintage, stemming from the days of Spinoza and others.) The point is that when the existence of God is ruled out as an explanation for the existence and present nature of the world, then some other explanation is necessary. The belief in evolution fits the bill.

So why does the theory of evolution influence people who claim to believe the Bible? Old-earththers are quick to point out that as the new theory was put forth, it found acceptance by well-known evangelical leaders like some of the Princetonians. This observation is certainly true, but it is also trivial. In the progress of doctrine, new ideas have to be tested and examined by the revealed Word of God. Testing evolution by the Bible required time. Over time, a cogently-argued young-earth creationism came into focus that understood the importance of the biblical narrative in the face of supposedly scientific observations. During the interim, some conservative Christians experimented with evolution. Others developed a “gap theory,” which says that God created, destroyed, and recreated the world, accounting for the fall of Satan.

In this debate as in others, some Christians down through the ages have accepted a wide assortment of interesting but unbiblical views. That some well-meaning believer accepts a theory as true (in any area of doctrine) does not make it true. Everything must be tested by the Word of God. On the other hand, evolution is at best a hypothesis. It is not science, for it is neither observable nor is it repeatable. It is an idea—an idea that rose out of deism, agnosticism, and atheism. In the long run, Bible believers began to understand the implications of accepting the theory of evolution and chose against it.

Clarke, Harper, and Today’s Evangelicals

Turn the clocks back one hundred and fifty years to the time when theological liberalism was beginning to encroach upon the churches. While clinging to the name and structures of Christianity, young, progressive thinkers began to accept the prevailing scientific opinions and to dismiss their Bibles as hopelessly filled with myth and legend. One example was Baptist theologian William Newton Clarke (1841–1912). In his intellectual autobiography *Sixty Years with the Bible* (1909) Clarke explained that he had to choose either the Bible or science because he could not hold both. When forced, he chose science over the Bible. He stated that the Bible

was forever irreconcilable with Geology and impossible of belief. Facts enough to convince me of that had already been presented, and I was convinced. Science had demonstrated that the earth was ancient, and it was useless to object. . . . My father, with the

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is a difference
about belief.
Both evolution
and creation are
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upon faith.

reverent caution of the older generation, decidedly hesitated here, thinking that the revelation of God must be interpreted by religion and by that alone. The Bible stood by itself, and must be interpreted in its own light. But though I appreciated the motive of this reasoning, I found myself yielding to facts, and allowing science, not my reading of the Bible, to tell me what I should believe about the age of the earth.⁴

These conclusions put Clarke in the vanguard of those who had little time for a book filled with myth and legend.

In 1894 another young academic, William Rainey Harper (1856–1906), delivered a series of lectures on the early chapters of Genesis, emphasizing their nonliteral nature.

These stories are not history, for the times are prehistoric times. They are the Hebrew version (purged and purified) of the best thoughts of humanity in that the earliest period when man stood alone with nature and with God. It is a sacrilege to call them history. To apply to them the tests of history—always cold, and stern, and severe, is profanation. They are *stories*, grand, inspiring, uplifting stories.⁵

What we are hearing today from evangelical evolutionists is nothing new. We have been here before. Conversations about the early chapters of Genesis among present-day evangelicals sound similar to conversations in the days of rising theological liberalism. The Bible is being dismissed as an authoritative record of God’s creative acts and dealings with humanity. This dismissal includes the all-important Genesis accounts of the Fall and Noah’s Flood. These accounts are myth and legend, not historically accurate truth—so say Bruce Waltke and a host of other evangelicals.

Why does this question matter? Without Genesis 1–11, we have no biblical explanation for the world as it is. We have no explanation for the entrance of sin into the world, and no explanation of God’s divine response to the sin when it came. To treat the first eleven chapters as myth leaves us wondering whether there was a historical Adam—a first man and first human. Does that matter? Without Adam and Eve, what happens to the biblical teaching on marriage, sex, and gender? Without the first Adam, how can we understand the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ? As in Adam (the first) all die, even so in Christ (the second) shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22)—but what can that mean if no real Adam ever actually sinned and died? Genesis 1–11 is foundational for a right understanding of God, of ourselves, and of His creation. If God did not mean what He said, then why should we serve Him? We might as well eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

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¹ “What We Believe,” BioLogos website, available at <https://biologos.org/about-us/what-we-believe/>. Accessed Dec. 26, 2019.

² There is an argument to be made here regarding whether the Hebrew word *day*, *yom*, refers to twenty-four-hour days, but I will leave this for others to make the case.

³ “What We Believe.”

⁴ William Newton Clarke, *Sixty Years with the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 27–28.

⁵ William Rainey Harper, “The Origin of Man and His First State of Innocence,” *Biblical World* 3 (1894): 107–8.

Why Does Creationism Matter?

The main argument for young-earth creationism (YEC) is a simple reading of Genesis. While scientific evidences and theological arguments buttress my conviction that the earth is young, my commitment to creationism begins with the assumption that the normal reading of the opening of Genesis is the correct one. Even granting the best of motives to those who advocate old-earth creationism (OEC), it still seems to me that no one would reach that conclusion from the text alone without the outside motivation of finding a way to make Genesis 1–3 fit the timeline of the secular scientific consensus.

But suppose we were to relinquish belief in a young earth—what are the consequences? Considering the repercussions of doctrinal change often helps us see the importance of the doctrine itself.

I had a professor who claimed that one's protology (understanding of beginnings) and eschatology (understanding of last things) run in parallel. His particular point was that old-earth creationism and amillennialism have a kind of symmetry. By contrast, both young earth creationism and premillennialism are more overtly supernatural and cataclysmic. I contend that other parallels between our theology of origins and our theology of ends are even more significant.

A longstanding YEC critique of all versions of old-earth creationism focuses upon the problem of death. Genesis unambiguously presents death and pain as consequences of the Fall. They are part of the curse that God pronounces in Genesis 3:14–19. Yet any version of OEC must have death as a constant presence in the billions of years that precede Adam and Adam's sin. Old-earth creationists try to sidestep this problem by claiming that Genesis 1–3 is poetical and does not give us an ordered timeline. The problem with sin and death, however, is not simply a matter of the chronology.

Suffering and Death

Even were we to concede the chronological point (and we should not), a *theological* problem remains. Old-earth creationism still requires death to precede the Fall. This order is profoundly inconsistent with the scope of Christ's redemptive work as it is explained to us in the New Testament. If death and suffering are not the result of Adam's Fall, there is no reason to suppose that death and suffering can be solved by the atonement of Christ. The scope of the atonement necessarily shrinks. It becomes limited only to producing judicial reconciliation between us and God. In other words, it can no longer affect the physical creation. As a result, the logically consistent eschatology of OEC must be a disembodied and immaterial one—and that kind of eschatology is biblically and theologically indefensible. Indeed, it is outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity altogether.

This point needs to be explained and clarified. If death and physical suffering preceded Adam's Fall, then they cannot be the result of his Fall. Instead, such horrors are

CHAPTER 1
IN the beginning God created the
heaven and the earth.
2 And the earth was without form
and void; and darkness was upon the
face of the deep. And the Spirit of God
moved upon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light,
and there was light.

just the way things are in a physical world. They are the necessary corollaries of any material existence. To be embodied is to be subject to suffering and death.

Granted, we Young-Earth Creationists struggle to understand what things must have been like before the Fall. Could Adam and Eve have been injured as they went about tending and keeping the Garden? Suppose a tree fell on Adam: what would have been the result? Could trees even fall in a very good world? And the animals that are now predators and carnivores—what must they have been like? What changes did the Fall produce in their physiology? The magnitude of these questions strains our understanding.

We have difficulty imagining a material world without the possibility of suffering. In this respect, OEC better fits our normal understanding of the world *as we now know it*. But it does so at a tremendous cost, for if suffering and death are essential properties of a material world, then any future bliss *must be* immaterial. This is the link between protology and eschatology. If death and suffering are not consequences of the Fall, then the redemption of this material world is impossible.

A Point of Debate

We need to pause and acknowledge a point of debate here. When speaking of the future, the Bible sometimes sounds as though this creation will be annihilated and replaced. A notable example of this language is 2 Peter 3:10–11: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness[?]”

At the same time, other verses portray the future world as a redemption of this one. Perhaps the most important of these is Romans 8:20–21: “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

So is the present creation redeemed, or is it destroyed and replaced? We can alleviate this tension by considering our theology of resurrection. The Christian’s future hope is not to escape the body. We have to emphasize this point repeatedly, because popular American eschatology envisions our eternal existence as an escape from the material world, complete with ethereal harps and clouds. This is a false idea, but it is not new. In the New Testament era, various precursors to Gnosticism believed that anything material was necessarily bad. True release from the woes of this life, then, assumed the escape from the body and the physical world.

Paul directly repudiated this theory: “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4). While Christians disagree on the details of Paul’s meaning here, Paul clearly did not wish to be rid of his body. Elsewhere Paul says that without bodily resurrection, Christianity is a worthless religion.

The Christian hope is resurrection, and to be meaningful as resurrection, our resurrection body must somehow be the same body that we now have. Without that continuity

there would be no resurrection, but merely replacement. To be sure, these new bodies will be so thoroughly transformed that they can rightfully be spoken of as *new*. But we must never emphasize the discontinuity of our resurrected bodies to the degree that they cease to bear any true relationship with our present bodies. To do so is to minimize Christ’s work of redemption, for we “ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the *redemption of our body*” (Rom. 8:23).

Resurrection and Redemption

Our understanding of our future resurrection can help us understand the redemption of the rest of creation. The differences between this present age and the one to come are enormous, so much so that it is also right to speak of the heavens and earth to come as being *new*. But the physical descriptions of the new earth, which are multifold, include the tree of life. If this tree maintains no real connection to the tree from which Adam was barred, then the storyline of Scripture does not hold together.

The new heavens and earth are a material reality in which sorrows and pains and death are impossible. This truth is relevant to our discussion of creation in two ways. First, it disproves the OEC assumption that material existence requires suffering and death. Second, suffering and death are absent from the new earth only because of the atoning work of Christ. Because the curse of death is a consequence of sin, and because the death of Christ absolves sin, the death of Christ is the death of death.

George Herbert’s poem “The Sacrifice” captures this connection magnificently. Christ speaks:

Then on my head a crown of thorns I wear:

* * *

So sits the earths great curse in Adams fall

Upon my head: so I remove it all

From th’ earth unto my brows, and bear the thrall:

Was ever grief like mine?

In the cross of Christ we have atonement for Adam’s sin, and with that, the lifting of the curse that has fallen on all creation because of his sin. If death is not a consequence of the curse, then resurrection is not a consequence of atonement. This is far too high a theological price to pay to allow us to read Genesis 1–3 so as to comport with the timeline of contemporary science.

I hasten to add that I do not know of a single old-earth creationist who actually affirms an immaterialist eschatology. But why not? As best I can determine, this is a happy inconsistency in their theology. Advocates of old-earth creationism do not deny the full scope of Christ’s redemptive work. But by affirming that Christ has come to take the thorns of the curse on His own head—making His blessings known far as the curse is found—adherents of OEC are highlighting a theological inconsistency in their theory of origins.

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What Do We Mean, “Young Earth”?

Christians, like most people, dislike uncertainty. Some of us want to be absolutely certain that we have the “best” English translation. In decision-making, phrases such as “God’s *perfect* will” often surface. In debates over worship, appeals to “God’s way” of doing church sometimes hold sway. So badly do we want certainty in these and other matters that we sometimes refuse to entertain viable alternatives—not because the alternatives are bad, necessarily, but because the very *idea* of alternatives makes us uneasy.

Alternatives mean uncertainty. Consequently, we may ostracize as evil those who entertain views that are simply different from ours. We tend to cluster with those who share our certainties (the “trustworthy” translation, “God’s way” of education, “established” service schedules, etc.). Sometimes we try to silence those who express uncertainty about our certainties.

It is not always wrong to defend ideas ardently, or even to separate over them. The New Testament itself sets a pattern for shared creedal traditions, “received” standards of conduct, and elements of regular worship. Not surprisingly, the historical church embraced these concepts from its earliest days and clustered around them. There really are things about which we may and must be certain. Oddly, Christians sometimes disavow certainty in the more critical matters while insisting on unanimity in matters where uncertainty should be acceptable.

One area in which some Christians seek more certainty than the Bible offers is the matter of the age of the earth. I believe in a young earth, and this view cannot be credibly disputed from the Christian Scriptures. The age of the earth must be measured in thousands of years, not billions or even millions. Of this I am certain. I can offer several reasons for this conclusion.

- *Hermeneutically* speaking, the Bible provides no credible reason to believe in pre-Creation chaos, gaps, ages, evolutionary development, or anything other than six ordinary, sequential days, each complete with a “morning” and an “evening” (Gen. 1). God “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” in a span of six enumerated days, and ever since then we have measured time in weeks of ordinary, twenty-four-hour days (Exod. 20:11).
- *Theologically* speaking, suffering and death in our universe begin very early. The presence of these calamities requires that the fall of our representative head, Adam, occurred very soon after God’s creation of the universe (cf. Rom. 5:12ff; 8:19ff). Together, these facts establish that the events in the first chapter of Genesis must have occurred within a compressed period of time.
- *Exegetically* speaking, Scripture includes chronogenealogies (genealogies that give the ages of people when begetting and dying) in Genesis 5 and 11. The presence of these time markers suggests that God intended to supply for us, if not a precise date, at least a general sense of the passage of time in early human history.
- *Cosmologically* and *apologetically* speaking, Moses describes a catastrophic, global flood in Genesis 6–8. While a correct understanding of Noah’s flood does not provide *all* the answers to the objections raised by scientists defending an old earth, it does supply most of them. Thus it is the principal or primary source of

The age of the earth must be measured in thousands of years, not billions or even millions.

answers to the scientific objections to a young earth. (See especially 2 Pet. 3:3ff).

- *Historically* speaking, the concept of deep time is almost unknown among Jewish and Christian cosmologies prior to the rise of modern, uniformitarian science. Ancient believers simply did not think in terms of millions or billions of years. They never would have understood biblical narratives in these terms.

Much more has been written in defense of a young earth that cannot be repeated here. This article is not principally a defense of a young earth. Instead, it aims to answer to the question, “What, precisely, do we mean when we talk about a young earth?”

The Young-Earth Movement

The modern young-earth creationist movement began in 1961 with the publication of *The Genesis Flood* by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb. In this volume, Whitcomb did not insist upon a strict, six-thousand-year age for the earth. Instead, he argued that the Genesis 11 genealogy (from Noah to Abraham) covers an undefined period of at least three thousand years and as much as five thousand years. He added, however, that anything in excess of five thousand years “stretches Genesis 11 almost to the breaking point” (489). Following his lead, that generation of young-earth creationists agreed that the age of the earth was six thousand to ten thousand years. They were unwilling, at first, to divide over anything more specific than this. Their concern was instead to present a unified front against all who would expand this number to millions or billions in order to accommodate the “assured results” of modern science.

