Inquirers' Class
Joining a Reformed Church

A Study for Prospective Members

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Introduction:
Joining a Reformed Church

The material found in the following pages is an expanded version of the content of a 7-week class that we call an "Inquirers' Class." It is our version of a membership class, yet we use the word *inquirers'* because we genuinely want those with a low level of commitment to feel welcome. The class is for both those who wish to join our church and those who merely are *inquiring,* looking into, curious about our congregation and its distinctives. We are comfortable, very comfortable with people attending and not joining. Often participants will complete the class and continue to evaluate whether to join or not for weeks or even months. One of our strongest members waited two years. The record is 17 years! We are comfortable with indecision and want the undecided to feel comfortable around us.

Vows
Joining a church, any church, is serious business. Joining a "Reformed or Presbyterian" church typically involves vows in which promises are made as to current beliefs or intended practices. Vow-taking itself is of course an inherently serious business, as Jesus says it must be, and as such, normally reserved for occasions of high importance (Mt 5:33-37). We affirm vows when we marry, when we join the military, when we enter public office, when we give testimony in a courtroom, and – when we join a church.

Membership
An objection may be raised: "We don't see church membership in the Bible. We believe it is a human invention not a biblical requirement. People, not God, are concerned about membership" What is our answer?

Our response is: we see church membership everywhere in the Bible. The people of God, Old Testament and New Testament form a covenant community. God entered into a redemptive relationship with Abraham and his descendants. This relationship is called a covenant, which is something like a contract, "an agreement between two or more persons," as our children's catechism defines it (Gen 12:1-3, 15:1-21). The covenant with Abraham includes a rite of admission, circumcision (Gen 17:1-14), and a sustaining covenantal meal, Passover (Ex 12:1-32). Those who fail to enter the covenant community or who violate its terms are "cut off from his people" because they have "broken (God's) covenant" (Ex 12:19).[1] There were, in other words, official signposts of belonging to the community, of inclusion and exclusion.

Jesus establishes a "new covenant," which is a renewing of the old covenant. His people are heirs of the covenantal promises made to Abraham (Gal 3:28-29; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Those who believe in Christ enter the covenant community by the New Testament rite of admission, baptism (Acts 2:38, 41), which is identified in the New Testament as the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11). They are sustained by the New Testament covenantal meal, the Lord's Supper. Those who violate the terms of the covenant are excluded, considered "as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Mt 18:17. Also 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Jn 9, 10). As in the Old Testament, there are official signposts of belonging,

[1] See also Ex 30:33,38; Lev 7:20,21,25,27; 17:10,14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3,5-6,17-18; 31:14, 22:3, 24; 23:29; Num 15:30-31; 19:13,20; 1 Sam 2:9; Ps 37:34; 101:8; 109:13; Prov 2:22; Is. 29:20; 48:9; Jer 44:11; Ez 14:8; Zech 13:8)

of inclusion and exclusion. Membership in the covenant community is assumed everywhere in the Bible.

New member class

Because membership vows are serious business, broad exposure to the doctrines and practices of a church under consideration is essential. Prospective new members need to know what they are getting themselves into. It is unfair, or so it seems to us, to provide only the barest of introductions to the church's convictions, for new members to join blindly, only to find out some months later that the fit is a bad one. Months may have been invested in acclimating to the new church when the dismaying discovery happens – *we* believe *what?* It seems wise to provide prospective members a broad overview of a congregation's beliefs and practices. For example, what does it believe about predestination, women officers, infant baptism, contemporary worship, and church discipline, just to name a few likely points of controversy.

Moreover, our approach to a new member class is to aim at conviction. Years ago a prospective member answered the question "Why do you want to join our congregation" with this: "Curb appeal." Obviously, this is a thin thread by which to bind new members to a church. There are various approaches by which to assimilate new members. There is a spectrum from what we may call the sociological to the theological. The sociological views recruiting and retaining new members much like one would for any club or social organization. Introduce them to people at a similar station in life. Quickly find a job for them to do so that they have a stake in the group. Stage events that are interesting and fun At church and in homes communicate to the prospects that they are wanted and belong.

We design our inquirers' or prospective new member class to fall on the theological end of the spectrum. We don't neglect the sociological, yet the emphasis is upon doctrine and practice. We want to convince prospective members that what we believe and practice is what the Bible indicates a church ought to believe and practice. We want them to join with us because they want to belong to a church that believes and practices what we do. We want them to join because our convictions match their convictions. Frequently we have heard our new members remark at the conclusion of an inquirers' class, "that is what I always believed – I just didn't know why."

Do some class participants draw the opposite conclusion? Indeed they do. Some get to the end of our seven sessions and decide that they belong somewhere else. Our view is that we have served their bests interest by helping them reach that determination. We have helped them to clarify what they believe and where they might find a church home that is compatible with their convictions even if our church is not that home.

Structure of the Class

Our inquirer's class is organized like the pyramid below:

We start very broad. Our survey of church history highlights the church's catholicity. Church history is our history. We identify with what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity," the Christianity that everyone agrees with, the Christianity of the Apostle's Creed. As we ascend the pyramid, we will always do so keeping in mind the faith which we held in common with other branches of Christendom: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the various Protestant denominations. As we highlight our distinctions, we do so in the context of substantial agreement. As we get more narrow, we do so in the context of the broad foundation of universal Christianity.

As we step up to the next level, we highlight the distinctive doctrines of Protestantism, represented by the five "solas" of the Reformation: *Scripture* alone leads us to *Christ* alone whom we receive by *faith* alone at the initiative of God's *grace* alone, all to the *glory of God* alone. These are the convictions historically held in common among Protestantism, setting it apart from Roman Catholicism.

At the next level we begin to look at our particular branch of Protestantism. We are *Reformed* Protestants. We will begin with an overview of the distinctives of the Reformed church, then our distinctive *worship*, then our distinctive approach to *ethics*, and finally our distinctive understanding of how *piety* is to be *nurtured*.

Yet as we become more and more narrow, we will repeatedly remind ourselves that we are narrow only in the context of substantial agreement with the universal church, represented by our survey of church history and the reciting of the creeds. We cite Scottish Presbyterian minister John "Rabbi" Duncan (1796-1870) who said, "I'm first a Christian, next a catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a paedobaptist, and fifth a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse the order."

Door of membership

We may conclude our introduction by noting that the door of membership is wide open to anyone who can make a credible profession of faith. Consider the first two membership vows:

> Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
>
> Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Him *alone* for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

These are the only two theological affirmations that are required: I know that I am a sinner and that I am trusting in Christ alone for my salvation. Some Reformed churches have required subscription to extensive statements of faith (e.g. Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort). American Presbyterians have not. One need not agree with us about infant baptism, or predestination, or the ongoing role of "signs and wonders." We have had Baptists, charismatics, Episcopalians, and the unchurched and atheological join with us. We *do* want for those who join to know what we believe and practice. When one of our distinctives is voiced in a sermon, we *are* eager for new members not to be taken by surprise. Yet new members are only asked to affirm theologically these first two vows. They mark the limits of our doctrinal requirements. By way of contrast, our officers must dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" of the 33 chapters of the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* the 107 questions of the *Shorter Catechism,* and the 196 questions of the *Larger Catechism.* The door to the offices of the church is very narrow; the door to membership is wide open.

Vow 3 affirms that one is committed to live the Christian life:

> Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

Vow 4 affirms that one is committed to supporting the ministry of the church:

> Do you promise to serve Christ in His church by supporting and participating in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

Vow 5 affirms that one recognizes and submits to the authority of the church officers:

> Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church and promise to further its purity and peace?

Some are taken aback by this last vow. It implies that Presbyterian churches exercise church discipline. We do not have a spiritual Gestapo that snoops around, peeking into member windows. However, when a member is guilty of *public* (not private) *notorious* (not run-of-the-mill) sin, they are asked to explain their behavior. They possibly are subject to official exhortation, suspension from the sacraments, and if they persist in sin and refuse to repent, excommunication. In taking these steps, we are doing nothing more than what the church has done for most of the last 20 centuries, as required by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 and reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

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The Church Catholic: Church History
Introduction

Modern man is guilty of "chronological snobbery,"[2] says C. S. Lewis. The illusion of "progress" leads many to conclude that there is nothing to be learned from the past. Never in history have traditional ideas and values been held in such universal contempt as today, and, one might add, with such disastrous results. Moral, spiritual, and social chaos are the legacy of a people who presume that the wisdom of the ages, the lessons of history, may safely be ignored.

Against the "spirit of the age," the church stands unapologetically upon the shoulders of the apostles, the Prophets, the Church Fathers, the great Councils, the outstanding theologians, and centuries of collective wisdom. Over a period of two millenia, the church has grown from a small band in Palestine to a fellowship numbering in the billions found in every corner of this planet. Upon the anvil of history, it has hammered out its beliefs and practices. We are the heirs of their efforts, learning and benefiting from both their mistakes as well as successes.

