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An Introduction to Christian Belief: A Layman's Guide

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Introduction

Systematic theology, though having once fallen on hard times in both the evangelical church and in the academy (for different reasons in each group), is now making a comeback. It should, for it is both *possible* and *necessary*.

Systematic theology, then, for our purposes, is the study of all facts about God and his work, from any and every source, but revealed primarily in the Bible, and brought together in a coherent and inter-related manner in order to instruct, encourage and guide the saints in godliness.¹ There are several reasons for studying, organizing, and presenting the major teachings of Scripture. Here are two:

- For the development of one's own understanding of God, truth, and the Christian faith. Peter admonishes us to grow in the knowledge (not just cognitive, but at least including that) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). In this way you will promote truth, avoid errors, and give yourself great opportunity to live an ethical and holy life. In short, the goal is that we live a life honoring to the Lord, worshiping him in truth (John 4:24), serving his church properly and in truth (Eph 4:15), and finding ourselves salt and light to our fellowman (Matt 5:16; Rom 13:8).
- For explaining, defending, and applying Biblical truth in a non-Christian context. Again Peter tells us to always be ready to give an answer for the reason for the hope which is in you (1 Peter 3:15). How much better if the answer is thought through and really reflects a balanced summary of biblical teaching!

An Overview of the Major Areas of Christian Belief

Bibliology: The Bible

The term Bibliology (from Greek biblos meaning "book") refers to the study of the nature of the Bible as revelation. It often includes such topics as revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, canonicity, illumination, and interpretation.

Revelation

We use the term "revelation" to translate the Greek term *apokavlyui* "apokalupsis, which means to "unveil" or "uncover." Biblically speaking, revelation is the act and process whereby God makes Himself known to men and angels. This he has done through miracles, visions, dreams, theophanies, providential control of history, conscience, Jesus Christ, and Scripture. Theologians have spoken of *general* revelation through nature (i.e., the created order), conscience, and providentially orchestrated history and *special* or *particular* revelation primarily in Christ and Scripture (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Acts 17:24-34; John 1:14-

¹ For the most part this introduction will refrain from all technical discussion and the historical development of these doctrines. It is purely intended for the beginner. After they have studied the introduction, however, it would be a good idea to advance to further discussion on each of these topics. Also, the reason the author has continued to use such words as "bibliology," "eschatology," etc. is so that the student can learn what they mean so that he/she will be better prepared to advance to more detailed discussions where these words appear frequently.

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18). Thus general revelation is equally available to all men at all times and while it alone cannot save, it is nonetheless both essential and preparatory to special revelation.²

Inspiration

“Inspiration” is the theological word, derived from the Latin term *spiro*, used to refer to the process whereby God *superintended* the human authors of scripture so that what they wrote was simultaneously their own words as well the Word of God himself; God “breathed out” his words through the words (using the minds and personalities) of his spokespeople. Thus, through Spirit-inspired writings God has preserved an historical/theological record of his words and deeds and has given it to his covenant people as a means of grace that they might trust him fully and obey him implicitly. As a result of our sinfulness and finiteness we stand in *need* of such divine guidance and wisdom; scripture was inspired to that end.

Inspiration, however, is not limited to mechanical dictation (indeed, very little of it can be said to be mechanical in any way), as we might have, say, in the receiving of the Ten Commandments (or the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3), but rather occurred in a variety of situations involving the writers as whole people (their minds, emotions, wills, etc.) in their own particular life situations (linguistic, religious, political, economic, etc.). The end product, however, was always God’s Word *to man through man* (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21) and carries God’s “full weight and authority.” Technically speaking, inspiration applies to the autographa (not copies or translations).

Some theologians have referred to the *verbal* (extending to the actual words, not just concepts), *plenary* (the entire Bible, not only those parts that seem to speak directly to issues of faith and practice) inspiration of Scripture. In our opinion, this is the view that (1) best corresponds to the view of OT writers, the prophets, Christ himself and his apostles, and (2) best represents the historic position/understanding of the church on this issue. Since the Enlightenment in France and Germany (17th/18th centuries), however, it has been fashionable to deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture in light of apparent historical inaccuracies and philosophical objections, particularly with the existence and nature of God as well as the limitations of language. But, while we can learn much from these views, we may safely set aside their antisupernaturalistic prejudices as both unfounded and contrary to the teaching of Jesus who himself strongly upheld the complete trustworthiness of Scripture without reserve (e.g., Matt 5:17-20).³

Inerrancy

Inerrancy, although not always properly defined, is a logical corollary to inspiration and in no way diminishes the human authorship of scripture. If what the authors of Scripture penned was indeed under the supernatural influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (as is properly affirmed), then since God is true, what they wrote and affirmed is in all ways true as well. Thus inerrancy applies to the autographa and Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic copies insofar as they faithfully reproduce the autographa. The doctrine rightly teaches that the scriptures are without error in all that they affirm (i.e., properly interpreted), whether they refer to geographical, historical, or theological issues. Thus the scriptures are the final authority in matters of faith and practice and take precedence over tradition, culture, and creed. This doctrine also allows for different literary styles, poor grammar, approximations in numbers, etc. (Psalm 119).⁴

² The objective revelation of God through nature, history, and conscience (human nature) is not extinguished because of man’s fall (see Psalm 19:1-6; Rom 2:14-15; Acts 17:26-27), but is seriously distorted through suppression and deliberate contempt (Rom 1:18-20).

³ For a discussion of this issue, see Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982). For some philosophical reflections on the reasonableness of God speaking, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

⁴ For further discussion of this and related topics, consult the series of articles in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

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Canonicity

The sixty-six books of scripture constitute the Protestant canon in that they provide God's rule for faith and life. The process of canonicity involves the church's recognition of the divine origin and authority of the sixty-six books of scripture. She, as the redeemed community, constituted of those who have genuine faith in Jesus Christ, is qualified for this task. It is important to note, however, that she did not *determine* which books were canonical, but only *recognized* those books which were canonical; scripture is self-authenticating. In the case of the Old Testament, generally speaking, she received it as the authoritative Bible of her Lord and his apostles, i.e., the prophetic message of God which was now fulfilled in and through Christ. In the case of the New Testament, the church, by applying varying tests such as *apostolicity* (was it written by an apostle or authenticated by an apostle?), *universality* (was it widely read and accepted?), and *character* (sufficiently spiritual, directed at godliness, doctrinal content in agreement with other apostles) recognized which books were "from the Lord" and which were not, though the process was by no means finalized by the end of the first century. In AD 367, in the 39th Easter Letter of Athanasius, we find a list of the 27 books of the NT we have today. This list was accepted by the churches east of the Mediterranean while churches in the west came to accept the same list some 30 years later, in AD 397, at the Council of Carthage.⁵

There are undoubtedly many reasons which prompted early Christians to preserve the writings of the apostles, but perhaps the passing away of the apostles as well as the development of heresies (e.g., Marcion) and doctrinal disputes, were two of the most significant, negatively viewed. Also, the Diocletian persecution (AD 303-11), in which Christians were tortured, their property taken, and their sacred books destroyed by fire, undoubtedly helped to move the church along in its recognition of which books were sacred (i.e., inspired) and which were not. That is, there arose the need to know which books to copy and preserve in light of the possibility that the state continue to try and destroy the faith.

The extent of the canon has been in some question among Protestants and Catholics since the addition of the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent (AD 1545-63). Anyone who has read these books will find them spiritually encouraging, much the same as reading great Christian literature, but they should not be regarded as on par with the 66 books, a fact which is recognized even by the Catholic church in its reference to them as *deuterocanonical*.

Illumination

Illumination refers to the work of the Spirit in the believer/believing community enabling him/her/them to understand, welcome, and apply inscripturated truth (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-14).⁶ For our part, we are to follow sound methods of interpretation in keeping with the nature of Scripture and generally accepted principles for understanding written communication. Further, we are, by faith in Christ, to put into practice that which the Scripture teaches us, lest we become blinded by our accumulated ignorance (James 1:21-22) and progressively blurred in our comprehension of spiritual realities. In this way illumination increases and our grip on the truth strengthens (or perhaps its grip on us!). See also the next section, entitled, "Interpretation."

⁵ For more information on the canon of Scripture, see Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*, New Testament Series, ed. Dan O. Via (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: University Press, 1987).

⁶ The entire passage from 2:6-16 has received no little attention in recent years. But even though there are disagreements regarding grammar, background, and theological emphases, there can be little doubt that the relevant thought for our purposes is quite clear: man in his unregenerate and carnal state cannot understand and accept the things of God (e.g., the cross-centered gospel), whereas the believer, who enjoys the enlightening ministry of the Spirit (cf. Eph 1:18), *is able to welcome* God's truth—now preserved for us in Scripture—in a deeply personal and transformative way. See Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians* NIBC, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 62-63.

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Interpretation

If Illumination is the work of the Spirit to help believers understand and apply Scripture, interpretation, broadly conceived, is the thought-through method we should follow in this endeavor. Interpretation involves, then, three elements: (1) coming to scripture humbly with a knowledge of my presuppositions, traditions, and cultural influences so as not to blunt or skew the force of scripture (but rather to allow it to leave its mark on me); (2) understanding what an author *meant* when he said such and such, and (3) understanding what he *means*, that is, how it applies to our lives today. Thus, in the first step we are interested in gaining an awareness of how our culture, tradition, and past acquaintance with Scripture has affected us. In the second step we are interested in the grammatical-historical meaning of a passage of Scripture. In order to achieve this we study the words of a text in their historical context, the literary structure of a passage, its mood, and the kind (genre) of literature it is. Combined with this is the comparing of scripture with scripture (e.g., interpreting the obscure by the clear) and ultimately the teaching of the Bible as a whole. In this way, and through the illuminating work of the Spirit, the church comes to grips with the meaning and abiding relevance of Scripture.

But this is only half the job. Moses did not write Deuteronomy and Paul did not pen Philippians simply to be understood (i.e., between one's ears). Rather, they wrote to save, guide, instruct, and orient other believers to God's will. In short, their writings call for a response and this involves first letting the Bible speak to me; convicting, educating, encouraging, and showing me where to go. I must bring my presuppositions and patterns of life to the passage and allow it to judge and straighten. Then I must allow the Scripture—as the very voice of God himself—to speak to my community and the larger world-context in which I live. The Lordship of Christ extends to the entire universe! And we must remember that his word is a primary way in which he expresses his grace oriented, kingly rule over us.⁷

Trinitarianism or Theology Proper

Trinitarianism refers to the study of the triune God. It often includes such topics as rational arguments for the existence of God, the attributes of God, the Names of God, the trinity, and the decree or plan of God.

Rational Arguments for the Existence of God

It needs to be said up front that the Bible nowhere argues for the existence of God in the way envisioned in these “proofs.” The overwhelming orientation of the Biblical writers is to assume that God exists and move on from there. Also, the strength of these arguments has been variously debated; some people find them helpful and generally convincing, especially when taken together, while others are not the least bit convinced. It is doubtful whether there is any necessary logical fault involved in denying any one of their premises or assertions since in many cases opponents are simply beginning with a different set of axioms. Further, there are many variations (i.e., more than one cosmological argument) of the arguments listed here. One should consult a textbook on the philosophy of religion for further discussion.⁸ Also, one should note that these arguments have been criticized by more than atheists. Many Christians have wondered out loud about their efficacy, value, soundness, and importance. The following is simply an introduction.

⁷ Some good introductory works on biblical interpretation include: Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); Leland Ryken, *How To Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard (Dallas: Word, 1993); Moisés, Silva, ed., *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation: Six Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Criticism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

⁸ I would recommend C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion, Contours of Christian Philosophy*, ed. C. S. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 31-76.

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The Argument from Creation

The argument from creation, or otherwise known as the *cosmological argument* states, in its most basic form, that everything we know in creation or in the universe has a cause (i.e., is contingent). But there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. Therefore, the universe itself has an uncaused cause and this Cause is God. In one form or another this argument has been advanced by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz and in recent years by Richard Swinburne. One potential defeater of this argument is the denial that one must look outside creation for a cause; creation might simply have always existed. But some take issue with this rebuttal arguing that such a response is in reality a copout since it does not explain why the universe of created, apparently contingent beings *continues* to exist. Also, it seems to be question-begging to *ex cathedra* postulate an infinite series of causes when such an argument is logically trivial and according to many philosophers and physicists, absurd. An infinite series of causes is an intellectual copout, they argue, and violates the principle of sufficient reason.

The Argument from Design

The argument from design, or otherwise known as the *teleological argument* observes the harmony, order, and design of things within creation. It then argues that such design and order implies purpose and, therefore, there must be an intelligent Designer and that Designer must be God. This argument too has been advanced since Greek philosophy and was propounded by Aquinas as his Fifth Way, William Paley, and also by Swinburne in recent times. One potential defeater of this argument is the apparent randomness of certain things and events in creation and the apparent lack of design. The problem of the quantity of evil would fit in here as well. Proponents of the design argument often suggest that there do appear to be random events, and so on, but this still does not detract from the overwhelming sense of design we experience. If design were not so, it is doubtful that human beings could or would have survived even this long.

The Argument from Being

Anselm's argument⁹ from being, or otherwise referred to as the *ontological argument*, claims that God is that "than which nothing greater can be thought." Since existence is a necessary property of the most perfect being, he must actually exist, since if he did not, he would not be the most perfect being one could think of. One potential defeater of this argument is the claim that it entails the notion of God in its premises. It, therefore, assumes what it is trying to prove. "It begs the question," as some would say.

The Argument from Morality

The argument from morality argues from *the fact of morality*, not the existence of what appear to be varied moralities. It states that the fact of conscience and morality indicate that there must be a moral Law-Giver. One potential defeater of this argument is the claim that morality is an evolutionary phenomenon and one does not need to postulate God in order to account for its existence. Others attempt as well to argue that there are many different moralities, a fact they claim does not lead one to the conviction that there is just one God, as theism argues. Proponents of the argument from morality point out that the evolutionist cannot have it both ways. The mechanism for evolution is generally taken to be some form of "survival of the fittest." If, then, morality were a evolutionary phenomenon, one would not expect human beings to care for the aged, to help the sick, to create, fund, and advance hospitals and medical research. But we do, and we find ourselves with a sense of guilt when we do otherwise. Also, it is by no means certain that there are many different moralities among human beings on the planet. In fact, the overwhelming data from sociologists is that in terms of basic morality about murder, stealing, lying, etc. humans are for the most part very similar. This does not mean that lying is sometimes honored; it means that it cannot be practiced consistently and universally in any one culture without that culture ceasing to function.

⁹ Anselm was not really arguing *per se* for the existence of God from the idea of "being." In his *Proslogion* (AD 1079) he was simply meditating and praising God for his greatness. Part of his greatness is that he necessarily exists, at least as far as Anselm is concerned.

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The Attributes of God

The attributes of God refer to those qualities or properties that set him apart as God and by which we recognize him as such. Theologians have tended to distinguish his attributes in terms of those that he alone possesses and those which he shares in a derivative and finite sense with his creation. Thus they refer to “Absolute and Relative,” “Immanent and Transitive,” and the most popular division among Reformed theologians, “Incommunicable and Communicable” attributes. Generally listed in the Incommunicable list are: Self-existence, immutability, infinity, and unity. Attributes listed under the heading of communicable include: spirituality, intellectual, and moral attributes, as well as attributes of sovereignty and power.

The Names of God

God has revealed himself in many ways throughout history, now recorded for us in Scripture—a living, inspired record of his disclosures about who he is, his purposes, plan, character and will. On many occasions he has given us a name by which he has unveiled his nature and by which we are subsequently to understand him. Some of these names include: Yahweh (the self-existent one)¹⁰; Yahweh Shalom (Yahweh is peace); Yahweh Maccaddeshem (Yahweh your sanctifier); Yahweh Raah (Yahweh is my shepherd); Yahweh Shammah (Yahweh who is present); Yahweh Rapha (Yahweh who heals); Yahweh Elohim (Yahweh, the mighty one); Adonai (Lord or Master); Elohim (The mighty or majestic one); El Olam (The mighty one, eternal); El Elyon (The most high mighty one); El Roi (The mighty one who sees); El Shaddai (Almighty God); Yeshua (Jesus; God saves); Christos (Christ; Messiah, Anointed one); Kurios (Lord); Soter (Savior), Abba (Father), and Theos (God).

The Trinity of God

The doctrine of the trinity is the affirmation based on the evidence of scripture that there is one God who exists eternally in three distinguishable persons, i.e., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A specific way of speaking about this phenomenon is to say that God is: one in essence/substance (*homoousios*), three in subsistence. The prominent contribution of the OT to trinitarianism, while providing what some consider to be evidence of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, is to repeatedly affirm the unity of God, both numerically and qualitatively. This unity is developed in the NT, however, in light of the coming and teaching of Christ, and shown to be more complex than had hitherto been known or understood. In the NT all three (i.e., the Father, Son and Spirit) are said to be divine, to do the works of God, and to be worshipped as God. The Father is clearly divine in the NT. The Son is deity (John 1:1; Titus 2:13), yet constantly distinguishes himself from the Father and the Spirit. And the Spirit is said to be God (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 5:3-5) and to be distinguished from the Father and the Son. Thus there is no room in the Biblical portrait for three gods (tritheism) or one God who manifests himself in three different modes (modalism). The Biblical portrait of God is that he is Trinitarian.

The Plan of God

The best statement of the “plan” of God or as is sometimes referred to as the decree of God, is that found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass” (Q.7). This doctrine can be seen in several places including most notably, Romans 9 and Ephesians 1:11: “in whom we also were called, having been foreordained according to the plan of him who works out all things in conformity with the counsel of his will.”

¹⁰ The difficulties in establishing the proper meaning of Yahweh are many and varied. Attempts to discover its meaning along the lines of comparative philology are tenuous at best, but so also with an examination of the verbal root. Its *usage* in Exodus 3:14 has generally been argued to suggest something along the line of God’s self-existence or at least the One who had been with the nation of Israel since the patriarchs.

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This is to be distinguished from God's will as understood from his commands and prohibitions which are clearly laid out in the Decalogue, expanded and applied by the prophets and brought to a Christocentric focus in the NT. The fall of man, then, was in the decree of God, but the command "not to eat the fruit," was clearly specified by God and He is thus not the author of sin in any way. Nothing more clearly teaches us that human beings have been endowed with a measure of genuine, responsible choice than sin. Thus there is a mysterious relationship between what has happened in history (i.e., the outworking of the decree) and the moral imperatives we find in Scripture. This mystery can be seen most clearly in the quintessential event of the cross and its portrayal in sacred scripture (cf. Acts 2:22-24; 1 Peter 1:20). The end result, of course, is a revelation of the glory of God (John 12:23-27)!

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Jesus taught that his death was not an "accident of history," but rather according to the foreordained or decreed plan of God. In Luke 22:22 he says: "the son of man goes as it has been *determined*" (ho, rismenon). Peter says, regarding the crucifixion and peoples' involvement in it, that Jesus was handed over to them by "God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (ho, rismene, boule, kaiprognosis tou theou). Yet in neither of these cases are the people and their actions minimized or the moral and spiritual consequences trivialized. Jesus says "woe" to the person who betrays him and Peter referred to the men as "wicked" (Acts 2:22-24). In sum, the early church implicated Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Jews, and Gentiles in this awful deed, claiming that they had done what "God's hand and will determined beforehand should happen" (he, cheir sou kai he, boule, sou proorisen genesthai). Again, see Acts 2:22-24. These texts tend to confirm the Augustian/Calvinistic doctrine that the decree of God is not identical with his foreknowledge; he knows the future because he has decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

The discussion of the order of the decrees has theological importance, but cannot be entertained at length here. Those who argue that God decreed first to create, then to permit the fall, then to save some and condemn others, to provide a redeemer, etc. are referred to as infralapsarians and would constitute most Calvinists. Those who argue that God first decreed to save the elect and condemn the non-elect, and then to create the elect and non-elect, then to permit the fall and finally to provide a redeemer, are referred to as supralapsarians.

Christology: Jesus Christ

The term "christology" (from Greek christos meaning "anointed one" or "Christ") refers to the study of Christ. It often includes such topics as the preexistence and eternality of Christ, OT prophecies about Christ, Christ's humanity, deity, and incarnation, as well as the issue of his temptations and sinlessness, his death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation, return, three-fold office, and states.

The Preexistence of Christ

There are several texts in the NT that speak in one way or another to the preexistence of Christ. John says the "word" became flesh which implies that he had existed previous to his incarnation (John 1:1, 14). Jesus himself suggests his preexistence in a number of texts. He said he had glory with the father before the world was (John 17:5) and that he had come from the father (John 5:43; 6:38). These imply preexistence. Paul also, in referring to Christ as the last Adam, implies his preexistence since Jews often held that both Adam and Moses were preexistent. So also when he says that Christ was "rich," but then became "poor," that he was "in the form of God," but "humbled himself," that he was "before all things" (Col 1:17). Both these references refer to the humiliation of the incarnation and therefore suggest that Christ existed previous to his coming to earth (see 1 Cor 15:45; and Phil 2:6).

Prophecies About Christ

Taken in the light of the entire canon, the historical fact of the resurrection, and with a view to Jewish hermeneutics, there are many prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament. Some of the familiar ones include: his birth (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4); his lineage (Gen 49:10; Luke 3:33); his place of birth (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7); his Galilean ministry of compassion and judgment (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:14-16); that he was the prophet to come (Deut 18:15, 18-19; Acts 3:20, 22); that he would function as a priest (Psalm 110:4; Heb 5:5-6); his betrayal (Psalm 41:9; Luke 22:47-48); his being sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:11-12; Matt 26:15;

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27:1-10); his violent death (Zech 12:10; John 20:27); his resurrection (Psalm 16:10; Luke 24:7; Acts 2:25-28); his exaltation to God's right hand (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33-34), his eternal reign in fulfillment of Davidic promise (2 Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 110:1; Isa 55:3; Acts 2:33-34; 13:22-23, 32-34).

The Humanity of Christ

There are several lines of evidence in the Scripture which converge to prove that from a Biblical point of view Jesus was truly and thoroughly human. Jesus had human names (i.e., Jesus, Son of David), was experienced by others as a human being (John 9:16), had a body (1 John 1:1), spoke normal human language(s), referred to himself as a man (John 8:40); others referred to him as a man (Acts 3:22); experienced life as a human being (Luke 2:52), including such limitations as hunger (Matt 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), tiredness (John 4:6), intense sorrow and distress (John 11:35; Luke 13:34-35), and ignorance (Mark 13:32); he had a human soul (Luke 23:46), and died (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The Deity of Christ

There are also several lines of evidence in Scripture which converge to prove that the Biblical writers regarded Jesus as human, but as more than human as well. They considered him divine. John says he was divine or God (John 1:1). Paul says he is the "very form of God" (morphe, theou; Phil 2:6) as well as our great God and savior (Titus 2:13). He is referred to as Lord (Matt 2:43-45), Yahweh (cf. Rom 10:9, 13 and Joel 2:32) as well as the King of Kings (a designation a Jew such as John would only give God himself—Rev 19:16). He does the works of God, including creating (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-20), sustaining (Heb 1:3-4), saving (Matt 1:23), raising the dead (John 5:25); judging (John 5:27), sending the Spirit (a work assigned to the father as well; see John 14:26; 15:26), and building his church (Matt 16:18). He accepts, as God himself does, worship from all men (Matt 14:33) and angels (Heb 1:6) and some day all men will bow to him (something only God accepts; Phil 2:10, Isa 45:23).

So we see that the doctrine of the simultaneous deity and humanity of Christ is not the invention of some fourth or fifth century church council (e.g., Nicaea [AD325] or Chalcedon [451]), but is clearly taught in Scripture. The precise formulation (i.e., a working model) of *how* this could be so may have had to await a response to the Arian heresy and other Christological developments (and a borrowing of Greek metaphysical language), but the essential features of the doctrine are found in apostolic and early church confessions.

The Incarnation & Kenosis

Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary (Matt 1:23; Gal 4:4) in fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction (Isa 7:14). From a more theological point of view, John says that the eternal and divine Word became flesh and that God thus "tabernacled" among us (John 1:1, 14; Exodus 40:34-35). The doctrine of the incarnation means that the second person of the Trinity took on human flesh. Jesus Christ is both undiminished deity united with perfect humanity forever and without confusion of attributes. One person, two natures (divine/human).

God became a man in order to redeem his creation and rule over it. Thus he came to fulfill the Davidic covenant as the promised King (Luke 1:31-33). In his role as Lord and King he reveals God to men (John 1:18); saves sinners (Gal 1:4), destroys the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), judges men (Acts 17:31) and brings all things in creation back in submission to God (1 Cor 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:10-11).

There have been many errors regarding the dual nature of Christ. We will briefly mention some here. The Ebionites denied Christ's divine nature (he only received the Spirit at Baptism) as also the Arians (cf. present day Jehovah's witnesses who claim likewise that Jesus is the first and highest created being). The Gnostics (i.e., docetism), affirming that Jesus only appeared human, denied that he had a *truly* human nature. Nestorius denied the union of the divine and human natures in one person (the divine completely controlled the human) and Eutychianism denied any real distinction in Christ's natures at all (the human nature was engulfed in the divine resulting in a new third nature). Finally, Appolinarius denied a facet of Jesus' humanity, namely, that he had a human spirit (the divine Logos took the place of Jesus' human spirit). These are all errors in light of the Biblical data and were rightly rejected at various church councils.

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Finally, there have been many attempts to explain the meaning of the term *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7, especially since the mid to late 1800's and the rise of psychology. It has been argued that the term *kenosis* refers to Christ willingly laying aside certain essential attributes such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence in order to redeem man. This theology in its various forms has come to be known as Kenotic Theology.¹¹ But is this what Paul is saying in Philippians 2:6, that Jesus gave up the use of or the possession of certain divine attributes? This is not likely. In fact, the apostle explains what he means when he says that Christ emptied himself *by taking on* the nature of a servant. Thus it is not the setting aside of any divine attributes that is being sung¹² about here in Phil 2, but rather the humiliation of the Son of God taking on human form and that “of a servant.” This, of course, is the point Paul is trying to make with those in the Philippian church. They too are to live the humble lives of servants, following Christ's example.¹³

The Impeccability of Christ

In light of the true divinity and real humanity of Christ, the question arises as to whether his temptations were genuine and if it were really possible for him to have sinned. Was Christ able not to sin or not able to sin? Some say his genuine humanity includes the idea that he could have sinned. Others claim that his deity makes it impossible for him to have sinned. All evangelical scholars recognize the reality of his temptations and the fact that he did not sin, but beyond this there is not much agreement. The oft-quoted analogy of two boys attacking an aircraft carrier in their rubber dingy (using sticks and stones), where the sticks and stones represent temptation and the aircraft carrier Jesus, may go a long way in stressing Jesus' deity and impeccability, but it simply fails to catch the reality and intensity of the attacks which Satan thrust upon him (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). The bottom line in connection with this debate, however, is that Jesus was both God and man, suffered temptation victoriously (Heb 4:15), and can therefore draw near to help us in time of weakness (Heb 2:18); his temptations have given us confidence in his sympathetic heart. Beyond that we cannot know much at all. We can say that no man has ever understood the strength, viciousness, and deceit of temptation better than him and this precisely because he never gave in.

Death of Christ

All four gospels record the death of Christ (under Pontius Pilate) which is interpreted in advance by Christ himself as a death for the forgiveness of sins, the establishment of the new covenant, and the defeat of Satan (Luke 22:15-20; John 12:31; 16:11). The heart of Christ's teaching on this matter became the authoritative teaching of the apostles (in keeping with OT assertions to the same). We will talk more about the proper interpretation of the death of Christ when we discuss the doctrine of salvation. It is enough for now to realize that the evidence for his death by crucifixion is overwhelming.

The Resurrection of Christ

All four gospels record the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), to another Mary (Matt 28:1-2), to Cephas (1 Cor 15:5), to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), to James (1 Cor 15:7), to

¹¹ See S. M. Smith, “Kenosis, Kenotic Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 600-602. These speculative theories of the incarnation have little to do with the exegesis of Philippians 2:7. See also B. E. Foster, “Kenoticism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 364.

¹² This section in Philippians (i.e., 2:6-11) may well have been an early hymn. This too should prevent us from drawing too much theologically from these statements for they are not reasoned theology *per se*, but instead the worshipful cry of the heart to God—the theology of which was undoubtedly well known in the community(ies) in which it came to expression, but which are to some degree lost on us today.

¹³ For further discussion about the incoherence charge often leveled at the doctrine of the incarnation and possible solutions in modified “kenoticism” or the “two minds” model, see Thomas D. Senior, “Incarnation and the Trinity,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 238-260.

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ten disciples (Luke 24:36-43), to Thomas and the other ten disciples (John 20:26-29), to seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-14), to more than 500 people (1 Cor 15:6), to the eleven at his ascension (Matt 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11), and finally to Paul (1 Cor 15:8). He appeared to the disciples over a course of about 40 days (Acts 1:3).