More recently, some within the young-earth creationist community have insisted that any deviation from a strictly six-thousand-year-old earth signals (1) compromise of biblical authority and/or inerrancy, and (2) a capitulation to uniformitarian atheism. According to them, one must stand firm on the absolutely certain foundation of six-thousand-year-onlyism. Nothing else will do. The sad result of this insistence has been unnecessary fragmentation among young-earth creationists.

On the contrary, certain substantial, exegetical reasons indicate that the age of the earth is modestly greater than six thousand years. These reasons do not surrender either biblical inerrancy or biblical authority, and they do not entertain uniformitarian ideals. These are reasons that should lead the young-earth community to make room in their ranks for those who are convinced of a slightly older, but still young, earth. Note the following.



First, the chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 involve significant textual variants. These are the genealogies that have led some to conclude that creation must have occurred in 4004 BC. (This date became familiar to generations of fundamentalists due to its prominent inclusion in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.) Yet comparing the textual variations within the Hebrew tradition, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch can yield dates for Creation ranging from as early as 5600 BC to as late as 3800 BC. Church history, predictably, is filled with attempts—scores of them—to isolate the date for the Creation within this range, and scarcely any two of those attempts agree.

Second, the Masoretic (Hebrew) textual tradition of Genesis 11 (which generally contains the shortest genealogies) may well leave gaps. One such gap becomes apparent when comparing Genesis 11 to Luke's genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:36). Luke includes the name of Cainan, which is also found in most Septuagint genealogies, but does *not* appear in most Hebrew ones.

Third, the genealogies that speak of begetting children also allow for generational gaps. For instance, Matthew 1:8 skips Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah. More to the point, the Torah features at least one *chronogenealogy* that clearly includes gaps (Exod. 6:16–20).

Fourth, we may unequivocally demonstrate from Scripture that Moses omitted at least sixty years from the chronogenealogy in Genesis 11. Note the following.

- Genesis 12:4 says that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left his father.
- Acts 7:4 tells us that Abram did not leave until his father was dead.
- Genesis 11:32 tells us that Terah died when he was 205 years old.

Consequently, Abram was born when his father was 130, some sixty years after Terah “begat” Abram and his brothers (Gen. 11:26).

The likeliest explanation of these numbers is that Terah began having children at age seventy but did not father Abram for another sixty years. Thus the genealogy contains a gap of sixty years. If a sixty-year gap can be found in Terah's record, then it is possible that similar gaps exist throughout the chapter—not huge gaps, to be sure, but gaps that might reasonably tally up to several hundred years.

In other words, we must not conclude that Moses was attempting, by his use of chronogenealogies, to pinpoint the exact age of the earth. At best this conclusion rests upon the silence of the text.

A six-thousand-year-old earth is not a defining feature of young-earth creationism.

Worse, it is plainly upset by the balance of the biblical data. Instead, Moses more likely intended to give his readers a sense of the general passage of time: the world is a few thousand years old, but not millions or billions of years old.

The Defining Feature

To conclude, then: a six-thousand-year-old earth is not a defining feature of young-earth creationism. People who try to fit the earth's age into this narrow time frame face not only historical but also exegetical problems. What, then, do we mean when we speak of a young earth? I propose that the *sine quibus non* of young-earth creationism are

- Belief in an immediate creation of the universe in six successive, twenty-four-hour days a few thousand (not million or billion) years ago.
- Belief in a literal, historical, and immediately created Adam, prior to whose fall death was absent in the universe.
- Belief in a catastrophic global flood as the primary source of answers to the scientific objections to a young earth.

I suggest that these principles are adequate to police the ranks of young-earth creationism and to define its adherents. They contain all the truth of which we may be *certain* in the matter of the age of the earth. If we refuse to recognize anyone who affirms these principles as a young-earth creationist, we are simply shooting our own.

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For more materials on this topic, see:

John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 474–89.

Benjamin Shaw, “The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and Their Significance for Chronology” (PhD dissertation, Bob Jones University, 2004).

Mark A. Snoeberger, “Why Commitment to Inerrancy Does Not Demand a Strictly 6000-Year-Old Earth,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 18 (2013): 3–17.

Henry B. Smith Jr., “The Case for the Septuagint's Chronology in Genesis 5 and 11,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Creationism*, ed. J. H. Whitmore (Pittsburgh: Creation Science Fellowship, 2018), 117–32.

Creation, Sex, and Gender

The Bible's account of the Creation and Fall defines many areas of human interest. One of the areas it affects most is human sex and gender. The opening chapters of Genesis establish a pattern that is both explained and applied in the rest of Scripture. What the Bible teaches about sex and gender is not only true, it is also essential to human nature and flourishing. The Bible's teaching can be summarized in the following propositions.

1. God created humanity in His image (Gen. 1:26–27). While human beings are in some ways similar to animals, they are also different. Of all created beings, only humans are made in the image and likeness of God. This image makes them unique and places them far above the other living things that God made during Creation week. God did not merely take some lower creature and add His image to it; rather, He integrated His image and likeness into human nature itself.

Furthermore, God created humans so that both the outer (material, bodily) person and the inner (immaterial, spiritual) person together constitute His image. God did not create humans as souls that live in bodies. He created them as bodies and souls together. Personal identity consists not only in the inner (which would be Gnosticism) or only in the outer (which would be materialism) but in both together. To deny that either is essential to individual identity is to deny the fullness of human nature.

2. God created both sexes to image Him (Gen. 1:27). God made humans in exactly two sexes: male and female. Neither maleness nor femaleness is humanly assigned. Neither is a social construct. Both maleness and femaleness are aspects of human nature, and both are necessary for humans to image God. Because God made the differences between male and female, those differences are essential.

Since the image of God inheres in both sexes together, neither is more important than the other, and neither is better than the other. Women can and should delight in being female. Men can and should delight in being male. Both should delight in a created order that includes the other. Both should image God to the other.

3. Sex has a purpose in God's creation (Gen. 1:27–28). Clearly God intended humans to reproduce. Sexual intimacy is His

means to that end. By definition males are humans whom God designed to beget children. Females are humans whom God designed to conceive and bear children. Maleness and femaleness are directly related to the purpose of reproduction through sexual intimacy, and sex organs are designed to fulfill this purpose.

God did not, however, intend reproduction to be practiced indiscriminately between all males and females. From the beginning He protected reproduction and sexual intimacy by restricting it to partners within the institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24). God always intended marriage to bind together one man and one woman. A marriage is constituted when a man and a woman do two things. First, they formally subordinate all other human relationships to their relationship with each other ("leaving father and mother"). Second, they solemnize their faithful devotion to each other ("cleaving," signified by the marriage oath). This leaving and cleaving are then reflected and consummated in sexual intimacy ("they shall be one flesh"). Within marriage sexual intimacy is holy and blessed by God; outside of marriage it falls under His judgment (Heb. 13:4).

Jesus grounded His teaching about marriage in the Creation account (Matt. 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12). According to Jesus, God overlooked some sinful marriages during the Old Testament period. Drawing upon the Creation account, however, Jesus emphasized that marriage is a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. Marriages to more than one spouse are always wrong.

In contrast, because of the nature of sex and marriage, marriage to a person of one's own sex is not possible. Unlike polygamous marriages, same-sex marriages are not marriages at all. They are sinful because they falsely pretend to be marriages, and they attempt to mimic sexual intimacy through same-sex genital manipulation. Same-sex manipulation does not constitute sexual intimacy and does not make same-sex





partners “one flesh”: it constitutes a perversion of the purpose and nature of sex.

4. The distinct functions of male and female imply different roles within certain spheres (Eph. 5:22–23; 1 Tim. 2:8–15; 1 Pet.

3:1–7). Males and females are equally valuable and dignified in the sight of God.

Nevertheless, God has constructed them differently—males are begetters, and females are conceivers and bearers. Consequently, within certain spheres God has assigned roles according to these functions. For example, within the home, males are responsible to provide for their own, to love their wives, and to take leadership of the household. Within the church, only males may occupy the office of pastor-bishop-elder. While these roles can be sinfully twisted by abusive males, they do not themselves grow out of any sinful ambition or reflect any abusive attitude. On the contrary, these roles are grounded in human nature and are part of the created order.

5. Sex and gender are distinguishable but not separable for humans (1 Cor. 7:1–16). One’s sex—being male or female—is a matter of biology. Sex cannot be changed, though the bodies of either sex can be mutilated to resemble the bodies of the other sex. A male will always be a male; a female will always be a female. Being male or female constitutes a significant aspect of every person’s identity.

Gender expresses this biological reality through behavior. While gender is tied directly to sex, to some extent it is culturally and socially envisioned. To the extent that cultural visions of gender do not contradict Scripture, males have a duty to learn culturally-envisioned masculine patterns of conduct, and females have a duty to learn culturally-envisioned feminine patterns of conduct. For any person deliberately to create confusion concerning sex or gender is contrary to nature (i.e., to the purpose for which God created sex).

All understandings of sex and gender that contradict God’s creative purpose are sinful. Because both men and

women share human nature, what they hold in common is much greater than what distinguishes them. When some vision of gender denies one of these areas of commonality (as when some cultures deny that men should be gentle), it becomes toxic. Furthermore, whenever some vision of gender introduces sinful elements such as arrogance, predation, immodesty, or resentment, its vision of gender becomes toxic. Both sexes are right to resist sinful, toxic visions of gender.

Because gender is tied to sex, it is not fluid. It is not possible to be a woman trapped in a man’s body or vice versa. It is, however, possible to experience confusion about one’s role and behavior (gender) as a man or a woman. Part of the business of Christianity is to help men learn to be rightly masculine and women learn to be rightly feminine.

6. The Fall has damaged the created order, including human embodiment (Gen. 3:17–19). Our bodies, like the rest of creation, have been made subject to vanity; the created order “groaneth and travaileth in pain” until it is redeemed at the resurrection (Rom. 8:20–24). People’s bodies often fail to perform according to the purposes for which God made them. God created eyes to see, but some people are blind. God created ears to hear, but some people are deaf. Similarly, God created sex for reproduction, but some people are not able to have children. The fact that some people are not fertile does not erase the fundamental purpose of sex any more than the fact that some people are blind erases the fundamental purpose of the eye.

Furthermore, some people are born without important parts of their bodies, and others are born with misshapen parts. These and similar conditions are abnormalities. Some are even disabilities. They are not the way things are supposed to be, and they do not erase the fundamental fact that God made humans to have eyes, ears, hands, and so forth. Most importantly, people with such afflictions continue to bear the image of God and are entitled to the full measure of human dignity.

In a very few instances, these abnormalities may take the form of disorders of sexual development (DSDs). In these

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What Is Marriage and Why Should We Defend It?

In the 2015 historic case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court discovered a new constitutional right for homosexuals to get “married.” During the proceedings of that case, Justice Samuel Alito asked the Obama administration’s Solicitor General Donald Verilli about the consequences of this decision for religious institutions opposed to so-called “gay marriage.” Verilli’s answer was as stunning as it was clarifying: “It’s certainly going to be an issue. I don’t deny that. I don’t deny that, Justice Alito. It is—it is going to be an issue.”

Verilli’s chiasitic answer covered America like dark clouds from Mordor. The Obama administration signaled that it not only wanted marriage between homosexuals to be legal but that it was prepared to punish conservative religious institutions for their opposition to this radical new definition of marriage.

Indeed, dark clouds are gathering. Our resolve to protect marriage will crumble if it does not lie upon a firm foundation. God’s Word reveals that this foundation was laid at the very dawn of Creation.

God Created Marriage

Genesis 2:18 says, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” After the “good” pronouncements in Genesis 1, God Himself says that Adam being alone was “not good.”

Then God had Adam name all the animals. Adam, however, was still alone. Adam could not fill the earth on his own.

Adam needed a helper, so God took one of Adam’s ribs and made a spouse for him. Genesis 2:22 says God “brought” this woman “unto the man.” Adam knew that this was whom he needed. She was someone he could commune with, someone who would share with him in life’s duties and blessings. Then God’s Word moves from history to application: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

Scripture teaches that God created matrimony. Marriage was not humanly contrived. It is not a social institution invented after years of evolution. Jesus taught the same thing: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?” (Matt. 19:4).

If God designed marriage, then we must conform our ideas about marriage to His. God, not the state, defines marriage. When we defend marriage, we defend an institution that God ordained.

God Gave Marriage

Marriage is a gift from God. Genesis 1–3 teaches this truth, for God created marriage *before* the Fall. This gift includes conjugal union. In 1 Timothy 4:3 Paul says that “God hath created” marriage “to be received” (along with meat) “with

thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." Marriage is a blessing from God.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus affirmed the blessing of marriage, both by His presence and by turning the water into wine. Following her Lord, the Christian church has always been pro-marriage. John Chrysostom explained, "There is no relationship between human beings so close as that of a husband and wife, if they are united as they ought to be."¹ Jonathan Edwards summed up God's gift nicely when he observed shortly after meeting his wife-to-be, "How greatly are we inclined to the other sex! Nor doth an exalted and fervent love to God hinder this, but only refines and purifies it."²

Since marriage is a gift, Christians ought to protect it like any other valuable given to us by a loved one. God has given us a great stewardship; to protect His gift is a great honor. We defend even heirloom china from theft and careless breakage; how much more should we defend marriage from ungodliness? We must not only thank God for marriage: we must also defend it.

God Designed Intimacy for Marriage

In Genesis 1:28 God blessed the first man and woman, telling them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." This blessing is for those who are married. According to Genesis 2:24, the "one flesh" union is for a husband who in marriage holds fast "unto his wife." God's Word commends the conjugal union in the marriage context. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul urges that a married man and woman "render" to each other "due benevolence" (1 Cor. 7:3; cf. vv. 4-5). The intimate union of a man and a woman is a part of God's gift of marriage so that we may be chaste and bear children.

Scripture not only commends this intimacy within marriage but also forbids any such intimacy outside marriage. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 God condemns both heterosexual and homosexual immorality. Romans 1:24-27 teaches that humankind's rejection of God led to the human lust for illicit sex. It declares homosexual acts to be "dishonorable," "shameless," and "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26-27). Jesus teaches that even our lustful looks warrant hell's torments (Matt. 5:27-30). Hebrews 13:4 both commends the marriage bed as "undefiled," while warning that "whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

In our present lascivious, pornographic culture, we must not only reject unnatural homosexual acts, we must reprove all sexual activity outside of marriage (1 Thess. 4:3-8). The early church had to define and defend true marriage in a sexually perverse Roman culture. So must we, in both our teaching and practice.