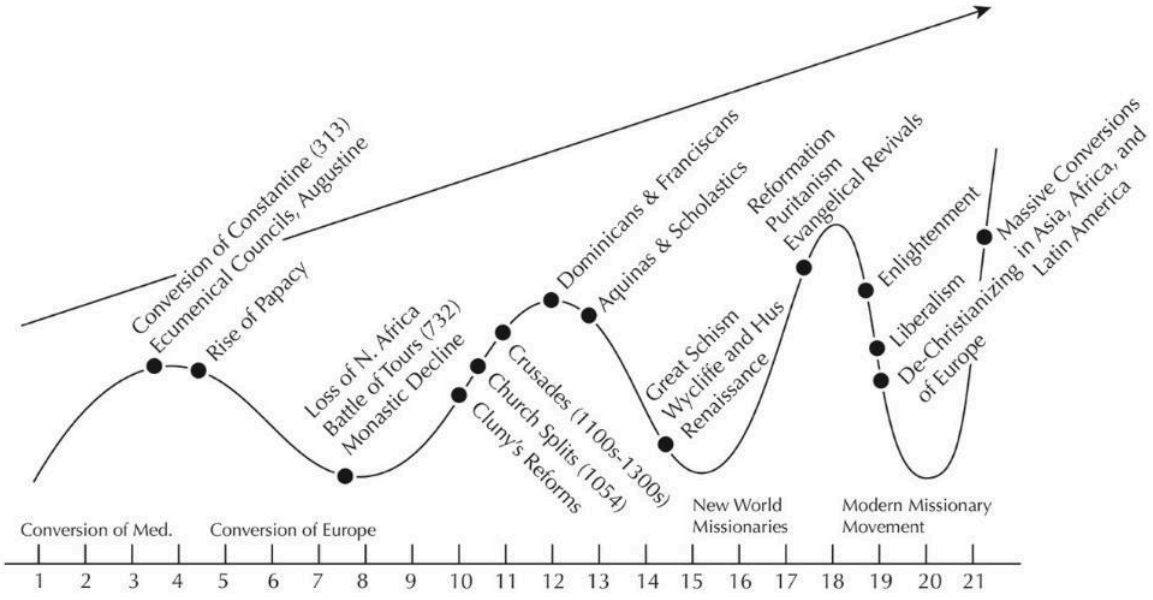
Who are we? We are participants in the greatest institution in the history of the world, the most enduring and most influential. Empires have come and gone, nations have risen and fallen, yet through the centuries the church remains, even thrives. We are a part of a great river of faithful chdisciples dating back to the apostles. Various heretical or erring streams have branched out away from that river. Yet we of the Protestant and Reformed faith faithfully sail in the flow of that orthodox stream.

We will divide the story of the church into five major eras as follows:

I. Early Church (30-325)
II. Late Antiquity (325-500)
III. Middle Ages (500-1350)
IV. Renaissance (1350-1517) and Reformation (1517-1662)
V. Enlightenment (1662-1900) and Modern Times (1900-present)

[2] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955; New York, NY; HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 254.

We will see that the progress of the church is not a straight line, but wave graph with an *upward trajectory*, something like this:



It is hoped that by this overview of church history, you will receive a measure of both wisdom and encouragement as we see how God has fulfilled His promise to lead His people into "all truth," even as He has led them into "all the world" (Jn 16:13)

Early Church (30-325)

The 30 years between the ascension of Christ and the completion of the Book of Acts changed the world forever. The early disciples "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Within 300 years they had conquered the mighty Roman empire and done so without arms or official political power. This conquest is one of history's great stories raising one of history's great questions: how did they do it? They encountered opposition from the Jewish and Roman authorities as well as from unruly popular movements (e.g. Acts 19). Yet they prevailed. How?

Background

We first should recognize that there were crucial background or environmental factors that assisted the church in its mission.

Rome

The Roman Empire into which Christianity was born provided an environment in which it could rapidly spread. A common language, which at the time of the apostles' was Greek, meant that wherever the early evangelists traveled in an empire of 50-100 million of multiple ethnicities and races, they could communicate in the *lingua franca* of that era. Excellent Roman roads (superior to those built in Europe until the 19th century!) tied together an empire that stretched from the Euphrates to Spain, from the North Sea to Sahara. Roman power enforced the *pax Romana,* the peace of Rome, which meant that travel throughout the empire, whether by land or sea, was relatively safe. The early missionaries could travel to the ends of the empire with their gospel unmolested by bandits or pirates.

Jewish

Even more important than the Roman context was the Jewish context in which the early church was operating. The Jewish people had been scattered throughout the Mediterranean rim following the Maccabean wars (167-160 BC) and again in 62 BC in what is known collectively as the *diaspora*. Jewish communities were established throughout the Roman world, complete with synagogues. Gentiles known as "God-fearers," who to one degree or another converted to Judaism, attached themselves to these communities. We sometimes may imagine that the Apostles preached on street corners. They at times may have, but the pattern that we find in the only record of their preaching places them in synagogues. They went first to the synagogues in a given community, were invited to provide the exposition of the Bible reading, and preached Christ from the Old Testament.[3] Typically they encountered opposition, were forced out of the synagogues and responded by securing a meeting place for believers, thereby establishing a church in that community.[4] The existence of these Jewish communities with their places of worship and Gentile converts was perhaps the single most important external factor in the growth of the early church.[5]

Growth

[3] E.g. Acts 13:5, 14ff; 14:1; 17:17; 18:4ff; 18:19, 26; 19:8ff; see also Acts 16:11ff.
[4] Acts 13:43; 18:6ff; 19:9, 10.
[5] So argues J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1978), 6.

Grow the church did. Rapidly. Phenomenally. The Apostle Paul could claim that the gospel had been "proclaimed in *all creation* under heaven" (Col 1:23). He could speak of the faith of the Roman Christians being "proclaimed in *all the world*" (Rom 1:8), and the word of the Lord and the faith of the Thessalonians had "gone forth *everywhere*" (1 Thess 1:8).By the end of the 1st century, the church had been established throughout the coastal regions of the Mediterranean (North Africa, the Middle East, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Greece, Spain). By the end of the 2nd century it had spread to Gaul and Britain. By the end of the third century it had reached into the interiors of the Mediterranean, Ethiopia, Ireland, India (Thomas), Armenia, and even China.[6] By 197 A.D., the church father Tertullian (c. 155-c. 240) could write to the emperor,

> We are but of yesterday, and we have filled all that belongs to you —the cities, the fortresses, the free towns, the very camps, the palace, the senate, the forum. We leave to you the temples only.[7]

Persecution

Persecution tended to wax and wane throughout the period of 30-325. Much of it was sporadic and local. The church enjoyed relative peace within the empire from 30-64 AD as a protected sect of Judaism. The first state-sponsored persecution began in 64 A.D. when the emperor Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. Believers were violently persecuted. According to the greatest Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56-c.120 AD),

> Besides being put to death they were made to serve as objects of amusement; they were clad in the hides of beasts and torn to pieces by dogs; others were crucified, others set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed.[8]

Eleven of the 12 apostles were martyred, as well as many of those known as the "Apostolic Fathers." In 112 the Emperor Trajan proclaimed the death penalty for Christians for refusing to offer sacrifices to the emperor. Church leader Ignatius (d. 98/118) literally was thrown to the lions, saying as he went, "I thank You, O Lord, that you have vouchsafed thus to honor me." Another leader, Polycarp (AD 69-155), was burned at the stake for refusing to call Caesar "Lord." He declared to his tormenters,

> Eighty and six years I have served Christ… and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and then is quenched; but you know not of the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment. Bring what you will.[9]

The authorities were suspicious of the practices of the church, such as the Lord's Supper which was identified by some with cannibalism. Believers recognized a higher authority than the Roman divine-emperor, evidenced by their refusal to offer him worship or call him "Lord." Plus, they made easy scape-goats. Tertullian once complained,

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[6] Kane, *Concise History,* 30-31.
[7] Tertullian, cited in several sources
[8] Tacitus, cited in "From the Archives: Nero's Cruelties," *Christianity Today,* 1990, Issue 27.
[9] Cited in James C. Howell, *Introducing Christianity: Exploring the Bible, Faith, and Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 158.

> If the River Tiber rises as high as the city walls of Rome, if the River Nile does not send its waters over the fields, if there is an earthquake, or famine, or pestilence, immediately the cry is, 'The Christians to the lions.'[10]

Yet he also recognized, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The more the blood of Christian martyrs spilled on the ground, the more converts sprang up to replace them. This is the period in which believers identified each other secretly by the sign of the fish <><, the *ichthus*, the Greek word for fish, each letter standing for an article of faith (*I*esus, *Ch*ristos, *th*eos [God], *u*ios [son], *s*oter [savior]).

The persecution of the church by Rome came to a head during the reign of the emperor Diocletian (284-305). In 303 he issued an Edict of Persecution. Churches were destroyed, Christian books burned, and believers martyred. This persisted until 311 when civil war broke out between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire. The decisive battle, known as the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, was fought in 312. The western leader, Constantine (c. 272-337), on the eve of the battle was said to have seen a flaming cross in the sky accompanied by the words "By this sign conquer" (*in hoc signo vinces*). He took crosses into battle and emerged victorious. In gratitude he issued the Edict of Milan, or Edict of Toleration, forever ending persecution in the Roman Empire. In 380, Christianity became the official (and only) state religion. The Christian conquest of Rome was complete.

Explaining the growth

As noted, throughout this period, Christianity was illegal. Yet through the ebb and flow of persecution, the church grew, overcame, and conquered. We may now pause to consider why, beyond the external factors, the early church was able to achieve all that it did.

Resurrection

First, the apostles were absolutely convinced that the tomb was empty, that Jesus was risen and ascended, that He was at the right hand of God, and that from there He would one day return. They had seen, spoken to, eaten with, and even touched the risen Christ. This conviction emboldened their preaching. At the center of the message was the *fact* of the resurrection.[11] They preached the resurrection as a historical event. They preached the resurrection as a space-time reality. The message of the sin-atoning death of Christ and the risen, ascended and reigning Christ was one for which they lived and for which they were willing to die.

Charles Colson included a chapter in his book *Loving God* entitled "Watergate and the Resurrection."[12] He describes the situation in the Oval Office of the White House in which were gathered a handful of men who knew about the break-in of the Watergate Hotel by Republican political operatives and the conspiracy to cover it up. The group included President Richard Nixon, his chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, assistant John Ehrlichman, attorney general John N. Mitchell, John Dean, and Charles Colson. All that they needed to do, says Colson, was contain the cover-up within the circle of the President's closest advisors. They occupied the Oval Office,

[10] Jonathan Hill, *What Has Christianity Done for Us? How it Shaped the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 109.
[11] Especially in Acts 2:22-36; 3:1-16; 10:34-43; 13:26-39; 17:29-31; 23:6-10; 26:9-23; cf 4:27, 28.
[12] Charles Colson, *Loving God* (1986; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2018), Chapter 6.

the office of the most powerful man on earth facing nothing more than public pressure. Yet in a matter of days the cover-up collapsed and the men were scrambling to cover their own skins.