In recent times scholars have come to debunk most of the naturalistic theories (e.g., the swoon, hallucination) advanced to account for the resurrection and attending data. Virtually every scholar agrees that “something happened,” and most would agree that the resurrection is the watershed issue in a biblically defined Christianity. The question that is posed most acutely, according to Gary Habermas¹⁴, is whether the kerygma (the preached message of Christ’s resurrection) itself is sufficient to account for the data or whether a literal resurrection plus the kerygma is necessary to account for the data. Habermas outlines the critical answers according to four scenarios, pointing out that this is a debate not just between evangelicals and higher critics, but also between the higher critics themselves. First, there are those like Rudolph Bultmann who argue that the cause of the disciples’ experience is not ascertainable; it is buried in the NT text. Second, scholars like Karl Barth and Søren Kierkegaard argued that the resurrection was literal, but that it is not subject to study since it lies outside the realm of our experience of history. It must be accepted by faith alone. The third group of scholars, including Jürgen Moltmann, argue for the literal empty tomb and a historical explanation for the disciples’ change from grief to joy, but again the resurrection is an event that will only be finally vindicated/verified in the future. Fourth, there are scholars who argue that the available historical evidence suggests that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. Wolfhart Pannenberg would be an example of this thinking, though he argues against a corporeal body in favor of a spiritual body which was recognized as Jesus and which spoke to the disciples before departing to heaven.

There is, however, no valid *a priori* reason for rejecting the resurrection as portrayed in scripture. It is usually one’s theology of history that precludes whether resurrections happen or not. In any case, the empty tomb, the eyewitness testimony, the transformed lives of antagonists such as James and Paul, the existence of the church, the inability of the Jewish leaders to disprove the resurrection and the claims of the apostles, the early date and solid character of the claim to resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-4), as well as the solid character of surrounding evidence such as Jesus’ existence, ministry, death by crucifixion, and burial. The explanation which possesses the greatest explanatory power, is the most plausible (not *ad hoc*), and stands the greatest chance of not being finally overturned, is that Jesus of Nazareth was actually raised from the dead and appeared to many people. His body was a physical body fit for spiritual existence and was not subject any longer to death and limitations.

The theological interpretation of Christ’s bodily resurrection includes the doctrine that it is central to the Christian life and hope (1 Cor 15), that it demonstrates that he is the Son of God (Rom 1:4) and that he will someday return to judge the entire world (Acts 17:31). In the area of soteriology, the resurrection is the foundation of our regeneration and spiritual/ethical life (Rom 6:4-5; 1 Pet 1:2), our justification (Rom 4:25; Eph 2:6), our present ministry and work for the Lord (1 Cor 15:58), our hope of glorification and our eternal communion with the Father, Son and Spirit (1 Cor 15:12-28).

The Ascension & Exaltation of Christ

In Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:11, Luke records for us the historical fact and nature of Jesus’ ascension. The language seems to imply that Jesus ascended bodily to some place in the space-time continuum, but we are unable to see or know where.

Theologically, however, Luke has made it very clear as to what the ascension means. It was not just Jesus going somewhere. Indeed, his ascension led to his exaltation to the throne and his right to rule over creation, nations and the church. He was exalted to the right hand of God (a place of power and authority) in keeping with Davidic hope (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:34-35) and currently reigns over the universe (Eph 1:20-22a) and is head over all things pertaining to the church (Eph 1:22b-23; 1 Peter 3:22). As divine founder, leader, captain, and goal of the church he has sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) to endow her with life, love and power and will

¹⁴ See Gary Habermas, “Resurrection of Christ,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 938-41.

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someday return to bring her to be where he is, and to subject all things in heaven and earth to his Lordship. He has received, and continues to receive, glory, praise, and honor in light of who he is and what he has done (Rev 5:12). Every knee should bow before God's Christ, the exalted Lord of the universe. Someday, all will (Phil 2:9)!

The Return of Christ

The Bible predicts that someday Jesus Christ will return, suddenly, bodily and with great glory for all to see (Matt 24:30; Rev 19:11ff). At that time he will judge Satan and his angels, the living and the dead, and will establish his kingdom in its fullest sense. We will discuss the nature and timing of the rapture as well as the nature of the kingdom under Eschatology.

11

The States of Christ

It has been common among Reformed and other systematic theologians to speak of the two states of Christ: (1) humiliation, and (2) exaltation. Therefore, although we have covered some of the details already, we nonetheless survey them again in these terms. This will help to equip the student for further reading where these ideas will undoubtedly be discussed. "Christ's humiliation refers to his (1) incarnation; (2) suffering; (3) death, and (4) burial. His exaltation also contains four aspects: (1) resurrection; (2) ascension; (3) session (his being seated at God's right hand, and (4) return in glory.

The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, while not involving the "giving up" of any divine attributes, entailed Christ's willing submission to the limitations and weaknesses of humanity, being actually found as a servant among men. His suffering in terms of spiritual hardship, physical deprivation, and emotional pain are all part of his sufferings in humiliation. Jesus' humiliation was furthered heightened by the enormous suffering of an unjust, cruel, and ignoble death, bearing the sin of a cursed humanity on a cross. Though he probably did not descend into Hell, he nonetheless was dead for three days. From the time of the stable in Bethlehem until his death, he underwent humiliation in obedience to his Father for the salvation of the elect and the redemption of the cosmos.

Jesus' resurrection into a permanent physical body perfectly equipped for spiritual life is the turning point in his humiliation. It is here that he is vindicated and his defeat of all his enemies is secured. He received glory at his ascension and the right to rule as is demonstrated by his sitting at the right hand of God in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-36). Though the world awaits the final stage in the completion of Christ's vindication, and the salvation and judgment of the world, Christ will someday return bodily (Acts 1:11) and destroy all his enemies, including death. He will complete the final stage of his exaltation over all things.¹⁵

The Three Offices of Christ

While there were early church fathers who spoke about different offices of Christ, it was John Calvin in his *Institutes* (2.15) who systematized the idea of the threefold office of Christ: (1) Prophet; (2) Priest, and (3) King.

In Deuteronomy 18:18 Moses predicted that God would send another prophet like him to the people of Israel. Both John and Peter understood Jesus to be that one (John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22-24; see also Matt 13:57, John 4:44). The title of "prophet," however, is not found in the epistles. Nonetheless, it is clear that Christ functioned as the consummate prophet—one who *both gave revelation from God (forthtelling and foretelling) and was himself the quintessential revelation from God* (John 1:18). In this way he is unlike other prophets—a fact which may account for the conspicuous absence of this title from the epistles.

Jesus Christ also functioned in the office of priest. While the prophet was God's representative to the people, the priest was the peoples' representative before God. But in contrast to priests in the Levitical order, Jesus

¹⁵ See Wayne A. Grudem, "States of Jesus Christ," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1052-54; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 331-355.

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did not offer any animal sacrifice for our sin, he offered himself, an unblemished lamb of eternal worth. As a priest he has entered the holy of holies, not the copy on earth in the temple, but the heavenly place and is able to lead us, therefore, into the presence of God—a distinctly priestly function. He does not just enter the holy of holies once a year, but indeed he lives there forever now. Finally, both Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 teach us that his priestly role continues even now as he “ever lives to make intercession” for us in our weakness!

Finally, Jesus Christ fulfilled the office of King. But in contrast to the greatest of Israelite kings, i.e., David, Christ rules over the entire world, indeed the universe, including the church (Eph 1:20-23). He is the consummate king who rules wisely, attentively and with final authority and justice (Ps 2:8-9). In short, he rules as the God-man over the entire cosmos and when he returns he will deal definitively with all hindrances and obstacles to his deserved reign. At that time he will be called “the King of Kings” (Rev 19:16).

Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit

The term pneumatology comes from two Greek words, namely, pneuma meaning “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit” (used of the Holy Spirit) and logos meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” As it is used in Christian systematic theology, “pneumatology” refers to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Generally this includes such topics as the personality of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture.

The Personhood of the Holy Spirit

The personality (and therefore “personhood”) of the Holy Spirit has been denied by certain groups throughout the history of the church. Some point out that the noun for “spirit” in the NT is pneuma which is neuter and, therefore, the spirit is correctly referred to as “it” rather than “he.” In keeping with this idea, some refer to it [him] as “God’s active force,” almost in a Gnostic sense of an emanation from the one, true God. Before we look at the Biblical evidence, it is important to point out that there is no necessary connection in Koine Greek between grammatical gender and personal gender so it is simply false to say that since the Greek noun pneuma is neuter the spirit must be an “it.”

It is important, then, to see what the Scriptures say about his personhood, i.e., is he really a person, albeit divine? This is especially so in a culture moving more toward New Age thinking and pantheism. The Holy Spirit is not the “god” within us which we possess via our own natures, nor is he some amorphous feeling or “active force.” All these views denigrate him and rightly deserve rejection.

There are several lines of evidence in the NT which argue for the personality of the Holy Spirit. First, Jesus said he would send “another” in his place (John 14:16). The word for another is allos in Greek and refers to another just like Jesus. It is reasonable to conclude from this that the Spirit is a person since Jesus is clearly a person. Further, Jesus referred to him as a parakle,tos (enabler, encourager, comforter, etc.) which requires that he be a person since the functions of a parakle,tos are personal; Jesus functioned as a parakle,tos to the disciples.

Second, the fact that the Spirit makes choices (1 Cor 12:11), teaches (John 14:26), guides (John 16:13), reveals Jesus (John 16:14), convicts (John 16:8), seals believers (2 Cor 1:21-22), can be grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed (Matt 12:31), possesses a rational mind (Rom 8:26-27; 1 Cor 2:11-13), can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4), quenched (1 Thess 5:19), resisted (Acts 7:51), and on numerous occasions is distinguished from, yet directly linked with the Father and the Son as co-worker and co-recipient of worship, argues definitively for his personhood (Matt 28:19-20; 2 Cor 13:14).¹⁶

¹⁶ Some scholars attempt to argue for the personality of the Spirit by pointing out that in Ephesians 1:14 the relative pronoun “who” is masculine in the Greek text and not the expected neuter (i.e., to agree with pneuma). But there is a difficult textual variant here, i.e., the neuter relative pronoun, and it is exceedingly difficult to determine with great confidence which was original. The point is that not much weight should be placed on this passage. Also, some argue that the demonstrative pronoun in John 16:14 is masculine and

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The Deity of the Holy Spirit

As we noted above, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from, yet closely related to, the Father and the Son—and that on an equal basis. He receives the worship due the Father and the Son (2 Cor 13:14) and does divine works, including inspiring Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt 19:4-5), regenerating hearts (Titus 3:5), and creating, sustaining, and giving life to all things (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29-30). He is said to be eternal (Heb 9:14; only God is eternal), omniscient (1 Cor 2:10-11), and is actually referred to as God (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19-20). There is very little room for doubt; clearly the Holy Spirit is divine.

13

Scriptural Metaphors for the Holy Spirit

Scripture uses several important metaphorical expressions to refer to the Spirit, his sovereign character and his inscrutable, yet manifested workings. For example, Jesus referred to him as a *wind*—a metaphor which seems to underline the inscrutable nature of his moving in the hearts of people to give them life and bring them to faith (John 3:8).

In connection with his personal and glorious ministry to people, Jesus referred to him as *water* in John 7:37-39. This symbol portrays the Spirit as the One who can fulfill the deepest longings of the heart to know God, i.e., to enjoy eternal life (John 4:14; 17:3). As such, the metaphor speaks of promised messianic blessing and the presence of the kingdom in a new and powerful way (Isa 12:3; 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Zech 14:16-18; Joel 2:28-32; *Sukk* 5:55a).

In Matthew 3:16 (cf. Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) the text refers to the Spirit descending out of heaven as a *dove*. The symbol of the “dove” probably represents the beginning of an age of blessing and the end of judgment or perhaps it symbolizes the beginning of a new creation through the work of the promised, Spirit-empowered Davidic messiah.¹⁷

Another metaphor for the Spirit is *clothing* (Acts 1:8). This idea involves being dressed by another person so that one is characterized by this new clothing. In the case of the Spirit, it refers to his gift of power to us so that we might live consistent with the gospel as we boldly preach it throughout the entire world.

The Spirit is also referred to as a *guarantee* or *pledge* of the Christian’s glorification (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:21-22). In this case, the present gift of the Spirit is the guarantee that the totality of what has been promised to us will someday be fulfilled (Rom 8:30). BAGD (the standard Greek lexicon used in NT studies) refers to the “Spirit” in these passages as the “*first installment, deposit, down payment, [or] pledge*, that pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.”¹⁸

Closely related to the idea of the Spirit as “pledge” is the Spirit as *seal* or the One with whom Christians are sealed by God. In 2 Cor 1:22 and Ephesians 1:14, 4:30, Christians are said to be “sealed” by the Spirit of God. A “seal” in the ancient world referred to a “*mark (with a seal)* as a means of identification so that the mark which denotes ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner (see Rev 7:3)... This forms a basis for understanding the symbolic expression which speaks of those who enter the Christian fellowship as being sealed with or by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹ Thus the “sealing” of the Spirit speaks to the divine ownership of the Christian which translates into security and protection. This does not mean that the Christian will never sin or be chastened by God (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:1-11), but it does mean that God will never abandon them, neither in this life or the one to come (cf. Rom 8:38-39). We will discuss this more under “Soteriology” or “Salvation” below.

refers back to the “spirit” in 16:13. The masculine pronoun, then, used in reference to the Spirit, demonstrates his personality. This argument, too, is precarious at best.

¹⁷ See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word, 1993), in loc.

¹⁸ BAGD, s.v. *ajrrabwn*.

¹⁹ BAGD, s.v. *sfragivzw*.

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The Pentecost Spirit is also likened to tongues of *fire* in Acts 2:3. Fire represents the holy presence of God, as for example, in Exodus 3:2-5 and the “burning bush.” One might also recall the pillar of fire (Exod 13:21-22), the fire on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:17) and the fire associated with the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 40:36-38).²⁰ In all these cases, the holiness of God is paramount. Now, recall that the Christian’s election is unto holiness and Christlikeness (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4) and so the Spirit has taken up residence in our hearts to make this transformation a reality (2 Cor 3:18).

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation

14

The apostle Peter makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was responsible for the production of the OT scriptures (i.e., *graphe*,s) by carrying men along as they freely wrote God’s message. Paul likewise asserts the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the production of sacred Scripture (2 Tim 3:16—theopneustos). When we go to the OT we see this phenomenon in several places, not the least of which is the clear example of Ezekiel 2:2: “As he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and raised me to my feet and I heard him speaking to me” (see also 8:4; 11:1, 24). Other examples of the Spirit speaking to people include Balaam (Num 24:2) and Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10). Also, Jesus said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit (Matt 22:43; cf. Acts 2:30).²¹

There is not a great deal of discussion in either testament regarding the relationship between the Spirit and men during the production of Scripture. Peter uses the analogy of the wind filling the sails of a ship. So we may infer from this that the Spirit took the initiative and directed the work, but in no way suppressed the personalities, including the emotional and intellectual input, of the human authors. In fact, it appears that he used all of this (and more), for the spiritual/emotional/ethical experience of David writing lyric poetry (in the Psalms, for example) was not the same as Paul’s experience in writing 1 Thessalonians or Ezra’s experience in writing the book after his name or John writing Revelation. The fact that we have an intimate involvement of the Spirit of God with the writers of Scripture speaks not to mechanical dictation or even conceptual inspiration (cf. Gal 3:16), but instead to a divine-human *concurrence* (1 Cor 2:12-13).

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The work of the Spirit in the OT is much broader than just the production of Scripture, as important as that is. The Spirit was involved in creating the *cosmos* (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13). He is currently intricately involved in sustaining creation (Psa 104:29-30) and will someday, in a period of enormous divine blessing, completely renew it. The nature of the Spirit’s present ministry testifies to this future work (Isa 32:15; Rom 8:18-27).

The Holy Spirit came upon certain people to impart wisdom and practical skills, strength and ability. He did this during the building of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and all the tabernacle’s furnishings (Exod 31:1-11). He was also the strength and guidance behind the building of the temple (Zech 4:6).

The Spirit was involved in the administration of the nation of Israel by giving gifts of administration and wisdom (Gen 41:38; Num 11:25; Deut 34:9). He also raised up national leaders during the dismal period of the Judges. He gave strength, courage, capability in war, and leadership abilities to several people (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:19). Later on he anointed Saul, David, and Solomon for leadership by giving them strength and ability to prophesy, but in the case of Saul, the Spirit subsequently withdrew because of his disobedience (1 Sam 10:10; 16:13).

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the regeneration (Ezek 36:26-28), instruction, and sanctification of Israel in the OT (Nehemiah 9:20; Psa 51:11; 143:10; Isa 63:10). It is also said that he will produce righteousness and justice among the people of God in the messianic age (Isa 11:2-5; 32:15-20).²²

²⁰ Others argue that “oil” is a type or symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. It represents the power, cleansing, and illuminating work of the Spirit. See Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989).

²¹ See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 867.

²² This summary of the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT relies heavily on the work of Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 866-69. See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

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The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Christ

The Holy Spirit was involved in the birth of Christ, with the result that Christ, while fully human, was completely sinless (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit was also involved in Christ's anointing for messianic service (i.e., at his baptism [Luke 3:21-22]), filled him during his temptations (Luke 4:1; John 3:34), and revealed the timing and nature of the beginning of that ministry (Luke 4:14, 18). The Holy Spirit was also responsible for Christ's ability to perform miracles and cast out demons (Matt 12:28). He was also involved in both the death of Christ as well as his resurrection (Heb 9:14; Rom 1:4; 8:11). Further, perhaps the best interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 is that the pre-incarnate Christ preached *via* the Spirit *through* the mouth of Noah *to* the wicked back in the days before the flood.²³

15

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

We will discuss the various aspects of the work of the Spirit in relation to the church under the headings of "soteriology" and "ecclesiology." Suffice it to say here that the Spirit is involved in the works of calling, regeneration, uniting the believer with Christ, indwelling, filling, teaching, guiding, gifting, empowering, and sanctifying the believer. His primary ministry is to mediate the presence of Christ and the knowledge of God to the believer (John 16:13-14).²⁴

Anthropology & Hamartiology: Man and Sin

The term "anthropology" comes from two Greek words, namely, anthro, meaning "man" and logos meaning "word, matter, or thing." We use the word "anthropology" to refer to the study of man and a Biblical anthropology is the study of man as understood primarily from Scripture. Thus it often involves discussion of the particular creation of man, man in the "image of God," the constitutional nature of man, and man after the fall. Other areas of concern include human dignity, freedom, depravity, culture, and society. "Hamartiology," on the other hand, comes from two Greek terms as well, namely, hamartia meaning "sin" and logos. Thus it concerns the biblical doctrine of sin including its origin, nature, transmission, effects, and judgment.

The Creation of Man

There are several points that can be made from the Genesis narrative regarding the creation of man (Gen 1-2). These ideas are expanded upon and developed in the rest of Scripture. First, the *origin* of man is not in naturalistic evolution, but in the mind of God. Man was not an afterthought of some kind, or the result of blind evolutionary forces, but was created according to the purpose, plan, and good pleasure of God. In Genesis 1:26 God says "let us make man..." Second, man has a certain *place* as the pinnacle of creation. We are made in the "image" of God. Nothing else, including the angels, is said to be made in the image of God. Thus we are, in this sense, unique in the created order, with the result that we are both privileged and responsible (cf. Gen 3). Both men and women together reflect the image of God. More about this in a minute. Third, we bear a *special relationship* to God. In our original creation, coming from the hand of God, we were holy, upright, and perfect and there was no hostility between God and us. Fourth, we have a certain *role* in creation. We were created to rule over God's created earth, that is, to have dominion over it. Fifth, man was created in what appears as *an instantaneous act of God*, bringing together material aspects and "the breath of life." We will talk about this in a minute as well, but suffice it to say here that we were not taken from

1941), 95-99; and especially James I. Packer, "Holy Spirit," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 316-19.

²³ See Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 448-50.

²⁴ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 49.

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some previously existing animal. According to Genesis 2:7, our creation gives rise to the dual nature of our *experience* as we relate in both a heavenward (spiritual) and earthward (material) direction.²⁵

Man in the Image of God

The “image of God”—the referent for which we hold to be the same as the “likeness of God”—is a difficult expression to understand precisely. There have been many attempts to reduce it to various aspects of man’s being or relate it in some way to the functions he carries out in the world. Thus some have said that it refers to certain particular qualities in man such as his rational nature, morality, or religious capacity. Others, such as the Mormons, have claimed that the image of God is physical. Still others have suggested that the image is more relational in nature, and refers to man’s experience of being in relationship with God, other people, and creation. Some have collapsed the meaning of image into man’s God given function to have dominion over the earth. Thus, on this last reckoning, “image” refers to man’s ability to rule (cf. Gen 1:26; Psa 8:5-6).

Each of these views has a contribution to make, though it is doubtful whether the relational or functional view really answers the question as to what the image actually *is* (not *does*). Functional views describe certain realities which flow from being created in God’s image, but do not in themselves describe that image. The substantive view, long held throughout the history of the church, is the best view overall, but it is perhaps too narrow to restrict it to “knowledge,” righteousness,” “holiness,” “morality” or our ability for rational thought, etc. It is rather all of these and anything else that makes us like God, maintaining, of course, the necessary and Biblical Creator-creature distinctions (*contra* Mormonism).

The Constitutional Nature of Man

The question has come up in theology as to the constitutional nature of man. Most naturalists would argue that man is monistic, that is, that he is purely physical and that he has no soul or immaterial substance to his being. There are many conservative theologians who would also argue along similar lines, though they nonetheless regard man as a special creation of God with a special destiny (at least for the saved). But, there are several good, scriptural reasons for rejecting the monist account of human constitution. First, since God is a person and he does not have a body, but is spirit, we can safely argue that possessing a body is not the *sine qua non* of being a person. That is, “personhood” can exist apart from embodiment. Further, God could be considered a *paradigm* case of personhood and if this is so, then only those beings that bear a similarity (i.e., possess the attributes, not just functions) to the paradigm case can be considered persons. Second, the OT term *nephesh*, while it can refer to a body or parts of a body, nonetheless often identifies a person after death. It therefore refers to the soul/person which has departed a body, is still conscious, and as the immaterial aspect of a person may return to the body if God so wills (Gen 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22). Third, the OT portrays man as created of both material and immaterial substances (Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:6, 8-10, 14). Fourth, Jesus continued to exist after his death and before his resurrection which seems to imply that there was some immaterial aspect to his (human) being. Fifth, human beings are regarded as living spirits in the disembodied state (Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9-11 [souls]). Sixth, the future resurrection of all people indicates that there is an intermediate state as departed souls await this resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive (Matt 22:37). Moses and Elijah are alive as well (Matt 17:1-13). The story of Lazarus and the rich man seems to imply conscious life after physical death (Luke 16:19-31). Finally, Jesus made a clear distinction between the soul and body in Matthew 10:28: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” All these observations are most easily understood on the basis of a substances dualism in man (i.e., he is both material and immaterial).²⁶ We, therefore move on to talk about the two primary understandings of the immaterial aspect of man.

²⁵ I am not here arguing for some kind of Platonic or Gnostic dualism, or anything like it. I am simply saying, as C. S. Lewis had occasion to say, that we were made to live in two worlds simultaneously.

²⁶ For further discussion on this issue, consult Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 472, 474, 483; J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature & The Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 17-47; Erickson, *Theology*, 519-39. For a defense of the monist position, see J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London: SPCK, 1952), and the relevant articles in

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Many Christian theologians have argued for a trichotomous view of man, that he is body, soul, and spirit, where each term refers to separate substances. This view has often been advanced on the basis of passages such as 1 Thess 5:23, Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Cor 14:14. The major problem with this view, and the reason it is not well received any longer, is the almost universal recognition that the Bible uses “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably (Luke 1:46-47; John 12:27; 13:21). Further, Mark 12:30 lists four aspects of man: heart, soul, mind, strength. Are we to regard each of these as constituting a different substance? That is not Jesus’ point, nor is it Paul’s in 1 Thess 5:23. The point in 1 Thess 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 is not to inform Christians as to the precise substances which make up their immaterial nature, but rather that sanctification is to encompass the *whole* person. Thus it is tenuous at best to infer from these two texts specific details about our immaterial nature.

Taking all the Biblical evidence into consideration, it appears that the best view is some form of dichotomy. In any view of man, however, two things need to be held in tension: (1) that he is a composite being with both *complex material* as well as *complex immaterial* aspects; (2) that he is portrayed in Scripture as a *unified* being, so that what he does with his body involves his spirit and the motions his spirit engages in involve his body. In fact, both appear to be involved *in everything we do*. This view of man relates him well to his Creator in heaven and his commission here on earth. It also reads the Biblical data in a manner a little more consistent with the use of terms in Scripture (where two or more terms can refer to the same immaterial substance).

Finally, given our current culture, it is necessary to point out that when we argue for an immaterial aspect to man’s being, using terms like soul and spirit, we are not saying as many in the New Age movement(s) have claimed, that we all possess “god” in us. What we are saying is that there is more to us than just matter; we are also spiritually oriented beings, created in God’s image (but not that we are “gods” in any sense).

The Fall of Man and the Image of God

Genesis 3 describes for us one of the most diabolical and saddest points in our very early history. Adam had been commanded by God not eat from the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of the garden. The command was concise, yet clear, and the consequence of disobedience was lucidly and emphatically delineated: “you shall most certainly die” (Gen 2:16-17). But with the entrance of the Serpent, who we now realize was Satan himself (2 Cor 11:3), came the entrance of deceit and trickery. He was more crafty than all the wild animals the Lord God had made, and he said to the woman... (Gen 3:1). Well, you know the rest of the story: We ate the forbidden fruit, died spiritually (something the Devil forgot [neglected?] to mention), were judged by God immediately (Gen 3:6-19), death through murder came almost instantaneously (Gen 4), and eventually we died physically (cf. “and then he died,” Gen 5). From our first parents we receive both the guilt of sin as well as a corrupt nature (Rom 5:12-21).

The image of God, as a result of the fall, is effaced but not erased. The Noahic covenant, instituting a measure of authority among men for dealing with murder (Gen 9:6-7), the command to procreate, and prohibitions against such things as favoritism (James 3:9), are all based on the existence of the “image of God” in man, even after the fall; all these commands are related to the image of God in a post fall context.

The image of God, while severely distorted in the fall, is nonetheless being renewed progressively for those who are “in Christ” (in terms of “knowledge” in Col. 3:10). Finally, when the saints reside in heaven, the image of God will be completely restored in them. In short, God has chosen us to be holy in his sight and to be conformed totally to the image of His Son (Eph 1:3-4; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49), who is said to be “the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

The Doctrine of Sin

A brief review of the fall of man leads us naturally into a discussion of the essential nature of sin, as well as its origin, transmission, effects, and punishment.

Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy and H. Newton Maloney, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998).

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Many theologians rightly define sin as any want of conformity—in nature, disposition, or act—to the moral law of God. Again, this is an accurate definition as far as it goes (cf. 1 John 3:4), and perhaps better than referring to sin as experiencing personal finiteness, existential angst, desire to control others, selfishness, or sexual immorality. The one shortcoming, however, is that it does not really capture the heinous, aggressive, and vile nature of sin as such. Biblically portrayed, sin is more than a “want of conformity.” Sin is “out and out” rebellion, an insidious plot to personally subdue God and his just rule over our lives. It is a foolish attempt at a coup d’état—an attempt to extinguish not only His commands to duty, and his wise prohibitions, but also to nullify his presence and to extinguish knowledge of him—and all this with each and every blow.

Thus sin is spiritual/ethical in nature and has at its core the idea of autonomy and rebellion. It is ethical in nature, not *ontological* in that it is not an essential privation of some kind. Even after the fall, man still has all the *faculties* with which he was created, but his moral nature is twisted by sin. There are many key terms in the Old Testament which nuance the idea of sin in some way. These include *chata* (“to miss the mark,” Exod 20:20; 522x); (2) *ra* (“evil” or “ruin,” Gen 38:7 444x), and (3) *taah* (“going astray,” Num 15:22). In the New Testament there are several terms as well. Some of the more frequently used and important ones include: (1) *hamartano* (“to miss the mark,” Rom 5:12; 225+ times); *kakos* (“disease” or “moral filth,”); (3) *poneros* (“moral evil,” Heb 3:12); (4) *anomos* (“lawlessness,” 1 John 3:4).

The origin of sin in the *cosmos* is to be found in the disobedience of Satan and certain angels. Though there is debate about Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-19, there are some theologians who argue that one or both of these passages hint at the fall of Satan. In any case, when Satan arrives on the scene in Genesis 3 (cf. 2 Cor 11:3), he is already fallen and sinful. But as far as the entrance of sin into the human race is concerned, this occurred at the fall of man, also described in Genesis 3. Sin entered the human race through our first parents’ disobedience, as Paul makes clear in Romans 5:12ff.

There ought to be no doubt among Christians regarding the scriptural teaching that all men are sinful, though it is obviously true that not all men have expressed or will express their sinfulness to the same degree. But how did our first parents pass on sin to us? If it is true that sin entered the human race through the sin of Adam, how was it communicated to his offspring and thus to the race as a whole, given that we all descended from the *one man* (cf. Acts 17:26)?