God Designed Marriage for One Man and One Woman

Genesis 1-3 establishes the divine pattern for marriage between one man and one woman. God gave only one woman

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to the man. The creational pattern is not an accident; it is the norm for God's design in marriage (see Gen. 5:2).

The Creation account teaches this principle. In Genesis 2:24, the "man" is to "cleave" (hold fast) to his "wife." God designed marriage to be exclusively between one man and one woman, separate from other relationships. (Even parents are excluded.) Therefore, so-called homosexual marriage is really no marriage at all in God's sight.

Polygamy also deviates from God's will. Jesus taught that marriage is between only two: "[the] twain shall be one flesh" (Matt. 19:5; cf. Gen. 2:24 LXX; Eph. 5:31; 1 Cor. 6:16).

Believers must reject all unions that transgress God's design. God defines marriage, and He created it for one man and one woman. A woman cannot marry her poodle, a man cannot marry his robot girlfriend, and you cannot marry yourself (sologamy).³

Christians must not celebrate marriages that deviate from nature and from God's revealed will. We should offer no support to their ceremonies. We must not use our art to celebrate these so-called marriages. We are followers of the Lord Christ, not of American culture. Indeed, believers must not even grant that such unions are actually marriages.

God Designed Marriage to Have the Husband as Its Head

The creation account also teaches that man is the head in a marriage. This headship was established even *before* the Fall. Male headship is part of God's good design for marriage. Genesis 2 portrays the sixth day of Creation. There God created Adam first and gave him work to do (Gen. 2:7, 15, 19). God created Eve specifically for Adam (Gen. 2:18). Eve even came from Adam: "She was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23).

Thus, while affirming that God created both man and woman in His image (Gen. 1:27), the inspired Scriptures prioritize Adam's leadership. This pattern is deliberate. It is echoed in the New Testament (see, for example, 1 Tim. 2:13 and 1 Cor. 11:8-9).

In today's social climate the doctrine of male headship within marriage is seen as detestable. Yet God, in His goodness, has established male headship within marriage. Even though this teaching does not vindicate the small men who selfishly abuse their calling as leaders, believers are called to defend male headship as part of God's design for marriage.

God Designed Marriage to Be Permanent

The permanence that God intended for marriage is also taught in the Creation story. In Genesis 2:22 God Himself brings the man and woman together. Moses taught that marriage is to be enduring: in Genesis 2:24, he says "a man . . . shall cleave [hold fast] unto his wife." Moreover, the two become "one flesh." God makes them one.

In Matthew 19:6 Jesus applies this passage to all marriages: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” When two people are genuinely married, God Himself at that moment joins them together. The act of marriage is His act.

God hates divorce. Humans should not seek to undo what God Himself has done. To try to thwart God is foolish, proud, and rebellious. So we must not sever a marriage that God has brought together. Many believers concede that divorce is permitted when marriages are ruptured by sexual immorality and abandonment (see Matt. 5:32). Even allowing for such permission (we will not debate that question here), the vast majority of divorces today are nothing more than the overturning of God’s will.

A consistently biblical understanding of marriage is not only opposed to polygamy and to so-called homosexual marriage, but to divorce as well. The state has no more authority to call married people unmarried than it has to call unmarried people married.⁴ American churches have surrendered their moral clarity on this issue by treating couples who have been legally divorced as if God actually considered them unmarried. Believers must defend all of marriage by opposing divorce.

Why Should We Defend Marriage?

Marriage is very important to God. He instituted it as soon as He brought Adam and Eve together in the Garden of Eden. He gave us marriage because He loves us. God designed it for our good. When we compromise marriage, we deny that God created it. If we accept non-marriages, it is a sign that we fear man over God. When we fail to uphold genuine marriage, it is a sign that we glorify man over God. To make matters worse, our failure to stand for marriage displays ingratitude for this holy and blessed gift from God Himself.

Furthermore, God created marriage to display the gospel. After calling wives to submission and husbands to sacrificial

love, Paul cites Genesis 2:24. He declares, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). Even with marriage’s many imperfections this side of the Fall, God intended marriage to show Christ’s dying love for His people.

God created the marital bond to proclaim great gospel truths of Christ. In other words, when we lose marriage, we lose a powerful image of the gospel. So to protect marriage is to glorify Christ. If we abandon God’s design, we hazard the gospel itself.

We do not know what lies ahead for biblical churches, institutions of higher learning, and other Christian organizations. We may lose our tax exemption. The government might threaten us in other ways. A defense of marriage may cost us socially and financially. Nevertheless, having received both the gift and the love of Christ that it portrays, defending marriage is our joyful obligation.

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¹ John Chrysostom, “Homily 20 on Ephesians 5:22–33,” *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life*, tr. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson, Popular Patristics Series 7 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 43.

² Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 189, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The “Miscellanies”: (Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500)*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 332. Also see Michael A.G. Haykin and Victoria J. Haykin, *The Christian Lover: The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2009), xiii.

³ These examples are taken from actual news stories.


⁴ See Kevin Bauder, “Who Redefined Marriage?” *In the Nick of Time*, 8 May 2015.

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SOUND WORDS

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First Partaker

"Bless Me, O Lord, Bless Me!"

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning (1 John 2:7).

A few years ago a Baptist pastor conducted a fellowship workshop titled "The Pastor and His Private Devotional Life." He raised the question, "What does the ideal devotion time look like?" While introducing the topic he "admitted that he struggles with finding the time to delve into the Word."

A reviewer of the workshop recorded that, "Many pastors in the audience agreed that they share the same struggles. Several commented that these struggles don't come from a lack of desire, but often from unrealistic expectations. Demands on time and other factors tend to impact both the quality and frequency of private devotions."¹

For how many pastors is a regular, devotional routine optional? It may seem offensive to raise the question. Church members assume that if there's anyone in a congregation who has a sacred habit of personal devotions, it's the pastor. But this isn't always the case. In fact, some pastors argue that although a personal devotional routine is commendable, it's not necessary. After all, they reason, I'm always studying Scripture for sermon preparation.

But even pastors persuaded of their need for personal time in God's Word entirely apart from sermon preparation often admit to frustration in this basic Christian

discipline. I first became aware of this through my reading of a sermon during either my sophomore or junior year in college. It had been preached in 1967 to a ministers' conference by a Baptist pastor named Albert N. Martin. Martin began by explaining that he was somewhat uncomfortable with the topic, but that he had been assigned it. The topic was, *What's wrong with preaching today?*

Martin proposed that to whatever degree there really was something wrong with contemporary preaching, it could be explained as "the failure either of *the man* who preaches or of *the message* he brings." And in developing the failures of "*the man* who preaches," he put at the top of the list, failure to maintain and develop *one's personal devotional life*.

Martin's persuasion of this arose out of repeated experiences with pastors over a period of years when he had engaged in an itinerant ministry:

One of the most disturbing discoveries made during this time was the fact that very few ministers have any systematic, personal, devotional habits. I made it a practice to meet with the host pastor to pray and to share areas of common concern. When we would finally tear away the cursed façade of professionalism, and begin to be honest with the Lord and with each other, and confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, the confession came out again and again that the Word of God had ceased to be a living Book of devotional relationship to Christ and had become the official manual for the administration of professional duties.

At that early point in my ministerial training I was just beginning to attempt a consistent daily, devotional time. But I was finding it a tough struggle to get up out of bed, to feel awake to know where to read in my Bible, to keep my mind from wandering, to memorize Scripture. . . . In short, to make much headway of any kind. If I did get traction for even a day or two,

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

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something unexpected or unavoidable would interrupt my miniscule progress. I felt frustrated much of the time. It discouraged me.

A roommate who was quickly becoming a spiritual soulmate was struggling with the same growing pains. One day we were together in the university bookstore. A tall, good-looking man was scanning titles on a back shelf. My friend pointed him out, mentioned his name, and said that he was a pastor. We decided to see if he could give us some advice about our “devotions.” So we just sort of barged our eager way into his day, poor man. He was so gracious and didn’t give a hint of being inconvenienced by two young strangers. But when we related our difficulty in developing a satisfying devotional life, he wasn’t able to offer much help. I remember thinking, *He doesn’t really seem to know much about this.* Perhaps he was short on time for explaining anything in depth. But I was left with a vague impression, confirmed a year or two later while reading Al Martin’s message, *Even pastors don’t always have this down.*

That’s been nearly fifty years ago. I wish that I could say that what I’ve heard with some regularity from other pastors has eased that impression. But that hasn’t been the case. It’s been the opposite. I’ve become increasingly aware that Martin was right. Part of the answer to what is wrong with preaching today is that, in his words, the Bible has ceased to be a *living Book of devotional relationship to Christ*. Instead, it has become the *official manual for the administration of professional duties*.

I want to address this critical issue in depth. I feel constrained to say, however, that I’m not writing in a spirit of faultfinding. I’m keenly aware that this is a highly sensitive matter, one that goes to the very heart of a minister’s walk with God and to the question of his intimate pursuit of God, even to the root of his own sanctification. To raise any questions in these areas is almost to call a man’s fitness for ministerial office into question. I’m not wishing to do that, or to be perceived as suggesting that a man struggling in this area is disqualified from ministry until he attains near perfection in it. Far, far from it.

But I do believe strongly that whatever arguments anyone may muster to the contrary, a minister just must pursue a deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation with his Bible. It should become the very life of his life with God. And I don’t believe that this is a *new commandment*, but that like the commandment to love the brethren (1 John 2:7), this too is an *old commandment* which we have had from the very beginning of our Christian life. *Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night* (Psa. 1:1a–2).

Devotional Life

I’d like to begin by describing what I mean by a *deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation with the Bible*. It’s critical to distinguish this from two of its components which, understandably, we can easily mistake for its entirety. A devotional preoccupation isn’t merely

a devotional *time*. Nor is it only a habit of devotional *activities*. We may need to probe this.

The words *devote* and *devotion* appear seldom in our English Bibles. But they are, nevertheless, excellent expressions for describing the nature of the relationship into which God calls Christians. The *American Heritage Dictionary* says that to *devote* is to *give one’s time, attention, or self entirely*. Accordingly, *devotion* is *ardent*. In religion it is *ardor*, or *zeal*.

You can see that what makes the words *devote* and *devotion* particularly useful when applied to a Christian practice is that they describe a kind of deliberate contraction. A narrowness that is intentional. But here’s what’s critical to get hold of: the decided restriction isn’t coerced. It’s *ardent*. The limited focus is out of affection—*His delight is in . . .* (Ps. 1:2). It’s *delight*, it’s *ardor*, it’s—here’s the stellar word for it—*love* (!) that narrows (and, is it too much to say, *constrains*) him down devotedly to a *day and night* fixation on *the law of the LORD*.

Many passages reflect devotion to Scripture. But as you would expect, it is the psalm of “walking the way of the Word” that really features it—Psalm 119.

- I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches (v. 14).
- I will delight myself in thy statutes (v. 16).
- My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times (v. 20).
- Thy testimonies also are my delight (v. 24).
- Behold, I have longed after thy precepts (v. 40).
- I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved (v. 47).
- Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage (v. 54).
- At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments (v. 62).
- I delight in thy law (v. 70).
- O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day (v. 97).
- How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth (v. 103)!
- Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart (v. 111).
- Thy law do I love (v. 113).
- I love thy testimonies (v. 119).
- Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold (v. 127).
- I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments (v. 131).
- Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it (v. 140).
- Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights (v. 143).
- Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word (v. 148).
- Consider how I love thy precepts (v. 159).
- I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil (v. 162).

- Thy law do I love (v. 163).
- My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly (v. 167).
- Thy law is my delight (v. 174).

What we preachers need to ask is whether we ourselves can actually testify to these same feelings about the Word of God. Most men in the ministry would react to the question almost immediately. *Of course (!) I love the Bible!* Perhaps they do.

But can a preacher, pastor, missionary, or evangelist genuinely claim that these are his feelings, yet struggle consistently to find time for daily, nonprofessional reading and praying over Scripture, let alone argue that it isn't really necessary? Apart from some remarkably exceptional case, that just doesn't add up.

An Illustration

Something comes to mind that seems to be very much what Psalm 1:2 and Psalm 119 are calling for from any Christian, but especially from a minister.

When Matthew Henry (1662–1714) began his famous commentary, he didn't do so with any of his occupational ministries (and he had many) in mind.

It has long been my practice, what little time I had to spare in my study from my constant preparations for the pulpit, to spend it in drawing up expositions upon some parts of the New Testament, not so much for my own use, as purely for my entertainment, because I knew not how to employ my thoughts and time more to my satisfaction. Every man that studies hath some beloved study, which is his delight above any other, and this is mine.²

Matthew Henry, of course, is not our official benchmark. The Bible is. Passages such as Psalm 1, Psalm 19, and Psalm 119 are. But aren't those passages describing what Matthew Henry is relating about himself—a man who really hungered for his Bible, not as the source of sermons for others but as the love of his heart for himself?

The writer of Psalm 119 testified, *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways* (vv. 14–15). This is *exactly* what Psalm 1:2 is describing and what Matthew Henry is relating. Match the lines:

Ps. 119: *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies.*
 Ps. 1: *His delight is in the law of the LORD.*
 Henry: *Some beloved study, which is his delight.*

Ps. 119: *I will meditate in thy precepts.*
 Ps. 1: *In his law doth he meditate.*
 Henry: *Drawing up expositions*

Why shouldn't this be the standard about which preachers cease forever to be double-minded? Why shouldn't it be a nonnegotiable for every man we ordain to the ministry? Why should we think that it's normal and acceptable for preachers to be known as fans of all manner of things (some admittedly good, and some truly

questionable) yet entirely excusable for displaying little drive and passion for serious, *devotional* time with their Bibles? If this is actually the case with us, can we wonder that so many of our people are passionate about nearly anything and everything other than their own intimate knowledge of the Lord?

A Critical Distinction

Charles Bridges comments on the two verses from Psalm 119:14–15.

Our rejoicing in the testimonies of God will naturally flow in an habitual meditation in them (verse 97; Ps. 1:2). The thoughts follow the affections. The carnal man can never be brought to this resolution. Having no spiritual taste, he has no ability for spiritual meditation.

Indeed, many sincere Christians, through remaining weakness and depravity, are too often reluctant to it. They are content with indolent reading. And with scarcely a struggle or a trial, yield themselves up to the persuasion that they are unable to abstract their minds for this blessed employment.

But perseverance will accomplish the victory over mental instability, and the spiritual difficulty will give way to prayer; “Lord! Help me!”

The fruitfulness of this employment will soon be manifest. Does it not “stir up the gift of God that is in us” (II Tim. 1:6), and keep the energies of the heart in a wakeful posture of conflict and resistance? Besides this, it is the digestive faculty of the soul, which converts the word into real and proper nourishment. This revolving of a single verse in our minds is often better than the mere reading of whole chapters. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart.”