His point? The empty tomb has to be explained. Even the enemies of Jesus concede the point that the tomb was empty, forcing them to concoct the story that the disciples had stolen the body (Matt. 28:13). Does it make sense to argue that the disciples overcame the fears that led to their betrayal, denial, and abandonment of Christ, overcame the guard at the tomb, rolled away the stone that covered its entrance, stole the body, disposed of it in a way that was never discovered, and then were martyred for what they knew to be a fraud? Does this make sense of what we know to be true of human nature, of which the collapse of the Watergate cover-up is but one example? Various skeptics have tried to explain the empty tomb by means of a "Passover Plot," a conspiracy of some sort or another, or perhaps a mass delusion or hallucination. Yet as the one-time Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, C. F. D. Moule (1908-2007) has argued (and I paraphrase), 'if there is a resurrection-shaped hole torn into the fabric of history, with what does the secular historian (who presupposes the impossibility of the miraculous) propose to stop it up?'

There is a resurrection-shaped event in history that can only adequately be explained by a resurrection. Consequently, "know for certain," once and for all, "that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Christianity cannot be reduced to an ethical system or a philosophy or a way of life that one might agree or disagree with. Christianity is about a person. Christianity is about the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is about the facts of history. It is the atoning death and conquering resurrection of Christ as a historical event that the church proclaims, the Christ who calls all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30, 31).

Holy Spirit

Second, the early church was empowered by the Holy Spirit. The disciples had been with Jesus for the three years of His earthly ministry. They had heard His teaching. They had witnessed His miracles. They had seen his interactions with various people in various circumstances. Were they not ready now to minister on their own? Had Jesus not prepared them for their mission? Contrary to what we might otherwise have expected, Jesus tells them to *wait*. He tells them to "stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49, cf. Acts 1:4-5). Why wait? What was missing? What the disciples lacked was power. What they needed was the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised,

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given. The Spirit empowered the preaching of the disciples. Their unaided natural endowments were inadequate to the task. Their ordinary gifts were insufficient. Why? Because a miracle is required to make a Christian. Their preaching and teaching and witness would fail without the power of the Spirit. This too is a lesson that the church has had to learn and relearn in every generation. The Spirit was given in the context of a prayer meeting (Acts 1:14, 24; 2:1ff). It is critical that the church understand that all its efforts to

grow, its programs, its organizations, its ministry and mission will all fail without the outpouring of the Spirit. It is vital still today that we pray that God give us the Spirit once more and bring a world-changing revival in our day, as He has done repeatedly in days of old (Luke 11:13).

Way of life

Third, there are a number of overlooked lifestyle factors that must be considered. Sociologist Rodney Stark estimates that there were under 8000 Christians in a Roman Empire of 60 million by the year 100. Yet he points out that if the church grew at a not unreasonable rate of under 4% per year (fertility plus conversions), there would be over 217,000 Christians by the year 200, nearly 6.2 million by the year 300, and an astonishing 33.8 million by the year 350, or over 56% of the population of the entire Empire. Some early Christian writers by that time were indeed claiming that Christians were a majority, leading Stark to say that "Constantine's conversion," often credited with the growth of the church, "would better be seen as a response to the massive exponential wave in progress, not as its cause."[13] He reckons that this extraordinary progress occurred through gradual, steady, long-term growth. It occurred mainly by converts introducing their family members to the Christian religion. Conversion proceeded "along social networks formed by interpersonal attachments."[14] Taking a fairly unconventional approach and setting aside supernatural explanations for the moment, Stark provides three sociological or lifestyle-based reasons for the growth of early Christianity.

Epidemics and care

First, Christianity was able better to cope with the devastating epidemics that struck the Roman Empire in 165 A.D. and again in 251 A.D. The first of these is estimated to have reduced the population of the Empire from a quarter to one third. Christianity was able to explain epidemics as divine testing designed to strengthen faith, whereas pagans merely were terror-struck. Christians responded by lovingly caring for the afflicted, resulting in higher survival rates among Christians. During the plague during the reign of the Emperor Maximus Daza (305-313), it was the Christians who stayed behind and helped the sick and shared their food and water. Pagans abandoned and fled from the infected, hastening their demise. Elementary care such as food and water provided by fellow believers greatly reduced mortality rates among Christians. Their ethics of love and care had no parallels in pagan religions or among pagan philosophers and led to conversions to Christianity. Pagans could not but help notice with admiration, "Oh how they love one another."

Status of women[15]

Second, women enjoyed a higher status in Christian circles than in the larger Greco-Roman world. For example, Athenian wives typically were married at puberty if not before. Legally they were classified as children. They were not allowed to own property and were themselves the legal property of a man (e.g. father, husband or brother) their entire lives. Their husbands could divorce them simply by ordering them out of the house. Their security was always in jeopardy. Christian women, however, were protected by the church's strong prohibition of divorce. They married at an older age and had a voice in whom they would marry. Exposure of live infants,

[13] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10; also Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011)*,* 153-15; 170-172; 186.

[14] Ibid., 18.

[15] On the appeal of Christianity to women in the ancient world, see Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 121-136.

particularly deformed males and unwanted girls, was legal, widespread, and morally acceptable, even endorsed by Plato and Aristotle.[16] Stark cites a letter from the 1st century A.D. from an out-of-town husband to his wife soon to give birth: "If it's a boy keep it, if a girl discard it."[17]

Abortion was a major cause of death among women. By prohibiting both infanticide and abortion, Christians helped correct the gender imbalance (more boys than girls) of the Greco-Roman world. Christian women didn't die from botched abortions because Christians didn't abort babies. This meant there would be more wives, more babies, and more Christians. Naturally enough, Christianity was especially successful at attracting women, particularly in the upper classes.

Marriage

Third, closely associated with the status of women, Christian *fertility* rates played a vital role in the growth of the early church as well. Historians cite evidence of birth rates below replacement in the Greco-Roman world. Marriage was held in low esteem among men, many of whom attributed avoiding marriage due to the difficulty of dealing with wives.[18] Male prostitution, bisexuality, and homosexuality were widespread, contributing to the decline in birth rates among pagans. So also did infanticide and abortion, the latter as noted, often rendering women infertile and even killing them. Various methods of birth control were utilized and sexual deviancies practiced throughout the Roman Empire to avoid conception.[19] All this contributed to a declining pagan population.

Over against this, Christians celebrated fertility. They sought to fulfill the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). They taught that the primary purpose of sex was procreation. Again, they prohibited infanticide and abortion as murder. They prohibited prostitution, homosexuality, bisexuality, and non-reproductive sexual acts. Consequently, Christian fertility rates surged. Christians out-reproduced their pagan neighbors. They sought to have children, celebrated their arrival, and avoided practices that would have prevented conception. Christian men and women cherished marriage, cherished family, and cherished children. Rod Dreher, writing in his book *The Benedict Option,* argues that "Christianity… worked a cultural revolution, restraining and channeling male eros, elevating the status of women and of the human body, and infusing marriage – and marital sexuality – with love." He cites Sarah Ryden's work, *Paul Among the People,* who writes that Christian marriage was "as different from anything before or since as the command to turn the other cheek."[20] "Superior fertility," Stark affirms with understatement, was "a nontrivial portion of Christian growth" in the early centuries.[21]

Doctrine

The Christian victory wasn't simply sociology, as we've seen. The way Christians lived can only be explained by Christian convictions. Christian doctrines played a foundational role for the sociological outcomes. "Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive,

[16] Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 97ff; 118ff.
[17] Ibid., 97, 98.
[18] Ibid., 117.
[19] Ibid., 121, 122.
[20] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Penguin Random House, LLC, 2017), 199.
[21] Stark, *Rise of Christianity,* 128.

liberating, and effective social relations and organizations," Stark maintains.[22] Evidence from ancient cemetery inscriptions indicates that Christians lived longer than their pagan contemporaries. Why? Because they avoided excesses – moderation was deemed a virtue and so they avoided drunkenness and gluttony and promiscuity. They lived healthier lives.

Why did they live as they did? Because of Christianity's distinctive doctrines. Like what? Like "God is love." Because God is love, Christians understood that they were to love each other. The ancient world "regarded mercy and pity as pathological emotions – defects of character," unworthy of the wise and found only in the unenlightened, Stark reminds us.[23] Christians, by way of contrast, belonged to a community in which mercy and mutual care were regarded as virtues.

Unbelievers took notice. The Roman satirist Lucian (c. 125-c. 180) wrote with admiration,

> It is incredible to see the ardor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator (Jesus) has put into their heads that they are all brethren.[24]

Greek orator and author Aristides (117-118 AD) described the Christians to the Roman Emperor in these words:

> They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit in God.[25]

Sanctity of human life

Any other doctrinal factors? Yes – the sanctity of human life made in the image of God. Remember this was a world in which life was cheap. For entertainment people went to arenas to watch wild animals tear men apart or to watch men hack each other to death. This was their spectator sport. "It is difficult to comprehend the emotional life of such people," says Stark.[26] Where Christians had the power and influence to do so, they prohibited such "games." Tom Holland (who by the way is not a Christian), in his acclaimed book *Dominion,* tells the story of his own fascinating journey from a glamourous view of the classical world ("the glory that was Rome") to his awakening to its sheer brutality. The Greco-Roman world from the Spartan general Leonidas to the Roman Julius Caesar had a "complete lack of any sense that the poor or weak might have the slightest intrinsic value."[27] For Christians, all races, classes, and nations bear God's image, and therefore all human lives are of intrinsic worth.

In a word, the early Christians remained faithful throughout this period of opposition and growth. They maintained high moral standards, avoiding the arena and the theater, the latter a hotbed of

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[22] Ibid., 211.
[23] Ibid., 212; also Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 112-119.
[24] Kane, *Concise History,* 25.
[25] Cited in Colson, *Loving God,* 176.
[26] Stark, *Rise of Christianity,* 214.
[27] Tom Holland, *Dominion, How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 11.

lasciviousness, and eschewing the popular immoral songs of that day. Despite social and political pressure, they remained faithful, obedient. When their pagan neighbors were journeying to the arena to watch the brutal gladiatorial games, Christians stayed home. When their pagan neighbors were trotting off to the highly immoral theater (much like today's forms of "entertainment"), the Christians were trotting off to church. When their pagan neighbors were singing sensuous songs, the Christians were singing psalms. The early Christians maintained high moral standards.