Some have argued that there is no *direct* connection between the sin of Adam and Eve and the sin of the each member of the human race; rather, each person, perhaps following the example of Adam, has willfully chosen, on their own, to sin and violate God’s will. But this interpretation, while perhaps agreeing, at least formally, with the idea that “all have sinned” (Rom 5:12), does not do justice to Paul’s teaching in the whole of Romans 5:12-21. For it is said there, at least five times, that sin entered the human race through one man (transgression) and that the entire race was affected—not by sinning themselves, but rather through the sin of Adam.

Thus, there is a direct connection between the sin of Adam and the fallenness of the entire race. Some say this direct connection is *realistic* while others argue along *legal* lines. The first group argues that the race as a whole was present seminally in Adam and thus sinned when he sinned. This seems to do justice to the “all sinned” of Romans 5:12 and has some support from the Abraham/Levi/Melchizedek parallel in Hebrews 7:10, but the meaning of “all sinned” ought to be determined more in keeping with the primary thrust of Romans 5:12-21 where the sin of Adam seems to be the direct cause of our sin; no *mediate* mechanism appears to be in view in Romans 5:12-21.

Perhaps the best view is to understand Adam as the federal head of the race and as such his sin was *imputed* (i.e., charged to our account) to us with the result that we too are legally guilty. This seems to make the most sense out of the direct connections expressed in Romans 5:12-21. Again, over five times the phrase (or something similar) “for just as through the disobedience of the one man the many *were made sinners*,” appears in the paragraph.

Now the idea that there exists a legal, not just biological, relationship between a man and his posterity is not unheard of in scripture. Some refer to it as *corporate solidarity*. Perhaps the best known example illustrating this concept is the sin of Achan (Joshua 7). His sin of stealing “the city’s riches” is counted as the sin of the nation of Israel (Jos 7:1, 11) and indeed his entire family was punished. In a similar way (but it is strictly speaking not identical), we often see today how the sin of one person directly affects others. When a person

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hijacks an airplane with 130 people on board and then crashes it, all on board suffer because of the decision of one person.²⁷ The decisions of one person often have a "representative" character.

Now, some have objected to this doctrine on the grounds that we are blamed for something we did not do. This can be responded to in several ways, but in the end it must be realized that all men, including you and me, are sinners and will be judged for our *willful* and *personal* rebellion. Was it fair that Christ died for us so that we might escape God's wrath? Is it fair that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us when we simply believe in His Son? If the issue were really one of fairness, viewed humanly, who of us could stand in His presence?

But not only are we in a state of guilt before God, we also received at birth a sinful nature and so we are polluted by sin as well—hence our *willful* and *personal* rebellion. And it isn't that some parts of us are fallen, but rather that our whole person, every part of us, is fallen and enslaved to sin. This also is a result of Adam's sin. We prove the fact that we have a sinful nature each and every day (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Denial of sin, neurosis, estrangement from loved ones, enemies in the work force, inability to love and receive love from others, lying, stealing, cheating, as well as a host of other sins beset us daily. We were born, i.e., we are by nature children of wrath (cf. Eph 2:1-3).

The Christian and Sin

The question often comes up as to the effects of sin on the life of the Christian. Sometimes the question is posed most acutely as "Does a Christian lose their salvation when (not if) he sins? We cannot go into this in great detail here, but will cover it more thoroughly under soteriology. Suffice it to say here, however, that a Christian's sin is just as sinful as that of a non-Christian. Sin is sin, no matter who commits it; it is both an offense to and violation of God's holiness. But the Christian stands in a posture of being justified once and for all (Rom 5:1). His standing or position before the Lord is immutable but his personal fellowship with the Lord and His people will be disrupted by sin, sometimes severely. At some point the Lord will probably chasten him, and in certain cases, ultimately shorten his life because of sin (1 Cor 11:30; Heb 12:1-13). When the Christian does sin, however, he is to immediately confess it to the Lord, and repent from it, knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:9). And, in many circumstances he will need to confess his sin to another offended person and make restitution. Failure to confess known sin leads to spiritual and moral hardening and delusion regarding one's true condition (Heb 3:12-13).

The Punishment for Sin

The first and primary reason God punishes sin is in order to prove himself righteous and just. This, of course, he did most fully in the cross (Rom 3:21-26; 9:19-23). A second reason God punishes sin is to bring back an erring son or deter others from sinning.

Spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death are all punishments for sin, as are certain sufferings in this life. But beyond question, eternal death is the gravest punishment for sin imaginable. In this case, God makes it impossible for the sinner who dies apart from the saving mercies of Christ to ever be reconciled with Him. Torment will be their eternal lot; they will be eternally separated from God, "shut out of the Lord's presence forever," as Paul says (2 Thess 1:8-9; cf. also Matt 25:41, 46).

Sin always has consequences for both the present life as well as the next. The Christian cannot escape certain consequences of sin in this life or judgment for sin in the next, but this judgment does not revoke his salvation. He will still be with the Lord forever, but it does affect the nature of his reward (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Romans 14:10-12).

²⁷ I am not saying that the others on the aircraft are guilty of hijacking (in the same sense that we are counted guilty because of Adam's sin). My only point is to show that the poor decisions of one person often adversely affect the many.

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Angelology: Angels

The term “angelology” comes from two Greek terms, namely, *aggelos* (pronounced *angelos*) meaning “messenger” or “angel” and *logos* meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” In Christian systematic theology it is used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of angels. It includes such topics as the origin, existence, and nature of angels, classifications of angels, the service and works of angels as well the existence, activity, and judgment of Satan and demons (as fallen or wicked angels). Some theologians, however, treat Satan and demons under a separate heading, namely, demonology.

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The Nature of Angels

An angel is a spirit being created by God and commissioned by Him for some special purpose in accordance with the outworking of His plan (e.g., Col 1:16; Heb 1:14). They have enormous, though limited (as a creature) power and knowledge. They are referred to as “messengers” in both the Old and New Testaments and as such they carry out the work of God. Though some scholars have denied their personhood, it is clear from Scripture that they do indeed have personality; they think (1 Peter 1:12), feel (Luke 2:13), and choose (Jude 6), and holy angels render intelligent and excellent praise to God. They are of a higher order than man, as Psalm 8:4-5 explains, but they are inferior to Christ (2 Sam 14:20; Luke 20:36; Heb 1). Apparently they are unable to procreate (Matt 22:30).

In the Old Testament angels are also referred to as the “heavenly host,” “sons of God,” and “holy ones” (1 Samuel 17:45; Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalm 89:5, 7). The first expression, “heavenly host” relates to their innumerable number and power to defend God’s people (cf. Heb 12:22). The second expression, “sons of God” highlights their close relationship to God, their godlike qualities, and the capacity in which they function before him. The third expression, “holy ones,” underscores their pure moral character.

Classifications of Angels

There is not a great deal revealed in Scripture about the classification of angels. One could wish for more information, for what is given does suggest “ranks” or “classifications” among them, but it is difficult to say much beyond this. We should comment at the outset, however, that the claim that some angels were confined to the abyss when they sinned and others were not, on the basis of texts like 2 Peter 2:4, is unlikely. All fallen angels are being held in pits of darkness until their appointed day of judgment, but they are able from there to carry out evil strategies against God, his people, and his creation.

Michael is referred to as an archangel in Jude 9—a designation not received by any other angel in scripture (though of course there may be many other archangels). This seems to indicate that he has authority over many angels and does so under the authority of God. He is also referred to as “the great prince,” where the term “prince” also seems to connote levels of authority among the angels (Dan 9:21; 12:1). There are also angels which rule over certain countries such as we see in Daniel’s reference to the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” (10:13).

While there is some debate over guardian angels, it seems that Jesus in Matthew 18:10 may be implying this.

There are also the Seraphim mentioned in Isaiah 6:2-4. Unfortunately, this is the only place where they are mentioned in Scripture, so not much can be said about them. The term seraphim means “burning ones” and may allude to their brightness, yet it is interesting that they hid their feet and faces from the brightness of the Holy One of Israel. Thus it appears that they are deeply concerned about the holiness of God and worshipping him in humility. In Isaiah’s case they came to him, and on behalf of God, communicated to him the knowledge that his sins were forgiven. Having been cleansed by the burning holiness of God, the prophet was now prepared to speak to a disobedient Israel on God’s behalf.

Cherubim are also mentioned numerous times in the OT and once in the NT (Heb 9:5). They seem to be connected with protecting God’s holiness and access to him in relationship. Thus they are stationed at the Garden of Eden making it impossible for man to return to the garden and eat from the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Similarly, they are connected with the mercy seat and the law in Exodus 25:18-22; it was there at the mercy seat that God met with sinful man, i.e., the Israelites. They are the living beings Ezekiel saw in his

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vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28; 10:15) and they seemed to have four wings and faces like lions, bulls, eagles and human beings. They had human hands, feet like calves hooves, etc. See Ezekiel 1:4-14 for further details. They too, like those Isaiah saw, shone brightly, like burnished bronze. They are also associated with fire, lightning, and holy worship of the true and merciful God (cf. Revelation 4:4-8).

Service of Angels

It is impossible to describe all the services which angels provide at God's command, but here are some of the following connected with salvation, judgment, and God's providential control of human history. In terms of salvation, angels played a role in the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ. They delivered the message to Mary that she was to have the Christ-child (Luke 1:26-38) and they proclaimed him as Savior before the shepherds (Luke 2:13). They ministered to Christ during the period of his wilderness temptations just as they strengthened him in his Gethsemane trials (Luke 22:43). They were also ready at his command to fight for him (Matt 26:53). Further, they rolled away the stone from his tomb and they also proclaimed his resurrection (Matt 28:2, 6).

The writer of Hebrews summarizes the role of angels in the lives of believers in Hebrews 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to help those who will inherit salvation?" As such, they are vitally interested and involved in our own spiritual growth and the mission we have of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. They will, when God desires, encourage us and even rescue us from physical dangers so that we can continue God's work of preaching the gospel (Acts 12:7; 27:23-24). They are deeply interested in the salvation of the lost and rejoice when one sinner repents and turns to God (Luke 15:10). Indeed, Philip was commissioned by an angel to go and meet the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road so that this man could be saved (Acts 8:26). Angels are also involved in caring for believers when they die (Luke 16:22).

Angels are also used by the Lord in the judgment of unbelievers. This can be seen in Genesis 19:12-13 when the angels tell Lot to get out of Sodom; at the Lord's command and because of the evil of that city, they were preparing to destroy it. Sometimes they inflict punishment (Acts 12:23) and in Revelation 8-9, 16 they are intimately connected with the trumpet and bowl judgments.²⁸ At the end of the age they will be the ones who gather the unrighteous for judgment (Matt 13:41-42).

In the sense that angels were involved in the coming of Christ, the salvation, growth, preservation of Christians, and the judgment of unbelievers they are involved in the providential outworking of God's plan (encompassing all things) in the world. This can be seen in the control of nations as well (Daniel 10:13, 20-21).

Satan as a Fallen Angel

The term "Satan" means "adversary" in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament writers simply brought the name over into Greek without any change. Satan is a fallen, wicked angel, perhaps a cherub, though this is by no means certain (cf. Ezek 28:14).

There has been much speculation about Satan (and his demons) which calls into question his existence and personhood. First, it must be said that the devil or demons are attested to by every NT writer and appear in several OT books as well. Second, Jesus Christ himself dealt directly with Satan and his demons on numerous occasions (e.g., Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 5:1-20). Third, certain particularly egregious evils throughout history—such as the Holocaust—lend support to the reality of the biblical portrait of Satan, demons, and their destructive capabilities and activities.

Satan is also clearly portrayed in Scripture as a person. But some argue that the biblical idea of Satan and demons must be demythologized. That is, Satan and demons belong to the worldview of Christians (and others) in the first century, but now with the advent of the scientific worldview, we know better. What physical ailments the ancients attributed to Satan we now know are diseases caused by microscopic bacteria

²⁸ See Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 255-61.

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and viruses. The problem with this view is that Christians (and others) in the first century did not attribute all physical infirmities to the devil, only some. Thus they were not quite as naïve as this view implies. Further, it is simply arrogant, not to mention naïve, to assert that because they lived then and we live now, their metaphysical views are necessarily infantile, childish, and implausible and ours are necessarily informed. Perhaps we do not know as we ought to know. Besides, science is incapable of rendering judgment on this issue for in the nature of the case, the reality of the things talked about do not lay within its scope, methods, or 'knowledge paradigms' of inquiry.

There are others who say that the devil is really a way of speaking about evil forces, in culture. This is, however, far afield from what the Bible teaches regarding Satan and his emissaries. Concerning Satan, the Bible teaches that he is a person (i.e., has personality, but he is not human). He is very cunning (Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:3), gets angry when he is foiled (Rev 12:17), and exerts his will in capturing people who are unwilling to listen to the truth (2 Tim 2:26). These are all functions a person carries out and he, of course, will be held accountable to God for all that he has done, is doing, and will do (John 12:31; Rev 20:10). Thus he is morally responsible. So he is not just a force in culture, evil or otherwise; he is a person who though not to be equated with culture, nonetheless plays an evil role in cultural and world events (1 John 5:19). Demons also have personality and are not the souls of dead people who sinned apart from the saving grace of Christ.

In scripture **Satan** ("adversary") goes by many names and titles which are elucidate his activity of opposing God's purposes, plans, and people. His *names* include: (1) **the devil** ("slanderer" Matt 4:1; 13:39; Rev 12:9)²⁹; (2) **Beelzebul** ("Lord of heaven"; Matt 12:24; while it was used by the Pharisees to refer to Satan, the origin and associations of the name are uncertain. It might have been used originally to refer to the Canaanite fertility deity who was the chief adversary of the Israelite religion. In this case *Baal* means "lord" and *zebul* refers to "heaven"³⁰), and (3) **Belial** ("one who opposes God"; 2 Cor 6:15).³¹

Satan is also known by my many *titles* which reveal his efforts of opposing the work of God and causing harm to the saints. He is known as the **god of this age**—an age characterized by sin and opposition to God. He opposes the gospel by blinding people's minds to its truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is similarly referred to as the **prince of this world** (John 12:31). And so there is a sense in which the entire world system lies in his lap (1 John 5:19). He is the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2; Col 1:13) and as such rules over the demons who do his bidding and over unbelieving people, the sons of disobedience. His name, **the evil one**, suggests his own nature and the nature of his work among people promoting evil and opposing righteousness and truth. He is known also as (1) a vicious **thief** who comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10); (2) **the tempter** (1 Thess 3:5); (3) a **murderer** (John 8:44); (4) **the father of lies** (John 8:44), and (5) the **Great Dragon** who deceives the entire world (Rev 12:9). What great news it is that Jesus' ministry struck at the heart of his power and he is now a defeated foe, awaiting sentencing. His final end will be in the lake of fire where he will be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10).

Demons as Fallen Angels

Satan is a fallen angel and is referred to as "the prince of demons" (Mark 3:22). Therefore, demons are fallen angels as well and under his command. At times they are referred to as "unclean spirits" and "evil spirits", both ascriptions referring to their moral and spiritual wickedness (Matt 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26). They are also referred to as "principalities and powers" in Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 15:24, and Colossians 2:8-15. They are able to inhabit people and speak through them (Mark 1:34) as well as to inhabit animals (mark 5:12). They seek to cause disease, though not every disease is caused by them (Matt 12:22-24). They

²⁹ BAGD, s.v. *diavbolo*". The name is sometimes used interchangeably with Satan (Matt 4; 1, 10; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12)

³⁰ See G. H. Twelftree, "Demon, Devil, Satan," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 164.

³¹ The precise origin of this name is very difficult to pin down. It is probably not used in connection with any OT "personage," but is found in later Jewish writings and at Qumran. It seems to indicate one who opposes God and his purposes. See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 40 (Dallas: Word, 1986), electronic version, in loc.

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desire to deceive Christians (2 Cor 11:14) to the point of getting worship from them (1 Cor 10:20) and therefore must be firmly resisted (Eph 6:12-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8). We are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Cor 2:11). The bottom line is that demons, like their father the prince of demons, want to thwart the work of God by causing the people of God to sin or do anything that would render them less effective for Him. They also love to lead the entire world away from the truth in Christ and to destroy them if God permitted (cf. John 10:10). Their ultimate plan is to overthrow the kingdom of light with the kingdom of darkness and to dethrone God.

The Judgment of Angels

23

By what we have said so far it may seem that we are advocating a kind of “dual of equals” between the forces of good and the forces of evil. This is not so. The Devil and his angels are completely under the control of God in every respect. Their ultimate end in the lake of fire proves this (Rev 20:10). In short, their judgment was secured through the cross and resurrection of Christ for through that great event he has driven out the prince of this world (John 12:31). The war may not be over, but the ‘cross-victory’ at Normandy has rendered ultimate victory certain.

Dealing with Demons and Spiritual Warfare

Virtually all Christians would say that we have at least some measure of authority over Satan. After all, we can resist him and are not required to submit to his authority (James 4:7). Also, there are times that we must engage in “hand to hand” combat against Satan and his forces (Eph 6:12-18). Other Christians go further and claim that we can, as our Master did, cast out demons when we are confronted with them. This too seems quite scriptural and indeed necessary at times. We are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and share in his reign at the present time. This seems to be Paul's point in Romans 16:20 when he says that the God of peace will soon crush Satan “under your feet”—an allusion to Psalm 110:1 and messiah's reign.³² The eschaton has broken into the present and we now possess authority in Christ to overcome the works of the devil.

NOTE: A word about demon “possession.” The term “possession” in reference to demons or Satan does not appear in the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures and is an unfortunate mistranslation. There are two ways in which the Bible speaks about the influence of demons on people. People are said to be “demonized” or “to have a demon.” This is not the same thing as possession in the modern day use of that term where it often means that the demon has *complete control* over the person, using him/her at will. This is rarely the case, even in the gospels. Most often the language of “having a demon” and “demonized” seems to speak of demonic influence to greater or lesser degrees.

There is considerable debate in the evangelical community around the world as to whether demons can inhabit Christians who possess the Holy Spirit. We cannot answer in detail that question here, as important as it is, but no one on either side of the debate can afford to ignore the profound influence Satan and his demons can have on Christians, sometimes to the point that indwelling looks possible. In any case, we must stand firm in our position in Christ. When he attacks, we must resist him using the word of God and prayer. Above all we must pursue a holy life so that we do not give him a foothold. Also, we must be careful of blaming all sin and disease on him and forgetting our own participation in evil. The “demon under every rock” syndrome is potentially just as faith wrecking as denying Satan's existence.

Soteriology: Salvation

The term “soteriology” comes from two Greek terms, namely, *so„ter* meaning “savior” or “deliverer” and *logos* meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” In Christian systematic theology it is used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of salvation. It often includes such topics as the nature and extent of the atonement as well as the entire process of salvation, conceived as an eternal, divine plan designed to rescue lost and erring

³² The future tense “will...crush” refers to the eschaton when Satan will be completely defeated, but notice that just as then, so also now, we participate in his overthrow. In Romans this implies the defeat of his power in temptation because of indwelling sin and death.

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sinners and bring them back into eternal fellowship with God. Many regard it as the primary theme in Scripture with the glory of God as its goal.

The Nature of the Atonement

Throughout the history of the church a number of different views regarding the nature of the atonement (i.e., the theological significance of Christ's death) have been advanced. The **Recapitulation view** was advanced by Irenaeus (ca. 120-ca. 200). In this view Christ sums up all humanity in himself in that he went through all the stages of human life, without succumbing to temptation in any way, died, and then rose from the dead. The benefits of his life, death, and resurrection are then available to all who participate in Him through faith.

The **Example** or **Moral Influence** (or “subjective”) **view** has been advanced by theologians such as Pelagius (ca. 400), Faustus and Laelius Socinus (sixteenth century), and Abelard (1079-1142³³). Though there are certainly different moral example views,³⁴ their essential agreement consists in arguing that the cross demonstrates how much God loves us and this, then, awakens a response of love in our hearts; we then live as Jesus himself lived. While there is biblical support for this idea (e.g., Phil 2: 6-11; 1 Pet 2:21), it is incomplete as it stands and fails to recognize the more crucial aspects of scriptural teaching on the issue.

Another theory of the atonement advanced in the early church—and really maintained as the standard view in the early church until Anselm—is the **Ransom to Satan view**. Origen (185-254) was one of the chief proponents of this understanding which asserts that Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan to secure the release of his hostages, i.e., sinful men and women. While ransom language is used in Scripture to refer to the atonement (e.g., Mark 10:45), it is probably incorrect to include in this the idea that a “price” was paid to Satan, for nowhere in Scripture is such an idea suggested.

In his work *Christus Victor*, the Swedish theologian Gustav Aulén (1879-1977) argued for a **Divine Triumph** or **Dramatic view** of the atonement, similar to the ransom theories of Origen and the early church. In the *dramatic view* God overcame all the powers of hell and death through the cross and in doing so made visible his reconciling love to men. This too has some biblical support, but it is unlikely that it adequately summarizes all of scriptural revelation on this issue.

The **Satisfaction** or **Commercial view** of Anselm (1033-1109) argues that man has dishonored God by his sin and that through the death of the perfect, sinless God-man, Jesus Christ, *that* honor and more—including Satan's defeat—has been restored to God. This theory also finds support in scripture, but more than God's honor was restored through the death of his son.

The **Governmental view** of the atonement, advanced by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), places a high value on the justice of God and the demand of his holy law. In this view, the death of Christ upholds God's moral government in that it demonstrates His utter commitment to His holy law. He could have forgiven men, however, without the death of Christ, but this would have left men without the true knowledge of His commitment to His Law. The death of Christ, then, is not as a substitute for us, but rather God's statement about what he thinks about his moral government of the universe. This view has much to commend it, but as a global theory it simply cannot account for the tight connection between three important facts in Scripture: (1) the reconciliation of the believing sinner; (2) the forgiveness of sin; and (3) the death of Christ. Peter says that “Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring [us] to God” (1 Peter 3:18; cf. Rom 5:8).

³³ It is difficult to say for sure whether this was Abelard's view or whether he simply wanted to emphasize it alongside more orthodox views.

³⁴ The Socinian view emphasized Christ's human nature in order to present him as an *example* of the kind of love *we* are to show to God. The moral influence theory, as advocated by Abelard, and later by Horace Bushnell in the US, regards the death of Christ as a demonstration of *divine* love and Jesus' divine dimension is emphasized. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 785.

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The *Penal Substitution view* of the atonement³⁵—the view most often associated with the Reformers, in particular, Calvin—argues that Christ died in the sinner’s place and appeased the wrath of God toward sin. Thus there are a cluster of ideas in this view including redemption (ransom), sacrifice, substitution, propitiation, and reconciliation. Though there are tensions in this view, and though the other views each contribute important insights to the idea of Christ’s atonement in the NT, this one perhaps rests on the best scriptural support, and brings together the holiness and love of God, the nature and sacrifice of Christ, and the sinfulness of man in a way that all are properly maintained. It is important, however, that the valid insights from the other views not be lost or eclipsed by this model.

The Extent of the Atonement

The question is often asked, “For whom did Christ die?” Evangelicals generally give one of two answers to this question. Both answers appear to enjoy support from Scripture, tradition, and logic. They are: that “he died for all men” (the *general* redemption view) and that “he died only for the elect” (the *limited* or *particular* redemption view). No evangelical believes that Christ died to save the entire world in the sense that every last man will go to heaven on the basis of his death. This is *universalism* and rightly rejected by scripturally informed Christians. Therefore, every evangelical *does limit* the application of the atonement to some degree; this is important to note!

Both sides in this dispute agree that the gospel can and should be genuinely offered to all men, that it is sufficient for the salvation of every man, but that not all men will be saved. In the end, however, it seems that the most consistent summary of the Biblical evidence is that Christ died for the elect only. In this way, he paid the penalty for the sins of the elect only and all other people will pay for their own sins in eternal destruction. In this scheme there is unity in the workings of the Godhead in that the Father elects certain ones in eternity past, Christ dies for them in history (he does not die for all men, only for those the Father has chosen), and the Spirit applies that death to the elect and keeps them until the day of Christ. This is precisely the portrait we get in Ephesians 1:3-14 (see also John 17:9). In the case of particular or limited atonement, then, the term “world” in Scripture (e.g., John 3:16) does not mean all without exception, but all without distinction and the term “bought” in 2 Peter 2:1 does not ultimately mean actually “bought” in a salvific way, but only that God is the rightful owner of these men though they deny this by their teaching (cf. Deut 32:6).³⁶

The Process of Salvation

Unconditional Election

The term “election” refers to God’s choice, before creation, of those individuals from the mass of humanity whom he would bless by delivering them from eternal condemnation and granting them eternal life. It is a choice that cannot be frustrated in any way as it is grounded in trinitarian resolve.

The term “unconditional” coupled with “election” means that God’s choice had nothing do to with any foreseen merit of any kind in the objects of his choice. He chose them unconditionally; he freely chose unworthy sinners because of *his* love not because they in some way merited salvation.

³⁵ We are here envisioning the atonement to include such important ideas as substitution, sacrifice, reconciliation, and propitiation.

³⁶ See Grudem, *Theology*, 594-603. For a more modified Calvinistic view, see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 825-35. Also, the language of “bought” (agorazo,) in 2 Peter 2:1 might come from the OT, as we pointed out, but it might be the specific language of Peter’s opponents, that is, it might be their estimation of themselves. Peter thus uses it in a sarcastic way. Also, when John says that Christ died not only for our sins, but also for (peri + gen) the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2), he may simply be responding to an incipient form of Gnosticism which confined initiation to a select few. John says, “no, this gospel is equally for *all* men.” For a thorough discussion of this issue, the reader is encouraged to study John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, The Works of John Owen, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967).

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Those who teach a “conditional election” often argue that God foresees a person’s faith and on that basis chooses them. In this scheme God’s foreknowledge is neutral with respect to the events of the future. But here again terms such as *yada’* in Hebrew and *progino,„sko,„* in Greek do not indicate neutrality, but a positive relationship to the thing known (cf. 1 Peter 1:20).³⁷ Further, conditional election is seriously flawed, since men are dead in sin and unable to believe or save themselves (Rom 3:9-11; Eph 2:1). Also, scripture nowhere teaches that because a man believes, God decides to choose him. Rather, it is the other way around: men believe *because God has chosen them*. From beginning to end, Scripture is clear that God saves men and they, left to themselves, would never turn to him; indeed, they are unable (John 6:65; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:15-16, 20-22). Neither is there any teaching whatsoever in Scripture regarding prevenient grace that renders all men able to believe. Those who believe in Christ, believe because of God’s work in their hearts.

Effectual Calling

Generally speaking, there are two “callings” in Scripture.³⁸ There is a *general call* in which the good news is proclaimed to every creature under heaven. This includes the preaching of the pure gospel coupled with a summons to repent and believe. Jesus called everyone who was weary and heavy laden to come to him for rest (Matthew 11:28-30; Isaiah 45:22). Many did not come, but some did.

There is also what has been termed a *special or effectual call* wherein the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to convict a sinner and bring him/her to faith. Those who are freely chosen (i.e., unconditional election) by God receive this special call. An unbeliever cannot thwart God’s effectual call in their hearts, but this does not mean that people come into the kingdom “kicking and screaming” against their will. Rather, their choice is genuine,³⁹ but it is generated, carried along, and brought to fruition by the Spirit. We see this special call on the elect in Romans 1:7; 8:30; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Tim 1:9.

Regeneration

Regeneration is often referred to as the “new birth” (i.e., “born again”) and is outlined for us in three principle texts, namely, John 1:12-13; 3:3, and Titus 3:5⁴⁰ (see also James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3). It is a once-for-all (*pace* Calvin) act of God’s Spirit (indeed, every member of the trinity is said to be involved in one way or another), not of human will or because of good deeds, whereby a person is *renewed* spiritually and *made alive* in Christ; they become a child of God and are “born” into his family and enjoy his special fatherhood. It is a gracious work of the Spirit in keeping with the promises of the New Covenant and is inscrutable from a human standpoint, though its effects are obvious: love for God that cries out “Abba” Father, prayer in dependence on God, hatred for sin, and love for other Christians as well as those without Christ. Regeneration logically precedes saving faith, for those who are dead in sin cannot believe. No one can enter the kingdom of God, Jesus said, unless he is born again (cf. John 3:5).

Conversion

If election, efficacious calling, and regeneration (cf. also justification and glorification) describe objective aspects of salvation, that is, God’s work in salvation, then conversion describes the human or subjective response *to God’s gracious working*. Conversion involves hearing the pure gospel and mixing it with saving faith and genuine repentance. Thus conversion has two closely related aspects to it: faith and repentance. Faith itself involves understanding the message of salvation through Christ, agreeing with it, and personally

³⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 926; see also BDB, 394.

³⁸ We are not concerned here with the “call” to a particular vocation.

³⁹ Here we are talking about a choice that involves understanding, agreement, and an embracing of the work of Christ on the cross.