And now Bridges states a critical distinction.

But **this meditation not only includes the stated times of thought**, but the train of holy thoughts that pass through the mind during the busy hours of the day. This maintains a habitual flow of spiritual desires, and excites the flame of love within, till **at length the Psalmist's resolution becomes the inwrought habit of our minds** [emphasis mine].

This is what I'm trying to get at in clarifying that it's important to distinguish a *deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation* from its components; *devotional time* and *devotional activities*. You may need to read that last Bridges' paragraph again—not just the words emphasized, but the entire paragraph. Read it until you grasp the fine distinction that he's making. It's actually one between “letter of the law” and “spirit of the law” devotional habits.

I remember what it was like to struggle with a “letter of the law” devotional life. To have to form *the Psalmist's resolution* again and again and again. Those

were the early college years that included a lot of frustration and discouragement. But they were necessary. Most Christians have to develop the devotional routine in that way, as a resolution before it is a love—like children have to be taught to play an instrument by discipline and routine before they can ever hope to do it as a delight and a skill. But, Bridges says, *at length . . . the resolution . . . becomes the inwrought habit of our minds*. Earlier in the paragraph he expressed that inwrought habit as *the train of holy thoughts that pass through the mind* (and what comes next is really great!) *during the busy hours of the day*.

But I do believe strongly that whatever arguments anyone may muster to the contrary, a minister just must pursue a deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation with his Bible. It should become the very life of his life with God.

Preachers keep *busy hours*! True! But let's be honest, brothers, isn't there a certain *kind* of busy life that ought to be nonnegotiable with every Christian, but especially with every minister of the Word? Doesn't it begin with *stated times of thought* (devotional meditation on God's words) that excite *the flames of love within*? Doesn't it result day by day in the ability to carry a *train of holy thoughts . . . through the mind during the busy hours*?

To put this into other words, this kind of busy life is a *deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation*. The devotion begins the day and is so deeply satisfying that it continues to pulse all through the day. It's the default of the man's spirit, no matter how busy the hours. Oh! What a blessed life! *Blessed is the man!*

John Newton once said, *A Christian in the world is like a man transacting his affairs in the rain. He will not suddenly leave his client because it rains. But the moment the business is done, he is off. As it is said in Acts, "Being let go, they went to their own company."*³

The parallel to a preacher and his ministerial business isn't exact, of course. But isn't a preacher who really loves the Scripture and how it brings him into immediate fellowship with the Lord, something like a Christian businessman? Each is engaged in his calling. Each is constrained to follow it, even at times when it is unpleasant or especially busy. But each is wired up to default as soon as possible to his deepest devotion.

An Evidence

One of the most telling fruits of a deeply satisfying devotional life is that God's words come out of

our mouths spontaneously and naturally: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* (Matt. 12:34). If we're wondering whether our devotional life is really what it ought to be, this is a pretty fair test. Throughout a normal day, do scriptural examples and scriptural expressions come readily to mind? Do they surface in our speech almost effortlessly?


This is one of the distinctive characteristics of the writings of the Puritans. They seem to have a nearly encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture. I often marvel at their ability to amass many scriptural illustrations of a single, fine point, or to express their thoughts naturally in the very words of relatively obscure passages. The Bible seems to have been their native element.

Spurgeon, who was himself an avid collector and reader of Puritan literature, had this same facility with the Bible. It's undoubtedly one of the primary reasons that he continues to be one of the most widely read preachers of all time. His preaching is timeless because it's stitched through everywhere with Scripture. He spoke somewhere about the ministerial ideal being a preacher who is so *bibline* that if you cut him anywhere he bleeds Bible.

The only way this happens is when the Bible has been a man's daily, happy environment. It simply will not take place if his time in Scripture is pretty much limited to Saturdays, in preparation for Sundays. It won't "rub off" on his spirit sufficiently to become his verbal "accent."

I trust that you know that I'm not arguing for a cursed, pharisaical showmanship. I'm trying to offer an objective, scriptural way to examine ourselves. To what degree do we actually have a deeply satisfying devotional preoccupation with the things of God as found in the Word of God? A fair, accurate test of this is the degree to which Scripture allusions, expressions, illustrations and lessons come out of our mouths spontaneously and naturally all through our day, busy or not.

If our relationship to God's Word is what it should be, so that it is not just in our heads Saturday and Sunday but in our hearts all day every day, we'll find that its expressions are one of the easiest ways by which to express ourselves. What it says will be what we've come to think *and feel* most naturally. Consider again: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*.

What a decisive turning point it would be for someone reading this, if you would again lay a daily hold upon your Bible and pledge passionately, *I will not let you go unless you bless me!* Not my church, not my small group, not my staff, but *me!* Bless me, O Lord, bless me! 

¹ <https://garbccconference.org/conference-news/the-private-devotional-life-of-a-pastor/>

² "Preface," *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

³ Quoted by Josiah Bull, *But Now I See: The Life of John Newton*.

Bring . . . the Books

David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity:
American Fundamentalism Since 1850*

I grew up fundamentalist, but I sometimes need help getting my heart into fundamentalism. David O. Beale's *In Pursuit of Purity** was just the medicine I needed recently. Dr. Beale served as a faithful professor of church history and Bible on the faculty of Bob Jones University and Seminary from 1973 to 2012. In addition to authoring works on historical theology and Baptist history, he has also conducted study tours in the British Isles, on the European Continent, and in the Middle East.

History books don't usually jump off my shelf for casual reading, but I found inspiration from Beale's accounts of faithful men who made difficult decisions, and I took warning from the missteps and falls of others. Although the work is primarily an academic survey of the movement, I believe this sort of devotional profit is exactly what was intended: "The Fundamentalist who knows [the movement's] past will not only find a vision for the future, but he will discover wisdom for the present by considering the victories and defeats of his predecessors. He will recognize his vital need of the God who has worked miracles in the days of his fathers, but he will also know to avoid the sins that would limit his usefulness in the Lord's work" (353).

I read of deceptive "religious outlaw" Harry Emerson Fosdick, who seemed more interested in the money and fame that a John D. Rockefeller could bring him than the heavenly reward of preaching the truth (187–88). "Millions would listen to Fosdick's kind, affable, and intelligent voice and wonder what it was that the Fundamentalists were screaming about" (197). Through accounts of those who followed Fosdick and others like him, Beale demonstrates repeatedly that once error begins to sink an institution, it becomes nearly impossible for it to be righted. I was encouraged that even in the 1920s moderate conservatives "were demonstrating that when all was said and done their doctrinal militancy was simply not as strong as their zeal for spreading the gospel" (216). They opened the door for error that would ruin the next generation.

I'm grateful for Beale's respectful presentation of both the faith and the flaws of men of the past. A strong Northern Baptist pastor such as Richard S. Beal Sr. of Tucson, Arizona, struggled with the shift from nonconformity to separatism. He told his church, "Ours is not a separatist movement. Why should we surrender to liberalism the great institutions built up by orthodoxy? . . . Modernism does not build churches, it steals them. . . . The very schools erected by our forefathers . . . are now being used to destroy faith. . . . Our loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ demands our loyalty to our denomination" (291). However, he later helped lead the separatist movement that came out of the Northern Baptist Convention.

Beale doesn't shrink from pointing out a strong fundamentalist's weaknesses. For example, he gives both

praise and criticism for J. Frank Norris and Carl McIntyre. Furthermore, he mentions the defection of faithful expositor A. C. Dixon from the Baptist Bible Union months before he died: "Dixon, like many other Fundamentalists, fought the good fight almost to the midnight hour of his life, then virtually gave up the militant stance" (225). I took warning from all these accounts.

On the other hand, the words of George C. Needham of the early prayer-meeting revivals encouraged me: "Carefully we sought to compare scripture with scripture, waiting in prayer before the Lord for light on the difficult passages, until the word became living, real, intelligible and precious" (17). And I wish I lived in a day when Christians pulled together for Bible conferences for a week or two at a time. "Fifty percent of the speakers at the [1878 New York City] American Bible and Prophetic Conference were Presbyterians. None of these Presbyterians considered Fundamentalism a mere 'Presbyterian movement.' To the contrary, they quite willingly worked across denominational lines without sacrificing their own denominational fundamentals" (114).

Beale intends for his readers to come away with a desire to learn more about some historic heroes. Beale's historical summaries of development in various movements and denominations are immensely helpful. I anticipate referring to his initial chapter, "Defining Fundamentalism," as well as his sections on "The Development of American Liberalism," "The Changing Face of Liberalism," "The Old [Presbyterian] Guard," and "The Deep Roots of [Baptist] Controversy." Of particular interest to me (and I believe to many readers of this review) is Beale's tracing of the history of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship from its 1921 inception as the Fundamentalist Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention, through its rocky years as the Conservative Baptist Fellowship beginning in 1946, until it was renamed the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship of America in 1967. Beale also lists the presidents and gives highlights of the life of the organization.

Most helpful for me was the reminder illustrated throughout the entire book that "the only true Fundamentalist is a fighting Fundamentalist" (357). I aspire to live out this ideal, and I trust that this book might also be a help to anyone waffling in his resolve towards militantly pure living and ministry. ☞

*An updated version of the book is to be published soon.

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

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Straight Cuts

"I Charge You, O Ye Daughters of Jerusalem"

There is great debate as to how Song of Solomon, the greatest love song ever written, is organized. Most theologians will agree that the central axis of the book is 5:1, especially the phrase, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." There is clearly bilateral symmetry seen on each side of the divine blessing pronounced on this couple's union on their honeymoon night illustrated by the characters, words, phrases, themes, and matching units. These inverted linguistic elements mirror each other—hence, all the earmarks of a macro chiasmic structure—but how does one distinguish the units?

The answer is seen in the Song's adjuring chorus. On each side of the stand-alone axis, the theological center, are three units. The units are marked off by the chorus (2:7; 3:5), the axis (5:1), the chorus (5:8; 8:4) and the conclusion of the book. Unit one (1:1–2:7) parallels unit six (8:5–14), unit two (2:8–3:5) parallels unit five (5:9–8:4), and unit three (3:6–5:1a) parallels unit four (5:2–8).

The chorus (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4) is subordinate to the central theme of the book: union. The text begins with the **adjuration**: "I charge you." By the Hiphil use of the verb "charge," the Shulamite is not asking her audience to make an oath but is imploring them to do something that, if not followed, would imprecate them.

The **audience** whom the Shulamite is trying to persuade is the "daughters of Jerusalem." With great interest, these citizens of the city of peace have been carefully watching the increasing chemistry between the "fairest among women" and Solomon.

The **appeal**, "by the roes, and by the hinds of the field," are the imprecatory powers to judge them if they do not obey her imploring. This is not what one would initially expect. Normally such an appeal would be "by God." Poetically beautiful statements, but the graceful female gazelle and the timid doe, by themselves, do not invoke fear or high motivation to live godly. Their appeal only makes sense when one recognizes these animals are an allusion to their Creator—Yahweh. With that recognition, the appeal is forceful and morally binding. The use of the creation to allude to the Creator allows the inspired author to write a book with no explicit reference to God. While similar to the Book of Esther, this book reinforces another theme: union, instead of providence. Except for an abbreviated form of Yahweh in the suffix of the word translated "most vehement flame" (8:6, literally "flame of Yah"), there is no mention of God. Although oblique and intentionally remote, it is not surprising that 8:6 is arguably one of

the most intense images for love in the Bible.

The text then states two synonymous actions to avoid, stressing one singular behavior. The **avoidance** is sharply stated: "stir not up, nor awake my love."

The two verbs used are masculine plurals expanding the application to both men and women. The first verb "stir up," means arouse or excite. The object of the verbs "stir up" and "awake" is "love." The italicized pronoun "my" in "my love" should be dropped. In this context, the noun has the meaning of physical love or passion. The Shulamite is adjuring her audience to not "stir up" or "awake" passion. Although Song of Solomon is not cited once in the New Testament, it is alluded to in a number of verses. The Shulamite's chorus is the foundation for Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:1 and is akin to the phrase "it is good for a man not to touch a woman [i. e., to kindle passion]." The context in both Shulamite's chorus and Paul's epistle is describing a couple's relationship prior to marriage.

The Shulamite then states there is the **appropriate** time to arouse passion as seen in the phrase "till he please." The feminine qal verb relates to the feminine noun "love" and could be translated "until she (love) please." There is an appropriate time when love and passion should be fully enjoyed between a man and a woman. This is seen exclusively in the context of marriage. Solomon is praising the beauty of his new bride in 4:1–15, addressing her as his "spouse" in 4:10. In 4:16 Shulamite responds to his praise and answers when it is appropriate to be intimate, by using the imperative of the same verb ("awake") from the chorus. She intensely tells him that it was now the right time to "awake" passion. The paradise-like conditions were perfect for him to delight in her and to allow "love" to "please." Their appropriate union would stress to the "daughters of Jerusalem" the importance of moral purity as well as point them to the "great mystery" (Eph. 5:32) of spiritual union that believers enjoy today with our Heavenly Groom.

The holy, loving (3:10) relationship seen between the Shulamite and the king presents a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ, the King and His bride, the Church. This is a powerful relational picture to lead the "daughters of Jerusalem" to "weep for" themselves over their sin (Luke 23:27–31) and to "seek him" (Song 6:1), the King of Peace! When there is "no spot" or moral blemish seen in our lives (Song 4:7; Eph. 5:27) and where love for our King is described as a "most vehement flame," then others will seek the King to enjoy Him, as Hudson Taylor wrote in his commentary on Song of Solomon, *Union and Communion*. ☞

*"Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth"
(2 Tim. 2:15)*

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The people of God of every age have yearned to know more about the place of their eternal destiny, heaven. Our day is no different, as books about heaven continue to be written and movies portray man's imaginations of heaven. On a popular level, those who have had a near-death experience are treated as authorities on the matter; but God's revelation provides the only true source of information concerning this majestic home of the blessed.

The Dwelling Place of God

The glory of heaven is that it boasts the presence of the Triune God. The Father is in heaven ("Our Father *which art in heaven*," Matt. 6:9), the Holy Spirit proceeds from heaven ("the Holy Ghost sent down *from heaven*," 1 Pet. 1:12; cf. Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6), and Jesus ascended to heaven after His crucifixion ("this same Jesus, which is taken up from you *into heaven*," Act. 1:11). Although God is fully present everywhere at all times, in heaven the creature experiences the greatest awareness of that divine presence. If this were all we knew of heaven, being with God would be enough to make it extremely exciting to go there.