Lessons

The history of the apostolic and early church is a great encouragement to us. Beginning from ground zero, without material or political or human resources, the early Christians were able to conquer the greatest empire that the world has ever seen. What happened once could happen again among us who enjoy far more in the way of resources than did they.

The early church grew because of the Spirit-empowered Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the love, courage and faithfulness of the early Christians. It grew because Christians simply out-thought, out-lived, out-loved, and out-(re)produced their pagan neighbors. It took 300 years. Yet after 300 years, Christians were a majority. Why? Because they were pro-God, pro-life, pro-family, pro-marriage, pro-children in a classical culture that was addicted to idolatry, pleasure and (ironically) death. This is why our strategy must be that of the marathon and not the sprint. The immediate future may look bleak. The long term: Jesus shall reign.

Late Antiquity (325-500)

Now that the church is past its period of persecution in the Roman Empire, what does it look like? What are its doctrines? What does it do when it assembles? Who are its members? Can we provide a profile? The church has been on the run for 300 years. Time has come for it to settle its beliefs and practices.

Members

The early church was exceptionally ethnically and generationally diverse. Among its strongest churches were those of North Africa, Egypt, the Middle East, Asia Minor, as well as Europe. Stark estimates that by the year 500, more than two-thirds of Christians were outside of Europe. Syria, not Italy was the church's center of gravity.[28] Much of the leadership of the early church came from non-European regions, as we will see. We know from the epistles that its gatherings included the young and the old, the rich and the poor, upper class and lower class, the single and the married, parents and children, the slave and the free, both males and females.[29] Because outreach was not demographically targeted, the resulting churches were not what has been called "homogenous units."[30] Early congregations drew indiscriminately from their surrounding area.

A fascinating but often overlooked fact about the early church was its non-European character. Of course Jesus and the apostles were Middle-Easterners. Yet many of the most important church leaders were also non-European. The flow of intellectual life was not north (from Europe), south, but as Thomas Oden (1931-2016) has demonstrated, from south to north, especially from the continent of Africa.[31] Tertullian (c. 155-240), recognized as "the Father of Latin Theology," was a North African. He coined the terms Trinity and sacrament. So also was Cyprian (c. 210 - 258), and the most important theologian in the history of the church, Augustine (c. 354 - 430). "Nowhere in the Latin West had the implications of Christian teaching been more brilliantly elucidated than in Africa" says Tom Holland, "or to such influential effect." [32] Athanasius (c. 296 – 373), nicknamed the "black dwarf," who stood *contra mundum* in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, was an Egyptian. The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus), also vital in the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, were from Asia Minor, present day Turkey. These were the crucial voices in formulating the early creeds. Christianity can only be described as a "western" religion in a highly qualified sense.

Church practices[33]

Calvin maintained that the *Genevan Psalter* of 1542 and subsequent Reformed worship was "according to the custom of the ancient church." What do we know about the worship of the early church? Can this claim of his be substantiated? Study of the apostolic church in Scripture and of the Patristic period in the works of Church Fathers and other historical sources give

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[28] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 199-200, citing Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[29] For example, Titus 2:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; James 2:1-13; 5:1-6; 1 Cor. 7 1-40; Eph. 5:22-6:4; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:18-4:1; Phile.
[30] This is the language of the "Church Growth Movement" of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.
[31] Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010). He is also the editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture,* Volumes 1-29 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000-2010).
[32] Holland, *Dominion*, 186. According to Rodney Stark, "By the seventh century, Christianity probably was far stronger and more sophisticated in North Africa and Asia than in Europe" (*Triumph of Christianity,* 4).
[33] For further elaboration, see T. L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2014)*,* 36-43.

substantial support to his claims. Starting with Acts 2:42, we find a simple description of simple worship consisting of a few basic elements. No attempt was made by the apostolic and patristic church to duplicate the elaborate rituals of the temple. Their model instead was the synagogue with its simple services of Scripture reading and exposition, its psalmody and prayer, to which was added the Christian sacraments.

> *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* (Acts 2:42)

The gatherings of the apostolic church were short on ceremony and long on substance. There were, in fact,

- No written liturgies until fourth or fifth century
- No developed ritual or ceremony until fourth or fifth century
- No visual art in places of worship until third century; no liturgical use of art until sixth century
- No liturgical incense used until fourth century
- No church calendar developed until fourth century
- Simple church buildings until the fourth century (often house churches)
- No instrumental music until tenth century

Finally, services were held on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:8). This is confirmed by Pliny the Younger's letter (110 AD), Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (c. 155 AD), the *Didache* (c. 80-110 AD), and Tertullian. Church fathers such as Tertullian (c. 155-240) and Lactantius of Carthage (c. 250-325) were champions of simplicity.

Note the importance of the fourth century. Keep that in mind as we proceed.

As for the details of the services themselves, we may discern the following elements:

Scripture reading
The early Christians followed the practice of synagogue and early church of *lectio continua,* that is, sequential readings of Scripture. They read straight through whole books of the Bible. The calendar-based lectionary was not developed until fifth to seventh centuries with its *lectio selecta* readings in favor of sequential reading (1 Tim 4:13).[34]

Preaching
They again followed the pattern of the synagogue, of exhortation based upon and arising out of the Scripture reading (see Lk 4:16-27; Acts 13:14, 15:21; 5:42; 6:2, 4). *Lectio continua*

[34] See Roman Catholic scholars J. A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy: To the Time of Gregory the Great,* Liturgical Studies vol. 6 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 167-174. Also, Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin,* 22-24; 83-94.

preaching is found in the works of leading church fathers such as Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome, and others.[35]

Prayer

They utilized what has been called a "full diet of prayer," including Prayers of Praise, Confession of Sin, Thanksgiving, Illumination, Intercessions (five-fold based on 2 Tim 2:1ff), and Benediction. We find these prayers in both the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus and the *Apostolic Constitutions,* both likely dating in the fifth century when the public prayers of the early church were first recorded. The early church prayed "according to Scripture," filling their prayers with scriptural content and employing these six basic prayer genres. Extemporaneous prayers are found in Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (155 AD) where he describes the presiding elder as praying "according to his ability," as also does Hippolytus.[36]

Psalmody

The early church sang psalms primarily (e.g. Acts 4:24-26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Jas 5:13), and also hymns (e.g. Lk 1:46-55; 2:29-32; 2:68-79; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-26). Pliny the Younger's letter to the emperor (112 AD) speaks of the early Christians singing hymns to Christ. The Church Fathers are effusive in their zeal for psalm singing, with Tertullian (ca. 150- ca. 225), Eusebius (ca. 260-ca. 320), Athanasius (ca. 295-373), Augustine (343-430), Jerome (ca. 345-420), Basil (ca. 330-379), Ambrose (ca. 339-397), and Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) among the many who provide testimony of this love of singing the psalms.[37]

Sacraments

Scriptural baptisms were simple washings without ceremony, as were those described in the *Didache* (ca. 80-ca. 110 AD) and Justin Martyr's *Apology* (ca. 155 AD). The Apostle Paul identifies baptism with circumcision (Col 2:11), giving it a covenantal interpretation. (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39; Rom 4:11). Tertullian (ca. 150-225) was first to use the Latin term *sacramentum* meaning "sacrament" or "oath," demonstrating a covenantal understanding.[38]

The *Lord's Supper* was administered by the early Christians simply as a meal. The *Didache* (ca. 80- ca. 110 AD) and Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (ca. 155) confirm the simplicity and non-sacrificial nature of the early observance. Augustine reemphasized the covenantal understanding of the Lord's Supper and gave to the sacraments their classical definition as "visible words" and as external signs of inward realities. This covenantal understanding was based upon the scriptural pattern of covenantal meals in which agreed-upon obligations between parties are confirmed (Gen 14:18; 18:1-8; 27:19; Ex 12-13; 24). Jesus deliberately placed His Supper in this context by referring to the cup as "the new covenant in my blood" (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; cf Heb 9:20).[39]

In summary, the public services of the early Christians were simple services in which the word of God was read, preached, sung, prayed, and displayed (in the sacraments). These services could

[35] See Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin,* 98-103 and sources cited there.
[36] Ibid, 108-114.
[37] Ibid, 125-130.
[38] Ibid, 181-183.
[39] Ibid, 152-157.

take place anywhere, in the catacombs of Rome and in houses, in the open air and in church buildings. Elaborate liturgies, rituals, and ceremonies were novelties introduced only in the era of Constantine, that is, the fourth century, with the building of monumental church structures and the increasing felt need to compete with the rituals of the mystery religions. When the church today uses minimal ritual, when it keeps matters simple, when its various exercises revolve around the word, it stands in good company.[40] Reformed Protestants have no reason to be intimidated by the claims of the liturgical churches as to the antiquity of their forms.

Doctrines

With the persecutions now over in the Roman Empire, the church entered into a period of theological reflection and formulation. The Constantinian settlement allowed the church to give much needed attention to its doctrines. There were many voices claiming to be Christian. Some of these denied the deity of Christ, others the necessity of God's grace and others the goodness of the physical world. What did the church believe? The time had come for the church to define the parameters of orthodox belief and practice and exclude what was deviant and heretical.

The most important event in the struggle to define the church's theology took place in 387 AD. A young man of 31 years of age was struggling to believe. He had been reared by his Christian mother Monica who prayed for him daily, and a pagan father. As a teenager, he abandoned Christianity as too simplistic, took a mistress, and at 18 they had a son. At 19 years of age he converted to Manichaean Christianity, named for Mani, a Persian Christian monk. Manichaens rejected the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament. They contrasted the material world which they believed was created by the devil with the world of the spirit which was of God. This dualism satisfied him until he was 28 years old. Then in 384 he began listening to the preaching of Ambrose (c. 340-397), Bishop of Milan, who taught from the Old Testament that creation was good, the God of the Old Testament and New Testament was one and the same, and that God was incarnate in Christ Jesus. This brought on an enormous struggle within him as he sought to make sense out of life and find peace with God. One day while walking outside discussing these things with a friend, he heard a child singing, *tolle lege, tolle lege*, "take up and read, take up and read." He rushed back into the house, picked up a copy of the book of Romans and randomly read at the page to which he had opened it:

> "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom 13:13, 14).