⁴⁰ Regeneration seems to be associated in the early church with baptism, but it must be said up front that Scripture nowhere sanctions the belief that regeneration is materially related to anything other than Spirit sponsored, saving faith. The rite of baptism is the Christian symbol for salvation, and is often associated with faith, but of itself it contributes nothing.

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trusting him to save you. An essential element of that trust is repentance from known sin. This involves a turning from sin to Christ for forgiveness. Thus saving faith is penitent and genuine repentance is believing; it is not just worldly sorrow (Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1; 2 Cor 7:10). Faith is not just mental assent and neither is biblical repentance. We are not dealing simply with historical facts in the gospel, though it indeed rests on these, but we are dealing with a person, “a consuming fire” as one biblical writer put it (Heb 12:29).

When one or the other element, either faith or repentance, is not mentioned in the biblical text, we are not to infer from this that the author thinks the other element unessential to the gospel. Rather, the author may be emphasizing one element over another, but not to the exclusion of the other. In many passages just *believing* is mentioned (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; Rom 3:22) and in many others only repentance is mentioned (e.g., Luke 24:46-47; Acts 3:19; 17:30; Rom 2:4). A genuine response to the gospel involves both elements. Someone has once said that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Together they picture for us a genuine response to God’s gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ.

Union with Christ

The expression “in Christ” (and its derivatives) is used in the NT to express our union with Christ as believers. It encompasses the whole spectrum of our salvation from its conception in the mind of God to its consummation in the new heavens and the new earth. Our election was “in Christ” (Eph 1:4) and so are all the ensuing benefits, namely, our calling, redemption, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification (Rom 8:29-30, 38-39; 1 Cor 1:30; John 15:1-11; 1 John 2:5-6). Our entire present experience and future destiny is “in Christ.”

Our experience of death to sin and resurrection to new life is in light of our union with Christ in *his* death and resurrection. Thus, not only are we “in Christ” but he (as well as the Father and the Spirit) is also in us (John 14:23) and through His indwelling Spirit we are sanctified in Christ and increasingly conformed/transformed to his image (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). And, all believers are “one body” in Christ Jesus which itself is a spiritual reality that should give rise to zealous efforts to develop unity (not disunity or uniformity) among true believers (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; Eph 4:4).

Justification

The doctrine of justification is crucial to a proper view of the gospel and is not simply a doctrine developed in the heat of the battle in Galatians.⁴¹ Several things should be noted briefly about this doctrine. **First**, *justification* refers to a legal declaration by God that our sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven through Christ and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. **Second**, it is a once-for-all decision to declare (*not make*) us righteous in his sight so that there remains no longer any legal recourse or accusation against us. This is the meaning Paul intends when he asks in Romans 8:33-34: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? God is the One who justifies.” **Third**, since justification involves forgiveness of sin and dealing with actual condemnation, it ultimately settles the question of our guilt; we are no longer in a state of guilt. **Fourth**, we possess, in God’s sight, the righteousness of Christ, and since God views it this way, this is indeed reality. It is not fiction as some have argued, but real, though the doctrine of justification does not deal directly with *practice*, but *standing* before God’s holy law. Our standing has been forever changed and we are no longer guilty; the law no longer has recourse against us. **Fifth**, justification comes through faith and not by works as Paul makes clear in Romans 3:26-28; 4:4-5. We do not earn this standing, but rather it is credited to our account through faith in Christ. **Sixth**, it is dangerous to the purity of the gospel of God’s grace to introduce ideas of moral improvement into the doctrine of justification. While justification is related inextricably to sanctification, they are not the same reality and should not be confused. Justification does not mean that God infuses righteousness into us in order to prepare us to receive his grace (which is really not NT grace at all).

⁴¹ Paul lists it as integral to the process of salvation in Romans 8:30. There it is linked with other important truths such as God’s predestination of the elect, his calling them to salvation in history, and his commitment to bring them safely to glorification in the future. Justification is also important a doctrine for marking out the people of God who know they are saved not by works which they have done, but by the grace of God.

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Again, justification deals with our legal standing and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us; it does not refer directly to our day to day growth in the Lord. **Seventh**, there is an eschatology to justification. As N. T. Wright says, "The verdict issued in the present on the basis of faith (Rom 3:21-26) *correctly anticipates the verdict to be issued in the final judgment* on the basis of the total life."⁴²

Adoption

Adoption refers to God's decision to make us members of his family and to offer us all the benefits and (ethical) standards involved in living "under his roof." If justification deals with my legal standing before God as a sinner, then adoption deals with my familial relationship to the judge; I am now one of his own children through adoption (Gal 3:26) and he has become my Father. In many different texts—many more than one finds in the Old Testament—the New Testament claims that God is our special Father through the gospel and that we are his children. It is in the context of this new relationship that we receive many, great blessings. **First**, God is our *Father*, the one who cares for us and all our needs. He is the one Jesus enjoined us to pray to, for our "heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask" (Matt 6:25-34). **Second**, He forgives us when we confess our sin, for he is both a Father who is holy but who also understands our weaknesses and draws alongside to help in time of need (Matt 6:12-14). **Third**, He disciplines us and chastens us for our sin so that we might share in his holiness (Heb 12:10). He loves us so much that he will not let us wander forever, but will draw us back to his side. Indeed, by His Spirit he leads us into greater experiences of his holiness and this is essentially what it means to be a son or daughter of God (Rom 8:14). **Finally**, it is through our sonship that we become heirs of Christ, and of God, and of all that eternal life has in store for us, including suffering in the present life (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17).

We note also that sonship or adoption leads to a new kind of life in God's family.⁴³ We are to imitate our Father who loved us with such a great love. We are to love others according to the example he set for us (Eph 5:1; 1 Pet 1:15-16). Through regeneration we are transformed morally and spiritually so that we can live like sons of God and not like slaves who do not know their masters.

Sanctification

The doctrine of sanctification can be spoken of in three tenses. With respect to the *past*, we have been set apart, both to belong to God, positionally speaking, and to serve him, practically speaking. We were sanctified at the moment of conversion and were declared legally holy and belonging to the Lord (1 Cor 6:11). With respect to the *future*, we will be totally sanctified someday in our glorified bodies. At that time our practice will completely match our position or standing before God. At the *present time* we are being sanctified, that is, increasingly being transformed into the image of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). Thus the nature of sanctification is transformation; we are being progressively conformed into the image of the Son who died for us. This is God's decreed purpose (Rom 8:29).

Sanctification in the present time, then, is the process of *transformation* into the image of Christ and the efficient cause of this glorious change is the Spirit living in us (2 Cor 3:18). He mediates the presence of Christ to us and unfolds the moral will of God to us (John 16:13-14; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19-20). The Spirit uses the people of God (Col 3:16), the word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17), circumstances God ordains to mold and shape us (Rom 8:28), and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). We are on his potter's wheel, not a treadmill; relationship, transformation, and holiness are the goals, not exhaustion.

Therefore, the purpose for which the Spirit is aiming in our lives is Christlikeness and the degree to which we are conformed to him is the degree to which we are sanctified. The fruit that should characterize our lives, then, ought to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-24). The root of this transformation lies in our co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ (Rom

⁴² N. T. Wright, "Justification," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 360.

⁴³ This, of course, directly relates to regeneration and sanctification.

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6:3-4), and the process is never completed in this life (Phil 3:12-13). Nonetheless, we shoot for perfection (1 Peter 1:15-16), knowing that such will not be the case until the Savior comes from heaven to transform our lowly bodies (Phil 3:20). Until then, the process is colored by struggle against the world (1 John 2:15-16), the flesh (Rom 8:6-7; Gal 5:17), and the devil (Eph 6:12).

Our role in the process of sanctification relates directly only to the present time. It involves mortifying the deeds of the body, that is, putting to death those things that belong to our earthly (carnal) natures (Col 3:5) and conversely, putting on Christ (Rom 13:14). If, by the Spirit, we put to death the misdeeds of the body, we will certainly enjoy all the power, comforts, and joys of the spiritual life (cf. Rom 8:13). We must remember in our struggle against sin (and, for righteousness), however, that we live in relationship with God *on the solid foundation of justification*. Though we strive to please him, it is not so that he will become our Father and take us in, rather it is because he has already declared his Fatherhood over us and because he is the One who works in us to this end. Again, our responsibility can be summed up in the word: “cooperation.” God is the one who works in us both “the willing and the doing” (Phil 2:12-13).

Perseverance

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is really the idea of sanctification taken through the whole of a person’s life. If God is the author of their salvation, he is also the finisher of it. As Paul says, he will bring to completion the good work he has begun in Christ (Phil 1:6). Since faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9), God enables believers by the power of the Spirit to persevere in their trust and to continually move toward Christlikeness, even if for a long while they err in sin. God does not revoke his call, nor annul the justification he has put in place (Rom 11:32). Those whom he has called...he also glorified (Rom 8:30). He will never let his own perish (John 10:28-30).

Passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 have often been used to deny the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. But these passages do not teach that people can lose their salvation (cf. Heb 6:9). Rather, the writer is drawing inferences based on the evidence (i.e., behavior of his audience) he sees. Like a good pastor he is warning people of the real consequences for those who live with knowing or unknowing contempt for Christ’s sacrifice. He does not know whether each and every one is saved, only that if they are going to withdraw from Christianity/persecution into the politically safe-haven of Judaism, then one may certainly question whether such a person knows Christ. Thus the writer warns them of the eternal consequences of life apart from Christ. The important point that these so-called warning passages demonstrate is that *one* of the means God uses to protect his saints and enable them to persevere is powerful preaching and his word of rebuke.

Finally, this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, or as it is commonly called, the eternal security of believers (not exactly the same thing), does not lead to sluggish behavior or a lack of zeal in the Christian life. First of all, it includes severe warnings in this regard; we saw this above. Second, perseverance means that the Spirit is persevering with us in order to bring about the fruit of the Spirit in us. He has been doing this from the beginning since we were at one time dead in sin when he breathed regenerating life into us. Why would he stop after we’re saved? We are no more sinful now, than we were then. Third, our election is unto holiness and glorification and the Trinitarian plan cannot be thwarted (Eph 1:4; Rom 8:30). Fourth, to argue that believers can lose their salvation is to misunderstand many Biblical passages and to position the work of sanctification ultimately in the human will. This is unscriptural and contrary chiefly to the principle of grace. Finally, those who want to argue from Hebrews 6:4-6 that believers can lose their salvation if they don’t live properly, must also accept the truth that, once lost, it cannot be regained—as the passage clearly says. On the contrary, however, the Bible emphatically teaches the eternal security of the believer (Rom 8:38-39).

We must also note that not every one who claims to be a believer is a believer, and therefore to be saved. Thus the warnings by several scriptural writers. Many will say to Him on that day, “Lord, Lord,” and he will say to them, “Depart from me, for I never knew you” (Matt 7:21-23). Therefore, just because a person claims to believe in Jesus does not mean that they do. The doctrine of eternal security refers only to those who are truly born-again and who therefore persevere to the end.

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Glorification

Glorification is the moment at which the life of God is strikingly manifested in us when we receive our resurrected bodies and are perfectly fitted for existence in the eternal state. There will be some similarity between our mortal bodies and our glorified bodies, as the example of Jesus after his resurrection demonstrates (e.g., John 21:4ff), but there will be great differences between that which was sown in dishonor and that which will be raised in honor (1 Cor 15:35-49). It will be a body similar to its predecessor, as a seed is to the plant into which it grows. But it will not be marked by dishonor, decay, weakness, and the absence of spiritual life. On the contrary, it will be a material body, specially fitted for spiritual existence and clothed with dignity, power, and glory. It will be patterned after Christ's own resurrection body (1 Cor 15:49). In these glorified bodies there will be perfect concord between desire and fulfillment in terms of our obedience and service to our great King. Our experience of God will be one of complete fulfillment as well. At that time we will be truly human and able to worship and praise God in a way he rightfully deserves (see the section under "Personal Eschatology" below).

Ecclesiology: The Church

The Nature of the Church

There is a great need today to understand the essential nature of the church from what Scripture teaches and not firstly from the role some claim she ought to play in society. We cannot continue to define the church existentially, that is, by the way she interacts with the world and the resultant changes she undergoes. We must begin with the word of God in order to get a sense of the kind of entity she is, and from there we can decide on the kind of tasks she ought to be engaged in.

The term *ekkleḗsia* is used predominantly throughout the New Testament (approx. 114x; not in 1, 2 Peter) to refer to the church. We may look at its use in Classical Greek to understand it, but even more important is its usage in the Septuagint. The term in Classical Greek most often refers to an "assembly" regularly convened for political purposes, such as voting on issues affecting the city in which the people live.

In the Septuagint (the Greek OT) the term *ekkleḗsia* is often used to translate the Hebrew term *lh^{aq}** which can refer to meetings for civil affairs (1 Kings 2:3), for war (Num 22:4), of nations (Gen 35:11), and a variety of other gatherings, including, and most importantly, Israel's gatherings for religious purposes (Deut 9:10; 2 Chron 20:5; Joel 2:16).⁴⁴

The term *ekkleḗsia* in the NT can refer to the "church of God" meeting in a home (Rom 16:5), in a particular city (1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1), in a region (Acts 9:31) or a larger area such as Asia itself (1 Cor 16:19). When these data are taken together we realize that the church is a universal body composed of all true believers in Christ, united in Him by the Spirit, and that there are particular geographical expressions of it here and there and throughout history. Thus, though there are many local "churches," there is really only *one* church (Eph 4:4; Heb 12:23).⁴⁵

This leads naturally to the idea that the church is both visible and invisible. It is invisible in that God knows who is *truly* a Christian and who is not. It is visible in that there are local expressions of it to which Christians commit themselves. Further, it is not necessary to belong to a local church to be a Christian, though, of course, one will want to out of obedience to Christ. And, just because a person goes to church, does not mean they are in fact part of the spiritual body of Christ.

⁴⁴ There is another term in the Hebrew OT, namely, *hd^u@*, and it often refers to Israel as a "ceremonial community" centered in the cult or the Law. It is, however, never translated with *ekkleḗsia*. See Jack P. Lewis, "qahal," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 789-90; Lothar Coenen, "Church," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:291-95.

⁴⁵ Cf. BAGD, 240-41.

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Let us turn now to a discussion of the various metaphors used in reference to the church. This will give us yet more insight into the essential nature of the church. Though the list is long, we will concentrate on only a few.

Metaphorical Expressions in Reference to the Church

The NT writers refer to the church using several rich metaphors. **First**, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 she is corporately referred to as the body of Christ, and in Ephesians 1:22-23 she is the body and Christ is the head. **Second**, she is also referred to as God's family; we are all sons and daughters of the Lord (2 Cor 6:18). **Third**, her intimate and dependent relationship to her Lord is likened to a vine and its branches (John 15:1-11). **Fourth**, in her relationship to the world she is referred to as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). **Fifth**, she is corporately referred to as a building (1 Cor 3:9), a living temple that actually grows (Eph 2:20-21) and a holy temple in which God dwells (1 Cor 3:16). **Sixth**, in her service before God and in her relationship to him as *His People* she is referred to as a "holy nation," a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9) and each member is likened to a living stone, built around the chosen and precious cornerstone of Christ himself. **Seventh**, she is referred to by the Lord as the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13-15; Acts 13:47; Col 4:5-6).

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The Church and the Kingdom of God

Another question that must be dealt with in determining the precise nature of the church is her relationship to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God may be thought of as the reign of God and the church as the realm in which that reign is visibly manifested. But the church is not the kingdom, as some theologians have contested, though the relationship between the two should not be separated. Ladd makes five helpful observations regarding the relationship of the church to the kingdom: (1) the church is not the kingdom; (2) the kingdom creates the church; (3) the church witnesses to the kingdom of God; (4) the church is the instrument of the kingdom, and (5) the church is the custodian of the kingdom.⁴⁶

The Church and Israel

There are many covenant-amillennial theologians who argue that the church has replaced national Israel in God's plan of blessing and has herself inherited the promises to Israel, thus becoming the *new Israel*. They state that the Davidic covenant is now being fulfilled in the church and will be ultimately fulfilled in the eternal state, and that there is, therefore, no future for national Israel and no special future for ethnic Jews either. On the other hand, there are many Dispensational-premillennial theologians who argue that the church and Israel are distinct and must not be merged. They claim that the Davidic covenant is not now being fulfilled in the church (since it was made with national Israel), but that it, along with all the other promises God made to Israel, will be fulfilled in the millennium. In this system the two entities of Israel and the church must be kept separate, one fulfilling God's earthly promises and the other his heavenly promises.

There are, however, mediating positions between these poles. Many covenant-premillennial theologians argue that there will be a future restoration of many *ethnic* Jews as Paul seems to argue in Romans 11, but not the kind of *national* restitution that the classic or revised dispensationalist holds. On the other hand, there are progressive dispensationalists who argue that the Davidic covenant is being fulfilled in the church, but that present fulfillment does not set aside the fulfillment envisioned in the OT with the nation of Israel. These dispensationalists would argue that there is a soteriological equality among all the people of God (Israel in the OT and the church in the NT), but that there are structural differences, and that these differences will be to some degree maintained in both the future millennial reign of Christ as well as the eternal state.

One can see from this brief overview that the question of the relationship of Israel to the church is a complex one to say the least. It is not likely that the two are to be regarded as completely distinct entities, however, since so much of the language of the OT and its promises are said to be fulfilled in the Messiah and his

⁴⁶ For his defense of these points see, George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 109-117.

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connection to the church (e.g., Acts 13:33; Gal 3:29). One may reasonably question, on the other hand, whether the church, as is the view of some, can adequately exhaust the height and breadth of some of the OT promise language and whether God could be said to have really fulfilled that which he said he would. This suspicion is further confirmed when the Synoptics, Romans, and Revelation seem to picture a time of consummation in respect to the kingdom—a time which can, with very little difficulty, be brought together with OT hope.

Purpose & Service of the Church

The purpose of the church is to carry on the work of Christ in proclaiming the gospel and being a light to the world (John 14:13-14; Acts 1:8; Acts 13:47). Thus the gospel and its life transforming character stands at the heart of the church and is to be reflected in her members.

The church is to have a God-ward focus in worship, praise and prayer. This involves freely worshipping the Trinitarian God and praying for each other as well as for those in the world, including our political leaders (1 Tim 2:1-3). The church is also commissioned to establish and equip new believers in the faith. This includes teaching concerning the gospel and its ethical concomitants, i.e., obedience to the Lord's commands, love for each other, and responsible and holy living in a fallen world. The church is also to have, as we stated earlier, a consistent ministry to the world in terms of acts of kindness and witnessing to the truth and reality of God and the gospel. Thus a healthy church keeps in focus its upward, inward, and outward calls as really three aspects of one call to know Christ and to make him known. The primary authority in directing these activities is, of course, the Scriptures as interpreted and applied through dependence on the Spirit and the wisdom gained from the church throughout her history.

The Government of the Church

Throughout the history of the church there have been several different, yet basic forms of church government. These include: (1) Episcopalian; (2) Presbyterian; (3) Congregational, and (4) Non-government. We will briefly describe the first three here, but space prohibits any extended discussion.

In the *Episcopalian* form of church government the archbishop (and there are several) has authority over the bishop who in turn presides over a diocese, i.e., several churches, which are cared for by the rector or vicar. The archbishop, bishop, and rectors are all ordained priests within the Episcopal system of church government. This form of government can be seen in the Methodist, Anglican, and in its most hierarchical form (i.e., many levels of bishops), Catholic church.

Various denominations employ the *Presbyterian* form of church government where the local church elects certain elders to the "session," (Presbyterian) or "consistory" (Reformed Church), some (or all) of whom are members of a higher governing body called the "presbytery" (Presbyterian) or "classis" (Reformed). Some of the members of the presbytery or classis are chosen by the presbytery (or classis) to form a synod. There is yet a higher governing body in the Presbyterian Church, referred to as the General Assembly which itself is composed of lay and clergy representatives from the presbyteries. The General Assembly may be responsible for churches in a region or country.

In the *Congregational* form of church government, both the autonomy of the local church (under Christ, however) and the rights of its members are stressed. The conviction in this system is that there is no evidence in the NT that churches were controlled by other individuals or other churches. In fact, Paul told Titus to establish leaders in the churches from among the people in Crete (Titus 1:5). There is no mention that these leaders were responsible to outsiders for their budget or day-to-day, practical considerations. The priesthood of believers is held in high regard in this system, though in most forms of this government, a leader or leaders are chosen (in extreme cases they are not), but they must in no way replace the ministry and involvement of the members.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For further discussion of these three representative forms of church government, see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1069-83; Leon Morris, "Church Government," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 238-41; D. MacLeod, "Church Government," in *New*

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The New Testament seems to support most fully the idea of a plurality of elders⁴⁸ at any one location (Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 4:14; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2), but not the idea of a developed hierarchical structure beyond this. The authority of the apostles is communicated to us via the writings they left to instruct us, but there is no need for “presbyteries” or “general assemblies” to which we are to be accountable. Indeed, it has often been these organizations which have caused local churches to go astray doctrinally. Through free and desirable associations with other Christian fellowships, churches and their leaders can maintain high levels of doctrinal and moral purity, as well as an awareness of what’s going on around them and ways they can serve into other situations.

There are certain qualifications that must be met before a person should be considered for the role of elder, including moral qualities (i.e., above reproach), good leadership in the home, and ability to teach, and such a candidate must not be a recent convert (see 1 Tim 3; Titus 1). The principle roles of the elder involve leading, teaching and protecting the church of God.

Just as there were for elders, so there are for deacons, certain qualifications that must be met before a person be considered for this office in God’s church. These qualities are listed in 1 Tim 3:8-13 and include moral qualities, as well as good leadership in the home, though nothing is mentioned regarding teaching the faith. It seems that some of their manifold duties would include administration in the church as well as perhaps handling the finances for the church.

Ordinances Given the Church

There are two ordinances⁴⁹ given the church by the Lord. They are baptism and the Lord’s supper, or as the latter is commonly referred to, the Eucharist. We will begin our discussion with a summary of baptism, dealing with the command to be baptized, its mode, meaning, and significance, the subjects of baptism, and the effect of baptism. We will also briefly discuss the Lord’s Supper.

The first thing that we note about Christian baptism is that within the overall framework of making disciples, the resurrected Lord commanded it. In Matthew 28:19-20 he told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. They were to do this in two ways: (1) baptizing them into the Trinitarian name of God, and (2) teaching them to obey everything that Christ had commanded. Baptizing new believers is not an option for each local expression of the church, though only certain members in any given church may actually do the baptizing (cf. 1 Cor 1:17). The early church understood the importance of baptism and faithfully practiced it in the case of new converts.

The most common meaning of the verb “to baptize,” both in Greek literature and the New Testament, is to “immerse,” “dip,” or “plunge.”⁵⁰ It does not mean “to sprinkle.” The idea of “immersion” fits well with and best explains the evidence of the New Testament. Several facts indicate this: **First**, John baptized people in the Jordan river and not on dry ground—a fact which is most easily explained if immersion were the mode rather than sprinkling. This, of course, is the case with Jesus’ baptism, who is said to go down into the waters and come up out of the waters.⁵¹ **Second**, John baptized at Aenon near Salim *because there was much water* (hoti hudata polla e,,n ekei) there. It seems reasonable to suppose that such a great amount of water would not have been needed if sprinkling were the method John used (see John 3:23). **Third**, there is the case of

Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 143-46.

⁴⁸ “Elders” are also known as “pastors,” “overseers,” and “bishops” in the NT. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 913-14. Though this position is by no means certain, it does seem quite tenable.

⁴⁹ These are sometimes referred to as “sacraments.” To some, the term “sacrament” suggests the idea that either participation in these rites is necessary for salvation or that they actually work in and of themselves, apart from the faith of the participant. Indeed, this is often how they are conceived in the Catholic church.

⁵⁰ See BAGD, s.v., baptizo,,. See also A. Oepke, “baptizo,,” in *TDNT*, 1:529-46.

⁵¹ Matthew uses the expression anebe,, apo tou hudatos (Matt 3:16) and Mark says anabaino,,n ek tou hudatos (Mark 1:10). Both indicate that Jesus and John were in the water, not just beside it.

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Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:37-38. If baptism simply involved sprinkling, it seems that they would not have had to wait until the Ethiopian saw a large amount of water. Also, why did both Philip and the Ethiopian go down into the water if only sprinkling were required? The explanation that best suits the meaning of baptizo,, and that makes sense of both Philip and the Eunuch in the water together, is that when Philip baptized the Ethiopian, he submerged him in water and then lifted back out again.⁵² **Fourth**, the fact that Peter associated baptism with the removal of dirt from the body indicates that he was thinking of something much more than simply sprinkling (cf. 1 Pet 3:21). This is in keeping with the idea of immersion. **Finally**, Paul uses water baptism in Romans 6:4 to symbolize the idea of “dying and rising” with Christ. The apparent parallel with “dying and rising” is much more easily understood if immersion is the method that Paul had in mind (see also Col 2:12).

In as much as baptism is an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality, and a new union between Christ and believer, it is to be administered to believers only. It does not work *ex opere operato* as the Catholic church teaches (cf. 1 Pet 3:21), but is an ordinance given to those who have personally trusted in Christ, conscious of what they are doing. There are several passages in Acts that make this clear (2:41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15). Other passages that seem to speak of the baptism of households (Acts 16:32-33; 1 Cor 1:16), therefore, should not be understood to include infant baptism, or the baptism of unbelieving adults, but rather that everyone (or mostly everyone) in the house responded to the gospel and was, therefore, baptized.

There are also some who argue that baptism is necessary for salvation and they often refer to Acts 2:38 (though not just this passage) in support of their views. Others have responded to this argument by saying that the verse should be translated as: “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *because of* (eis) the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” If this were the proper translation, it would virtually settle the issue against baptism as necessary for salvation. But, in short, the evidence for the translation of eis as *because* is very unconvincing. There are other considerations, however.

Since repentance can precede baptism in Acts (cf. 3:19; 26:20) and salvation is given totally by grace in Acts (e.g., 10:43, 47; 13:38-39, 48), baptism, though joined closely in this passage with believing, must not constitute an essential aspect of a saving response to God. It is best to view baptism here as water baptism and to recognize that the early church viewed baptism as incorporating both the spiritual reality and the physical symbol.⁵³

The idea that baptism is not necessary for salvation is further confirmed when we read Paul’s comments in 1 Cor 1:17. He says there that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel. But, if baptism were an essential element in a saving response to the gospel, Paul would certainly have never omitted it. But, by his own testimony, he did. In effect, then, he separates the preaching of the gospel from the ministry of baptizing. Thus baptism is not an essential part of the gospel. Peter, too, says as much when he equates baptism with the pledge of a good conscience toward God and not the removal of dirt from the body (1 Pet 3:21). Further, to add baptism, i.e., an external rite to the gospel, is to create insuperable tensions with Romans 4:1-12 and—all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding—to mix faith and works (Eph 2:8-9). It is a different gospel than the one Paul preached and is to be flatly rejected (Gal 1:6-7). Finally, if baptism were essential to saving faith, then the thief on the cross could not really have entertained the hope of heaven as Jesus promised (Luke 23:43).

Baptism, then, symbolizes a believer’s union with Christ in his death to sin (and life in Adam) and resurrection to new life. Closely connected with this and expressed in texts like Titus 3:5, is the idea that baptism signifies a “washing” or “cleansing” and that those who are baptized “into the name of Christ”⁵⁴ are regarded as clean and are to live holy lives. In terms of “witness,” baptism symbolizes the believer’s introduction into Messiah’s community, to live in the Lord’s body among those who belong to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

⁵² The same language that’s used of Jesus coming out of the water is used of the Eunuch as well (i.e., (avebe,,san ek tou hudatos).

⁵³ See Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 369-71.

⁵⁴ This, or one of its variants, is the most common way Acts refers to people being baptized.

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The second ordinance given the church is that of the Lord's Supper. If baptism is an initiatory rite, and symbolizes our definitive break with our old life in Adam and our definitive union with Christ, then the Lord's supper or Eucharist is an ongoing rite, signifying our ongoing communion with Christ and our constant proclamation of the message regarding his death (i.e., for the forgiveness of sins).

There are differences of opinion among genuine Christians as to how often the Lord's Supper should be observed. The synoptics do not record Jesus saying how often it was to be celebrated, but the fact that the Supper relates to the new covenant and symbolizes Jesus' blood being poured out for many, seems to indicate that Jesus viewed it from the beginning as relating to all his potential followers until the time when he will physically sit down with us and drink it anew in his Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29). Luke adds the comment that the disciples are to do this, i.e., partake of the bread, *in remembrance of me* which also implies that the Lord's Supper would be a continuous event (see 1 Cor 11:24). But, still, there is no text that says that we are to observe it every week, once a month, four times a year, or whatever. It seems from 1 Cor 11:20ff that the Corinthians were practicing it fairly regularly, but exactly how often is uncertain, and this, of course, is not precisely the problem Paul is addressing in 1 Cor 11:17-34. It also seems that given the nature of the Supper as a "reminder," to celebrate it fairly frequently would be a good thing, provided it was done in a way honoring to the Lord and encouraging to all his people present.