The Gathering Place of an Innumerable Host

The vast population of heaven incorporates angels ("of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels *which are in heaven*," Mark 13:32). Believers can only imagine the grandeur of an innumerable host of celestial beings surrounding the throne of God (Heb. 12:22; Dan. 7:10). Some of these supernatural beings engage in the full-time duty of praising God and declaring His holiness (Isa. 6:1-3), while others are observing present human conduct (Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:12). Scripture indicates that these spirits minister to God (Dan. 7:10) and minister to believers even from their position in heaven ("despise not one of these little ones . . . in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. 18:10).

The Home of the Believer

Jesus comforted His disciples with the hope of heaven in preparation for His departure from them. He told them, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). While Jesus provided no details to satisfy our curiosity, He does give us the assuring truth that heaven will be a place of belonging. What the disciples enjoyed from the beginning of Jesus' ministry would continue as an eternal reality (John 1:38-39). The disciples would desperately crave the presence of Jesus, so His assurance that He would receive them to Himself was the perfect tonic for their anxiety (John 14:3).

At the point of death, a believer is immediately

present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8) and remains with Him in a spiritual state until the resurrection of that believer's body. At the return of Christ and the Rapture of His church, these deceased believers will accompany Christ as they receive their glorified bodies (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Scripture seems to indicate, therefore, that believers never leave the pierced side of the One who redeemed them (Rev. 14:4).

Having lost my dad to cancer when I was sixteen, I have often pondered what exactly he is doing in heaven. This natural inquisitive spirit does lead one to wonder why God has chosen not to reveal more of what our deceased loved ones are doing in heaven. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that God does not want us to know in this life because He wants us to experience it for ourselves, and part of the answer, no doubt, relates to our inability to even comprehend that spiritual reality. In an age of great technological advances and the expansion of knowledge through the Internet, we forget about our vast ignorance of even the common everyday things in life that happen around us. I can't even discern what is going on in the mind of my cat!

God gives us only the information that we have the capacity to handle. On a recent visit from my grandkids, I observed an older sibling boasting to his younger brother about his knowledge of algebra. Their mother reminded the older brother of the not too distant past in which he himself was struggling to comprehend it. As he grew older and his capacity to comprehend grew, it now finally made sense to him. Like my grandson, someday all God's children will know even as we are known; but for now in our mortal flesh we must admit that "we see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Heaven will be a whole new reality with a completely new spiritual dimension. Nothing will be lost or diminished but rather more will be opened to us. Do you recall the time that you first learned about negative numbers? That knowledge did not cause you to lose any of the positive numbers but a whole new (perplexing) world of math opened up before you.

There is an astounding new piece of innovative technology: sunglasses that enable colorblind people see the beauty of color. YouTube videos capture the emotional response of people who discover for the first time a whole new brightly pigmented world, and they are moved to tears with overwhelming joy. Heaven will be like that: another dimension in which we see more clearly the wonderful goodness of God that has been true all along! Our heavenly vision awaits us!

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

The Treasure Chest of the Saints

The recipients of Hebrews experienced persecutions that included the loss of their material possessions. Yet they remained joyful because they knew that they had “in heaven a better and enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). This incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven for believers (1 Pet. 1:4) seems in the context of Hebrews to encompass things of value that parallel material possessions. While we are left guessing what these things could be, we have the assurance that the God, who provides us eternal life through the death of His own Son and thereby grants us access to His presence as His children, will certainly provide all things for His own not only in this life but also for all of eternity (Rom. 8:32)! If mankind, even in our state of wickedness, knows how to give good things to our children, then surely our unchanging Father plans to satisfy us with His eternal goodness (Matt. 7:11; James 1:17). It is the delight of God in all the coming ages of eternity to demonstrate “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

Parents and grandparents delight in a child’s expressions of surprise and joy as he opens a special gift. Perhaps what makes the moment of death for believers so precious to God (Ps. 116:15) is that He delights in seeing His children react for the first time to all the good things He has prepared for them in heaven.

Jesus called these good things incorruptible “treasures” that cannot be diminished. He encouraged His disciples to live for eternity and thereby to store up these treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20). These treasures defy description, yet they have beneficial value for the believer upon his arrival in glory! The permanency of these heavenly treasures dwarfs the value of those things we treasure on earth.

A mother inquired about a rock that was lying on her son’s nightstand. The young boy confidently proclaimed that he had returned from the creek that day with the “most special rock in all the world.” Naturally, time altered the boy’s perspective so that years later he would only sheepishly acknowledge that he had placed so much value in a flat rock. Believers often value the insignificant as well, and many will be ashamed of the wood, hay, and stubble that they had treasured (1 Cor. 3:12).

When I was a child, kids used clothespins to attach baseball cards to their bicycle frame in order to replicate the sound of an engine as those cards fluttered against the spokes of their turning wheels. Because of the shortsightedness of those children, many valuable baseball cards were ruined for a momentary amount of pleasure. Likewise, believers overlook that which would have eternal value because they do not take their eyes off the things of this temporal world (Col. 3:1–2). For many, a drastic value change will occur with their first breath in heaven.

When I was a teenager, I asked my father if we would be able to drive in heaven. He told me that the most exciting thing we could think of on earth would be of no significance to us in heaven. He illustrated this to me by reminding me of our trip to an amusement park. He

believed that the disdain I had for riding the “kiddy” rides when I had access to the thrill of the rollercoaster would be the same way that I would feel about the pleasures of this earth in comparison to the thrill of being in glory!

The Reward of the Faithful

In the face of opposition and persecution, Jesus encouraged His disciples with the thought of the great reward that awaited them in heaven (Matt. 5:12). God will not forget what is done for Him in this life (Heb. 6:10) and will reward believers for their work that abides the purifying fire of the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:14). Many righteous deeds done in secret will receive an open reward from the Father (Matt. 6:4) as Christ openly claims us before Him (Matt. 10:32).


This reward will impact the *abundance* of our entrance into Christ’s kingdom (2 Pet. 1:8, 11) and may also include our level of authority and participation in administration of the millennial reign of Christ on the earth as kings and priests to God (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

The concept of rewards often occurs in the context of suffering to embolden faithfulness (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:10). The words of Revelation 2:10 (“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”) remind believers that God may allow His own to suffer even martyrdom, but that He will grant them a compensatory reward! The three Hebrew youths acknowledged this, yet they remained faithful to God (Dan. 3:17–18). Not only did God deliver them through the flame, but He also prepared a reward for them on the other side (Dan. 3:30).

This kind of faithfulness demands great faith. My grandson was born with a medical condition that required multiple surgeries to remedy. My son’s fatherly heart wanted to protect his son from all pain, yet the doctors must be allowed to cause that infant pain in order to produce a more desirable end. The father knew this, but the son did not. Believers often do not understand why their Father allows them to endure pain, and yet God is producing something in them and through them that procures for them a glory that cannot to be compared to their present suffering (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). Trust the Father who acts in this life with a view toward eternity and endure faithfully with a steadfast hope for the reward (Heb. 11:26).

Like a fisherman who attempts to deceive the fish into accepting what is harmful to them, Satan allures believers on the path of suffering to find an easier, wider road (Matt. 4:1–9). Yet Jesus reveals that the path of suffering for God leads right to the Father’s great reward in heaven (Heb. 12:2–3).

Conclusion

Heaven exceeds our present ability to comprehend. May God’s revelation of heaven cause us to cry out with that beloved apostle who saw those great, future realities, “even so come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). 

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Evangelical and Gay?

I was pastoring a fundamental Baptist church in rural America. One day a church member came to me and tearfully confessed, "I'm gay." Though he had been raised in a typical evangelical congregation, he felt that he could not ignore his sexual desire for men. He said that he had struggled with this temptation since his early teens. The internal conflict of conscience, conviction, and experience had brought him to the point of despair.

This conversation was not an isolated incident in my ministry. In fact, episodes like this have become common today, even in conservative churches. We rarely used to talk about this issue; now we are being forced to confront it.

Evangelical attitudes toward homosexuality are rapidly changing. According to the Public Research Institute, nearly twenty-five percent of evangelicals support same-sex marriage while another twenty-five percent are ambivalent (Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, *A Shifting Landscape*, 2/26/14). Jeremy Thomas, a sociologist who tracks Christians' views on homosexuality, told *Politico Magazine* that

"Evangelicals will more or less come to embrace homosexuality in the next twenty to thirty years. I would put all my money on that statement."

This shift in attitudes has already resulted in a growing defense of homosexuality within evangelicalism, and that defense is represented by three important authors.

The first is John Boswell, a Yale historian who published *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* in 1980. Though it received negative reviews from historians and theologians alike, it won the 1981 American Book Award for history. This book was one of the first academic works that attempted to combine a positive view of homosexuality with a high view of Scripture. Boswell argued that early Christianity was tolerant of, or at least ambivalent toward, gay people. Religious intolerance and persecution of homosexuals arose only at those times when cultural and social pressure dictated theological dogma. Boswell's book was the first major publication to move the gay agenda from

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being countercultural towards becoming a cultural and Christian norm.

The second author is James Brownson, a New Testament scholar and ordained minister in the Reformed Church of America (which still maintains a traditional view of sexuality). Brownson attempted to change the views of his own tradition with a 2013 book entitled *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. This work is notable because, unlike liberal revisionists, Brownson does not seek to undermine or silence scriptural texts that deal with same-sex issues. Instead, he claims these texts should be interpreted according to “moral logic,” or the underlying ideas of love, inclusion, and kinship. He believes that the ethic behind sexual prohibitions is of greater value than the prohibitions themselves. Consequently, Christians should reimagine sexual prohibitions for today’s context.

Third is one of the more recent and influential evangelical works supporting homosexuality, Matthew Vines’ *God and the Gay Christian* (2014). Vines was raised in a conservative Presbyterian church. He dropped out of Harvard to study this topic. His book popularizes the earlier academic studies and presents them to a broader audience. Vines reiterates Boswell’s thesis, arguing that the ancient world knew nothing of sexual orientation, only of sexual practice. According to Vines, sociology now *knows* that people experience sexual orientation as an unchangeable state of personhood. Because biblical authors did not and could not know about sexual orientation and homosexual identity, the biblical prohibitions only speak against perversion and excess. These prohibitions do not address or forbid loving and committed same-sex relationships.

In all, these works reveal three characteristics of the current evangelical defense of homosexual practice. Biblical Christians need to understand these characteristics. They also need to respond each characteristic with a clear defense of scriptural orthodoxy.

Characteristic One: Biblical and Cultural Ambiguity

Six scriptural passages speak directly to same-sex issues (Gen. 19; Lev. 18, 20; Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6; 1 Tim. 1). Evangelical defenders of homosexuality claim that these passages are ambiguous and difficult to apply to today’s context. Boswell and Brownson, for example say that the disturbing narrative of Genesis 19 is too culturally bound to be directly applicable; it should be seen as a prohibition against violence and inhospitality. The Levitical prohibition, which calls homosexual acts an abomination, is viewed as a specifically Mosaic tenet similar to circumcision or dietary laws, and hence not binding upon New Covenant Christians. Likewise, they argue that Paul’s use of the rare word *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 does not describe mere same-sex activity but designates a “male prostitute.” They argue that the distance between our culture and that of the biblical world is too great to permit a direct and specific application. This view insists that Scripture never speaks against committed, loving, same-sex relationships. In nearly every instance, some

This shift in attitudes has already resulted in a growing defense of homosexuality within evangelicalism.

perceived ambiguity in the text leads to reinterpretation of the prohibition itself.

Response: Biblical Clarity

Adherents of the traditional view must begin by ardently defending inerrancy and scriptural authority. Though honest students of the Bible must account for cultural differences and seek to understand the world of the original recipients of Scripture, nearly all passages can be clearly

understood in their original contexts. Furthermore, careful interpretation readily communicates application. Obviously, the New Testament outlines a dispensational change from the Levitical requirements. This change, however, does not nullify (for example) the force of the Ten Commandments. The command “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is not rendered inoperative simply because we do not bow to carved idols. We understand that anything can become an idol, physical or not. In the same way, the six passages that deal with homosexuality, when taken together, form a clear prohibition against same-sex practices. Paul’s use of rare terminology is clarified in each context where he uses it. In fact, no major theologian in Christendom questioned prohibitions against same-sex practices until the twentieth century. The Bible is quite clear on this subject.

Characteristic Two: Experience Dictates Interpretation.

Many evangelical defenders of homosexuality allow their experiences to dictate their understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Boswell identified as gay and tragically died of complications from AIDS. Vines began studying homosexuality in Scripture when he publicly identified as gay, and his book mentions several examples of other Christians who walked a similar path. Even Brownson, a disciplined exegete, admits that he changed his position after his son came out as gay. In their books, it is clear that these people’s experiences and relationships forced them to reexamine what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. They could not imagine, for example, that Paul’s stern warning about same-sex relationships could be applied to their loved ones or themselves. Their experiences led them not only to reinterpret Scripture, but to reimagine millennia-old prohibitions.

Response: Scripture Dictates Experience

If Scripture is divine revelation then it is authoritative. If it is authoritative then we must subjugate our experiences to it. For example, an alcoholic or drug addict may feel a sense of hopelessness and may believe change to be impossible. This experience, however, does not overrule the transforming hope of the gospel, which can still overpower addiction. The same is true for people who experiences lust in any form. Their lust does not define them as a person. Like addiction, illicit sexual desire is a sin that needs to be “put off” while the new creation of the gospel is “put on” (Eph. 4:22–24).

Characteristic Three: Contemporary Words and Categories.

Vines begins his book by describing an emotionally difficult time in which he, as a sophomore in college, finally asked himself the question, “Am I gay?” Implicit in this story is the contemporary idea that homosexuals or gays constitute a category in which attraction defines personhood. This move—

using homosexuality to define a category of personhood—is regularly employed by defenders of homosexuality. They use the phrase “gay Christian” or the initials “LGBTQ” as a personal description. Since the sexual revolution, sexual attraction has become so central that it is now definitive.

Response: Reject Contemporary Words and Categories

In the ancient world, the dichotomy between *hetero* and *homosexuality* simply did not exist. What is now called “gayness” was seen as a sexual practice, not a personal definition. Ironically, though the word “homosexual” is a combination of a Greek prefix and a Latin root, neither Greek nor Latin had a single word that was equivalent to the modern notion of homosexuality. Indeed, the word “homosexual” did not appear until 1869 in German and 1892 in English.

This phenomenon helps to explain why Scripture uses a variety of words and ideas when describing same-sex activity. Boswell, Brownson, and Vines spend considerable effort explaining that neither Scripture nor historic Christians confused practice with personhood, but then they insist on using contemporary categories of personhood such as “orientation” or “gay” to understand and describe identity. Vines states, “Even though past societies did not recognize it, the fact is now undeniable that gay men and women exist” (40).