At that moment, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) was converted. He later wrote in his *Confessions*,

> Instantly, as I finished reading… something like the light of full certainty was infused in my heart and all the dark shadows of doubt fell away.[41]

Out of his own experience, he insightfully reflected in his *Confessions* (400 A.D.) about all humanity, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." And also, regarding the

[40] See again Jungmann's summary, as found in *Worshipping with Calvin,* 22-24.
[41] Various editions.

primacy of faith, *crede ut intellegas*: "Believe in order to understand." Augustine went on to become one of the greatest men who ever lived. He is regarded as the greatest man of late antiquity and the most influential theologian in the Western church, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches. He did more to shape Christian theology than any other single individual. Though he attended none of the church councils, he was involved in answering all the key questions of 325-500 AD.

Physical world

First, is the God of creation the God of the New Testament? Against the Manchaeans, Augustine argued the following:

- The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament; a wedge may not be driven between the two;
- The physical world is created by God and is good and to be enjoyed by believers;
- God was manifested in the flesh in Jesus Christ;
- Evil was not created but is the absence of good; it is good gone bad.

Church

Second, is the church pure or mixed? A sect of North Africans known as Donatists protested the readmission into the church those whose faith had lapsed during Diocletian's persecutions. They formed a separate true or pure church free from the "deadly sins" of the catholic church. Augustine, made Bishop of Hippo (in North Africa) in 395, rebutted them:

  - The church is imperfect. In this era, it is a mixed multitude of genuine Christians and counterfeits, of wheat and tares (Mt 13:24-30). As the English Baptist C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) would later say, "If you find the perfect church, don't join it. You'll ruin it."

- Yet the church is necessary. Indeed he said, there is, "No salvation outside of the church."
  - Force may be used to protect the truth and punish error. Jesus said, "Compel them to come in" (Lk 14:23). Coercion is approved because it is for the good of those compelled. Regrettably, this provided the basis for the persecution of heretics and the Inquisition.

Free will

Third, is the will of man free or enslaved? About 380 a British monk named Pelagius, concerned about the loose morals and passivity wrought by the emphasis on grace, began to teach:

- The will of man is free even after the fall.
- Adam's effect on his descendants is that of a bad example only, not a corrupt nature.
- Sin is a choice, not a condition. Man can do what God says if only he will.

Augustine's rebuttal was to argue for the following:

- *Original sin* – we are born corrupted and enslaved by sin. This is true from birth. He told in his *Confessions* the famous story of his neighbor's pear tree. As a boy he and some friends stole pears from the tree of a neighbor even though he had his own pear trees with fruit superior to those of his neighbor and they were not hungry. They threw the stolen pears to pigs. Why then did he steal? For the thrill of it, "loving as I did, the sin for the sin's sake." Citing the enticing nature of evil and his internal conflict, he admitted to praying, "Make me pure (*continentam*), but not yet."
- The *necessity of grace.* We are not able to believe and obey God until God makes us able. Grace must precede our response or we will not respond. "Give what you command" he said, "and command what you will."
- *Predestination* – Grace is given to some by God's choice through the word and sacraments.
- The *perseverance* of the *elect.* Those whom God has chosen cannot be lost.

The church affirmed Augustine's view of the bondage of the will and the necessity of prevenient grace by condemning Pelagianism at the councils of Carthage (416) and Ephesus (431).

Trinity and the dual nature of Christ

Fourth, is God three or one, is Christ human or divine, or divine but of a lesser divinity? Augustine's influence was crucial. The first five "ecumenical" councils established Christian orthodoxy. The most important two were as follows:

- Council of Nicea (325), was called by newly converted Constantine in order to deal with Arianism. Arians, named for an elder (presbyter) named Arius (c. AD 257-336) in Alexandria, Egypt, said Christ was the supreme creature and so was not co-eternal or co-essential with the Father. The champion of orthodoxy was an Egyptian named Athanasius (296-373) who fought the Arians all of his life, sometimes alone. Five times he was exiled from the Empire. Hence the phrase, *Athanasius contra mundum.* His views prevailed at Nicea (325) which formulated the following creed, the last section of which (on the Holy Spirit) was added by the Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in *one God*, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made, being of *one substance with the Father*;

by whom all things were made;
who for us and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried;
and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father;
and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life,
who *proceeds from the Father and the Son*;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets;
and we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church;
we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
and we look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The phrase "and the Son," later added to the third section, will become an issue over which the church will divide. It is known as the *Filioque* clause. In 1054 the Eastern Church, known as Orthodox, and the Western Church, known as Catholic, will separate, the Catholic insisting on its inclusion, the Orthodox insisting on its exclusion. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God in three persons, who are "the same in substance, equal in power and glory" (*Shorter Catechism* #5). The differ only in the Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

- Council of Chalcedon (451) clarified the "dual nature" of Christ, that He is one Person, "at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man . . . in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." Notice the modesty of Chalcedon's formulations. We are more able to describe the "hypostatic union," the union of the human and divine natures, by what it is not rather than what it is. The mystery is great.

There remained a long battle over the orthodox understanding of the two natures of Christ. How was the union of the two natures to be described yet the integrity of each nature still preserved?

- Eutychians (named for Eutyches of Constantinople [c.380-c.456]) blended the two natures, the divine swallowing-up the human. Problem: The natures were united but confused.
- Apollinarians (named for Apollinaris of Laodicea who died in 390) proposed that Jesus had a normal human body within which was a divine mind. J. I. Packer called this the "envelope theory." The First Council of Constantinople (381) condemned this. The

problem: The natures were united but as with the Eutychians they were also confused. Both of these are labeled monophysitism (mono – one; physitism – nature).

- ❖ Nestorians (named for the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius [c. 386-451]) taught that in the incarnation two distinct and separate natures, the human and the divine are brought together. Packer calls this the "pantomime horse" theory, two distinct persons under the same skin which remain un-united. Nestorianism was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431. The problem: The natures are not confused but they are not united either. What the church was groping toward was a union of the two natures in Christ, the human and the divine, without confusion.

Still today we refer to "classical theism," the doctrine of God as formulated by the church fathers, affirmed by the medieval theologians, by the Reformers, and by post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy. Both Calvin in his *Institutes* and the Westminster Divines saw little need to elaborate upon the classic doctrine of God, to correct or even to expand upon it. It is the common heritage of the whole church.

Fall of Rome

Fifth, why did Rome fall? When Alaric and the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410, it shocked the world (it hadn't happened for 800 years). Many blamed Christianity, arguing that the abandoning of their traditional gods had brought catastrophe. Even Christians wondered, how could God have allowed this? Jerome exclaimed, "The city which has taken the whole world is itself taken!" Augustine wrote a rebuttal to the pagan accusations entitled *The City of God,* his greatest work and a classic in the Western canon. He argued the following:

- ❖ Rome's fall was self-destruction, brought on by pride and wickedness.
- ❖ There are two kingdoms or cities, the city of man, which is of this world, temporal, and passing away; and the city of God, which is eternal, unscathed, and not identified with any earthly kingdom.
- ❖ Time is linear. He identified the cross as the center of history, a one-time event, the crux. Historian Christopher Dawson said that Augustine was "not only the founder of the Christian philosophy of history," but "actually the first man in the world to discover the meaning of time."[42]

In summary, through the labors of Augustine, Christianity was preserved as a religion of grace, relevant in this world, worshiping a triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with a linear, progressive view of history.

Lessons:

The major lesson of late antiquity was the importance of orthodox truth. In the competition between truth and unity, truth must win. Otherwise, the church will lose the gospel altogether,

[42] Cited by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 30.

and with it, the whole reason for its existence. This means that difficult decisions have to be made. Feelings have to be hurt. Individuals or groups have to be excluded. The Pelagians, Manichaens, Arians and others were all called to repentance, and failing such, had to be removed from the church. The gospel itself must be protected at all costs. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy must be preserved. Heresies must be identified and condemned. Heretics must be removed from the fellowship of the church until they repent. “Purge the evil person from among you,” the Apostle Paul insists (1 Cor 5:13; cf Mt 18:15-17; 2 Jn 9-11). The church must always be committed to “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), not speaking love without truth or speaking truth without love, but always the *truth* in *love*, not compromising either at the expense of the other.

The Middle Ages (500-1350)

We have given focused attention to the early, foundational centuries and will necessarily treat each succeeding era with greater brevity. The Middle Ages often have been characterized as a "dark" age. It is doubtful that this was ever an accurate characterization, more a result of Enlightenment vanity than historical fact. The term "Middle Age" did not even appear in English until 1753. Enlightenment-inspired historians described the era as merely "middle" between the enlightened classical world and their own enlightened era. During the so-called "Dark Ages" (the front end of the Middle Ages), the gospel slowly transformed the character of the ancient classical world and the ancient barbarians of Europe into those of the Christian religion, while still preserving the best of antiquity.[43]

The Middle Ages were a time of substantial growth for the Christian church, yet also of decline. The interior regions of Europe were Christianized, yet North Africa and the Middle East and Asia Minor were lost to Islam. Two institutional developments took place which Protestants lament: the papacy and monasticism. Yet we also recognize the achievements of the church throughout this period. Moral progress was substantial. The gladiatorial games were abolished and slavery in the West disappeared for a thousand years (half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves). For the first time in the history of the world, a civilization was created that recognized the essential dignity of all people made in God's image. What we today recognize as "self-evident" truths (life, liberty, property) and universal rights (such as equality, franchise, speech, assembly, press, religion, self-defense, etc.), have been anything but, except where Christianity has gone: not in the ancient world and not in areas dominated by other religions even today. Culturally, Europeans under the sway of Christianity were able to develop, Stark maintains, "better ways to farm, to sail, to transport goods, to conduct business, to build churches, to make war, to educate, and even to play music."[44]

We may begin to evaluate this period through the lens of these three key developments. We will then go on to highlight the positive religious and social progress enjoyed throughout the medieval period.