There are also different views on the nature of the Lord's Supper and the relation of the elements (i.e., bread and wine) to the actual, physical body of the Lord. Roman Catholicism argues a view called *transubstantiation* where it is claimed that the bread and the wine are mysteriously transformed into the literal body and blood of the Lord so that the Lord's body is literally present *as* the elements. After all, Christ did tell the disciples: "this *is* my body" and "this *is* my blood." But this interpretation goes beyond the figure of speech employed by the Lord. We may safely assume that the disciples understood the metaphor (which does not mean that there is no literal referent) since Jesus himself was sitting right there. Are we also, then, to regard the "cup" as the "new covenant" itself, for Jesus said "this cup *is* the new covenant" (Luke 22:20)? On another occasion, when he referred to himself as a "door," they understood the metaphor quite well. They never imagined, and neither should we, that Jesus becomes a literal door every time someone becomes a Christian. Further, this view is based, in large measure, on an unscriptural idea regarding the operation of this sacrament *ex opere operato*. Salvation is by grace through faith and not by receiving sacraments.

In contrast to the Catholic view, Luther argued a view referred to as *consubstantiation*. He argued that the language: "this *is* my body," and "this *is* my blood" requires some special physical, presence of the Lord. In his view, then, the Lord is present "in, with, and under" the elements. But this view rests on the idea of the ubiquitous human nature of the Lord. The problem is that scripture affirms that Jesus ascended to heaven in his earthly, glorified body and in no place affirms a ubiquitous body.

Perhaps the best view is to recognize that Jesus is indeed using a metaphor, as he did on many other occasions, and that the metaphor being used points to his spiritual presence. That is, when we celebrate the Lord's supper, the elements remind us that he died for us, that we have forgiveness through his broken body and blood, and through him we freely participate and enjoy the benefits of the new covenant which he inaugurated. As we reflect on these things, Jesus is present to us spiritually, to strengthen us and glorify himself. Thus, the Supper, when done to the Lord by faith, confers sanctifying grace, not saving grace.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is for believers only, but it is not to be confined to baptized believers only, while others, who for whatever immediate reason have not been baptized, are excluded. Further, a person is to examine her/himself to see if their fellowship with and treatment of other Christians is consistent with their claim to participate in the one body of Christ. The Lord dealt with the Corinthians fairly sternly because of their failure to genuinely love other members of Christ's body. They were arrogantly and selfishly indulging themselves at the Lord's Supper at the expense of those who were in need; in short, they held the church of God with contempt and for that God judged them with sickness and death (1 Cor 11:17-34; cf. v. 30).

Gifts Given the Church

It has been God's single-minded intention from the beginning to create a church—a group of people called out of darkness into the wonderful light of his presence and blessing (Gen 12:3; Lev 26:12; Jer 32:38; Ezek 37:27; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3-4). He has showered numerous gifts upon us, including the gift of salvation

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itself. Further, in keeping with this great salvation is the indwelling presence of the Spirit who bestows different spiritual gifts upon each and every member of the body of Christ. What follows is not an exegesis of the various texts wherein the gifts are mentioned, but a general discussion of the gifts followed by a pastoral hermeneutic for dealing with differences on the issue of the sign gifts.

This is the first thing to remember about the spiritual gifts: they are given by God, *at his discretion and for the good of the body*. Paul makes this abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11. And given that the Lord is the One who alone organizes his body (1 Cor 12:18), it is not necessary or healthy to pray for a certain gift. In fact, this is undoubtedly one reason why we are never commanded to pray to personally receive spiritual gifts, but only that we may understand and properly use the one(s) sovereignly given to us and allow others freedom to exercise theirs (1 Cor 14:1). In this way, we avoid the reductionism so prevalent and destructive in the Corinthian church (i.e., the mistake that only one gift really counts). God will give a spiritual gift(s) to each member *as He determines* (without our consultation or pleading) for he has the big picture regarding the needs of the body.

So the sovereign Lord is the giver of the gifts. The next thing we need to understand is that *not everything* that happens in the name of Christ and spiritual gifts is actually of God. This fact is evident when we study 1 Corinthians 12-14 (see 12:1-3 which heads off this whole section). We realize that we can hold erroneous views regarding the existence, purpose, and use of the gifts and may, therefore, need correction. Thus, humility is the “order of the day.” We must let Scripture teach us about these things, lest we, like the Corinthians, wander off into error. On the other hand, I am not necessarily advocating the common idea among certain churches that every supernatural occurrence “outside the norm” is of the Devil and demonic. Those who live like this might do well to remember Jesus’ teaching regarding the blasphemy of the Spirit (Matthew 12). Let’s move on.

There are five passages that explicitly mention the gifts: (1) Romans 12:4-8; (2) 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12-14 (Acts 21:9); (3) Ephesians 4:11-12; (4) Hebrews 2:3-4, and (5) 1 Peter 4:10-11. Several observations can be drawn from these texts. First, no two lists of gifts agree. Therefore, it is likely that the number of gifts mentioned in the New Testament is not exhaustive. In keeping with this observation is the fact that Paul refers to the various manifestations of the Spirit as “gifts of...” implying that there is more than one gift of, say, administration, “helps,” etc. Also, the *terms* themselves, “i.e., “administration,” “helps,” etc. are vague and can accommodate any number of scenarios. Finally, see Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 where he refers to a “variety” (*diareseis*) of gifts. He says that one and the same Spirit sponsors many different “gifts” (*charismato,,n*); the Lord, a variety of “services” (*diakonio,,n*); and God many different “workings” (*energe,,mato,,n*). These are all referred to as “manifestations of the Spirit” (*phanero,,sis*).⁵⁵ Thus, the apostle gives the impression that he could never list all the gifts, *but what he is doing is giving the Corinthians a theological and practical paradigm* in which to think about these Spirit-inspired manifestations. He is definitely not, in any text, giving them an exhaustive list of the gifts themselves.

So then, variegated Spirit-inspired gifts are given to the body of Christ for the common good, but we can sometimes misunderstand them. That love is to be the ambience in which they’re practiced and that they are not the defining line, separating who is spiritual from who’s not, is clear enough in Scripture. It therefore matters little what our experience is; if we do not use our gifts in love, we are outside the will of God and offer no real strengthening to his church. So it goes without saying that the presence of the fruit of the Spirit provides the necessary context for the proper exercise of His gifts (cf. Gal 5:22-23).

There are also difficult questions surrounding the precise meaning of certain gifts. Some of the gifts such as “teaching,” “exhorting,” “serving,” “giving,” and “administering” are in one sense not that difficult to understand and there are good scriptural examples to help flesh out what they mean. But gifts such as the “message of wisdom” and the “message of knowledge” are difficult to be certain about. It is probable that

⁵⁵ It is exegetically indefensible to assign some gifts to the Son, others to the Father, and still others to the Spirit. Though this is common in certain churches, it is neither helpful for understanding the gifts nor the unity of operations of the Trinity. Further, it is based on a misinterpretation and harmony of the texts in question. It is a classic case of the fallacy of the excluded middle.

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the “message of wisdom” relates to God’s wisdom in Christ, i.e., the message of the cross and a concomitant ethic. Therefore, someone who had this gift might have the ability to understand in significant ways how the apostolic teaching of the cross relates to the present life of their church; the Spirit teaches them this for the benefit of the church and they are able under his guidance to utter its content. On the other hand, the “message of knowledge” may refer to speaking forth knowledge gained by direct revelation of the Spirit or to spiritually insightful teaching and exposition of God’s truth. But it is difficult to be certain on this issue. It is equally difficult to be certain why it is referred to as “knowledge” (gno_o,sis) and precisely how it differs from the gift of “the message of wisdom.”

So there are some ambiguities in determining the meaning of certain terms used to describe certain gifts. There is also the question of whether certain gifts are still given by the Spirit. This, of course, involves the issue of the cessation or continuance of the sign gifts and perhaps the gift of apostle. Are gifts such as miraculous powers, healing, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues still being given to the church?

There are several things that need to be said by way of preface regarding the cessation/noncessation discussion. First, among the informed and less pejorative people on this issue, there is a clear realization that this is not a debate about whether God still performs healings and miracles. According to the best testimony he does and all *informed* Christians, on all sides, recognize and celebrate this fact. Nor is this debate—as I have often heard it claimed—about whether there are spiritual gifts today or not. No *informed* Christian on any side debates that issue. Of course, God still gives spiritual gifts to his church. The question, then, is whether God still gives the sign gifts to individuals in the church. Some say “yes” and some say “no” and of course, there are gradations of opinions within each “camp.”

Further, there is apparent tension in the NT itself on this issue. It seems that 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 anticipates the existence of the sign gifts throughout the church age while it is strange that the second generation writer of Hebrews does not appeal to miracles current in his experience, but instead to the miracles done by the Lord and his apostles (Heb 2:3-4). Also, does the fact that miracles had an obvious function of confirming the apostles’ doctrine necessarily entail the idea that no such confirmation is needed today (cf. Acts 14:3; Heb 2:3-4). In other words, was the confirmation tied to the men solely or to their message, or to both? If we preach the same message as they do, why should we not expect similar divine confirmation? How do we account for the relative absence of the miraculous gifts in the history of the church? And, when they do appear, they seem to be qualitatively less than what is evidenced in the New Testament? Thus there are questions about the New Testament’s teaching on this subject and our experience of these gifts today.

In any case, those who say “yes” to the presence of the sign gifts generally point to their experience and then Scripture to confirm their case. They sometimes claim to have witnessed a miracle done by somebody or to have spoken in tongues themselves. Then they tend to read the Scriptural texts in question in that light. And this is not necessarily a bad thing as much as it is a natural and necessary thing to do. We all read the Bible in light of our experience; we have no choice. We cannot extricate ourselves from our historical setting, including background, culture (e.g., church associations), spiritual experience, patterns of thought, and so on.

But all this does not lead to the conclusion that one’s interpretation of the Bible *and their experience* is necessarily correct. For example, even those “spiritual” Corinthians badly misunderstood Paul on the issue of Christian—non-Christian relationships (see 1 Cor 5:9-13). Therefore, while we cannot “attain a view from nowhere,” so to speak, with increased awareness and sensitivity to our preunderstandings, we *can* have our views changed by more responsible readings of Scripture (cf. the process in 2 Tim 3:16-17). This, of course, is true for every Christian, irrespective of the issue in question. But it has pointed application to those who have a tendency to read Scripture myopically in light of their own experience, i.e., they tend not to ask historically sensitive exegetical questions and they often brush aside texts which seem, at least on the surface, to be potentially hazardous to their view.

On the other hand, those who say “no” to the question of “sign-gifts” generally start with Scripture and attempt to demonstrate that the Bible does not teach the continuance of these gifts. Their method, they claim, is based on the correct premise that Scripture is the final authority in matters of faith and practice. Thus, with these people, Scripture seems like the best place to start, and perhaps they’re right, but it is not logically necessary to start there, even with the premise of *sola scriptura*. Thus the “scripture principle” does not logically or necessarily give rise to one approach over the other. All that matters is that the Bible have the

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final, authoritative voice on the matter. We could just as well begin with our experience and we often do when we approach Scripture.

Therefore, the starting point in both situations is not *logically* problematic at all; what is problematic is that most people never get beyond their starting point to a serious and thoughtful consideration of the other locus in this theological discussion, namely, Scripture, in the case of the “Continuist” and experience in the case of the “Cessationist.” Both must be seriously examined and key points of tension allowed to remain until genuine syntheses emerge.

In short, I am *not* saying that those who begin with experience never go to Scripture, but it has been my experience that many in this camp do not get around to a *serious* consideration of Scripture, including reading the exegeses of their responsible detractors. If they did that they would better understand the strengths and weaknesses of all positions, perhaps be more inclined to live humbly before God on this issue, and be prepared to contribute among those with whom they disagree. In some cases, views may be changed and Christian integrity developed. On the other side, those who begin with Scripture, consistently argue as if their experience played no role in shaping their views (which is simply naïve) and many of them do not ever get around to seriously considering (1) the experience of others and (2) Biblical texts which seem to weaken their view. In the end, the advice given to the person who argues for the gifts’ continuance is the same advice given to the cessationist. If we approach the issue in this way we may be able to better appreciate the spiritual gifts in general and their relative importance for the Christian life; we may actually discern the Spirit’s pathway through this problem.

Finally, we need to say a word about the gift of tongues. First, it was a Spirit-inspired gift given to the church and there is not a hint in Paul’s language to the Corinthians, that, properly understood, it was demonic or anything of the like. Second, when properly exercised it contributed to the good of the body. Third, whatever you believe in this area, you are not at liberty to cause division in the body of Christ over it. If you believe that the gift exists, great! Then, please follow Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 12-14 regarding its proper use and do not require others to speak in tongues. Not all speak in tongues, as Paul says (1 Cor 12:30). Use it for the betterment of the *body* and only when there are interpreters present. And, do not make the fatal mistake of judging another’s spirituality based on this gift. That is a serious grievance against the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 4:30). If, on the other hand, you believe this gift does not exist today, great! Be patient with those who contend that it does and encourage them to continue to seek God’s will for their lives. Do not become proud, but love your brothers and sisters and learn from their experience. Be careful not to play down peoples’ spiritual experience to the point where you have basically caught and tamed the Holy Spirit. You may find him more like wind than you thought (John 3:3-5).

No Christian should define or order their spirituality around this gift, or any other gift for that matter. For Christian spirituality is primarily taken up not with psychological experience, but ethical (holiness), and Biblical living centered on fellowship with Christ and Spirit-inspired confession of Him as Lord (1 Cor 12:1-3). Therefore, the presence or absence of this gift is not a determiner for the presence or absence of the Spirit! This Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 12-14, see esp. 12:1-3, 30. Now, having said this, we must say a word about the narratives in Acts.

The manner of the giving of the gift in Acts 2, 10, and 19 (it is not mentioned in Acts 8 in the case of the Samaritans) was to confirm the reception of the *same Spirit* among *different ethnic groups* and thus to prevent division in the early church, that is, between Jew and Gentile. The apostles reasoned that if Gentile men, i.e., Cornelius and others spoke in tongues just as they [i.e., the apostles] did when they received the Spirit at Pentecost, then surely these Gentiles had received the same Spirit in the same way (see Acts 10:45-46; 11:1-18, esp. vv. 1-3 and 17-18). Thus the Spirit evidenced his coming by the gift of tongues. The giving of the gift of tongues, then, was not because these Gentiles were saved, *per se*, and not as some second work, but rather as a telltale sign that the same Spirit had now come to live in *Gentiles* too. Thus, they *too* were members of God’s church and there was to be no division between Jew and Gentile. The same God is Lord of both and the apostles were beginning to grasp this!

Even though the gift of tongues is not mentioned in Acts 8, the coming of the Spirit upon the Samaritans is also portrayed in such a way as to highlight the theme of unity. The fact that the apostles Peter and John left Jerusalem to go and investigate the report about the Samaritans indicates that there were questions in their

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minds about the validity of the Samaritans' conversion (Acts 8:14-17). But when they saw that these people had received the word of the Lord, they laid their hands on them and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. Once again, his coming later, after receiving the word of the Lord is not to give future Christians a pattern (see Ephesians 1:13-14), but rather to accentuate the unity that was to exist now between Jews and Samaritans—two groups who typically hated each other (see John 4:9). The laying on of hands by the apostles, though not necessary for salvation (as 3000 converted on the day of Pentecost confirms), confirms their agreement with and stamp of authenticity on the Samaritans' conversion.

Therefore, the giving of the gift of tongues and the coming of the Spirit in the book of Acts, establishes Luke's overriding concern to show the Spirit's desire that there be no divisions in the church. The Spirit is not teaching us in Acts that he comes in stages of any kind (this is antithetical to the point of the Acts narratives), but rather that he comes equally upon all who believe the gospel so that all may live in unity under the Lordship of Christ. This is true also of the disciples of John the Baptist. They too received the same Spirit when Paul laid hands on them. The Spirit delayed his coming for the very reason that these men be united with others in the church.

There is much more that can be said about the spiritual gifts, but space prohibits. Let everything be done for the good of the body and do not give unnecessary offense in these matters. May God give his church wisdom, power, and love in the development and exercise of the gifts He has given.

Eschatology: End Times

The term “eschatology” comes from two Greek terms *e[scato*” and *logos*” meaning (roughly speaking) “last, end, or final” and “study of,” respectively. Theologically speaking, then, the term eschatology refers to “the study of final things” in the Bible. It concerns both personal eschatological issues such as death and the intermediate state as well as themes with a more general or corporate focus. The latter would include such ideas as the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment, tribulation, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state.

Personal Eschatology

There are both personal and corporate aspects to the Biblical portrait of eschatology. On the personal side, all people will experience *physical death* and the *intermediate state*. There have been a few exceptions to this rule, however, in the Biblical record (e.g., Enoch; in the future, Christians alive at the Lord's return do not seem to pass through physical death, but instantaneously receive their resurrection bodies), but by and large all people can “count on” going through the experience of physical death (Heb 9:27), followed by conscious existence throughout an interim period until the *resurrection of the body*.

Physical death is described in scripture as the separation of the soul or spirit from the body; this seems to be the immediate result of the decay and termination of the physical body. James says that the body without the spirit is dead and the writer of Ecclesiastes, speaking of physical death in general, says that the body returns to the dust from which it came and the spirit to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7; cf. Gen 2:7; 3:19).

But the use of the term *death* in scripture is not confined simply to physical death. Rather, it is also used to describe the spiritual state of all people (except Christ) born into this world. The apostle Paul says that we are “spiritually dead in sin” until we are made alive with Christ (Eph 2:1-6). As a result of being spiritually dead, we produce works consistent with death, darkness, and profound ignorance of God (Eph 4:17-19).

But those who die in this condition of spiritual death face yet another death. This one, however, is permanent, without hope of change or deliverance. It is referred to as the second death and results in a permanent state of separation from the gracious presence of God. It is eternal punishment for sin and rejecting God's presence in Christ. It is referred to in Revelation 21:8 as the *second death*.⁵⁶ Here is what John says:

⁵⁶ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 3:455.

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Revelation 21:8 But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death.”

John says earlier in Revelation 20:6 that believers in Christ will not have to endure the second death.

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Physical and spiritual death are a result of Adam’s sin (1 Cor 15:21).⁵⁷ Adam as the representative man was commanded not to eat of the fruit of the tree on payment of *certain* death (Gen 2:17). This penalty of “death” involved more than spiritual death, for man was banned from re-entering the garden, taking from the tree of life, and living forever in a sinful state (Gen 3:23-24). Thus the penalty of death for sin included physical death as well as spiritual death (see the refrain “and he died” in Gen 5).⁵⁸

The existential problem of death is so grievous that many lose hope and any desire to go on in life. But for the Christian, death does not have the final say in the matter; “loss” is not the final outcome. As sad, fearful, and troublesome as the expectation and experience of death is (Acts 8:2; Phil 2:27), the Christian has the assurance, based on the resurrection of Christ and the ministry of the indwelling Spirit, that resurrection and life with God will be his/her final destiny (1 Thess 4:13). While we grieve for our deceased loved ones now, we grieve not for them—insofar as they are believers in Christ, they are with the Lord—but we grieve for ourselves, in our deep and profound sense of loss. In our time of need let us come to the throne of grace to find mercy and receive grace upon grace (Heb 4:15). The Lord Jesus Christ is no stranger to the suffering of death (1 Cor 15:55-57).

There is the question, however, of what happens to people after they die, but before they are resurrected. This is often referred to by theologians as the “intermediate state” (*Zwischenzustand*). Several answers have been given to this question. **First**, there are those who suggest that the soul enters an unconscious state of limbo until the resurrection of the body.⁵⁹ Generally those who argue for “soul sleep,” as it is often referred to, claim that this is the significance of the many references to Christians “falling asleep” in the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-15). But it is highly unlikely that “sleep” is anything more than a metaphor (euphemism)—*viewed from the perspective of grieving Christians who are still alive*—to refer to deceased Christian loved-ones who will one day “awake” to be with Christ (and family and friends) in resurrection life. Thus, the point of the metaphor is not that they are now in an unconscious state, but rather that death is not their final destiny, resurrection life with Christ is (see John 11:11-14)! The metaphor indicates that death is only temporary for the Christian. Further, the story of Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates conscious existence after death, not “sleep” in the way advocates of “soul sleep” often argue.

Second, Roman Catholic theology customarily argues that the souls of believers are not yet completely purified; hence they go to purgatory to experience cleansing and preparation for heaven and God’s presence. Catholics often base this doctrine on elements of church tradition and certain texts, including, but not limited to 2 Maccabees 12:42-45 where Judas Maccabeus is said to have taken up a monetary collection to be sent to Jerusalem as a sin offering; he is thus said to have “made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sins” (NRSV). Other NT passages used to support the doctrine of purgatory include Matthew 5:26; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 3:15, and 2 Timothy 1:18. Even a quick glance at these passages, however, reveals that the doctrine of purgatory cannot be legitimately read out of them. Further, the tenor of

⁵⁷ This does not mean that man was necessarily immortal *vis à vis* his nature, but rather that he could have lived forever through partaking in the tree of life. Disobedience and the entrance of sin, however, made that impossible, that is, without the atonement of Christ.

⁵⁸ See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1170-72.

⁵⁹ Luther taught that the believer was not in purgatory but safely asleep in the arms of Christ until the last day. Generally, however, soul sleep has been associated with such groups as Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

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NT theology and the necessity of present faith in Christ for salvation makes such a claim patently false. The apostles held out hope only for those who personally trusted in Christ in this life.

Third, another view of the intermediate state is “instantaneous resurrection.” In this view, propounded in various ways by F. F. Bruce, W. D. Davies and others, Paul had no room for the intermediate state of disembodied existence, but rather taught in 2 Cor 5 that upon death the Christian immediately receives a resurrection body which is presently hidden in the eternal order. But this interpretation of 2 Cor 5 is dubious at best (cf. 5:9) and the presupposition that man must have a body or he ceases to exist—often associated with a strict monistic anthropology—must be rejected on clear scriptural grounds (as we indicated above).

Fourth, a better view of the intermediate state is that the disembodied souls of believers go to be “with Christ” (2 Cor 5:8-9) and will from there await a resurrection body at his return. The apostle Paul said that the dead in Christ will return with the Lord at the rapture and *then* all will rise (i.e., receive resurrection bodies; 1 Cor 15:22-23; 1 Thess 4:14, 16). Those who die apart from Christ go immediately to hell (Luke 16:23-24) and from there await a resurrection to judgment (John 5:28-29; Matt 25:46).⁶⁰ There seems to be very little indication in scripture that we are given resurrection bodies immediately after death. Rather, the emphasis seems to fall on a future resurrection of believers and unbelievers coordinate with the Lord’s return.

Now, regarding the resurrection, certain questions have emerged. But before we entertain them, let us say first of all, that that believers will most certainly be glorified in resurrected bodies. This is a doctrine clearly taught in scripture and throughout the history of the church (John 5:28-29; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:12-58; 2 Cor 5:1-10).

But some have asked about the nature of the resurrection body. Regarding the first question, some argue that since Paul said that “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50), our bodies will not have corporeality. But there are several weaknesses in this view. First, it is unlikely that by “flesh and blood” Paul means to contrast non-material with material. Rather, as the next phrase in 1 Cor 15:50 indicates, he is contrasting that which is *perishable* (our bodies in their present existence under Adam and sin) with that which is *imperishable* (our glorified *bodies*). Second, it seems fairly clear in scripture that Jesus’ resurrection body was physical (Luke 24:39; John 20:27; 1 Cor 15:49), and since ours is patterned after his, we may expect ours to be physical as well (Phil 3:21). This does not mean that in our resurrected bodies we will have all the limitations we now labor under, but that we will actually have *bodies* (they may be capable, as was the resurrected Jesus, of much more than we can now imagine).

There is also the question of the identity of the person who dies and the person who is resurrected. Some philosophers and theologians, who maintain a monistic view of man, cannot even begin to entertain the idea that a person exists apart from their body, i.e., that there is an immaterial soul. For them, then, there is either no life after death, or in the case of some Christian theologians, God must recreate the person at the resurrection; the point is: disembodied existence is impossible. This raises the question of personal identity and who really gets raised from the dead when a person dies. But while this poses a problem for substance monists and others, scripture speaks quite clearly on the identity of the deceased person and the subsequently resurrected person: *As to identity, he/she is the same person*. Corporeality or physicality is not essential to personhood as the personhood of God himself and angels teach us. Again, despite widespread monism among Christian philosophers and theologians, scripture affirms an anthropology of substance dualism (complex material united intimately with complex immaterial). The soul/person continues after death and as such awaits the resurrection when he/she will receive a glorified body.

There is also the question of the nature of the resurrection body, but we will have to leave that topic until the next update.

⁶⁰ See Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:473-74. On the interpretation of the story of Luke 16 see Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 203-8.

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Corporate Eschatology

The Return of Christ: Areas of General Agreement

It Is Certain, Though Day Unknown

The triumphant hope living through the pages of the New Testament rests on the facts that Christ rose from the dead, ascended to heaven (where he is currently reigning in fulfillment of Davidic promise), and *will certainly someday return*. As the apostles were standing, watching Jesus go into heaven, Luke tells us that two men dressed in white appeared and queried them: “Why are you standing here looking into the sky?” Perhaps the disciples were worshipping and struck with awe or perhaps they thought Jesus might immediately return to be with them. In any case, Jesus continued into heaven, but the men told the disciples that *in the same way* (tropos) that Jesus went into heaven *he* would most certainly return (Acts 1:11). This, of course, was the firm and widespread belief of the early Christians. Paul taught that “the Lord *himself* would come down from heaven...” (1 Thess 4:16) and John mentions it frequently as the hope of the saints in the book of Revelation. In 22:12 Jesus says, “Behold, *I* am coming soon...” and in 22:20 he repeats the same idea. Further, Revelation 22:20 demonstrates that it is and should be the prayer of every Christian’s heart, that is, for Christ to return quickly (see also Phil 4:5; Heb 9:28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 3:2-3).

There are perhaps many reasons for the early church’s strong belief in the personal return of Christ, but none can be more central than that Jesus himself taught the doctrine. In his great Olivet discourse, Christ announced, in keeping with Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man, that he would most certainly return (Matt 24:3; 24:30; John 14:3; Rev 1:7).

Another important aspect that all Evangelical writers agree upon is the fact that the precise date of the second coming is not known and cannot be known. Even Jesus did not know the date of his return; only the Father knows that (Matt 24:36). Therefore, while we can recognize certain signs (which, incidentally, have been occurring since the beginning), we cannot know the hour in which the Son of Man will return. Indeed, “date-setting”—as it has come to be known in certain circles—is an effective distraction, taking our eyes off what we are clearly commanded to be doing in his absence, namely, serving him with wisdom and diligence, in the expectation of his certain return (Matt 24:36-25:30). Such a fascination with nailing down the date comes from hearts who either know Christ very little or not at all; they lead unsuspecting people down theological “rabbit trails” only to find both themselves and their followers ensnared in the end. Many a cult and wayward Christian group are testimony to that truth.

I am not saying that eschatological teaching is unimportant; not at all. I am talking about those who give 88 reasons for the rapture in ‘88. They are misguided and no person (Christian or otherwise) need listen to them. In fact, the teaching of Jesus would suggest we ignore them. Thus, the Bible’s eschatological focus should be ours and we definitely ought not contradict such clear teachings in scripture (e.g., Jesus says he does not know the time of his return) in favor of our deluded attempts to know the inscrutable.

It Will Be Personal, Bodily, and Visible to All

The idea, stemming in part from many liberal circles, that Jesus would return spiritually, as opposed to bodily, is difficult to square with many passages in Scripture and has more to do with certain antsupernatural presuppositions brought to the text. Again, Acts 1:11 is most certainly envisioning a *personal, bodily* return. The fact that “every eye will see him” is given its most natural meaning if Jesus’ return is thought of as bodily (Matt 24:30). Again, Paul said the Lord *himself* will return (1 Thess 4:16).

It Will Be Magnificent

The return of Christ will not be in obscurity and a “stable” in a small town in the land of Judah. While the world was largely ignorant of his first coming (though in John’s view, it too was glorious), they will not be ignorant of his second coming. Jesus warns his disciples not to run after every individual who claims: “Look! Here is the Christ” or “Look! There is the Christ” (Matt 24:23). According to Jesus there is a two-fold reason

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why we should not bother with such idle speculation. First, many false Christs will appear to deceive many. Second, there will be no mistaking his coming. In other words, there will be no need to run here and there claiming “Here he is,” for just as “lightening that flashes in the east is visible as far away as the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt 24:27). Indeed, there will be signs of cosmic proportions associated with his coming (Matt 24:28).⁶¹

He Will Come As Judge and Savior

The twin themes associated with the coming of the Son of Man in the Evangelists’ presentation are the judgment of unbelievers and the salvation/reward of the elect. Thus Jesus is returning initially as both Judge and Savior (Mark 13; Luke 21).⁶²

Jesus says that in the period preceding his coming many will be persecuted and put to death because of him (Matt 24:9-12), but the one who stands firm to the end will be delivered (i.e., “saved”). Thus, after the period of great tribulation—a period which Christ said will be shortened for the sake of the elect (24:22)—he will return and gather his own from the four winds. But, he will also judge his enemies and all those who have despised his coming. These are those of whom it is said: they “mourn” (24:30); they will be “cut to pieces and assigned a place with the wicked” (Matt 24:51); they are “foolish” and banned from the “banquet” (25:3, 10-12); “wicked, lazy servant(s)” and “worthless servant(s)” who will not share in their “master’s happiness,” but instead will be “thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (25:23, 26, 30). The King will separate them as goats and consign them to the eternal fire with the Devil and his angels (25:41). They will receive “eternal punishment” for their sin (25:46).