Nearly all Christians, even conservatives, have accepted and use these categories. To say that people “are gay” is to say that their sexual attractions define their identity in the same way that the pronoun “he” denotes a male. Biblical Christians should adopt the Bible’s point of view: though the same-sex acts were widespread, those acts were not the same as identity. Sexual attraction, while real, does not define the person who experiences it. To define people by their sexual attractions is to dehumanize them and to elevate physical passions to an improper position. Christians must reject these categories in favor of biblical and Christ-centered identity.

Boswell, Brownson, and Vines all attempt to hold current secular ideas while professing allegiance to biblical authority. They end up merely rejecting or replacing that authority. Unfortunately, many in evangelicalism are ready to receive these arguments—but no one can serve two gods. We cannot accept contemporary culture’s categories about identity while claiming Scripture as authoritative.

So . . . What Then?

So how should we apply these observations? Here is one way: when my church member confessed, “I’m gay,” I replied, “I don’t believe in such a thing.”

“Pastor, maybe you don’t understand,” he insisted. “I’m sexually attracted to men. I’m a homosexual.”

“I don’t doubt your sexual attraction,” I answered, “but I deny that you can define yourself by it. You’re not gay, there’s no such category. You’re a man who has been made in the image of God Himself, and you are a person for whom Jesus Christ shed His blood. You struggle with sin, like the rest of us. Now let’s both continue the lifelong process of mortifying our passions and lusts as we become more like Jesus.”

Brett Williams is provost at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis, where he earned his PhD in Theology. He has been a youth pastor and a senior pastor and has also enjoyed leading backpacking expeditions in the Colorado Rockies.



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Winter Board Meeting

Thank you to Bible Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina, for hosting this year's FBFI Winter Board Meeting on February 10–11. Pastor Ron Allen and his staff cared for us well. We were treated to some wonderful North Carolina food and the use of excellent facilities. This meeting was well attended, and the usual business (minutes, treasurer's report, etc.) was accomplished, but our committees also met for planning and discussion purposes. The committees handle many of the core responsibilities, and having the committees allows a broad number of men to be involved.

The annual Winter Board Meeting is an important time for the FBFI. These meetings are about far more than the operations and finances. The winter meeting has become a valuable planning resource for our Fellowship. This year, much of the meeting time revolved around evaluating how men prepare for the ministry. Several men led sessions that reviewed the standard mode of preparation from past years—calling, college, entering full-time ministry under a mentor and learning the ropes—but also offered innovative suggestions. Statistics reveal that the number of men entering ministry is inadequate. Not only that, but the debt load, increased instances of older men being called into ministry, and shrinking number of places for fundamentalists to train leads us to the need to be more creative. Throughout the two-day meeting, the burden of our members was evident. We would like to forge ahead in offering quality alternatives.



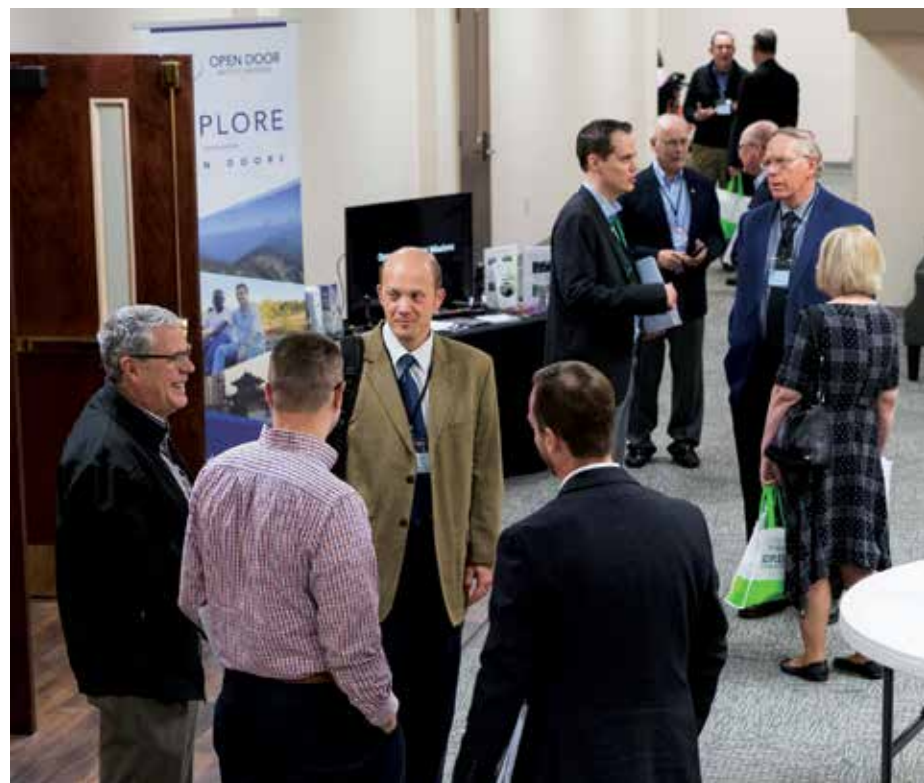
South Regional Meeting

Morningside Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, hosted the March 2–4 South Regional Fellowship. Speaking on the theme of “Discipleship for Life,” Jim Tillotson preached two outstanding messages on heeding the mandate and overcoming the obstacles to discipleship. Mark Minnick followed up with messages on being committed to the tools of discipleship as well as planning to be effective in discipleship. Mike Yarbrough finished up on Wednesday night with lessons learned from the example of Jesus in discipleship.

As usual, the meeting was well organized and revolved around a central theme. In addition to the general sessions, attendees had options from sixteen workshop sessions—some specifically for ladies. The young people were treated to a series of lessons on Creation by Jeff Setzer. One of the great benefits of regional meetings is the fellowship. Tony Facenda is to be commended for organizing the schedule in such a way that people had time to fellowship while enjoying both first-class refreshments and vendor displays. Tony and his wife, Karen, were also responsible for the meals—which means that they came early and cooked and cleaned—and they had a great spirit.

Next year's South Regional Fellowship is March 1–3 at Berean Baptist Church in Lilburn, Georgia.





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God's Image Bearers

Loving Our Neighbors in a Fallen World

I recently ran across *The Third Option* (Simon and Schuster, 2018) by San Diego pastor Miles McPherson. *The Third Option* is an examination of race and racism informed by McPherson's experiences as a self-described mixed-race individual who identifies as black, who has placed his faith in Jesus Christ, and who has been actively involved in seeking racial reconciliation. The heart of McPherson's book is that instead of choosing sides in the current racial divide we must choose a third option: to honor and love our fellow human beings as image bearers of God.

What follows is not a review of *The Third Option*¹ but rather a meditation on its central thesis, that our attitudes and behavior toward our fellow human beings must take full account of the fact that they were created in God's image. This realization can help us respond in a Christlike way not only to issues of race but also to many of the other contentious and divisive issues that plague our society.

In God's Image

McPherson asserts that the main reason racism is wrong is that it denies a fundamental reality of the Creation, that all people of whatever background or social group are made in God's image.

When we allow racism into our hearts and society, we minimize the priceless value of God's image in others, which limits our ability to honor, love, and serve them the way God calls us to.²

In other words, racism as a practice is evil because racism as a concept is heretical. Human beings retain the image both before and after the Fall (Gen. 1:26–28; 5:1–3; 9:6; James 3:9). Acts 17:26 states that God made all people of one blood, and James condemns respect of persons (2:1), pointing out the hypocrisy of blessing God and cursing people who are made in His likeness (3:9). Loving and honoring people, even though they are fallen, is like cherishing a loved one's picture, even though it may be smudged and torn. This does not mean endorsing evil and error. Neither does it mean that people are exempt from accountability.³ Recognizing the image of God in people does mean, however, that we respect their human dignity and individuality and seek to share God's truth and love with them.

McPherson argues that racism reflects a universal human tendency to implicitly sort people into various categories depending on how much like us they seem. This sorting can be based on things such as race, religion, gender, or profession, and one of its manifestations is applying double standards based on group membership. For example, we are more likely to appreciate the individuality of those within our group than those outside of it. We are more likely to empathize with them and to give them the benefit of the doubt as to their motives. On the other hand, we are more likely to view outsiders through preconceived notions or stereotypes, and we are less likely to think of them and treat them as individuals. We are quicker to take offense at what they do or say and are more likely to judge their motives.⁴

Proactively Demonstrating

Apart from racism, one can observe group bias all around, from cliques in school, to double standards in political discourse, to class or professional snobbery. Although frequently manifesting itself in hostile and demeaning words and deeds, it more often affects people, including believers, in a more subtle way. As McPherson puts it, "[Not many] people could honestly conclude that they proactively demonstrate honor to others."⁵

In other words, it is not enough for me simply to avoid purposefully harming others. I am obliged affirmatively to show God's love to them. Passing by on the other side will not do.

When we allow our mistaken beliefs about other ethnicities to prevent us from loving them, a different [i.e. non-overt] form of racism causes us to *withhold His love* from those God created us to love. In other words, racism is as much a sin of *omission*—not doing what we are called to do—as a sin of *commission*.⁶

McPherson's fundamental prescription is that we make regular, conscious choices to show honor and love to others, "choosing to apply our in-group bias to those in our out-groups."⁷ This is an extension of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. It means examining how we view and interact with groups and individuals and choosing to change where necessary to be more like Christ.

The need for such a shift in thinking in our Christian lives should be obvious. What pastor does not grieve when he sees church members huddled together with their friends while a visitor stands around awkwardly looking for a friendly face? Or cringe when a well-meaning usher or greeter makes an insensitive remark that hurts that visitor's feelings? How many times do believers' interactions on social media reflect the pervasive dishonoring of people commonly associated with online discourse? How many believers are intimidated by someone's appearance or apparent group affiliation, assuming he or she will not want to listen to the gospel?

"A Sin of the Heart"

Of course, change is much harder to implement than to talk about. We are not only image-bearers but *fallen* image-bearers. As McPherson points out,

Racism is a sin of the heart, and Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned. *All* means *all*: Whites, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Middle Easterners, and everyone in between. Racism is an equal opportunity offender, a human condition that affects all people.⁸

We must understand that sin in the human heart is inherent and intractable. Absent the power of the gospel, no genuine progress can be made against it.⁹ Law and society can and should do things to suppress vice. However, without a heart transformation our efforts will have only limited success. We suppress one manifestation of sin and selfishness only to find another popping up somewhere else, or we drive sin underground, making people defensive and hypocritical. Because of the reality and pervasiveness of human sin, we must insist even more on the purity and priority of the gospel. As desirable as mitigating racism or other social ills may be, if we allow any social or political goal to dilute the gospel or add to the Great Commission, we hinder both the Great Commission and our social actions and goals.

We must also be realistic about human depravity even as we seek to honor and love the image of God in people. First, even if we are born again, we cannot grow to love the way Christ loves without engaging daily in the spiritual battle of progressive sanctification. Second, in a fallen world, sowing biblical truth in love sometimes brings a harvest of hatred. While it often is the case that a soft answer will turn away wrath, people are still alienated from God, and the truth may offend them despite our best efforts to show them Christ's love.

Nevertheless, seeking to honor the image of God in people is necessary for us to be effective in the Great Commission. Christ sought out and ate with publicans and sinners. Paul insisted on becoming a servant to both the Jews and the Gentiles so that he might win them to Christ. We are to do good to all people, especially to those of the household of faith and to live in a way that the gospel will not be hindered. We can all learn how to be better ambassadors for Christ. The question is, how important is it to us?

David Shumate is the General Director of Mexican Gospel Mission, International, in Phoenix, Arizona.



¹ Although I have reservations about some of its exegetical points and theological emphases, I found the book challenging and helpful and its point of view refreshing.

² *The Third Option*, Introduction.

³ On the contrary, being properly accountable to God and others for how I live is an affirmation of my moral significance as an image bearer.

⁴ *The Third Option*, 19–23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15. I found this statement personally convicting.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ The following line of thinking, while not contradicting the book, is not drawn from it.

Creation, Sex, and Gender

Continued from page 15

disorders, people are born with or develop some level of bodily sexual ambiguity or irregularity. The cause may be genetic (as with Klinefelter or Turner syndromes). It may be hormonal (as with androgen insensitivity syndrome or congenital adrenal hyperplasia). DSDs may also arise from other causes. These conditions together have been labeled "Intersex," and they are genuine medical conditions.

How should Christians respond to people with DSDs? First, these conditions are extremely rare and do not redefine what is normal for humans. Second, because DSDs are physical defects and disabilities, they are not sinful or shameful (though they are, of course, very personal and usually private). Third, DSDs do not alter the fundamental structure of humanity as created in two sexes; they do not introduce a third sex or make male and female into a continuum. Fourth, people with DSDs face very difficult choices, none of which may be ideal. Christian physicians and counselors should help them to choose in ways that are both moral and conducive to personal flourishing. Finally, because people with DSDs are made in the image of God, they deserve full acceptance, respect, and compassion.

Human Value and Dignity

Creation in God's image gives all humans value and dignity (Gen. 1:26–27; Psalm 8). Even sinful people (and we are all sinful) still bear God's majestic image. People who are confused about gender still have value and dignity. People who commit sexual sins (including same-sex sins) still have value and dignity. Jesus invariably greeted sinners with compassion; He showed anger only toward those who tried to thwart His mission.

Christians must stand against wrong ideas and wrong conduct. Part of their calling is to expose the unfruitful works of darkness, including deeds that are too shameful to dwell on (Eph. 5:3–14). Rebuking a sin, however, is not the same thing as demeaning or belittling a sinner. Part of the Christian calling is also to bring the hope of the gospel to all kinds of people, including people who do shameful things. Believers can welcome and befriend sinners of all sorts—just as Jesus did—without condoning the sins that they commit.

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Introduction to Position Statements

David Shumate

At its Winter Board Meeting in February 2020, FBFI adopted position statements on two issues, both of which have an important bearing on the gospel. Neither of these issues is new, but each has become increasingly prominent in the past few years.

The first position statement rejects what has become known as the New Perspective on Paul, which has become popular in some evangelical circles and which denies the biblical doctrine of imputed forensic righteousness of the believer through faith alone in Jesus Christ. The second deals with the issue of Social Justice. Righteousness and justice, both individually and socially, are important biblical priorities. However, we must resist the temptation to add social action and goals, however laudable, to the gospel or to the Great Commission. The ultimate cause of injustice is sin, and the ultimate remedy for sin is forgiveness and transformation through faith in Jesus Christ. Anything that dilutes this message is harmful both to the gospel and to the cause of justice.

FBFI position statements reflect the consensus of the FBFI Board and are designed to identify its positions on important and relevant issues and to give a basic rationale for those positions. Elaboration on different issues referred to in the statement can be found in *FrontLine* magazine and on the Proclaim and Defend blog.