The Papacy

The church of the Apostles was governed by direct apostolic command. The Apostles were special men with special authority. Their position or office was temporary and extraordinary. An Apostle was required to have seen the Lord (Acts 1:21,22; 1 Cor 9:1, 15:5ff). They sometimes exercised miraculous powers or "signs" which identified them as Apostles (2 Cor 12:12).

Leadership in the Post-Apostolic Church

The Apostles provided for the ongoing government of the church by authorizing elders to rule in their place. We find that in the New Testament elders (presbyters) were elected or appointed in every church (Acts 6:1-6, 14:23; Titus 1:5). "Bishop" was originally just another name for "elder" (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 3:5,7). *Bishop* was the function, *elder* the *office.* There typically was a teaching elder or presiding elder in these early churches. Yet elders were not priests.

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[43] Stark says of the "Dark Ages," "They never existed." Rather, "this era was instead a period of rapid and remarkable progress" (*Triumph of Christianity,* 4, 237-253).

[44] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 240.

Councils of elders from all the churches were already deciding issues during New Testament times (Acts 15:1ff). The early church government was representative (the people choosing their leaders), plural (authority was entrusted not to individuals like apostles but boards of elders), and connectional (authority flowed between the churches; they were not autonomous; Acts 15:22-16:5).

Development of hierarchical system

Despite the pattern of rule by a plurality of elders, Ignatius of Antioch (d. 115) early advocated one elder per congregation. He did this because of the problem of conflict with plural eldership (they argued a lot!). Gradually, step-by-step, the church moved in a hierarchical direction. Rule by bishops was all but universal by 200. *Presbyters* were called *priests* by 250. The Bishop of Rome had established a "primacy of honor" based primarily on political considerations by the end of the 2nd century, though not a "primacy of office." By the 4th century, the Bishop of Rome began to assert the primacy of office. Here are some of the key developments.

- Pope Damascus (366-384) was first to claim the "keys of the kingdom."
    - Pope Suricius (384-399) was first to call fellow bishops "sons" not "brothers" and was first to call his decisions "decretals."
    - Pope Innocent I (401-417) was first to claim authority over all the churches
    - Pope Leo I (440-451) was the first to exercise secular power. When the Vandals sacked Rome in 455, Leo negotiated their withdrawal. The collapse of civil authority left a vacuum that was filled by the church. Leo was first to:
        - exclusively claim the title of Pope (means "father;" other bishops up to that time had used it);
        - claim to be the successor of Peter;
        - claim the power of "binding and loosing" (Mt 16, 18).
    - Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) marks the transition from the ancient world of Imperial Rome to medieval Christendom. Under the Lombard threat (northern Germanic tribes, 590), Gregory took command of the city, organized its defense, organized distribution of food to the hungry, gave orders to generals, and negotiated a peace settlement. Yet even Gregory fiercely resisted the title of "universal bishop," or "universal pope," denying universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over other bishops and the whole church, as Calvin pointed out in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion.*[45]

Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond papal power continued to grow, including the claim of "universal bishop," of papal infallibility. The Pope came to be seen as a monarch ruling over the church, a far cry from the representative forms of government which characterized the early church. In the late 8th century, a document was forged known as "the Donation of Constantine" in which it was claimed that the Emperor Constantine had granted the papacy complete political supremacy over the Western Roman Empire. We say the "Western Roman Empire" because the Eastern Church resisted all of these claims, pointing out that it was the older church (rebutting

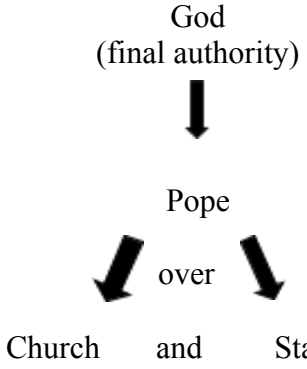
[45] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.v.10.

Rome's frequent appeals to the antiquity of its practices) and enjoyed direct ties with Jesus. Extravagant Papal claims eventually will contribute to the "Great Schism" of 1054, when the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches separated.

The politicized popes were increasingly entangled in secular, earthly affairs and the inevitable power struggles that result. In 1073 Pope Gregory VII issued the *Dictatus Papae,* which said:

> The Roman Pontiff alone is rightly to be called universal. He alone can depose or reinstate bishops. The Pope is the only one whose feet are to be kissed by all princes. He may depose Emperors. He himself can be judged by no one. The Roman Church has never erred, nor ever, by witness of Scripture, shall err to all eternity.[46]

This papal decree was a summary of all previous Papal claims. It conceives of the world like this:



Finally, Pope Boniface VII issued his *Unam Sanctam* in 1302, the strongest claim ever made by the papacy of the superiority of the church over the state. He said,

> Both swords, the spiritual and the material, therefore, are in the power of the church.[47]

Involvement in worldly affairs, the exercise of the "material sword," increasingly distracted the church, diminished the esteem in which the church was held and even brought disgrace, a story which we will pick up later.[48]

Monasticism

The monastic movement was the single most important factor in the post-apostolic missionary expansion of the Christian church. Almost all of the early missionaries were monks, as were

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[46] Frank C. Roberts, *To All Generations: A Study of Church History* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1981), 88.

[47] We may add to these claims the dogma of papal infallibility defined 500 years later by the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870 in its document *Pastor aeternus.* It declares that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra,* or officially, he speaks infallibly for the church.

[48] See summary of Papal development in D. G. Hart, *Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 97-111, 118-128.

most of the church's leaders. Over and above deep devotion to Christ, monasticism combines two ideals: *asceticism* (self-denial or deprivation) and *separatism* (separation from the world). These ideals came from two sources or influences.

The first of these was the Bible. Didn't Jesus and the Apostles teach that believers should sell all their possessions and give the earnings to the poor (Mark 10:17-22)? Didn't they commend avoiding marriage (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:8), regular fasting (Matt 6:16), and separation from the world (2 Cor 6:14ff)?

The second source was Platonism's and eastern mysticism's repudiations of the physical world. Both saw the physical world as a thing to escape by non-participation in the world of sense and matter. For the spirit to thrive, the body and its appetites must be suppressed. The blending of these two influences, the Christian and the philosophical, produced a form of Christianity that emphasized:

- ❖ vows of poverty, celibacy, and separation
- ❖ disciplines of meditation, fasting, prayer, and other forms of self-deprivation.

Monasticism developed in two forms, solitary and communal. Those who came to be known as hermit monks lived alone in the wilderness. Some have been called "grazing monks" because they ate grass like cattle. Among the better-known hermit monks are:

- ❖ Acepsimus (b. unknown, died 376), who lived for years in a tiny cell. When he finally emerged, he was so bent and wild-looking that a shepherd thought he was a wolf and shot him.
- ❖ Symeon Stylites (389-459), who lived 37 years chained to the top of a 40-foot stone pillar.
- ❖ St. Anthony (251-356), who at 20 sold his estate and gave it all away. He never bathed, slept little and then only on rocky soil.
- ❖ Athanasius (c.296-298 – 373), who wrote *Life of Anthony* which further popularized monasticism.

Whereas hermit monks lived alone, communal monks (as one might deduce) formed communities. Benedict of Nursia (480-c.542) formulated what became the Benedictine Rule, governing life in monasteries. Benedict was from a wealthy Italian family. While studying in Rome he became disenchanted with the world and became a hermit. He tortured himself, rolling naked, for example, through thorn bushes. However, he saw the dangers of isolation and the need for communal living. He told a hermit monk who had chained himself in a cave, "The true servant of God is chained not to rocks by iron but to righteousness by Christ." The Benedictine Rule required:

- ❖ vows of poverty, chastity, obedience

- ❖ a life of manual work, prayer, reading
- ❖ lifelong commitment to a single monastery to which a monk is "married" to the community. Other monks are "brothers." Monks could sleep horizontally, eat three meals a day, and work together.

Sacerdotalism

Also to be lamented was the transformation of the concept of clergy from that of pastors or preachers to that of priests (*sacerdos,* Latin for priests). The sacrament came to be seen as not simply a sacrifice of praise, but a propitiatory offering. The communion table was transformed into an altar. The priests were ordained to offer the eucharist elements of the sacrificial mass upon the altar. They came to play a mediatorial or intercessory role. Confession in particular necessarily was made through a priest. The sacraments expanded from two to seven (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, ordination, confession, anointing of the sick, and extreme unction). Grace was understood as infused into the soul through the sacrament, enabling thereby the believer to do the good works that would save him – but only after thousands of years in Purgatory. The whole system was saturated with semi-Pelagianism, which like Pelagianism was condemned by a church council (Second Council of Orange, 529). Nevertheless, the medieval system that developed depended on optimistic view of what the human will could do apart from divine grace.

Positive impact

There were many positive effects of monasticism. First, *Europe's land was developed*. Monasteries were typically established on the frontier (so as to be separate). Monks worked hard, clearing undeveloped and often unusable land and draining swamps. As a result, vast areas became prime arable land. Historian Paul Johnson says land development laid the foundation for Europe's later prosperity and its "world primacy."[49]

Second, *learning was preserved.* Because the monasteries emphasized the study of Scripture, they developed libraries and the liberal arts. They tirelessly copied both classical and religious works. Every book was created entirely by hand, every page laboriously cut and stretched from preserved calf or sheep skins, every surface hand smoothed with pumice, every word exquisitely inscribed with a quill pen and handmade ink, and the calligraphy sometimes magnificently decorated with painted imagery, ornamental borders and elaborate initial letters often heightened with gold leaf. Every work, whether sacred or secular, was laboriously and reverently created as a unique artwork glorifying the acquisition of knowledge.[50] The monks were devoted to study. Monasteries became centers of learning, and culture.

Third, the *Christian mission progressed*. Whole peoples were converted and mass baptisms administered. Here are some of the very missionaries involved.