The righteous, on the other hand, have an entirely different fate in the hands of the sovereign Lord. He is their Deliverer (1 Thess 1:10) and he will—at his coming—gather them from the four winds (24:31), for they have watched for his coming (24:42); they were wise servants who will be entrusted with a great deal more (24:47). They are the wise virgins who were prepared for his arrival and the banquet, and thus they went in (25:10). Again, they gave proper stewardship to their God-given talents and were entrusted with much, much more (25:29). In the end, the righteous will receive their inheritance, i.e., the kingdom that has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world (25:34). They will inherit eternal life (25:46).

The Return of Christ: Areas of Difference among Evangelicals

The “Imminent” Return of Christ

No evangelical denies the scriptural fact that Christ will return bodily at some point in history. But the precise manner in which this will occur and the immediate results of his return have been variously debated. The questions surrounding the manner of his return have arisen in light of two groups of texts, one which talks about an imminent return (i.e., Christ could return *at any moment*)⁶³ and one which appears to teach that certain events must be fulfilled (i.e., occur) *before* Christ could return. Passages such as Matthew 24:42-44 and Luke 12:40 seem to teach that the Lord could come at any moment whereas other passages seem to affirm that before Christ returns the gospel must be preached in all the world (Matt 24:14), the great tribulation must occur (Matt 24:21), the man of lawlessness must appear (2 Thess 2:3) and “all Israel” must be saved (Rom 11:25-32). Others also talk about “signs” that must appear (Matt 24:4-14). In any case, it is these latter passages which seem to indicate that in reality his coming cannot be imminent, for certain signs *must precede* it. Several solutions have been offered to synthesize these data.

⁶¹ This is true whether 24:29 is taken literally, which is quite probable, or metaphorically.

⁶² It appears that Luke has a focus on AD 70 (21:20-24), but it also appears quite reasonable that verses 21:27, 35 are looking to the grand eschaton as well. Thus, what happened in AD 70 could be repeated again, on a much grander scale.

⁶³ We are not saying here that the Bible teaches that he *will return* at any moment. The teaching that claims that Christ will return at any moment is false, not taught in Scripture, and an error that many in Evangelicalism have fallen into.

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Now it has been typical of many liberal theologians—concerned as they are with stressing the ethical and universal aspects of the kingdom of God within societal structures—to solve this tension by simply affirming that both Jesus and Paul were wrong about the second advent. They were trapped in an outmoded and unscientific Jewish apocalypticism and were simply wrong about a bodily return, and therefore incorrect in their claim that *any* so-called return would be imminent.

First, it goes without saying that the worldview of the Biblical writers *is* quite different than the liberal interpreters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The former allows for divine intervention and miracle, whereas the latter has reduced Christianity to a nice (naïve?) ethic and permitted little or no room for the supernatural. In short, because of the modern liberal's commitment to the so-called scientific paradigm he must speak over Scripture at this point in hope of straightening Jesus and Paul out. But, what is left is not Christianity at all, but a powerless religion of some sort. Be that as it may, the bodily return of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture (e.g., Acts 1:11), and so the informed Christian simply regards the liberal to be in error on this point (and many other related points as well) and unhealthily married to the outmoded and untenable worldview of modernism.

We might also note too that the way in which the Biblical writers viewed prophecy is important as well. Just because they use terms such as “soon” (Rev 22:12) and expressions such as “in a little while” (Heb 10:17), in connection with the coming of Christ, does not mean they thought the events were going to come to pass immediately, but only that they viewed the future as an imminent reality. In this way, i.e., through prophetic foreshortening, their message has benefit and application to every generation. In summary, there are better and more scripturally sensitive solutions to this problem than those offered by various strands within Liberalism.

Some evangelical scholars have attempted to resolve the tension in these two groups of texts by claiming that the coming of Christ is not an imminent event, but must be preceded by certain other events. Thus they have given preeminence to texts which stress “delay” and regard the first group of “imminence” texts in this light. For example, Louis Berkhof argues that on certain occasions when Jesus referred to his coming he was referring to “his coming in spiritual power at the Pentecost; sometimes to his coming in judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem.” Berkhof also points out that the parable of the pounds was spoken to correct the notion that the kingdom of God should immediately appear (Luke 19:11) and in many other situations Jesus and Paul argued that there would be a delay before the kingdom would come (Matt 25:5; 2 Thess 2:2). In short, Berkhof argues that all the texts that speak of an imminent return should be read in light of the passages that speak about delay. For him, predictions concerning the “calling of the Gentiles,” the “pleroma of Israel,” “the great apostasy and tribulation,” “the coming revelation of Antichrist,” and all sorts of “signs and wonders” are the locus around which the other texts must be aligned.⁶⁴ The long and short of this method is that the Bible does not teach imminence, but only delay concerning the return of Christ. Not all, however, have agreed with him.

Grudem respectfully disagrees with Berkhof on this point, arguing that Berkhof's solution is too one-sided and suffers from two related problems: (1) it nullifies the warnings to watch and be ready for Christ's coming because it essentially teaches that Christ cannot come at any moment, and (2) it uses the “signs” of Christ's appearing in a way not intended by Scripture, i.e., as indications that his coming is not for a long time. But surely such signs were given to teach us that his coming is *right at the door!*⁶⁵

Some dispensationalists have argued that the reason for the tension is because the first set of passages (i.e., texts which speak of an imminent return) refers to a secret coming of Christ *for* his saints at the rapture, while the second set of passages relate to Christ's second coming *with* the saints to reign on the earth. Thus the rapture of the church is imminent while the second coming—a different event—will be preceded by many signs and follow the rapture by seven years (in many schemes). This view has the strength of allowing both sets of passages to speak clearly with no contradiction. But some have criticized it on the basis that it is hard to derive two comings out of the passages that speak of the Lord's return, and the portrait of the “rapture” in

⁶⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 695-703.

⁶⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1095-1105.

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1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 seems to be anything but secret or private (cf. “a loud command,” “the voice of the archangel,” “the trumpet call of God”).

Another solution is to argue that the imminency passages are not speaking objectively about the timing of his coming, but rather subjectively about our *experience* of his coming. The focus in the warning passages is not on Christ’s return *per se*, but rather on our *experience* of his return. So, even if his return cannot occur until after certain events, there will nonetheless be certain people who are not ready and who will experience his coming as a *thief in the night*. Thus these passages are not saying anything directly about the timing of his return, but only how we should live in light of his return.

This solution obviously stresses a very important element in the passages, viz., our need to be ready for his return, but in the end it must be judged unsatisfactory. Texts arguing for imminency—such as “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7) and “I am coming soon” (Rev 22:12)—are speaking about objective realities and not just our subjective state when he returns.

Another solution argues that all the signs have occurred and Christ could come back at any moment. In this way, the passages which view Christ’s return only after a series of events have taken place are given full credence. This runs into two problems, however. First, the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ—if taught in Scripture (and this view supposes that it is)—was being taught at the same basic time as the doctrine of delay. This means that imminency was not correct until the events were fulfilled; it was incorrect when it was first taught. But this brings the inspiration of Scripture into question. Second, many of the events such as the preaching of the gospel and the great tribulation seem to have not yet been fulfilled yet.

A final view argues that his return can be understood as imminent, if we realize that while it is unlikely, the events preceding his return, i.e., the universal preaching of the gospel, the great tribulation, and conversion of the Jews have already been fulfilled. The strength of this view is that both groups of texts are allowed to speak and it does admit a degree of healthy uncertainty in our interpretation of many of the relevant passages. The admitted weakness in this position is that, as we stated above, it is difficult to imagine that the great tribulation and the kind of Jewish response envisioned in (AD 56-57 when Paul wrote) Romans have occurred.⁶⁶

The Nature and Timing of the Rapture

The Nature of the Rapture

Among those who claim that the Bible teaches a “rapture” of the church, there are differences of opinion regarding its nature. The term “rapture” comes from the Latin term *rapio* meaning “caught up” and is thus an attempt in English to capture the meaning of the Greek term ἀρπάζω (*harpazo*), in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There, the apostle says that saints who are alive at the coming of the Lord “will be suddenly *caught up*” together with saints who have previously died and together they will join the Lord in the air. The precise nature of this “meeting” in the air and the events that follow are questioned by some scholars.

Some argue that the saints, together with the Lord, immediately return to the earth. Among many things, they cite as evidence the technical meaning of the term ἀπανθίσσει (*apante*), “meet” in 1 Thess 4:17. They say that the term was often used in reference to a special delegation going outside the city gates in order to escort an approaching dignitary back into the city. This, they infer, suggests that Christ and his saints will immediately return to earth.⁶⁷ Others, such as most dispensationalists, argue that after the rapture takes place, the church is taken away to heaven where she experiences the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7). These interpreters argue that the technical force of the term *apante* does not obtain in this instance since the saints are not going out to meet the Lord on their own, but are rather “snatched away,” as it were. Further, the technical force of the term, if indeed it is present, does not require

⁶⁶ This is Wayne Grudem’s position in *Systematic Theology*, 1101.

⁶⁷ So, e.g., George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 91. See also Matt 25:6 and Acts 28:15-16.

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that the Lord return immediately to earth, only that he do so at some point. This, they point out, will occur after the seven year tribulation.

So then, the contemporary questions about the nature of the rapture are not so much about what the event itself will be like, subjectively speaking, but rather what will happen immediately after “we meet in the air.” Will we return immediately or will be go to heaven until the end of the Great Tribulation. Obviously, these questions are closely linked with further questions about the timing of the rapture—questions to which we now turn.

The Timing of the Rapture

The purpose of this section is not to argue for one position over another, but simply to present the various positions and comment on them briefly. Each position mounts exegetical and theological support and is held by devout and informed lay people and scholars within evangelicalism. These are not positions which in any way reveal or test a person’s orthodoxy and they should not be viewed as such. Further, the use of a label to identify one group in distinction to another is the bane of summarization and generalization, but which remains helpful as long as readers understand that *within each camp* there are major and minor differences among various proponents and *between camps* there are many other important areas of agreement.

First, there are certain scholars who argue that the rapture will occur *before* the Great Tribulation begins; thus they are referred to as pretribulationists. Dispensational, pretribulationist scholars such as Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie, et al. attempt to demonstrate that while God’s people have always suffered trials and tribulations, there is yet coming on the earth a definite period (7 years) of unparalleled tribulation in fulfillment of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27; Jer 30:7). The church, however, will be raptured *before* this period begins (Rev 3:10) and will then return from heaven with the Lord at his second coming seven years later.

A minor offshoot of the pretribulationist rapture argument is the partial rapture position. In this scheme, proponents argue that only the faithful in Christ will experience the rapture before the Great Tribulation; the rest will be raptured during the Tribulation. So the rapture is viewed more as a reward for the *faithful* than as deliverance for the church, *per se*.

Second, other scholars have argued that the rapture of the church will occur *after* the Great Tribulation; thus they are referred to as posttribulationists. Among the various theologians who advocate this position there is difference of opinion over whether there is a definite period of Great Tribulation (though all admit that the church has been in tribulation since her beginning). J. Barton Payne argued that there would be no definite time of tribulation while George Eldon Ladd argued for a period of three and one-half or 7 years of tribulation before Christ returned. Both were in agreement, however, that the rapture would occur only after tribulation (whether general tribulation or the Great Tribulation).

The third major interpretive position regarding the rapture of the church is the midtribulationist position; those who hold this view are thus referred to as midtribulationists. In this position the rapture will take place *in the middle of* the seven year tribulation before the wrath of God is truly poured out in the last three and one-half years (before the battle of Armageddon). Proponents argue that the events of Matt 24:10-27 and other tribulationist events predicted in Daniel 7:25, the Olivet discourse, and Revelation 12:14 are best synthesized in this understanding.⁶⁸

The Nature of the Millennium

1. Postmillennialism

⁶⁸ Some fine resources to consult for a better understanding of this topic include R. G. Clouse, “Rapture of the Church,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 908-10; *Three Views of the Rapture; Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulationist?* Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 369-442.

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Postmillennialism is the doctrine which affirms that through the work of the Spirit in Christian preaching and teaching in the present time of the church (before the second advent) the world at large will eventually be evangelized and won to Christ. This will turn out in a world characterized by universal peace instead of strife, universal prosperity instead of inequality, godliness instead of evil, and so on, though the time period may be more or less than a thousand years (since, according to some postmill interpreters, the 1000 years of Revelation 20:4-7 can be taken symbolically for an indefinite period of time) and evil will still be present to some limited degree. Thus there is a focus in postmillennarian thought on the present aspects of the kingdom of God with the result that through Christian influence many economic, educational and social ills will be resolved. Kenneth L. Gentry summarizes the postmillennial position well:

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Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with a general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind.⁶⁹

Postmillennialism (or postmillennial kind of statements) in one form or another, it is argued, can be found as early as Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-340) and Origen.⁷⁰ Postmillennial thought also gained ascendancy in the thinking of certain early Reformers such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and later in Puritans such as John Owen (1616-1683), Isaac Watts (1674-1748), and in that brilliant mind Jonathon Edwards (1703-1758). A. H. Strong (1836-1921), president of Rochester Theological Seminary (1872-1912) was also an able American exponent of a postmillennial reading of scripture.

In my opinion there are many good and helpful emphases in postmillennial thought. First, theologically speaking, there is a stress in much postmillennial thought on God's sovereign power (to bring about his ends), provision (Christ's presence, the Spirit, the gospel), and purpose in the world. This is good and commendable (and to be found in varying degrees in other eschatological systems of thought as well). Second, though it has been questioned in the past, there is, among most postmillennialists, a genuine desire to read postmillennial doctrine out of scripture rather than into it.⁷¹ The authority of Christ to commission the church to take the gospel to the end of the earth (Matt 28:16-20), the gradual growth of the kingdom as evidenced in Christ's parables (e.g., mustard seed and leaven), and the growth of the church in spite of severe opposition all seem to testify to a postmillennial understanding of scripture.

But there are weaknesses with this view. Indeed, so great are the problems that it is difficult to maintain a postmillennial reading of Scripture. The most damaging criticism offered by opponents, is the fact that the system as a whole is not able to come to grips with *all* of scriptural teaching regarding the *eschaton* and none of its exegetical points seem to lead explicitly to postmillennialism. I, for one, could not find a single exegetical argument in Gentry's exposition of postmillennialism that was specific enough to establish postmillennialism as opposed to pre- or a-millennialism. Further, the passages that are often used to argue for postmillennialism, some of which Gentry uses, can be easily and more profitably read in another light.⁷² Again, the system's inability to deal with certain important texts (and themes) which characterize the age of the church as one of suffering and which also demonstrate that the church's hope is not in an age of righteousness coming apart from the literal presence of Christ, raises serious doubts about the correctness of

⁶⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry, "Postmillennialism," *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 13-14. Gentry holds to a theonomic postmillennialism.

⁷⁰ Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 15. He cites the work of Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Vol. 2: Life, Ministry, and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 192 and Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. n.d. [1910]), 2:591, cf. 122.

⁷¹ Robert Gentry's work cited above is just such an example of this.

⁷² See Craig L. Blasing, "A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 76-80; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1122-27.

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the view as a whole.⁷³ Further, as Blaising rightly implies, since the church has come 2000 years and still sees no evidence of a postmillennial movement in history, one has cause to wonder about this interpretation of Scripture.⁷⁴

2. Historic Premillennialism

Modern Premillennial theologians strongly disagree with their postmillennial brothers and sisters over the issue of the millennium, what it will look like, and how it will come about. For them, the idea that the church will bring a golden age of righteousness and peace through its Spirit-inspired preaching is scripturally unfounded. According to the premillennialists this will only happen in connection with the second coming of Christ, when the King is visibly and bodily present. To this extent they would also disagree with amillennial interpreters.

But this does not mean that historic premillennialism does not see any of the kingdom existing in the present fulfillment of God's purposes through Christ in the church. It does. But, again, this is not to be equated with the millennial kingdom when Christ will reign personally and bodily on the earth.

Many premillennialists have a special place for the Jewish people in the eschaton, based in several cases on passages like Romans 9-11 where it seems, especially in 11:25-32, that Jewish people will be saved in large numbers at that time. Dispensational premillennialists argue for a much more pronounced role for national (not just ethnic) Israel in the end (see below).

Premillennial readings of scripture stem back to the early church which was for the first three centuries largely premillennial. Christian leaders such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus⁷⁵ were premillennialists, believing that a golden age of blessing and the renewal of Jerusalem would occur at the second coming. But the Alexandrian school, led by such men as Clement and Origen, were opposed to such Jewish, materialistic views of the future. Also, under the weight of Augustine's amillennialism, premillennialism was increasingly abandoned throughout the medieval period and was in short supply throughout the Reformation, and the post-Enlightenment periods of the church. It was really not until the nineteenth century that premillennialism began to make a comeback, especially within British and American expressions of Christianity.

A key passage for all premillennialists is Revelation 20:4-6. They argue that it teaches a literal reign of Christ upon the earth, though not all are in agreement that it must be exactly one-thousand years. Detractors have pointed out that premillennialists have only this one passage upon which to base their system, but this is simply misleading (e.g., 1 Cor 15:22-24).⁷⁶ However, even if there were only one passage correctly interpreted, this should be enough for any of us to believe the doctrine.⁷⁷

One of the key points in the interpretation of the passage involves the repeated use of the verb "live" (e[zhsan] in 20:4, 5. Amillennialists generally argue that the first resurrection (20:4) is spiritual and the second is physical (20:5). But it is difficult to see how the two uses of the term in the same context, without any apparent contrary indication, can mean two different things. Further, a less strained reading of Revelation 20:4-6 suggests that physical resurrection is in view in v. 4 and therefore also in v. 5 (and the aorist is ingressive, i.e., "came to life"). To see both uses of e[zhsan] as referring to "spiritual resurrections" seems to beg the

⁷³ See Robert Strimple, "An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 63-66.

⁷⁴ Blaising, "Premillennial Response," 75.

⁷⁵ See Berkhov, *Systematic Theology*, 709, for a discussion of Irenaeus' eschatological views.

⁷⁶ See Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, eds. *The Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody, 1992).

⁷⁷ I realize that some will undoubtedly say that I have blunted the force of their argument; they would argue that if only one passage teaches a doctrine, we might want to rethink whether even that passage teaches it! This point is well taken, but the problem remains, that no consistent and plain reading of Rev 20:4-6 has been advanced by amillennialists or postmillennialists to the contrary, though there have been many good and ardent attempts.

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question. These are not the souls of the dead reigning with Christ in heaven, but dead saints physically resurrected to reign with him on the earth (see Rev 5:10).

3. Dispensational Premillennialism

In terms of eschatology, Dispensational premillennialism differs from historic premillennialism primarily in its insistence that Israel *as a nation* will be regathered at the end times, converted, and the land promises made with her fulfilled in the millennial kingdom (e.g., Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-21). Thus, the point is not that many Jews will be saved in the end, but that the *nation of Israel* will exist and will inherit the promises made to national Israel in the Old Testament.

Previous forms of dispensationalism made these kinds of distinctions in keeping with the insistence that God had two peoples: the church was his heavenly people and Israel was his earthly people. This tenant cannot be maintained in light of NT evidence to the contrary (cf. Eph 2:11-22); there is only one people of God. But, some progressive dispensationalists have argued that this does not mean that the nation of Israel cannot be regarded as “in Christ” (in some eschatological future) and still a political entity. It seems that even in the eternal state “nations” will be understood to be nations (Rev 21:24). So then, within an overarching soteriological equality and unity joining the people of God, there remains the possibility of structural differences (not inequalities in any sense of access to God) in the millennium. It is not unreasonable, then, that God should deal with Israel in this way and such an interpretation appears to reflect a reasonable reading of OT texts as well as NT passages such as Romans 9-11, especially 11:25-32.

4. Amillennialism

Generally speaking, the term “amillennial” refers to the conviction, held by many godly and informed Christian scholars down through the ages, that there will be no future, earthly millennial period after Christ’s return. This, however, is to view the system from a purely negative point of view. Positively stated, amillennialism believes that the church is the expression of the millennial reign of Christ now, where “millennial” is understood to refer not to a literal thousand year period—though some reformers understood it this way⁷⁸—but to the reign of Christ as experienced between his exaltation and parousia. This reign is over the new people of God, the church, which replaces Israel in the outworking of God’s eternal plan.

The amillennial scheme of end time events is really quite simple and straightforward. Lewis and Demarest summarize it well:

The amillennial order of events is: Christ’s present, spiritual reign over the church; increasing apostasy on earth; the Great Tribulation; Christ’s second coming with deceased saints; the destruction of evil powers; the general resurrection of believers and unbelievers; the Last Judgment; and the eternal state. Amillennialism thus affirms that at the end of the age there will be one return of Christ, one resurrection and one judgment.⁷⁹

Thus it (i.e., in its varied forms) has simplicity as a commendable feature and has been held down through the ages but such notable theologians as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and present day thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper, Hermann Bavinck, and Louis Berkhof.

Amillennialists give several reasons to support their eschatological views. First—and these are in no particular order—there is apparently only one passage in all of the Bible that can possibly be adduced to demonstrate an earthly thousand year reign of Christ, i.e., Revelation 20. No other text in the Old Testament or New Testament affirms such an idea, so it is best not to understand Revelation 20:4-6 in this way. Second, the entire book of Revelation is symbolic and we ought not, therefore, regard the “thousand years” in Revelation 20 as referring to literal years. Third, the binding of Satan referred to in Revelation 20 is consistent with what Jesus said would happen during the period of the church (e.g., Luke 10:18) so there is no need to place this in the eschatological future. Fourth, the “first resurrection” in Revelation 20:4-5 is not literal, but

⁷⁸ But they saw the thousand year period as having already been completed before their time and the rise of the papacy as a sure sign of the end.

⁷⁹ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 372.

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a spiritual resurrection into the presence of God in heaven. Besides, scripture teaches only one literal resurrection (e.g., John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), not three or more as advanced by many premillennialists. Fifth, against many premillennialists, amillennialists generally affirm that there is no place for Israel in the future. The church has replaced her in God's plan.

Several things can be said in response to these arguments. First, even if Revelation 20 were the only passage in the Bible that taught an earthly, thousand year reign of Christ, that should be enough to convince us. The Bible need only affirm a doctrine in one place, so that when properly understood, it should be regarded as authoritative. Further, there are many OT passages that can be better viewed as referring to an earthly reign of Messiah before the eternal state rather than as a reference to his eternal reign in heaven (Isa 11:2-9; 65:20; Zech 14:6-21). There are also other New Testament passages that can be reasonably read in this light (1 Cor 15:24; Rev 2:27; 5:10; 12:5; 19:15).

Second, it is true that the genre of Revelation is apocalyptic—though this is not the only form of literature in the book—and contains much symbolism. But this fact does not preclude an earthly kingdom in Revelation 20 and a straightforward reading of this text. Though genre is always an indispensable tool for interpreting, informed opinion on all sides of this debate demonstrates that appeals to genre are inconclusive. What is more important in this case is the immediate context and the actual words that are used in Revelation 20:4-6. And, it is here, that the premillennial position is simpler, less strained and therefore more probable.

The context describes, albeit in apocalyptic language, several important historical facts. The description of Christ's bodily return and the destruction of the beast and false prophet are historical descriptions of future events. Thus, the context describes what will occur in history at Christ's return.

Is the binding of Satan literal? Actually, many amillennialists argue that it is, but that it happened at the first advent with Messiah's ministry.⁸⁰ Appeal is often made to texts such as Matthew 12:28-29 and Luke 10:18 and correspondences are forged between Rev 20 and these gospel passages. But it can be reasonably asked whether these texts should be regarded as referring to the same event. It has been debated, but a straightforward reading of the context of Revelation 20 would argue that what happens in Revelation 20 follows *chronologically* what happened in Revelation 19, i.e., the return of Christ. Therefore, if this is true, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 cannot be the same event as that referred to in the gospels during the earthly reign of the messiah.

But there are other more cogent arguments to demonstrate that the binding in the gospels is not the same as that in Revelation. First, it is said in Revelation 20:1 that an angel did the binding, not Christ himself. Thus the portrait in the gospels is quite different, too disparate it would seem to be the same. Second, the purpose for Satan being bound in Revelation 20 is so that he will not "deceive the nations anymore." But in what sense are we to understand this if it is the same as the binding that took place in the ministry of Christ and now occurs through the ministry of the church? According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 6:10-18, and 1 John 4:4, Satan is quite free to roam and tempt whom he wills (cf. also 1 Pet 5:8). But the binding in Revelation is much more absolute than the gospels or epistles will grant. So it is more reasonable to conclude that Matthew 12 and Luke 10 do not refer to the same event as Revelation 20:2-3. This does not mean they are not related, however. The earlier and "inaugural" binding during Christ's ministry and the church age anticipates the later binding in Revelation 20:2-3, which itself sets the stage for Satan's final overthrow and destruction in Revelation 20:10. This is all in keeping with the progressive realization of God's kingdom on earth.

We must also reiterate what we said above regarding typical amillennial exegesis of the "resurrections" in Revelation 20:4-5. Amillennialists generally argue that the first resurrection (20:4) is spiritual and the second is physical (20:5). One of the reasons they do this is to avoid bracketing the 1000 period off with two bodily resurrections (which would seem to point to an earthly reign after the return of Christ). But it is difficult to see how the two uses of the term in the same context, without any apparent contrary indication, can mean two different things. Further, a less strained reading of Revelation 20:4-6 suggests that physical resurrection is in view in v. 4 and therefore also in v. 5 (and the aorist is ingressive, i.e., "came to life"). Again, these are

⁸⁰ No one argues that Satan will literally be bound with a *chain*, as if he were corporeal, but what scholars mean is that Satan will be prevented from tempting people for a period of time.

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not the souls of the dead reigning with Christ in heaven, but dead saints physically resurrected to reign with him on the earth (see the promise in Rev 5:10).

Third, the idea that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan has certain merit, but, as we implied above, needs refinement in light of Romans 11:25-32. The church presently participates in Abrahamic and therefore Davidic and New covenant blessings, as amillennialists affirm, but she has not utterly eclipsed God's promises made to the nation of Israel or at least ethnic Jews. In Romans 11:26 it is not likely that "all Israel" refers to the elect number of Gentiles and/or Jews during the church age, but refers to an eschatological ingathering of Jews coordinate with Messiah's return and reign. If this is so, then an earthly millennium—the sort envisioned in premillennial thinking—may well be the time and place for the fulfillment of Israel's OT hope (a hope, I might add, that also involves all nations).

So where is the strength of amillennialism's replacement theology? It is ultimately in the Biblical recognition that there is only one people of God for all time with a soteriological equality binding them together. But it has an inherent weakness in that it does not recognize structural (political) differences present in eschatological texts. Indeed, at face value, nations are still regarded as nations in certain texts referring to the eternal state (cf. 21:24).⁸¹ Romans 11:25-32 does speak of a future restoration of Jews (probably national Israel) as Jews. Of course, they will not be saved apart from faith in Christ, but the salvation of "all Israel" will represent God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises to the nation, which promises are taken up with earthly, political and spiritual realities.

Resurrection, Judgment, and The Eternal State

The Resurrection of All People

The Bible teaches that there will be a resurrection of all people and that all will be judged (John 5:28-29).

The Final Judgment of All People

Though some liberal theologians have often denied the fact, it is quite certain that the Bible teaches a final judgment, after which individuals will go to their allotted destinies, i.e., heaven and eternal bliss or hell and eternal punishment. Biblically speaking, this "day of judgment" is most certain and will be the culmination and fulfillment of numerous judgments of God against sin and evil throughout history.

Examples of God's judgment against wickedness and his rewarding of righteousness abound in the Old Testament. He judged man for his sin in the Garden (Gen 3) and he later judged him in the Flood, though he rewarded Noah's faith and righteous behavior (Gen 6:8-9). He judged Abimelech (Gen 20), Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod 7-11), the Amorites and those living in Canaan at the time of Israel's conquest (Gen 15:16; Joshua 10-12) as well as unbelievers among the Israelites (Joshua 7). The Lord judged king Saul and rejected him as king over Israel (15:26). He also judged David for his sin with Bathsheba; David's son died (2 Sam 11-12; cf. 12:18) and his kingdom fell into turmoil (2 Sam 13-20). God repeatedly judged the nation of Israel for their sin (e.g., Judges) and threatened to send both the northern and southern kingdoms into captivity. This eventually occurred in 722 BCE (Israel in the north) and 586 BCE (Judah in the south; Lamentations). He also judges the nations of the earth for their continuous sin and rebellion (Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Dan 2-7). Though his ways in judgment are not always easy to discern or accept (Hab 1-3), he is nonetheless the just judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25).