20.01: New Perspective on Paul

The New Perspective on Paul, fathered by E. P. Sanders, developed by James D.G. Dunn, and popularized by N. T. Wright, is not only erroneous exegetically but more importantly is heretical theologically as a nonevangelical understanding of the apostle Paul and the soteriological teachings of the New Testament.

First, the New Perspective reverses the Reformation's proper understanding of Jewish legalism and its close analogy to the works-righteousness semi-Pelagianism of the Roman Catholic Church.

Second, the New Perspective misinterprets Paul's transformation on the Damascus road as a calling instead of a conversion from Judaism to Christianity.

Third, the New Perspective sees justification as a secondary and sociological doctrine in Paul's writings with no concept of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer resulting in a once-for-all acceptable standing before God.

Fourth, the New Perspective declares that "justification is not how someone becomes a Christian" (Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 125) and that the gospel is not about how one gets saved; rather, it is "an announcement about Jesus" (ibid., p. 60).

And fifth, the New Perspective proclaims that "justification, at the last, will be based on performance, not possession" (Wright, "Romans," p. 440).

The FBFI affirms its doctrinal position that Paul rejected the Law as a means of salvation, not primarily because it was a barrier between Gentiles and Jews, as the New Perspective on Paul argues, but because of our inability to keep it (Gal. 3:10). Therefore, all who rely on the "works of the law" to be saved are cursed (Gal. 3:10a; Rom. 3:20), and only those who rely in biblical faith upon the sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ are justified before God (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 1:17; 3:21).

20.02: Social Justice and the Gospel

The original social gospel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the expression of the false theological idea of the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. The Bible teaches that the spiritual fatherhood of God extends only to those who are born again into His family by saving faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12). Therefore, there is no spiritual brotherhood among all people but only among those in Christ.

Nevertheless, Christians can be said to be a part of the "neighborhood of man." Christ taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that our neighbors include those who need our help and whom we can help (Luke 10:25–37).

This principle should also dictate the approach believers take toward the current debate over Social Justice. Social Justice advocates within the church promote an ideologically driven social transformation, which they argue is either part of the gospel or a necessary corollary to it. Although the gospel is often given initial priority over social involvement, eventually social involvement gains parity and finally replaces the gospel altogether.

Regardless of the merits of social programs or reforms, these are not Christ's commission to the New Testament church. His church is neither a political body nor a means for social justice. He created it to declare the whole truth of God revealed in His Word and to lead its members to believe and obey it in all aspects of their lives. As a consequence, believers will reflect their growing relationship with Christ as they fulfill their various civic responsibilities. Although both individuals and churches should strive to be good neighbors, their primary responsibility is spiritual and eternal rather than social and temporal.

Injustice exists because of sin, from which no individual or group is exempt. Therefore, the ultimate answer to all injustice is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Christ we are one new people. Our ethnicity, biological gender, and position in life do not determine our worth before God, and they should not affect our brotherly love for each other.

Sadly, injustice will exist in the world until Christ returns. Until He reigns, our mission is to proclaim Him to the world, making disciples of all peoples, baptizing them and teaching them to be more and more like Him, and realizing that the ultimate solution to the injustice in our world is the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ.

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A friend recently asked me about the *Pure Word New Testament* (thepureword.com). I'm the all-translations-are-good guy, right?

No. I cannot recommend the *Pure Word*. Anybody who has to attack the trustworthiness of other translations in order to promote his own loses my trust, and this is the first text I see on the *Pure Word* site: "There are over 450 English New Testament translations; all riddled with inaccuracies that never referenced the original Greek scriptures. The *Pure Word* research project was started to fix this problem." The upshot of this is, "Trust me rather than the translators who made your Bible!" But the site is vague about who did this work. Who is Brent Miller Sr.? What are his qualifications to translate the New Testament? Having credentials doesn't make you a good Bible translator. But neither does not having them!

The presenter in the video (is it Miller?) mispronounces "Koine" Greek. He says that English is an imprecise language compared to Greek, which is simply not true. Greek has areas of precision English lacks, such as the singular vs. plural "whom," but English has areas of precision Greek lacks, such as its tendency *not* to use the ambiguous genitive construction ("Mark's book" is less ambiguous than "the book of Mark").

"Monadic hermeneutics" is something I've never heard of. I'm guessing it means what we would usually call "lexical concordance": one English word translates each Greek word? If so, this is a terrible idea that simply doesn't work. No language maps in a perfect, word-for-word way onto any other. The discussion of the four "very precise" Greek words for love in the promo video is breathtakingly bad. *Agape* is not the Greek word for divine love. It is used for the "love" Demas had for this present world (2 Tim. 4:10), the "love" the Pharisees had for the chief seats at the feast and greetings in the marketplaces (Luke 11:43), and the "love" we're not supposed to have for the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17).

And if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, this is terrible pudding that I can't eat even a verse of: "Because, God has Loved in such a manner the satan's world, so that He Gave His Son, the Only Begotten Risen Christ, in order that whoever is Continuously by his choice Committing for the Result and Purpose of Him, should not perish, but definitely should, by his choice, be Continuously Having Eternal Life."

I usually try to be balanced in my judgment, I really do. But every once in a while a book reviewer gets to say, "Pure Blech."

Dr. Mark Ward is an academic editor at Lexham Press.



Layton Talbert

The Necessity of

Evangelical OT scholar Victor Hamilton asserts that “one could make an impressive case of the fact that without Genesis 1–2, the rest of the Bible becomes incomprehensible. That includes both Testaments” (*Reading Genesis 1–2*, 1). Without a characteristically literal reading of Genesis 1–2 (like we read the rest of Genesis or the rest of the Pentateuch), some of Christianity’s most fundamental teachings become incomprehensible—or worse, erroneous. The failure to affirm the historicity of the first directly created humans (identified in Scripture as Adam and Eve) has titanic ramifications for multiple, major areas of theology, worldview, ethics, behavior, and the very nature of your relationship to God through the Bible.

Anthropology

Human Dignity and the Image of God. The doctrine of the image of God in man (Gen. 1:26–27) implanted *on the day He created them* (Gen. 5:1–2), furnishes (a) the sole, express, biblical rationale against murder, (b) the only biblical ground for capital punishment, and (c) the basis for God’s solemn assertion (3x) that *He Himself* holds accountable anyone who commits murder (Gen. 9:6). The image of God in man is even the biblical rationale against abusive *language* towards others (James 3:9). Without the express creation of Adam and Eve in God’s own likeness, on the day that He created them, there is no scriptural basis for explaining or defending the *imago dei* in women and men, and all the ethical ramifications of what that means for human dignity and the sanctity of human life.

The Institution of Marriage. OT scholar Tremper Longman writes, “Eve’s creation from Adam’s side teaches that they are equal; that she is created from Adam’s body demonstrates mutuality” (*Reading Genesis 1–2*, 106). The problem with that statement is what precedes it: “the text does not intend to tell us how God created the first woman, but something about women and their relationship to men” (ibid.). Longman doesn’t believe that God actually created woman that way, or that the writer of Genesis ever meant us to *think* that God actually created woman that way. Longman calls Genesis 1–2 “theological history”—*broadly* historical but metaphorical stories designed to communicate theological truths; in other words, God did make everything, but not in the way He describes it in Genesis. Once you deny the factuality of a historical text, you undermine the very basis for its capacity to teach theological truth.

The question that must be asked is not just how should we read Genesis 1–2, but how did Jesus read it? When the Pharisees asked Christ a question about divorce, He based His view of marriage squarely on the biblical

account of the creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4–5). According to Jesus’ reading of Genesis 1–2, the statement defining the one-flesh nature of marriage (19:5) did not originate with Adam nor was it an editorial insertion by Moses. It was God Himself (“he which made them”) who said, “they two shall be one flesh.” If Eve wasn’t actually created the way Genesis describes, then any authoritative, scriptural basis for viewing marriage as a covenantal relationship of unity and solidarity evaporates into mythology. The Genesis description of a literal creation of a historical Adam and Eve was the basis for Jesus’ own understanding and teaching about the definition of marriage, the inviolable solidarity of the marriage bond (“shall be one flesh”), the sanctity of the marriage relationship (“what . . . God hath joined together”), and the intended permanence of marriage (“let not man put asunder”). To deny the biblical description of Adam and Eve as historical is to imply that Jesus Himself seriously misunderstood Scripture, history, and cosmogony. That’s a particularly awkward claim if, as John 1 teaches, Jesus was actually there at the Creation.

Gender Identity and Roles. In the same passage Jesus also assumed the original establishment of distinct genders based on the biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4). The Son of God grounded His teaching on the direct, divine origin of Adam and Eve (“he which made them at the beginning”) and their divinely intended gender distinction (“made them male and female”) on a literal reading of Genesis. Again, if Genesis 1–2 is not intended literally, then Jesus was simply mistaken. “If Jesus taught a view, I am bound to follow it. . . . I do not see how, within orthodox Christology, one could say that Jesus taught error about creation and then justify rejecting Jesus’ view” (Jud Davis, *Reading Genesis 1–2*, 211, 213).

Paul, too, grounded his inspired teaching regarding gender roles and distinctions on a literal reading of Adam and Eve and their historical actions described in Genesis (1 Tim. 2:12–14). The apostle assumes the literalness of both the biblical description of Creation (“Adam was first formed, then Eve”) and the Fall (“Adam was not deceived, but the woman”)—and builds Christian doctrine on that reading of Genesis. If the NT has any authority for the Christian at all, the ultimate test for your reading of Genesis 1–2 is whether it agrees with Jesus’ and Paul’s reading of Genesis 1–2.

Soteriology

Death and Sin. An evolutionary worldview—even a theistic evolutionary worldview—normalizes death as a natural

a Historical Adam and Eve

and necessary dimension of life, progress, and development. Yet the Bible consistently depicts death as the consequence and penalty of human sin (Ezek. 18:4, 20; Rom. 5:12, 21; 6:16, 23, 7:5, 13; 1 Cor. 15:3; James 1:15) and the enemy of humanity (1 Cor. 15:26; Heb. 2:15; Rev. 21:4) that ruined an originally good creation (Rom. 8:19–23). Without the biblical description of Adam and Eve, therefore, the Bible’s explicit connection of sin and death is not only wrong, it is nonsensical.

Original Sin. The Bible also explicitly connects our experience of death to our sinful condition, and our sinful condition to Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:22). “Original sin” is the Bible’s explanation for both our individual sinful propensity from birth (depravity) and our personal culpability from birth (guilt). That means that without the biblical description of a historical Adam and Eve, *including their historical actions*, there is no actual basis for these teachings that lie at the very heart of the gospel and the Bible’s explanation of our need for redemption.

Christology

The Last Adam. Citing Genesis 2:7, Paul links Adam—specifically in his created and life-receiving role—with Christ in His redemptive and life-giving role as “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). Paul says that Adam was a type of the one who was to come—referring to Christ (Rom. 5:14). A type is not a symbol or an allegory; typology is about actual fulfillment. And fulfillment requires that “a type is an actual historical event or person”—otherwise there is no basis for identifying it as a type (Grant Osborne, “Type, Typology,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*). Without a historical Adam, Paul’s teaching about Christ as the Last Adam sinks to the level of fairy tale.

The redemptive-historical correlation between Adam and Christ determines the framework in which . . . the redemptive work of Christ has its place. . . . Whoever divorces the work of redemption from the framework in which it stands in Scripture no longer allows the Word to function as the norm that determines *everything*. There has been no temptation through the centuries to which theology has been more exposed than this temptation. There is no danger that theology has more to fear than this danger (J. P. Versteeg, *Adam in the New Testament*, 67).

The Purpose for Christ’s Coming. Embedded in the biblical account of Adam and Eve is the first promise of a coming redeemer (Gen. 3:15). The purposes for that coming include deliverance from sin as the result

of the Fall (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:22; Heb. 2:14) and the restoration of creation from the collateral consequences of that Fall (Rom. 8:19–23; cf. Col. 1:19–20).

Conclusion

All the previous arguments, significant as they are, funnel into a final argument of cosmic consequences related to the character of God Himself, and your ability to reliably relate to Him through His words. Psalm 19:7 assures us that “the testimony of the LORD is sure.” A testimony is a solemn attestation to what is so. The word “sure” means “faithful, dependable, trustworthy.”

The record of Genesis is not merely a human writer’s imaginative telling of Creation; it is God’s testimony to those past events. If the doctrine of Scripture as the inspired self-revelation from God means anything, then the Lord’s testimony to His creation of man and his world is a reliable record of exactly what happened and how. For God, through Moses, to describe so graphically how they came into being, to name them, to quote their speech, to recount their precise actions (and, in later revelation, the consequences of those actions), to include their names in subsequent genealogies (as if they were actually historical people) puts the historical narrative of the Genesis account into the category of divine “testimony.” And Psalm 93:5 echoes the fact that the Lord’s testimonies are completely reliable. If the account itself is not a truthful record of not only *what* happened but *how* it happened, then its testimony to the reliability of God’s words is itself unreliable. If what God said is not what happened, then what God says cannot be trusted.

Genesis is being reinterpreted by otherwise evangelical theologians inside the church. In a kind of hermeneutical gerrymandering, many evangelical scholars have redrawn the interpretational boundaries of Genesis in a way that allows them to contradict a plain reading of the text in ways that they would (presumably) never dream of doing in any other passage.

The move within the Church to normalize an evolutionary reading of Genesis has theological and personal reverberations far beyond an academic, esoteric debate over hermeneutics. It pulls the rug out from under God’s testimony not only to the event of Creation but to the reliability of His words and the very integrity of God Himself. The notion that one can embrace God’s testimony about Jesus while dismissing His testimony about Creation is a dangerous form of theological schizophrenia.

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Offering Hope to the Homosexual and Transgender

“Sarah” (not her real name)¹ contacted Global Media Outreach (globalmediaoutreach.com)² in May 2018. She indicated that she had received Christ as her Savior, but she opened with this comment: “I’m a FTM (female to male) and want to serve Christ, but I don’t want to leave this life. . . . I’m confused.” Eventually, I learned prior to her transition, she lived as a lesbian for seventeen years. How would you answer? Can someone like this ever change?

Even more challenging, how can someone outside this lifestyle begin to understand, much less help, those who are struggling with homosexuality or transgender issues?

Over the years, I have worked with many individuals as they looked for answers. Following are some of the things that I have shared with individuals with whom I have contact.

I start with this: We all have sinned. God loves all of us and the Lord Jesus died for all of us. The ground is level at the cross. I care for them and want to help them.

I don’t take hostility, defensiveness, or verbal attacks personally. I remember where they are coming from. I try to defuse any anger that they may have. I’ve found we should treat hostile individuals graciously, with kindness, and with reasonableness. We must treat them differently than they are treating us. Their impression of us may be the only impression they have of Christianity and the Bible.