- ❖ Patrick (c.390-461), a Scotsman, was kidnaped as a young man and kept as a slave in Ireland. After escaping he became a monk, returned to Ireland, leading to its conversion to Christianity.

[49] Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Shimon & Schuster, 2012), 148-149.
[50] Taken from "A Little-Known Trove of Beautiful Books," *Wall Street Journal,* Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2016, D5.

- ❖ Columba (521-597), an Irish monk, took the gospel to Scotland (Iona) and northern England.
- ❖ Willibrord (658-739), an English monk, brought the gospel to the Netherlands.
- ❖ Eligius (c.588-660), a French monk, evangelized Flanders and the Low Countries.
- ❖ Boniface (c.675-754), an English monk, called "Apostle of the Germans," before a crowd of hostile pagans cut down a sacred oak tree dedicated to their god Thor. As they waited for him to be struck down by lightening, instead the wind blew over the tree, leading to the conversion of the whole tribe.
- ❖ Ansgar (801-865), a French monk, named "Apostle of the North," took the gospel to Scandinavia.
- ❖ Cyril (826-869) and Methodius (c.815-885), Byzantine monks, known as "the Apostles of the Southern Slavs," took the gospel to the Czechs, Croats, Serbs, and Bulgars.

We may learn a valuable lesson from the monastic movement. We may learn to appreciate the good done by those with whom we disagree. The monks were responsible for the *conversion of Europe* to Christianity. They were responsible for *preserving learning* through the Middle Ages and providing leadership for the church. (e.g. Jerome, Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great and, in later centuries, Aquinas, Anselm, Bernard, Luther, Loyola). We cannot but admire their zeal.

Yet we may do so without endorsing their extra-biblical and unbiblical practices. We appreciate the good that came from monasticism, seeing that good as the fruit of their Christian devotion and commitment. At the same time, that which makes monasticism monasticism, its asceticism and separation we cannot approve. We don't agree with their ascetic spirituality. The Apostle Paul says that those who advocate abstaining from foods and marriage teach the "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1-5). We don't agree with their separation from the world. Jesus said we were to let our "light shine before men" (Matt 5:16). We are to be "in the midst" of the present "crooked and perverse generation shining as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15).

We may now go on to examine the positive developments of the Middle Ages, developments which help to compensate for the negatives.

Education method and schools

It is true that the classical academies closed in conjunction with the collapse of Rome. Yet the art skills, craftsmanship, engineering, writing ability, and knowledge of the Greeks and Romans survived in the monastery and cathedral schools. Not only did it survive, but positive development took place. In 636 Bishop Isidore of Seville published a multi-volume work entitled *Etymologies* in which he outlined a specifically *Christian* system of education. His work was based on Augustine and the classical authors (Greek and Roman) before him. It consisted of the following:

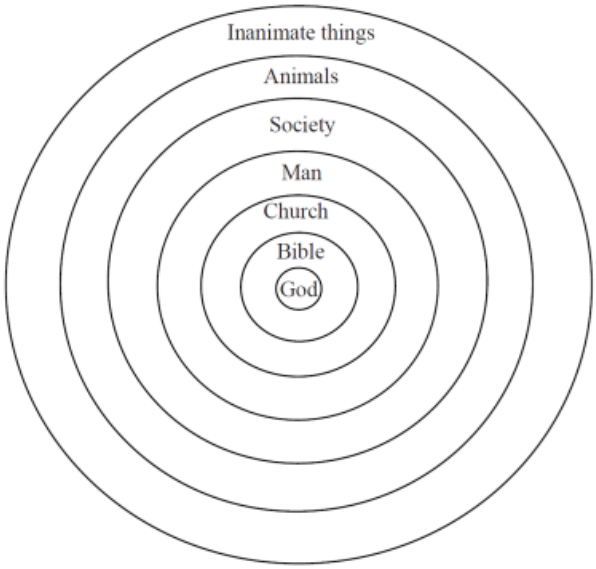
First, a *method* which divides education into three stages called the Trivium.

- *Grammar* – the basic facts of the various academic disciplines; e.g. numbers, letters, names and dates.
- *Logic* – (or Dialectic) – instruction in reasoning and argumentation is then given.
- *Rhetoric* – having established the facts and logic of things, one then studies how best to present the whole. Writing and speaking skills are developed.

Second, *a systematically ordered subject* matter:

- The seven liberal arts were identified: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic (the Trivium), arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (the Quadrium)
- Subsequent arts that depend on the seven liberal arts were identified – medicine, law, chronology (history), theology
- The heart of the curriculum was theology, called the "queen of the sciences."

At the foundation of all knowledge was the knowledge of God as revealed through Scripture as understood by the church.



This system of education dominated Western Civilization for 800 years, and in part, remains influential today. The current classical Christian school movement draws its inspiration from it, as Christians today recoil from modern educational methods and seek, in the words of Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957), to "recover the lost tools of learning."[51]

Monastic *schools* became the centers of learning from the 9th to the 11th century. Cathedral schools were established in cities by secular (non-monastic) clergy in order to train priests. In 900, there were 20 cathedral schools in Europe; by 1100, there were 200 schools.

Universities first developed in the High Middle Ages as guilds of teacher and students.

[51] From Sayer's essay, Douglas Wilson wrote his influential book *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

- 1158 – University of Bologne
- 1200 – University of Paris
- 1208 – Oxford University
- 1209 (?) – Cambridge University

By 1500 there were 80 universities in Europe. It was in these universities that the foundations for what would later be called the "scientific revolution" would be laid. "Only medieval Europeans believed that science was *possible* and *desirable*," Stark maintains.[52]

Scholasticism

Medieval thinkers sought systematic, orderly approaches to learning and knowledge. In theology, this approach became known as *scholasticism*. In particular, scholars sought to reconcile what can be known by faith with what can be known by reason. The rediscovery of Aristotle in the 12th century, respected as "the philosopher," gave impetus to this endeavor. Here are three of the scholars with whom we should gain acquaintance.

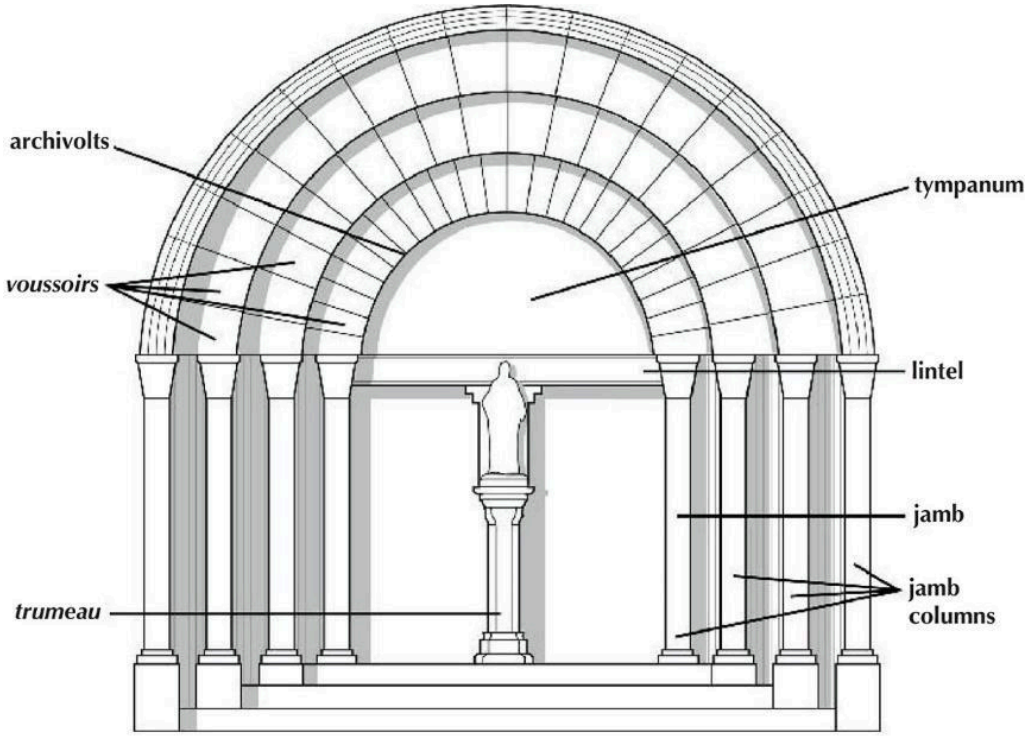
- Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), born in Italy, he is widely regarded as the greatest intellect between Augustine and Aquinas and the father of scholasticism. His most famous work was *Cur Deus Homo, Why God Became Man.* Following Augustine he said, "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand." He clearly articulated the understanding of the cross as "satisfaction," that is, Christ satisfying divine justice by paying the penalty for all sins.
- Peter Abelard (1079-1142), born in France, a man of strong ego and colorful personality, he wrote *Sic et Non, Yes and No,* according to scholastic method: listing pros and cons of a given question and then resolving. He said, "By doubting we come to enquiry, through enquiry we come to the truth."
- Peter Lambard (c. 1096-1160), Bishop of Paris, authored the *Four Books of Sentences,* which served as the standard textbook of theology until the Reformation era, and beyond among Roman Catholics. Written in the scholastic style, it compiles biblical texts and citations from the church fathers under the various theological topics, beginning with the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), another Italian, was the greatest of the medieval theologians. He wrote the massive *Summa Theologica,* a collection of all the themes of Christian theology. He believed that faith and reason ultimately agree with each other.

Architecture, art, and literature

There was an explosion of church and castle building in the 11th and 12th centuries. There were two basic styles.

[52] Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2014), 315.