In the New Testament, Paul makes it clear that God still judges today. In Romans 1:18—a verse that heads up a rather long section on God's judgment in 1:18-3:20—the apostle says:

⁸¹ It is possible to regard "nations" and "kings" in Revelation 21:24 as metaphorical descriptions, but no good reason seems to present itself for doing so. And if they are, are they simply representations of the regal aspects of the eternal state? If so, why the reference to "nations"?

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For⁸² the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness...

Notice that Paul does not say that the wrath of God “was revealed,” but rather “is revealed” or “is being revealed.” The **wrath of God** (ojrghV qeou`, orge,, theou) refers not to some irrational passion within the Godhead, but to his settled hatred for sin expressed or continually **revealed** (ajpokaluvptetai, apokalu,ptetai; cf. 1:17) in his giving people over to debilitating entrenchment in their sinful folly (vv. 24, 26, 28).⁸³

People and nations today continually suppress the knowledge of God, deliberately turning from knowledge of the true God to idolatry (the worship of money, sex, power in its various forms, etc.). As a result, just as the Israelites demanded that God give them a king, so people today demand that they be left to their own devices; they demand autonomy. Therefore God gives them over to their sin (cf. 1:24, 26, 28; Eph 4:17-19). The fallout involves escalating wickedness, sorrow, grief, pain, and misery. Man is by nature as incurably religious as he is morally and spiritually foolish.

2 Peter 2:9 also talks about God’s present, ongoing punishment of certain people: “if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, **while continuing their punishment.**”

So God has been and continues to judge individuals and nations for their sin. He does it retributively as well as therapeutically (i.e., so that people might “wake up” and turn from their sin). But all these judgments will find their culmination and vindication at the final judgment. There will come a day when God will finally judge all men (and angels) and in the process all sin will finally be condemned and all God’s acts of judgment will be shown to have been necessary, just, and holy. At that time every mouth will be silenced (Rom 3:20) and every knee will bow (Phil 2:9-11). Again, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that there is coming a “day” when there will be a final judgment.

In Matthew 25:32-33 our Lord compared the final judgment to the separation of sheep and goats. The sheep will go into eternal life and the goats will go into eternal punishment (25:46). The point is, there will come a day when there will be an irreversible and final reckoning. This is often referred to variously as “the day of the Lord” (Isa 13:6, 9; Jer 46:10; Joel 3:1 Eng; Amos 5:18-20) or in light of NT revelation, “the last day” (John 6:39), “the day of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16) or “the day of God’s righteous wrath” (Rom 2:5) and “the day of God’s visitation” (1 Peter 2:12; cf. 2 Pet 3:12; 1 John 4:17). To be sure, that “day” does include vindication and reward for God’s people, but it involves only judgment and loss for the world apart from Christ.⁸⁴

Again, Romans 2:5 speaks to this final day of judgment: “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for **the day of God’s wrath**, when his righteous

⁸² With the introductory word “for” Paul tightly connects 1:18-32 (and 1:18-3:20) with 1:17: The section 1:18-3:20 will demonstrate the truth of 1:17, namely, that all men need the righteousness of God and that they can only obtain it through faith not works.

⁸³ There is no reason, however, to necessarily assume that the “giving over” is permanent. There is ample biblical evidence to suggest that often times the goal of God’s wrath is therapeutic (cf. Judges). In other words, God gives people over so that they will experience the ruin of their sin and call out to him for salvation. In the Gospels, it often seems that those who lived the worst kind of lives were the first to come to Christ (cf. John 4), while those who appeared to live moral lives were not interested in his offer of salvation.

⁸⁴ On the basis of certain elements in Matthew 25:31-46 some scholars (e.g., Karl Rahner) have argued for a so-called “anonymous Christian,” i.e., someone who while disavowing Christianity does good works and is therefore possibly an unconscious Christian. Not only can this doctrine not be read out of Matthew 25, it also throws the rest of related biblical doctrine into confusion. The “stranger” of v. 35 is not Christ as a stranger to the person doing the good deeds, but rather another person, “a brother of Christ,” who happens to be unknown to the one feeding, clothing, and taking him in. In short, “the righteous” (v. 37) know Christ, but not necessarily that they had been directly serving him by serving strangers. It is only after the King has revealed this to them that they realize it to be true (vv. 37-40).

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judgment will be revealed.” 2 Peter 2:9 says that God is holding the unrighteous for *the day of judgment*. Jude 6 speaks rather vividly about God’s final act of judging: “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment *on the great Day*.”

Acts 17:31 also speaks about the final *day* of God’s judgment:

For he has set a *day* (hJmevra, he,,mera) when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Perhaps the passage that speaks most clearly to the certainty of final and irrevocable judgment is Revelation 20:11-15:

20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **20:12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. **20:13** The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. **20:14** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. **20:15** If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There are many indications that John is speaking about the final judgment in Revelation 20:11-15: (1) it occurs after the second coming of Christ (19:11-21), the completion of the millennial kingdom and the final judgment of Satan (Rev 20:1-10); (2) no further judgments are mentioned in Revelation before the final state begins (21-22); (3) the vision as a whole is predicated on Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days who comes to judge every human being at the end of history (Dan 7:14); (4) John refers to a great white throne which suggests not only a *just* judgment, but also a *climactic* or *final* reckoning; (5) the outcome of the judgment involves *eternal consequences*; thus no further judgment is necessary (20:10, 15); (6) earth and sky have fled suggesting the end of human history as we know it under Adam and sin; and (7) all the dead will be there, both great and small.

Though virtually every evangelical commentator on scripture agrees with the doctrine of a final judgment, some would argue that it actually involves three different judgments: (1) a judgment of believers after the rapture (i.e., the judgment seat of Christ; 2 Cor 5:10); (2) a judgment of the nations at the second coming to determine who will enter the millennium (cf. Matt 25:31-46); and (3) a judgment of all the wicked dead at the Great White Throne judgment after the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:11-15). Others would argue that all these judgments are really just one judgment, i.e., they all take place at the Great White throne judgment. We do not have space to develop the differences and the strengths and weaknesses of each view, but what is more important than whether the “final judgment” is at one time or spread out over three times is that (1) *all* men will most certainly be judged; (2) the outcome cannot be changed; there is no further appeal.

But there is more to the final judgment than just its facticity. First, although it is obvious that God will be the judge, within the councils of the trinity, the Father has determined to give all judgment to the Son (John 5:22-23, 27; Acts 17:31). Jesus Christ, Daniel’s Son of Man, will be the judge of *all* humanity, including the living and the dead (Matt 25:31-33; John 8:26, 50 [the Father is the judge]; John 9:39; 12:47-50; 2 Tim 4:1, 8). Further, the Son will judge wisely and justly (2 Tim 4:8).

Second, both men and angels will be judged (Acts 17:31; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), but there is an interesting twist to this idea; saints will also be involved in carrying out judgment (1 Cor 6:2-3) The idea that God will use his redeemed people in the execution of judgment has antecedents in the Synoptic tradition (Matt 19:28; Luke 12:29-32; 16:25) and may ultimately go back to the Old Testament where we see God using certain individuals to judge his people (cf. Judges) and the Israelite nation as a whole to judge other nations (e.g., the conquests in Joshua).

The fact that God has used his people to judge other people in the past and will do so again at the future, final judgment, may be connected to man’s charge to rule in light of the *imago dei* (Gen 1:26-28; 9:6-7; Psalm

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8:4-6). If this is so, it is understandable that glorified Christians, as those who have been completely restored in God's image, will judge angels and people *in the final judgment*. Thus, the saints will judge angels and people in the final judgment because this is a function of the restored image. In another way of speaking, believers will judge the living and the dead because of their inseparable connection to Christ the Judge, their personal share in his kingdom with its power and authority (cf. Rev 5:10), and the fact that they love what He loves and hate what he hates. In an important sense, and to an important degree, we will be just like him in our glorified states and will know his mind on these issues in a way only faintly grasped now (cf. 1 Cor 2:15-16).

Third, we said that all men will be judged. Therefore, Christians will be judged as well. Paul, speaking of believers in Romans 14:10, 12, says that "we will all stand before God's judgment seat" and "each of us will give an account of himself to God." He says basically the same thing in 2 Cor 5:10 although this time he refers to the judgment seat *of Christ*:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The judgment of Christians, however, seems to contradict Paul's teaching about justification by faith. If we are justified, why then are we judged? It seems that the idea of justification precludes entering into judgment. After all, didn't Paul say, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1)? But the problem is not as insurmountable as first appears. It is true that the doctrine of justification includes both the idea of eternal forgiveness as well as the eternal possession of the righteousness of Christ. But Christ's judgment of the believer is not to determine eternal destiny, *per se*, but to determine degree of reward. Though some evangelicals have spurned the doctrine of rewards for believers it seems fairly certain that the Bible does indeed teach it:

1 Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. **3:11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. **3:12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—**3:13** the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. **3:14** If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder *will receive a reward*. **3:15** If the work is burned up, the builder *will suffer loss*; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Again, Jesus talks about reward for faithful service (Luke 19:11-27) and Paul talks about receiving what is due *according to our deeds* (2 Cor 5:10). Again, the point about *degree of reward* seems to be clearly taught in Colossians 3:23-25:

3:23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, **3:24** since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance *as your reward* (antapovdosin, antapodosin); you serve the Lord Christ. **3:25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no favoritism.

Thus, according to these texts Christians will be judged to determine their degree of reward or the measure of their inheritance (e.g., ten cities, five cities, etc.[Luke 19:16-19]). This does not mean that throughout eternity men will suffer pangs of conscience for what they should have done with the grace of God given them while on earth. In the eternal state there will be neither death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4) and each man who enters, enters into the joy of his master (Matt 25:21, 23).

Therefore, the problem with the doctrine of rewards is not that the scripture does not teach it.⁸⁵ The problem involves coming up with a model that satisfactorily integrates ideas of justification, reward, and the absence

⁸⁵ Some writers have tried to deny this, but in my judgment have clearly failed. See, for example, Craig Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *JETS* 35 (June 1992): 159-72. Blomberg does a good job of raising the ethical issues involved in the idea of rewards, but he is quite unconvincing in his treatment of several important texts, especially 1 Cor 3:12-15.

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of shame/presence of joy in the eternal state (though many will experience shame at Christ's second coming [1 John 2:28]). This is a similar kind of struggle we face with other clearly biblical doctrines, e.g., the trinity, the incarnation, the imputation of sin, the concursive inspiration of scripture, etc. Some have suggested that the degree of reward is known only to God and the person who receives it. Perhaps it involves nearness to God and/or greater roles of service in the eternal state. But the bottom line is that we will each be rewarded for our service, though we know very little about the precise nature of these rewards. Finally, the idea of judgment is actually consistent with the doctrine of justification, since one aspect of justification is vindication and the final judgment of the Christian will vindicate God's righteousness in their lives (cf. James 2:21).

Nonetheless, rewards are a source of motivation to holiness and godly living. This, of course, is the way in which they are used throughout Scripture (Luke 19:11-27; Rom 14:10, 12; 2 Cor 5:10). They are not the only source of motivation for the Christian (cf. 2 Cor 7:1; 1 John 3:2-3; 4:11), however, nor does motivation for reward necessarily entail selfishness, as some suppose. They are one of several means of grace the Lord uses to sanctify us and move us along in the Christian life (cf. Rev 22:12).

The Doctrine of Hell

Arguments for Universalism

There are a number of different views regarding the fate of the finally impenitent.⁸⁶ *Universalists* argue, in one form or another, that all men and angels, including the devil, will some day be brought back to God as personal recipients of his eternal love. Many universalists argue there will be no punishment at all, while others argue that some really obdurate sinners will experience some suffering until they come to their senses and respond to God's love (cf. Origen). Thus, in the *apokatastasis* ("restoration," cf. Acts 3:21) of all things, all sentient beings will be restored to God. There are a number of passages in scripture that appear to suggest universalism. Some include: Rom 5:18; 11:32; 1 Cor 15:22; Phil 2:10-11; Col 1:19-20; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 2:9.

Three important and valid hermeneutical considerations must be mentioned at this point. First, any system of theology that rests primarily and almost exclusively on one attribute of God—as many universalists do in their reliance upon their understanding of God's love⁸⁷—is going to misinterpret God's overall revelation to us in scripture; it is inevitable. Many universalists seem to neglect the countless texts in scripture that speak about God's utter holiness, hatred for sin, and *eternal* judgment. But others, who recognize the significance of these texts in scripture, tend to either completely eclipse their meaning in favor of a sentimental view of God's love (primarily from a modernized reading of Jesus' ministry and teaching) or they severely restrict their meaning by relating it only to the present age, not the future. It is true that we all come to scripture, bringing along with us our presuppositions and preunderstandings. But it is not true that we all allow our presuppositions to influence us to the same degree. In many universalist interpretations of Scripture, it seems that *a priori* concerns have reached the level of *agenda* to the point of smothering texts which contradict such agendas.⁸⁸

Second, any text cited to substantiate any one particular doctrine must be read in a way consistent with its immediate linguistic and historical setting, as well as its broader biblical context. For example, Col 1:19-20 and Phil 2:10-11 actually refer to the subjugation of all things to Christ, not that every person will be saved (cf. 2 Thess 1:8-9). The two ideas are related, but they are not the same thing. In terms of 1 Tim 4:10, the fact that Christ is the only savior of all men does not mean that all will be saved, for some may determine not to accept his offer of salvation. Most universalists want to protect the freedom of the human will, but if

⁸⁶ In this section we will deal with the Biblical doctrine of hell including the universalist position as well as two conservative positions, namely, conditional immortality and traditionalism. We will not discuss the Catholic concept(s) of purgatory.

⁸⁷ It may be reasonably inquired, however, if they have even understood this properly from scripture, for they often speak of God's love as if it were an impersonal force, indiscriminately overtaking its objects, regardless of human freedom. As far as this is the case, their view is certainly unscriptural.

⁸⁸ See N. F. S. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper, 1951), 228-29.

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they're going to do this, they must accept the likely consequences that some will be lost. Also, Heb 2:9 states that Christ tasted death for all men, but the relevant question is, will all therefore necessarily accept this? According to Hebrews 10:26-31, apparently not! Again, the love of God is not a bulldozer that disregards human decisions and indiscriminately piles people up on the side of His grace. The fact that many do not ultimately or ever accept his love is repeatedly and clearly taught in scripture and it is simply wishful thinking, not to mention an irresponsible, handling of scripture, to argue otherwise; Jesus' discussion of hell as eternal should settle the issue for all concerned Christians (Matt 25:46).

Texts like Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 require a closer look. Romans 5:18 says:

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for *all* men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all* men.

It is often argued that if the first "all" means literally *all* men without exception, then certainly the parallelism between the two clauses here would require that the second "all" mean *all* men without exception, i.e., every human being that has ever lived. Therefore, it would seem that Paul is espousing universalism in 5:12-21 when he compares the universal effects of Adam's sin with the effects of Christ's righteous act? To argue for universalism in this text, however, is to neglect other key Pauline texts (2 Thess 1:8-9), including the previous verse in Romans 5:17. This passage plainly states that justification/salvation is for "those who receive" the abundant provision of grace. It is sufficient for all men, but only those who receive it by faith, reign in life! Paul has simply chosen the expression "all people" so as to keep the parallel between Adam and Christ going throughout the passage. Also, universalism requires the questionable premise that Paul is arguing in 5:15-19 that the group in Adam has now become the group in Christ. But this is certainly not his point. He is arguing, rather, that in the same way as Adam *directly* affects all those connected to him (i.e., all humanity), so also Christ *directly* affects *all those connected to him* (i.e., all those who receive his grace).

1 Cor 15:22 is another text which on the surface appears to support universalism. Before we look at it, however, it must be noted that as far as supporting universalism goes, it suffers from the same fate as Rom 5:18. That is, it was written by Paul and, therefore, has to be legitimately reconciled with texts like 2 Thess 1:8-9, which cannot on any sensitive hermeneutic be forced to allow universalism.

That being said, the text of 1 Corinthians is as follows:

For as in Adam *all* die, so in Christ *all* will be made alive.

We note two things about this passage and its context. First, though the passage does say "all will be made alive," it says so *only to those who are "in Christ."* That is, *all* who are in Christ, both those who are living (v. 17) and those who are now dead (v. 18) will be resurrected, i.e., have hope for the next life (v. 20). Second, to further substantiate that "in Christ" delimits the "all," we see that Paul's entire argument in 15:1-34 is really about the certainty of Christ's resurrection taken *in light of its benefits for those who have faith in him.* He makes this clear when in vv. 17-19 he refers to the faith of the Corinthians and their future hope in Christ. Paul is not holding out a universalistic hope here, but rather the hope proper to those who trust in God concerning the preaching about the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:1).

Third, there are many texts which speak of judgment and hell as being eternal.⁸⁹ In Matthew 25:46, it is quite clear that hell will be eternal.⁹⁰ Every other argument for the doctrine of universalism falls in light of this and similar texts (2 Thess 1:8-9; Rev 14:10-11; 20:10-15).

Two Views Current within Evangelicalism

At the present time, two primary views regarding the nature of the punishment of hell are being advanced within Evangelicalism, that is, among those who have a very high regard for scripture and the necessity of personal faith and the new birth. The first view is called "conditional immortality" or "annihilationism,"

⁸⁹ We will treat the issue of whether this involves eternal annihilation or eternal conscious punishment below. Suffice it to say here that these texts prohibit a universalist understanding of scripture.

⁹⁰ We will take up the issue of the nature of hell and eternal punishment below.

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though strictly speaking, the two are not precisely the same (as we outline below). The second view is often referred to as the “traditional” view.

Several things are important to note in this discussion. First, this is not, as some have erroneously argued, a debate directly related to inerrancy.⁹¹ The best evangelical theologians on both sides of this issue are committed to the Bible as God’s inspired and trustworthy Word. It is rather a question about the best exegesis of that Word and the resultant theology. Second, this debate is not about whether the wicked will be judged or not. Both sides agree that this will be the case. The debate is about the *nature* of that judgment. Conditionalists argue that the *conscious suffering* component is *temporary* and that God’s judgment will ultimately result in the *non-being* of the wicked. Traditionalists argue that *conscious suffering* component of God’s judgment is *never-ending* and *at no point* will the wicked cease to exist.⁹² Third, inflammatory rhetoric has no place in this debate, nor in any debate for that matter, for it only serves to alienate and to distort and retard understanding of others’ views. This does not mean, however, that a person cannot roundly criticize another’s views, but this should be done with Christian civility and *with the goal of furthering all God’s people in the truth on this or any issue*. Fourth, let us take to heart that this is a discussion about hell and the awful judgment to come upon those apart from Christ, i.e., upon many whom we know and love. As Stott has reminded us, let us mourn with Jeremiah and weep with Paul over the ultimate destiny of those who refuse to know and love Christ.⁹³ This is a very sobering doctrine, no matter what side of the issue one comes down on.

Before we discuss the relative merits of conditional immortality and the traditional view, let’s take a minute to clearly distinguish conditional immortality from other annihilationist perspectives.

⁹¹ For example, John Walvoord, “Response to Clark H. Pinnock,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 167-68, argues that “conditional immortality raises the question whether the Bible was actually ever inspired by the Holy Spirit and is verbally inerrant...the common assumption that the Bible bends to the wrong conceptions of punishment that existed in the first century implies that the Holy Spirit was not sovereign in guiding the scriptures and that the writers were not kept from error. The great majority of those who hold to conditional immortality of the wicked do not subscribe to the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy.” But surely Walvoord’s criticism is misguided and founded on a confusion of inerrancy and exegesis. First, this is a question about exegesis, not inerrancy, and neither Pinnock nor Crockett has downgraded God’s word to mere human opinion, ruled out any passage ahead of the game, or tried to “bend” scripture to conceptions of hell prevalent in the first century. We might as well accuse Jesus of the same thing since his view seems at times to be in line with much in Pharisaic Judaism.

Walvoord’s comments serve only to muddy the waters, poison the well, as it were. Most in the debate realize this. See Robert A Peterson’s response to Edward William Fudge, in Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views on Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 83-113, in which Peterson, a traditionalist, roundly criticizes Fudge, conditionalist, on several grounds, but never in respect to inerrancy. Why? For at least two reasons. First, Fudge is an evangelical and committed to inspired scripture. Second, the issue is irrelevant. The only way it becomes relevant is when certain texts are downgraded from the status of God’s word to an expression of mere human opinion. But, insofar as this debate has taken place among leading evangelicals—and this is who Walvoord is criticizing—such has not been the case. In other words, if it were possible for Peterson, Fudge, Pinnock, and Crockett to all hold a higher view of Scripture, say the one that Jesus himself espoused, the issue would still not be any closer to resolution.

⁹² This important distinction can be seen in Stott’s words: “You [David Edwards] rightly say that I have never declared publicly whether I think hell, in addition to being real, terrible and eternal, will involve the *experience of everlasting suffering*” (italics mine). Stott’s point is to the point and gets at the heart of the debate between traditionalists and conditionalists. See David L Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 314.

⁹³ David L Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 313.

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B. B. Warfield has outlined annihilationism in three major groups: (1) pure mortality; (2) conditional immortality; and (3) annihilationism proper.⁹⁴ *Pure mortality*, based as it often is on a rather strict materialism, sees no hope for the person beyond death. In other words, the life of the person is impossible without the body since the life-principle is inextricably connected to the physical organism. At death all people simply pass out of existence. *Conditional mortality*, generally speaking, argues that people do not naturally possess immortality, but must receive it from God. God, for his part, gives it only to those who are “in Christ” and eternally connected to the savior and his resurrection by faith. All other people, i.e., unbelievers, simply pass out of existence, either at death and/or after a general resurrection, or after a general resurrection and a period of suffering. *Annihilationism proper*, in contrast to conditional immortality, builds on the idea of the person as naturally immortal. Thus at some point—whether immediately at death, the judgment after a general resurrection, or after some determined period of suffering—those apart from Christ, will be annihilated; God himself will bring their very existence to an end.

Arguments for Conditional Immortality

We are now ready to discuss arguments for and against conditional immortality (hereafter, CI) and traditionalism. CI has received increasing support among certain evangelicals in recent years, including: Edward William Fudge,⁹⁵ John W. Wenham,⁹⁶ Stephen H. Travis,⁹⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes,⁹⁸ Clark Pinnock,⁹⁹ and Michael Green.¹⁰⁰ One notable evangelical who tentatively holds the position is John Stott.¹⁰¹ The question before us is this: Is CI able to stand on exegetical and theological grounds superior to the traditional view and is it thus to be preferred? The following is an interaction with some of the most popular and strongest arguments in favor of CI.

The Meaning of “Destruction” Language

Proponents of CI argue that the Greek verb *ajpovllumi*, *apollumi*,¹⁰² means “to kill” in the active voice and “to perish” or “be destroyed” when in the middle voice and intransitive.¹⁰³ For example, when Herod sought Jesus, he did so “in order to kill him” (Matt 2:13). Also, Jesus told people to be afraid of the one who could destroy, that is, “kill both body and soul in hell” (Matt 10:28). From such evidence Stott concludes that “if to kill is to deprive the body of life, hell would seem to be the deprivation of both physical and spiritual life, that is, an extinction of being.”¹⁰⁴ Further, in the middle voice, and while intransitive, the verb means “to perish” as in the case of unbelievers who are said “to be perishing” (1 Cor 1:18; cf. also 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3).

⁹⁴ “Annihilationism,” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 447-57.

⁹⁵ *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict, 1982); Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 19-82; 182-208.

⁹⁶ *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 34-41; idem., *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 27-41.

⁹⁷ *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 198.

⁹⁸ *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 398-407; reprinted in “Conditional Immortality,” *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992): 10-12.

⁹⁹ “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 135-66; idem., “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *CTR* 4.2 (1990): 243-59.

¹⁰⁰ *Evangelism through the Local Church* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1992), 72-73.

¹⁰¹ David L Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 312-29.

¹⁰² Cf. Matthew 2:13; 10:28. Here *apollumi* means “to kill” or “put to death.”

¹⁰³ For a brief discussion of the relationship of voice to transitiveness, see Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 409.

¹⁰⁴ Stott, *Essentials*, 315.

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Stott also argues that the nouns *apwleiva*, *apo,leia* (e.g., Phil 1:28; 3:19; Heb 10:39), and *ojleqro*, *olethros* (e.g., 1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:9), also mean “destruction,” or “ruin,” as defined by an “extinction of being.” He concludes that “it would seem strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed.”¹⁰⁵

Response

First, it is true that the verb *apollumi* can mean “to kill,” or “put to death.” But it is a non-sequitur to suggest that “killing” necessarily entails “extinction of being,” even if the killing is done in hell. This is true for at least three reasons: (1) the language of “killing” is phenomenological and is not, therefore, necessarily making any metaphysical claims about being or non-being; (2) to regard physical “killing” as “extinction of being” implies a certain underlying view of man which has been subtly imported into the definition, but which has not been established. I refer to a monistic view of man or certain Christian versions wherein life cannot exist apart from embodiment; (3) *apollumi* carries many other meanings other than “to kill.” It can mean: “to be lost” spiritually (Matt 10:6; 15:24); “to lose a reward” (Matt 10:42); “to lose one’s life” (Matt 16:25); “to destroy demons” (Mark 1:24); “to ruin a wineskin” (Mark 2:22); “to drown” (Mark 4:38); “to deprive someone of needed healing” (Luke 6:9); “to lack a relationship with God” (Luke 9:24); as a reference to “lost sheep,” (Luke 15:4-5); “a lost coin” (Luke 15:8); “a lost son” (Luke 15:24, 32); “lost people” (Luke 19:10—i.e., apart from Jesus and salvation); “to perish” as opposed to receiving eternal life (John 3:16); “to destroy your brother for the sake of food” (Rom 14:15); “to destroy a weak person by knowledge” (1 Cor 8:11).

Several of these instances are important and require brief comment. **First**, if Jesus is going “to destroy” demons (Mark 1:24) and their ultimate fate is the lake of fire, then on the *analogia fidei/scripturae* *apollumi* here probably does not mean “extinction of being,” since these demons (including the Devil) are “tormented day and night forever and ever” (cf. Rev 20:10). **Second**, “to ruin” a wineskin certainly does not mean that it ceases to exist, but only that for all practical purposes it ceases to exist *with respect to the purpose for which it was made*, i.e., it is no longer any good for holding wine. **Third**, *apollumi* can mean “to lack a relationship with God” (Luke 9:24) and in this sense the person is ruined or destroyed, that is, they are no good for the purpose for which they were created. This is evident in the lost (*apollumi*) son of Luke 15:24, 32. The son was *destroyed* or *ruined*, if you will, in that he was no longer in right relationship with his father, as evidenced by his lifestyle. However, he certainly did not pass out of existence, as his return to the father clearly indicates. **Fourth**, a Christian can be said to have been destroyed and yet be in perfect physical health and still have a relationship with God! This is true in both Romans 14:15 and 1 Corinthians 8:11. In both cases people are said to have been destroyed (*apollumi*) by another’s freedom and knowledge. Those offended certainly did not cease to exist, but were rather harmed in their relationship with God which develops according to one’s faith and commitment to holiness.

So we see that the term most often means to ruin something/someone by damaging it/them to the point where it/they can no longer function *according to its/their design*.¹⁰⁶ The term by itself says nothing about the non-existence of a thing or person. This is probably the point behind Matthew 10:28 as well. In this text Jesus is not making a comment about existence vs. non-existence, but about different *kinds of existence*, either with God or apart from God, the latter of the two being described as “ruin” or “destruction” in Hell.¹⁰⁷ Man can never personally and actively glorify God in Hell. We also see that in

¹⁰⁵ Stott, *Essentials*, 315-16.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, it is seriously questionable whether the term—in its 90 NT uses—ever means cessation of being, though in a few cases (e.g., John 6:12—the loaves that were broken) it might be implied. But even they are by no means clear.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Roger Nicole, “Annihilationism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 50, who says, “Spiritual death, or the “second death” (Revelation 20:14; 21:8), does not mean that the soul or personality lapses into nonbeing, but rather that it is ultimately and finally deprived of that presence of God and fellowship with him *which is the chief end of man* and the

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some cases, like Romans 14:15 and 1 Corinthians 8:11, the ruin is reversible. So also in the case of the “ruin” of the prodigal son. A return to God begins the process of undoing the destruction that was incurred. This opportunity to begin the process of “reversing ruin” or “undoing destruction,” however, is never said to extend past this life.

The Greek term *olethros* (“destruction”) occurs in 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:9, and 1 Timothy 6:9. Each of these cases is religiously colored and refers either to the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:5; which cannot be completed in this life) and to the result of God’s punishment of those who are unprepared for his coming (1 Thess 5:3), disobey his gospel (2 Thess 2:9), and/or pursue riches as an end in themselves (1 Tim 6:9). In none of these examples does *olethros* necessarily mean “extinction of being.”