A very important first step is to probe their motivation for wanting to leave homosexuality or wanting to make a change in their life. Wrong answers would be, “I’m afraid of AIDS,” “I’m picked on by society,” “I want to be accepted by parents,” or “I’m just so unhappy.” The right motivation is, “I want to love and obey God. I want to bring my life into conformity with the Word of God.” The right motivation is paramount for leaving an ungodly lifestyle.

In order to get to this point, of course, they must hear and receive the gospel. Getting motivations right involves getting right with God.

Then comes this big question: Are they willing to do whatever it takes to get into conformity with the Word of God?

We must be careful about saying all sin is the same. In God’s eyes, the remedy for sin is the same, but the consequences of sinful choices and behaviors are different. We don’t punish a child who lies in the same way that we punish someone who commits murder. Consequences for sins differ.

Keys for Victory

1. *Separation*—The individual needs to separate himself completely from homosexual and transgender friends and activities. This is critical, and can be very hard. He may need to get a new job. When we ask this of

him, we are asking him to give up everything. He is weak, and it's a war. He is in a spiritual battle for his life. He will also need to separate from wicked influences of the media and other activities that will pull him down.

2. *Immersion*—He must immerse himself in Christian things. He will need to get new friends, to be in church, to study God's Word, and to establish a solid prayer life. He needs someone to disciple him and be an accountability partner. (He should *not* have an accountability partner who is struggling to overcome homosexuality or is a transgender. Some support groups do this to their peril.)
3. *Change of focus*—He needs to get the focus off of self and on to spiritual things. The answer is not looking deeper into one's self for the answer. The goal is to move the person away from focusing on self and his issues, putting the focus on Christ and maturing spiritually.
4. *Renewing the mind*: The individual needs to get the focus off of sex. He shouldn't dwell on the struggle with lust and sin. When the temptation comes, he should ask, "Is this a biblical and pure thought?" (Phil. 4:8).

A key question: "What things am I doing that feed my desire to sin?" With God's help, he needs to stop doing or looking at things that feed the lust.

Eventually, the frequency and intensity of temptation will decrease. God will change the perspective of the temptation. Change takes time. Most often, it's a process, not instantaneous. Trust in God and obey God. Say "no" to the flesh. God is patient. Draw near to God.

The Battle in the Mind

The battle is not just about stopping bad behavior. An individual must deal with his thinking by the washing of the Word of God. Often fleeting thoughts can awaken lust in a moment. The one who struggles needs to slow down the thought process:

Analyze the thought by asking, "What does God want me to do with this thought and desire?" "What does God say about it?" He should use discernment, make a decision on it, and ask God's help to make a choice moment by moment to do the right thing.

Those struggling with homosexuality or transgender issues are dealing with the same issues of the heart that are common to all. Even believers struggle with sin and sinful desires (Rom. 7:15–24; 1 Cor. 10:13).

God's greatest desire for believers is holiness.

2 Corinthians 10: 5: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"

For nearly a year, she fought this battle with God's help. She is a transformed person. Her transformation is due only to God's power and work in her life.

1 Corinthians 6:11: And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Psalms 103:11–14 "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

As I began with Sarah, I shared the gospel with her and wrote, "I would counsel you to reach the place where you love God with all

of your heart, soul, and mind. Whatever decisions we make about life must be done out of love for God and wanting to obey Him."

For nearly a year, she fought this battle with God's help. She is a transformed person. Her transformation is due only to God's power and work in her life. Changing her name back to her birth name, coming off of hormones, leaving her transgender friends and all associated with that lifestyle did not come easily. It was a spiritual battle of giant proportions. She wrote, "Please pray that the Lord will mend this broken heart and crushed spirit because this journey is no picnic."

Over more than six hundred e-mails, we covered many Bible truths: God's holiness, His plan for our lives, applying practical Bible principles to her life, and many more. Recently she wrote, "With His sovereign power and His ways . . . He transformed me. I want to give my life completely to God, obeying Him, serving Him, and living for Him. Living who He created me to be . . . with a new body and mind. . . . God's Word helps me to live my real identity." She also wrote in another e-mail, "In the beginning of this wonderful walk, I was making my own plans. I would say, 'I gave my heart to God; I will be a good person.' So this meant I could stay with the hormones. . . . WRONG! God let me know He wanted 100%. So like a little kid, I cried and told Him, I did not like it." "Sarah" wanted to do it her way, but she realized God wanted her to depend totally on Him. To her, it was impossible, but God reassured her that nothing at all is impossible with Him. She said, "Now I live to please the Lord."

Annetta Small and her husband, Gary, live in Washington State, where they now serve in a ministry of helps to local churches, with Gary supplying pulpits and holding special meetings. Annetta also serves in an online ministry discipling people in despair over "alternate" lifestyles.

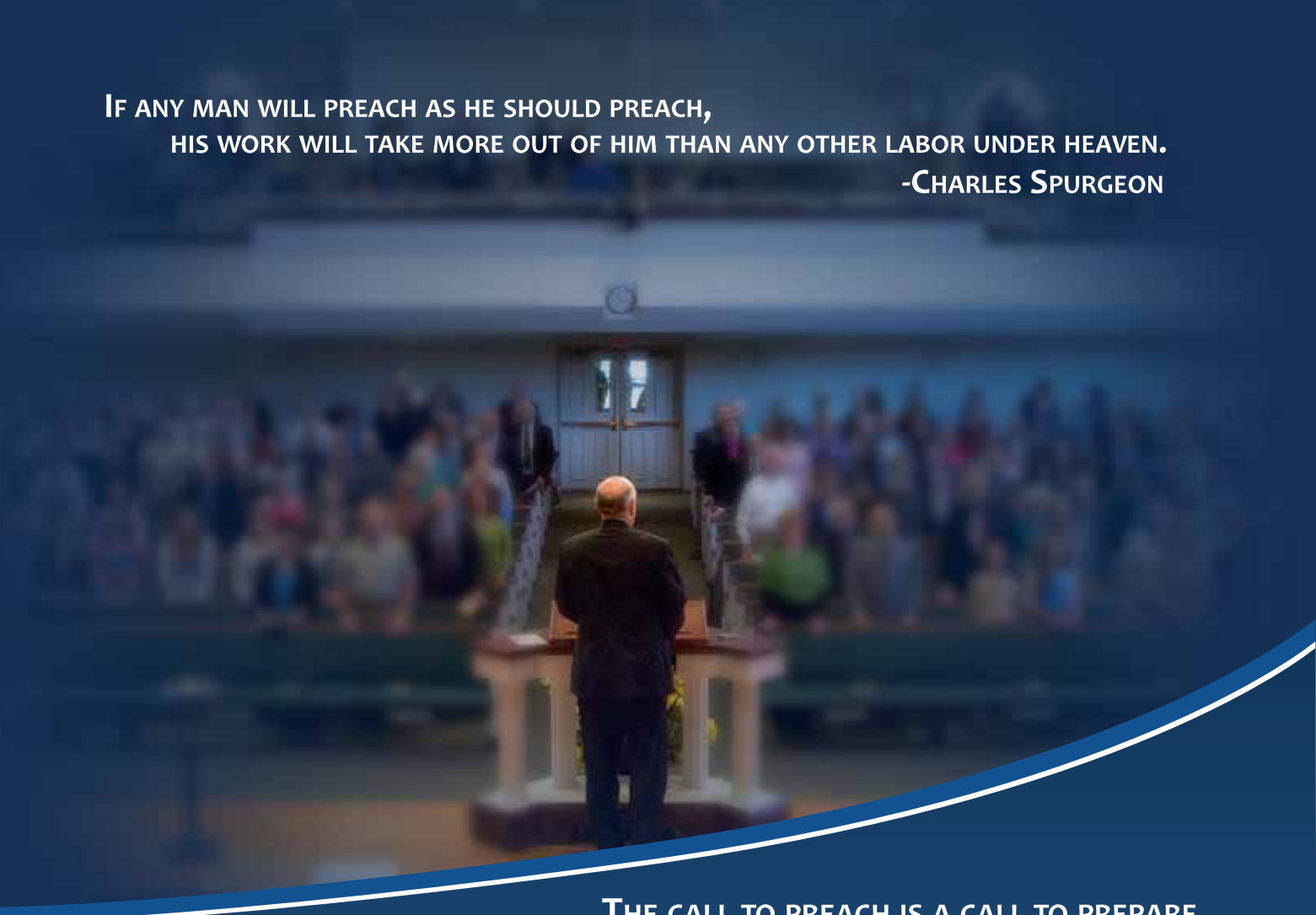
¹"Sarah" gave permission to share her story because she wants God to get the honor and glory.

²Individuals wanting help with these issues could submit their names at sites such as jesus2020.godlife.com or 4steps.godlife.com. Currently it isn't possible to make submissions directly on the GMO website noted here.

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Suffering and Surviving COVID-19

As a healthcare worker wheeled me to the isolation room, I waved goodbye to my wife, who was placed across the hall from me in the ER. Brittany was thirty-eight weeks pregnant when she and I tested positive for COVID-19. I'm profoundly grateful to the Lord that she and our four girls remained asymptomatic.

Lethargy was my first symptom. Nothing that couldn't be remedied by a cup of latte, right? Wrong. Fever and chills arrived later. On March 16 I quarantined. My symptoms were tolerable enough during the day—that's why the urgent-care provider told me I absolutely didn't need to be tested with COVID-19. During nighttime, however, my fever brought two friends—Mr. Dry Cough and Mr. Shortness of Breath! My respiratory rate was through the roof! I couldn't say two words without coughing and trying to catch my breath.

This shot pain into my stomach and back. My head felt like exploding. Hours passed. Recalling Romans 8:28, Psalm 46:1, Psalm 91, and humming "It Is Well" allowed me to fall asleep, thank the Lord.

In the hospital's isolation room, as the brave nurses hooked me up to all kinds of monitors, I asked for a Bible. I wrote out Psalms 23 through 28. It was then that Psalm 24:1 arrested my attention. "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." This opened up some refreshing insights about God's *possession*, *position*, and *distinction*.

Horatio Spafford, author of "It Is Well," lost his son to pneumonia. The great Chicago fire devoured his livelihood. Two years later, he lost his four daughters in a shipwreck on the Atlantic. On his voyage to see his wife in England, the ship's captain showed him where his daughters drowned. Over the waves he wrote "When peace like a river attendeth my way, / When sorrows like sea billows roll, / Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, / It is well, it is well with my soul." Spafford realized his family was God's *possession*.

I am the Lord's. My family is His. My sleeping or waking moments are all His! Everything is the Lord's. Whether we realize it or not, God possesses us because He made us. He created the universe for Himself. Then this truth hit me—He can do whatever He wants with my life as His possession!

Should He give my unborn son COVID-19? Should He spare him from it? That's His prerogative. In the midst of incredible suffering, Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15). Why? Because he realized that everything, including his breath, is God's—and God can do with it however He pleases!

God's possession points to His *position*. Paul writes, "God that made the world . . . he is Lord of heaven and earth"

(Acts 17:24a; cf. Col. 1:16–17). The psalmist records for us what this position is like: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). Because God occupies the highest position, no one can slap His hand and say, "Hey, what are You doing?" He literally just laughs at them!

I sent a text to my church and family: "Guys, they just confirmed I tested positive for COVID-19. The Lord is

not surprised by this at all. He's not on His throne scratching His head trying to figure out what He should do next. I'm so glad to be under His loving providential care." This brings me to the third principle I learned—God's *distinction*.

The God who possesses everything is distinctly good in everything. The God who does whatever pleases Him is a good and kind God. He doesn't do things on a whim. In His goodness, He prompted hundreds of people around the globe to pray. A missionary in Chile sent us groceries! A Filipino pastor led a prayer meeting where I was the speaker via Facebook live. Haven Ministries interviewed me for an Easter radio program where I got to brag about our distinctly good God. A TV station in the Philippines picked up my story. I had the wonderful opportunity to proclaim the gospel to their 110,000 viewers. Now, tell me if God isn't good! He is distinctly good. Suffering and surviving COVID-19 fine-tuned my understanding of God's *possession*, *position*, and *distinction*. "O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me" (Ps. 30:2). Glory to God!

CH (CPT) Christian Torres has been the pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Riverside, California, since 2019. He is also the Battalion Chaplain of the 418th Quartermaster Battalion (US Army Reserve) in Marana, Arizona. He and his wife, Brittany, have five children.





Biblical Spiritual Goals

If a person sets no goals in his walk with the Lord, he will live an unfulfilled life. Goals are important. The apostle Paul had a goal. He said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." His goal was a worthy one! Paul also wrote in Acts 20:24, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Paul's goal was to finish his work for the Lord with joy.

For me, there is nothing more satisfying and enjoyable than completing a goal I have set for myself. Others will find this to be true as well. Proverbs 13:19 states, "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul." You may have heard this statement before: "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it with deadly accuracy." Our lives are too short to be characterized by wasting away the time the Lord has given us. Let us now consider some important goals we should set for ourselves.

First, we should set a goal of growing deeper in our knowledge of God's Word. We all need to take heed to the admonition given by the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Studying the Scriptures requires spiritual "perspiration" by diligently concentrating our thoughts on God's Word.

Not too long ago I came across a profound statement that deeply challenged me. It is a quotation from a man named Robert Chapman. He said,

The scriptures contain the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character.

What a tremendous summary of what we have in God's Word! If we want to go deeper into God's Word, we need to

cry out the words of Psalm 119:18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Second, we should set a goal of growing stronger in our separation. We are living in a time when the Lord's people are bombarded with the world's ungodly ways. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the main character, Christian, was constantly being allured and tempted to go to Vanity Fair. Likewise, the world's bright lights of laughter, pleasure, and lust are enticing and appealing. But they are devastating and destructive to the Christian who embraces them. Jeremiah 10:2 declares, "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen." Romans 12:9 says, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." So there is a separation from worldly practices that a Christian should practice. But there is also a separation from some believers who are walking disorderly. It is a scriptural mandate! We read in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." Not only is there the necessity of withdrawing from those who walk disorderly, but sometimes there is also the necessity of avoiding them as well. Romans 16:17 says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." This kind of separation must be done with a godly, humble spirit. It is a firm tenderness that says, "You are my friend, but I cannot condone your lifestyle of disorderly conduct and unscriptural offenses."

Third, we should set a goal of growing more fervent in our service for the Lord. Psalm 2:11 says, "Serve the LORD with fear." That means we are to serve Him with a godly reverence. Psalm 100:2 states, "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing." Our service should be displayed by a joyful spirit coupled with songs of praise to His name. And when a believer gives more of himself in serving the Lord, he will be greatly honored by Him. Jesus said in John 12:2b, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

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