In the end, even if a person does not agree with everything we’ve said here, he/she needs to recognize that it is quite clear that *apollumi* does not necessarily mean or even entail the “cessation of being.” The same can be said for the 18 occurrences of *apo„leia*¹⁰⁸ and the 4 occurrences of *olethros*. The term *kolasis* occurs in Matthew 25:46 and 1 John 4:18. By itself, it refers to severe punishment without any necessary implication as to the length of time and certainly has no inherent connections to the idea of “extinction.” We will discuss Matthew 25:46 below.

Thus in terms of the available linguistic evidence it is disconcerting to see Clark Pinnock simply list the verses in which the Greek term appears and then conclude from the English translation that “destruction” means “annihilation.” All the passages he cites require interpretation and—in light of our word study of the relevant terms—a defense of the view he only claims. For example, in reference to Matthew 10:28 he simply asserts, “our Lord spoke plainly of God’s judgment as the annihilation of the wicked when he warned about God’s ability to destroy body and soul in hell.”¹⁰⁹ As to the rest of the passages he cites, virtually all evangelicals agree that the impenitent wicked will be destroyed by the wrath of God. The question that needs to be answered by further investigation is, “What does “destroyed” mean?”

The Meaning of the Imagery of “Fire”

The Bible speaks of “the fire” (Matt 3:10; 7:19; 13:50), “fire of hell” (5:22; 18:9), “eternal fire” (18:8; 25:41), and the “lake of fire” (Rev 20:14-15). But how are we to understand this metaphorical language involving fire? Some begin by claiming that “fire” is not a metaphor at all, but rather a literal description of hell.¹¹⁰ But how can hell be described as literal “fire” (Matt 25:41; Jude 7) and at the same time “blackest darkness” (Matt 8:12; Jude 13)? Either hell changes over time from one to the other or there are parts of hell that have fire and parts that are pure darkness. Despite the fact that such interpretations seem ridiculous, they: (1) are not necessitated by the texts themselves; (2) represent a failure to recognize the apocalyptic/metaphorical nature of the descriptions, and (3) are therefore the most strained, synthetic readings of the passages. The simplest and best explanation is to see the language as metaphorical, pointing to horrible realities, much of which probably lies beyond comprehension.

But what is fire a symbol of? What does it represent? Stott says that

the main function of fire is not to cause pain, but to secure destruction, as all the world’s incinerators bear witness...The fire itself is termed ‘eternal’ and ‘unquenchable’, but it

essential condition of worthwhile existence. To be bereft of it is to perish, to be reduced to utter insignificance, to sink into abysmal futility” (italics mine).

¹⁰⁸ The reader is encouraged to look at the NT uses of *apo„leia*: Matt 7:13; 26:8; Mark 14:4; John 17:12; Acts 8:20; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 6:9; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16; Rev 17:8, 11. There is nothing in these uses that forces us to conclude that *apoleia* means “cessation of existence.” Again, passages like Matt 26:8, Mark 14:4, Rev 17:8, 11 underscore the fact that cessation of existence is not the most basic meaning.

¹⁰⁹ Pinnock, *Four Views*, 146.

¹¹⁰ So Walvoord, “The Literal View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 28.

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would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed for ever, not tormented for ever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that the fire has done its work) which 'rises for ever and ever' (Revelation 14:11; cf. 19:3).¹¹¹

Again, quite apart from the problematic analogy with garbage (which is not thrown into incinerators on account of guilt for sin), there are at least four major problems with Stott's reading of Revelation 14:11. **First**, it suppresses contrary evidence; it is not warranted by the immediate context. The rest of Revelation 14:11 needs to be cited: "There is no rest *day or night* for those who worship the beast and his image..." Surely the most exegetically sensitive way in which to read "there is no rest day or night" is as "never-ending rest" for those who worship the beast. If that is true, then eternal, conscious suffering and not "non-being" is the point of the punishment and the passage. Thus, the imagery of fire suggests agony and torment, not extinction of being as Stott argues. This coheres well with Jesus' own warnings of the fire being "unquenchable," "eternal," and hell being a place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:12; 24:51; 25:30). **Second**, it agrees, not just formally, but materially with Revelation 20:10 (and 19:3) where John says again that the torment will be "day and night forever and ever." **Third**, if the fire does consume completely, one wonders how the smoke can rise eternally if there is nothing left to burn? Or, if "their worm" does not die, how is this possible if what they eat has been completely devoured? These seem like silly questions, but perhaps warranted by Stott's handling of the passage.¹¹² **Fourth**, in Mark 9:48 the idea of "unquenchable fire" is placed in parallel with "their worm *does not die*." If "their worm does not die,"¹¹³ then why does the "unquenchable" fire all of a sudden become "quenchable"? Mark 9:48 seems to suggest *prima facie* that "unquenchable" means eternal in quality (i.e., it characterizes the age to come for the wicked) and duration (that age is never-ending); there is a "never-ending-ness" to God's punishment of the wicked.¹¹⁴

The Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul and Greek Philosophy

Advocates of CI often point out that many exegetes have unconsciously imported into their reading of relevant texts an unbiblical anthropology stemming from Plato and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Thus Clark Pinnock argues:

If a biblical reader approached the text with the assumption that souls are naturally immortal, would they not be *compelled* to interpret texts that speak of the wicked being destroyed to mean that they are tortured forever, since according to that presupposition souls cannot go out of existence (italics mine)?

Pinnock goes on to argue, as Fudge¹¹⁵ and others have done,¹¹⁶ that immortality is something only God possesses (1 Tim 6:16). God can, however, bestow immortality *upon his people* (1 Cor 15:21, 50, 54; 2 Tim 1:10). But all the rest of humanity, that is, those outside a saving relationship with Christ, are by

¹¹¹ Stott, *Essentials*, 316.

¹¹² Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996),

¹¹³ Again, my argument rests on the never-ending nature of "their worm does not die." This, of course, is contested, but it is nonetheless the simplest and most straightforward reading of the passage and Mark's use of Isaiah 66:24. We will deal with this issue below.

¹¹⁴ Cf. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 349, f.n., 81.

¹¹⁵ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 51-64. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," 147, n. 25 refers to this argument as the central piece to Philip Hughes work, *The True Image*, ch. 37. Pinnock also says in the same footnote that F. F. Bruce, who forwarded Edward Fudge's book, "admits to conditionalism in the preface." But this does not mean that Bruce admits to CI. In fact, he explicitly denies adherence to either of the views, refusing to systematize his thoughts on the issue. Again, the reader must note that innate immortality is not entailed in the traditional view.

¹¹⁶ See Stott, *Essentials*, 316.

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nature mortal and cannot exist forever. Therefore, if they cannot exist forever, they cannot suffer consciously forever. The traditional view is thus predicated upon an erroneous view of man which itself has been unconsciously and consistently “read into” the biblical material.

But this argument, as presented by Pinnock, is fallacious for at least two reasons: (1) just because there is similarity in the two views of the immortality of the soul, i.e., between Platonic and Christian views, this does not mean that the latter was derived from and is, therefore, necessarily indebted to the former.¹¹⁷ That the Christian view is not directly dependent on the Platonic view is indeed the case, according to Erickson. This is confirmed when we consider two important differences between the two.¹¹⁸ First, the Greek view presents the immortality of the soul in both directions, i.e., eternally before embodied existence and eternally after physical death. But no Christian view holds to the immortality of the soul before the existence of creation (neither the traducian nor creationist view). Second, the Greek view often looks as if it entails the idea that the soul is naturally or inherently immortal, but no informed Christian view argues that either. Rather, what is argued is that God, by his free decision, has decided to render all people immortal and to uphold their being by his word (cf. Heb 1:3). These two differences are important and render Pinnock’s (and others’) claim groundless; (2) yet even if one could establish certain causal links between the Platonic view and the view of many Christian theologians, this would in itself not answer the question of the truthfulness of the Christian theologians’ view; that would be to commit the genetic fallacy. That debate must be adjudicated on scriptural grounds, something Pinnock does not do.

Another important consideration is this regard is the issue of resurrection. Jesus states in John 5:29 that there will indeed be a resurrection of the unrighteous to judgment. It seems strange and, though not absolutely logically impossible, that this leads to their annihilation or their simply passing out of existence. The resurrection would seem to guarantee their eternal existence. This seems especially appropriate because of the parallel with the resurrection of the righteous which has eternal life in view (which in the minimum involves never-ending existence).

The Doctrine of God’s Love

God is boundlessly merciful, loving and forgiving. Every Christian, whether a week old in the faith, or a veteran, knows this to be true. Indeed, the longer a person is in the faith, the more they ought to realize this truth. But the traditional view of hell pictures a God who tortures people endlessly, with no hope of restitution. This is cruel and sadistic according to at least one evangelical writer.¹¹⁹ How then can we square the fact of God’s love with such a view of eternal damnation and torment? The bottom line, or so it is urged, is that “we cannot.” We are sure of the first premise (God’s love) and unsure of the second (eternal conscious punishment), therefore the second must go lest we lose the first as well.

Response

Several things need to be said in response to this. **First**, it is admittedly difficult to reconcile the love of God with eternal, conscious punishment. This is especially true when one thinks of the love of God as expressed in the cross. I think that all sides recognize this. **Second**, even though God is love, he is also holy. It seems that on many occasions when conditionalists argue against eternal, conscious punishment, their reliance on the doctrine of God’s love precludes a strong sense of his holiness. **Third**, it would seem that the way in which conditionalists talk of the incompatibility of eternal, conscious punishment with divine love, God should not be permitted to judge anyone at all. The conditionalist who argues so vehemently from God’s love, as Pinnock does, must realize that he may have proven too much, for it is hard to see how CI as a form of annihilationism protects or at least salvages the doctrine of God’s love. If God shouldn’t judge the wicked with eternal, conscious punishment, it is hard to see how such a loving

¹¹⁷ We have seen this fallacy committed over and over again with the history of religions approach to gospel material, that we as evangelicals ought to know better by now.

¹¹⁸ See Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved: The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 226-227, for his discussion of this philosophical issue.

¹¹⁹ Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” 149-51.

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God could possibly subject any person to prolonged agony and torment only to see them annihilated at the end. In other words, conditionalism is not insulated from the problem nor is it any less impaled on the horns of the dilemma. Pinnock's oft repeated adjectives, namely, "bloodthirsty monster" and "saddist" seem to apply to his God as well.¹²⁰ **Fourth**, conditionalists constantly seek to diminish the harsh realities of the traditional view. But we may ask whether much of Jesus' teaching fits with *their* idea of God's love. After all, it was he who said, "Cut him (i.e., the wicked servant) into pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 24:51). This is extremely harsh language and, under Pinnock's view of divine love, one wonders what happened to Jesus' view of God's love. Thus, in light of Jesus' brutally harsh words, we may ask if Packer and Erickson aren't correct in referring to Pinnock's and Stott's view as influenced by secular sentimentality, despite protestations to the contrary.¹²¹ **Fifth**, we do not have any substantive idea how great the offense is of those who repeatedly spurn, distort, and suppress the love of God in Christ. While we may have an inkling, we are in no place to suggest that such a great love spurned will not result in eternal, conscious punishment. After all, it was committed against an eternal and infinite love. **Sixth**, proponents of CI often refer to the love of God as if it were a blind, overpowering force with no will and choice behind it. But, both God's "providential kindnesses" and his special, redeeming grace are not automatic and uncontrollable; they involve the decisions of a free person to engage a fallen world in various ways and to a greater or lesser extent with different individuals.

So the bottom-line is: appeals to the apparent contradiction between God's love and eternal, conscious punishment are inconsistent and just as lethal for conditionalism. In condemning the other view, it would seem that CI has unwittingly disqualified itself. But, in the end, we simply cannot answer this question with appeals to God's love. Finally, when the Bible talks about the fact of hell, it does so in connection with God's judgment and therefore his holiness. The love of God has often been brought into the discussion under the pretense of *analogia fides*, but we must be reminded that the proper context in which to reflect on hell is firstly and ultimately God's holiness and true justice. Let us not blur that reality. If we are going to talk about the love of God in connection with the nature of hell, let us talk about that love, *spurned*.

The Doctrine of God's Justice

But the eternal, conscious suffering of the wicked raises not only questions in connection with God's love, but also in connection with his holiness and, in particular, his justice. Do sins, no matter how egregious, require the punishment of eternal suffering? To make it more explicit, for sins committed in

¹²⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 529-30, rightly points out that "it takes considerable grace to listen sympathetically to Pinnock's pleas that his view be granted legitimacy, when his own purple prose condemns as sadists devoid of the milk of human kindness all those who disagree with him." Surely Pinnock realizes that he speaks against many of God's saints when he argues like this, for many godly people in the past have held to the traditional view. And, if the traditional view is correct, then has essentially leveled these epithets at God. By contrast, it is more wise to be cautious about CI, as John Stott himself is.

¹²¹ See Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved*, 227. Erickson also says that "Pinnock, Stott, and others depict a sentimentalized version [of God's love], in which God would not do anything that would cause anyone pain, displeasure, or discomfort." While Erickson is probably correct in seeing a soft and non-biblical view of God's love at work in Stott and Pinnock—though Pinnock adamantly denies any such thing—he goes too far when he implies that their God would not do anything to "cause anyone pain, displeasure, or discomfort." This is not true, for both Stott and Pinnock would argue for at least *some* conscious punishment (at least in the interim state; cf. Luke 16:23-24), just not everlasting, conscious torment. See also Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel—Universalism and Justification by Faith," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 126.

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time and therefore finite, is eternal suffering, in which case billions of years is only a drop in the bucket, really fair and just; is there not a “serious disproportion” here?¹²²

Response

First, as creatures hopelessly polluted by sin—a fact which both sides agree upon for the most part—is it really possible for us to determine what God’s justice requires and the limits he ought to put on his retribution? Sin is ultimately against God himself, an attack on his holiness, an attempted coup d’état, a rebellion of the most heinous kind. Therefore, even as reconciled rebels, we are in no position to argue that his justice does not necessarily demand eternal, conscious punishment.

Second, the CI argument from the justice of God may impale itself on the horns of a dilemma. If the wicked are punished until their sins are paid for, why then are they annihilated? Surely, justice has been served and they should be free to go (into heaven). But, if their sins have not been paid for, why are they annihilated? Justice would require that their sins be paid for, so they must remain until that is accomplished. It is precisely at this point that one hears the tip-to of “secular sentimentality” in the basement below the main floor.

This raises another interesting question: Can people experience punishment when they are extinct? Does punishment, then, for one’s own sins, require consciousness? Could God punish people who never existed? The CI’s will undoubtedly say “no” to this last question since they argue that extinction is the last element of the punishment. But they betray the opposite in their critique of the traditional view when they say that God keeps people alive forever just to punish them endlessly. Thus they believe that *consciousness* is necessary for the experience of punishment to exist. We may ask, then, whether “extinction of being” is really punishment at all. Punishment requires that the person so punished *experience* pain, loss, etc. If that pain is not experienced, then there is no punishment experienced and none being executed.

Third, the issue of the justice of hell is often broached in scripture in terms of degrees of punishment. Not everyone will experience the same degree of pain and suffering in hell. Some will be beaten with few blows, relatively speaking, and some with many (Luke 12:47-48).

Fourth, even Stott admits that if people were to continue in sin in the eternal state, then eternal, conscious punishment would be just.¹²³ But he cites no scriptural evidence to the point. However, there is some evidence that this will indeed be the case. First, hell is a place where there is pain (weeping) and violent anger (gnashing of teeth). This would seem to indicate sinful behavior. Second, people will continue to rebel against God even while they are experiencing enormous judgment, pain, and suffering. This, of course, has occurred in the past, but will occur again during the great tribulation.

Revelation 9:20-21

²⁰The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 16:9-11

⁹They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him. ¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

These two passages illustrate that men do not always repent when they are under divine judgment—even when that judgment is of the severest nature. Thus, we are not surprised to find scriptural evidence that

¹²² See Stott, *Essentials*, 318.

¹²³ Stott, *Essentials*, 319.

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unrepentant attitudes will probably persist into the eternal state. This seems to be the point John makes in the last chapter of the Bible:

Revelation 22:10-11

¹⁰ Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. ¹¹ Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

This text says in v. 10 that "the time is near," referring to God's final judgment. A person may wonder, then, how Rev 22:10-11 could provide evidence of attitudes and practices in the eternal state since it describes attitudes and behaviors *up to that point*. Carson comments:

Of course, the primary emphasis here is on the time from "now" *until* judgment: there is a kind of realized judgment, within time, that sometimes takes place. Nevertheless the parallel is telling. If the holy and those who do right continue to be holy and to do right, *in anticipation of the perfect holiness and rightness to be lived and practiced throughout all eternity*, should we not also conclude that the vile continue their vileness *in anticipation of the vileness they will live and practice throughout all eternity?*¹²⁴

The inference Carson draws from this passage is substantiated, not only by the parallel in the passage, but also by the reference to Jesus' coming in the next verse and the allotment of the righteous (v. 14) and the wicked (v. 15). The righteous live out their righteousness and the wicked continue in their wickedness, outside the gate of the city, of course.

So we conclude from this that God is just when he punishes the wicked forever, with everlasting, conscious punishment, since it seems likely that they continue in their rebellion, magic, murders, idolatries, and immoralities.

The Doctrine of God's Universal Reign

Some advocates of CI argue that if hell is to persist throughout eternity, then God's universal and unmitigated reign will be threatened for there is still "quadrants in the galaxy," i.e., "a corner of the kingdom" that is not *under his complete dominion*. They argue that hell contradicts the universal reign of God. Hughes says,

The renewal of creation demands the elimination of sin and suffering and death...The conception of the endlessness of the suffering of torment and of the endurance of 'living' death in hell stands in contradiction to this teaching. It leaves a part of creation which, unrenewed, everlastingly exists in alienation from the new heaven and the new earth.¹²⁵

Response

This argument suffers from at least two important flaws. First, it adds a step in the outworking of God's plan that is not there in the Biblical materials. It argues that hell and the glorified eternal state cannot coexist. Then it says, at some point after the final judgment (e.g., 2 years, 10,000 years, who knows), God will annihilate hell and all who are in it. The problem is, however, that the Bible knows nothing of this second move after the final judgment. The only thing it recognizes after the final judgment is a city which only the righteous can enter and the wicked *remain outside* (Rev 22:14-15). Revelation 22:14-15 is a clear indication that wickedness and righteousness can coexist in the eternal state. Second, why is it so difficult to conceive of the pure, unmitigated, and just expression of God's judgment in the eternal state? God is no longer tolerating any rebellion, or allowing sins to go unpunished (cf. Acts 17:30), but is instead exercising continual judgment on sin and the finally impenitent. In this scenario, nothing is a threat, either in theory or practice, to his glorious

¹²⁴ Carson, *Gagging of God*, 533.

¹²⁵ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Conditional Immortality," *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992): 11.

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rule. In fact, in such a scenario, eternity becomes the stage for the endless pure expression of the holiness of God.

The Marred Condition of the Eternal State

Some advocates of CI have argued that the presence of people suffering in hell will mar the joy of heaven.

Response

Packer points out that “this cannot be said of God, as if the expressing of his holiness in retribution hurts him more than it hurts the offenders; and since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what he loves and taking joy in all his self manifestation, including his justice, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way.”¹²⁶

The Process of Condemnation

We hinted at this problem above. Concerning God’s dealing with the finally impenitent, proponents of CI argue that *first* God will judge with “fire that annihilates.” *Then* he will bring eternal punishment which is in fact a statement about the non-reversing of the annihilation.¹²⁷ Thus, the advocate of CI serializes the final judgment. But is this how the Bible deals with it?

Response

There is no serialization of the final judgment in the way envisioned in CI. The two verses of Matthew 25:41, 46 are critical in this regard. They read as follows:

25:41 Then he [Jesus] will also say to those on his left: “Depart from me, accursed ones, into the *eternal fire* which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels...**25:46** These will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous to eternal life.

It is clear that eternal fire is to be read in parallel with eternal punishment as a reference to the *same thing*. They are not meant, on any plain reading of the text, to be understood as referring to two different judgments, one before the other (i.e., in serial). Thus a major premise in the doctrine of CI is without support. Further, if the *fire* is said to be eternal, involving endless time (though it may connote severity as well), why isn’t the *punishment* endless as well? The parallel with *eternal life* seems to further put the matter beyond dispute.

The Doctrine of Heaven

The Desire for Heaven

To know God deeply and to be without hindrance in the pursuit and experience of his love, is the unending desire of every sanctified heart. This, of course, only happens on a certain level and to a certain degree in this life. As both Jesus and Paul taught, we live in the “now, not-yet” of salvation, so that while we love God now, we do so only imperfectly and with great difficulty and struggle at times. We serve him with joy, but a joy often mixed with tears of sadness. There are times when our hearts get weary of serving him and through the deceitfulness of sin and the distractions in the world we are hardened and for a time led astray from our sincere devotion. Nonetheless, our deepest longings, implanted and renewed daily by the Spirit of grace, are to be free of indwelling sin and to worship and serve the Lord in a manner thoroughly pleasing to him. The good news is, Christ has prepared a place in which pure worship and bliss will be ours.

Concerning that place, often referred to as “heaven” in scripture, Paul says that “no eye has seen, no hear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9-10). Through the

¹²⁶ Packer, “The Problem of Eternal Punishment,” 18.

¹²⁷ See Kendall S. Harmon, “The Case against Conditionalism,” in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 113-15.

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indwelling Spirit—who continuously mediates the presence of Christ to us—we taste that future day now, but it is only a taste (no matter how intense). In the future we shall actually “see him face to face” (1 John 3:2-3). Who can really imagine what great things God has in store for those who love him? To meditate upon the Biblical doctrine of heaven is one of the most encouraging and stimulating of all the spiritual disciplines. The goal of this section is to give you some thoughts, however terribly inadequate they may be, to bring before the Lord in worship and praise. In short, they are thoughts about our future with God—thoughts that hopefully teach us how to live for God now. In this way the future will not seem so strange when we get there.

The Term "Heaven"

In the Bible the term “heaven” (shamayim in the OT and ouranos in the NT) is the first element in a merism which itself refers to *all of creation*, as in the expression "the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). The term is also used as a partial synonym for God, though more is entailed than just a reference to his person, per se. It is used this way, for example, in John 3:27, where Jesus says that "no person can receive anything except what is given him from *heaven*." But there is also a third way in which the term is used, namely, as a reference to a *special place* where God dwells in the fullness of his person and blessing.

The Nature of Heaven

As we said above, heaven seems to be a real place. Jesus repeatedly claimed to have come "from heaven" (John 6:41, 52; cf. 7:28-29) and after his resurrection, he ascended "into heaven" and someday he will be revealed "out of heaven" (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16). He is currently "in heaven" preparing a *place* for his own (John 14:3; cf. Heb 9:24). Thus, whether we can, by our senses, detect heaven or not, it is likely somewhere within our space-time universe since Jesus is there in his real, resurrected corporeal body. Our ultimate destiny, as those who have been eternally joined to the savior, is to dwell in heaven forever, in the presence of Christ, serving his Father day and night (Eph 2:6-7; Rev 22:5).

But there is some question over whether heaven is really more a state than a place. But, depending on how we understand these terms, the answer is probably both/and. If by a state, we exclude physical realities, then we are certainly in error. Heaven is not described in scripture as some amorphous, Platonized, spiritual existence. For we will reign in heaven in our resurrected bodies (Rom 8:17). Second, there will be a new heavens and a new earth, which implies location in space and time (cf. Rev 21:1). But just to focus on the physical features of eternal life with God is to miss the "new" state of things into which God is bringing us. In heaven, God will be present to bless us in ways unheard of or hitherto experienced. There will be no sin, but only perfect desire to worship, love, and serve him. There will be joy, continual revelation (for God's being and knowledge are infinite), extreme bliss, and grateful service. This is both qualitatively and quantitatively different than anything we have ever experienced.

Other questions have been surfaced in discussions about heaven as well. Some folk worry whether their sins and the remembrance of them will follow them into heaven. This is not likely, for God will deal with that at the final judgment and "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4). This is not a license to live however one pleases, since it must be kept in mind—even if we are unable to understand it—that there will be degrees of reward in heaven for faithful service here on earth. We must always make it our aim to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it (2 Cor 5:9).

Some people wonder whether there will be physical pleasures in heaven such as sex, eating, and drinking, etc. It seems that since there appears to be no marriage in heaven, there will be no sexual relations. Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:30 seems to suggest that insofar as the angels are not married and do not have sexual union, neither will glorified human beings. Perhaps, there will be no need for procreation in heaven; we are

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not given the specific rationale.¹²⁸ Regarding "eating and drinking," all that we can perhaps say, is that while we may be able to do so, there does not appear to be any reason why we must do so.¹²⁹

The New Heavens and the New Earth

The Lord explicitly promises to create "a new heavens and a new earth" where He will be present to bless His people with unimaginable glory and unfathomable riches (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). This is where all those who have loved God will dwell forever, in unbroken fellowship with Him. The Father longs to bless us with His presence and has indeed saved us for this very reason (cf. Eph 2:6-7).

Thus, there will be no more crying or mourning or death or pain for the old order under sin will be finally dealt with. In fulfillment of God's deepest desires, "He will be *our* God and we will be *His* people." Through the cross of Christ the Father has won the victory, secured us for his courts, and ushered in the kingdom without limit or opposition. We will reign with him in the new heavens and earth forever (rev 5:10).

Now it seems fairly clear in scripture that the new heavens and the new earth will be a physical place and we will love and serve God in it. The fact that Jesus is now there in his resurrection body and that we too will someday receive resurrection bodies to make us fit for God's presence, seems to indicate that "the new heavens and new earth" refer not simply to spiritual realities or spiritual modes of existence (though it certainly includes them), but also to physical realities. The glorified Jesus now dwells in heaven at God's right hand (Acts 1:11; 7:55-56).

That the physical creation will be renewed is taught in several passages. The apostle Peter speaks of a new heaven and earth:

3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare. 3:11 Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness, 3:12 while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze! 3:13 But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.

Paul also speaks generally of the same hope in Romans 8:18-25

8:18 For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us. 8:19 For the creation eagerly waits for the revelation of the sons of God. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly but because of God who subjected it—in hope 8:21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers together until now. 8:23 Not only this, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption, the

¹²⁸ We must be careful of taking Jesus' statement about our likeness to the angels too far. We should keep it to the issue under discussion, namely, marriage, with the implications that this apparently has for sexual union.

¹²⁹ Although it is true that Jesus himself ate after his resurrection, it does not seem reasonable to suggest that he *needed* to, but only that he did it to fellowship with the disciples at that time (cf. Luke 24:43). On the other hand, if the leaves on the tree of life in Revelation 22:2 are to be taken literally, and they are to be eaten, then it would seem that eating must be a continual feature of heaven since such eating maintains the healing of the nations. But this involves a crass literalism, not warranted by the text. The best way to regard this verse is symbolically (so most commentators) as a reference to the ongoing health and blessing of all people in the New Jerusalem. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1161-1162, who takes the reference to our eating and drinking at the marriage supper of the lamb as literal (Rev 19:9). Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1232, takes a much more symbolic view of these things. Given the limits of language and the sparseness of the details, it seems best not to be too dogmatic about these kinds of details.

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redemption of our bodies. 8:24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with endurance.

Notice in Romans 8 that although “the whole creation groans” right now (that is, between the inauguration of the kingdom at Christ’s first coming and the consummation at the His second) it will be liberated from its decay (through sin) in the future—*an event connected closely with the redemption of our bodies*.

There is some debate in Christian circles as to whether the present creation will be entirely done away with (followed by a new creation) or whether it will be renewed and made perfect by God. There are passages that seem to indicate a complete *removal* of what presently exists (e.g., 2 Peter 3:10, Rev 20:11; 21:1) and others that seem to speak of a *renewal* of what presently exists (e.g., Matt 19:28). But the answer to this question is not entirely important. One can hold to either view and still maintain a high view of creation at the present time. What is important, however, is that in one way or another creation will be changed, made new, and fit for eternity. It will be a place entirely suited for righteousness and redeemed human beings to faithfully, loving, and intelligently worship and serve the King of Kings!

This is perhaps a fitting place to end, that is, with our eyes focused on eternal realities and the joy of loving God. It is my conviction that we’re actually attracted to God because of his magnificent beauty. We gaze forward into eternity through the lens of a city whose brilliance is that of jasper, whose doors are glorious pearls, and whose foundation consists in all sorts of multi-colored, precious stones. And, of course, the light for that city is not the light of the sun or moon, but that of the Lord and his lamb! The fundamental reality that characterizes this city is God’s presence, and therefore, *life*. And that life is represented by the river that flows endlessly from the throne of God and the two trees of life that provide eternal healing for the nations. This description, as the angel says, is trustworthy and true. It is the great hope of every Christian and the *certain* victory of God (cf. Rev 21-22)!