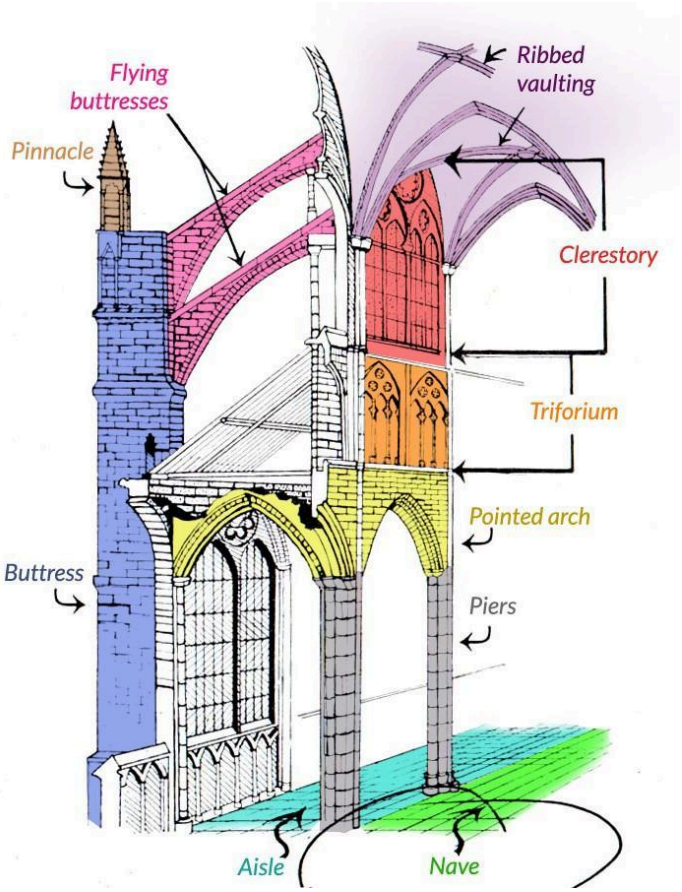
❖ *Romanesque* churches were built in the 11th century. They featured a masonry rounded ceiling called a barrel vault.



Romanesque Church Portal

Massive pillars and walls were needed to support the roof. Little space was left for windows and consequently, they were dark inside.

❖ *Gothic* churches began to be constructed in the 12th century. Ribbed vaults with pointed arches replaced the barrel vault of the Romanesque churches.



Use of flying buttresses supporting the roof allowed for the building of thinner walls and the extensive use of windows (especially stained glass). Gothic churches were full of light. The huge Gothic cathedrals of the High Middle Ages, requiring several generations to complete, represent this era's dedication to its chief value, that of knowing and serving God. Notre Dame (1163), Canterbury (1175), Strasbourg (1190), Chartres (1194), Reims (1212), and Amiens (1225) among others were built during this period.

- *Art* – achievements in the visual arts included beautiful illuminated manuscripts and attractive metal work. Medieval artists introduced the use of oil painting on stretched canvasses (rather than wood and plaster). Giotto (1266-1337), a Florentine, was the first to paint realistically, imitating nature, as the artists of the classical world did. He used perspective, three-dimensional depth, expressive focus, and realistic bodies. He blazed a trail that daVinci, Michelangelo, and countless others would follow in the Renaissance.
- *Music* – Medieval Christians developed polyphonic *music* (harmony) and musical notations (by the end of the 8th century).
- *Vernacular literature* – authors began to write in vernacular or common languages. Here are a few with whom we should gain some familiarity.

- Dante 1265-1321), a native of Florence, wrote his *Divine Comedy* in Italian. It is the story of the soul's progress to salvation, as Dante is led by Virgil (who is a symbol of human reason and therefore can only take him so far) and by Beatrice (Dante's true love, representing revelation) on a guided tour of hell (the "Inferno"), purgatory, and then heaven. The *Divine Comedy* is widely regarded as the greatest epic poem ever written.
- Petrach (1304-1374), another Florentine who also wrote in Italian, contributed beautiful love poems or sonnets.
- Boccaccio (1313-1375), also a Florentine, wrote *Decameron*, set at the time of the Black Death, and reflects the immoral outlook of the time.
- Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400) wrote *The Canterbury Tales,* which describes English medieval society.

Various popular literary genres also developed:

- troubadour poetry
- heroic epics, such as *The Song of Roland*
- romance, such as the Arthurian legends
- fables and short stories

Society and culture

The Middle Ages were a time of steady social, technological and cultural progress. The foundations for an increasingly prosperous society were laid in the Middle Ages. Those foundations, of course, were Christian.

Warfare

Gunpowder was introduced to Europe in the 14th century. It revolutionized warfare as medieval Christians forged canons which made castles, city walls, and armored knights obsolete. It also meant that Christendom would be able to defend itself decisively against outside threats, and thereby protect its educational, artistic, and economic progress.

Agriculture

An *agricultural* revolution was launched when by the 5th century European Christians had invented a wheeled plow with an iron blade (called a carruca) and iron horseshoes; when crop rotation appeared in the 8th century and a well-padded horse collar in Scandinavia in the 9th century. Plant breeding also was introduced in the Middle Ages. The average European was healthier, more energetic and more intelligent than his Greek and Roman predecessors.

Energy

An *energy* revolution ensued when Europeans began to invent windmills, watermills, and dams, harnessing the power of the wind and water. This enabled productive activity, such as grinding grains, sawing lumber and stones, turning lathes, grinding knives and swords, and pulping rags to make paper.

Transportation

A *transportation* revolution came about as Europeans invented effective sailing ships (Roman ships primarily were powered by oars) They invented carts with brakes and front axles that could swivel, and bred strong horses to pull their carts.

Manufacturing
A *manufacturing* and *metallurgy* revolution took place as northern Europeans produced high quality metal works (via goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths) especially metal weapons (swords, battle-axes, knives) superior to those even of the late Roman empire.

Time
The clock was invented at the end of the 13th century and perfected in the 14th. This gave Europeans a whole new outlook on time as a thing to be measured and valued.

Market economics
By the 13th century the medieval theologians began to reevaluate the lawfulness of loans, interest, profit, and credit. A cash economy replaced barter, accounting methods were developed and banks began to proliferate in the northern Italian city-states.

Urbanization
In what was known as the "High Middle Ages" (1000-1300), Europe prospered. Building upon the religious, moral, social and political foundation of the "Early Middle Ages," the population grew from 38 million in 1000 to 74 million in 1300. Increased food production (through use of new inventions mentioned above such as the horse collar, iron horse shoes, and the heavy, wheeled plow) freed a portion of the population from food production to work as tradesmen, craftsmen, and merchants. Town and city life revived as places where economic activity took place. Commerce increased, leading to the further growth of cities. New cities were often established near castles. The original meaning of the English *borough* or *burgh* and the German *burg* is that of fortress. Homes in these towns and cities were multi-storied and tightly packed. A family might live on the top floors and have its shop or workroom on the bottom floor. As one walked the streets, one might encounter the Smiths, Tanners, Bakers, Tailors, Weavers, Brewers, Carpenters, Bankers, Shoemakers, etc. These craftsmen organized guilds which established standards and prices for their products, and procedures for entry into a given trade (e.g. 5-7 years to progress from apprenticeship to journeyman to master craftsman).

Religious renewal
The Middle Ages were also a period of religious revitalization mainly through new monastic movements such as the Cluniac (10th century), which stressed integration with society rather than separation, and the Cistercian, the latter called "the Puritans of the Middle Ages" (11th century), and two preaching orders, the Dominicans (13th century), and Franciscans (13th century). These reinvigorated the Benedictine monastic ideals. We should familiarize ourselves with three important leaders of these renewal movements.

- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the greatest of the Cistercians, emphasized the need of grace and stressed the importance of personal love for Christ. He is associated with two hymns that we still sing today, "Jesus Thou Joy of Loving Hearts" and "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." He also stressed activism (over against the Benedictine quietism), preaching for the need of a second crusade to the Holy Land.

- Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), born to a wealthy Italian family, founded the Franciscans who emphasized biblical preaching and absolute poverty. Rejecting all property, the Franciscans supported themselves by begging. Begging orders are known as mendicant (lat. *mendicare,* "to beg") monastic orders. They rejected cloistering, instead mixing with the people. Francis' love of nature is apparent in his hymn, "All Creatures of Our God and King."
- Dominic (1170-1221) was an intellectual who founded his religious order for the purpose of combating heresy. His followers also took vows of poverty (and begging), emphasized doctrinal preaching and rejected cloistering.

Politics
In 1215 the English barons secured the *Magna Carta* from King John, which established that the king may not levy or collect taxes without the consent of a council. Parliamentary (that is democratic) rule may be traced back to this foundational document.

Daily life
Daily life in "Christendom" revolved around the church. It was a Christian society. The parish was the community unit, the parish church the focal point of life: baptisms, weddings, and funerals were held at the church; mass was attended each week: the church yard was used for parish dances, sports, festivals, fairs, markets. The church's sacraments not only imparted grace but also structured life: one was *baptized* at birth, *confirmed* as a youth, *married* as an adult, went to *confession* and received the *eucharist* annually, and received "*last rites*" at death. The church gave hope, though pilgrimages and relics were important expressions of devotion and superstition was widespread. Tom Holland summarizes life in medieval Christendom well:

> There was barely a rhythm of life that (the church) did not define. From dawn to dusk, from midsummer to the depths of winter, from the hour of their birth to the very last drawing of their breath, the men and women of medieval Europe absorbed the assumptions into their bones.[53]

Moral code
The Middle Ages established a civilization based on Christian ethics.

First, "family values" were firmly established. As we've noted, the ancient world widely practiced abortion, infanticide (usually girls), concubinage, obscenity, sexual perversion, and divorce (men only). By the end of the early Middle Ages these practices and problems are largely gone or driven underground. Monogamous marriage was established as the norm.

Second, slavery, assumed everywhere in antiquity to be valid (e.g. defended by Aristotle), quietly disappeared, to be replaced by serfdom. While slaves were defined by Aristotle as "human tools," serfs had the rights of marriage, contract, and property ownership. They were not owned by the lord of the manor "All classical societies were slave societies," say Stark. Indeed, "all known societies above the very primitive level have been slave societies." The exception? "Only

[53] Holland, *Dominion*, 11.

one civilization ever rejected human bondage: Christendom. And it did it twice!"[54] Not until the age of exploration (15th century) was slavery reintroduced to the Christian world, and then abolished a second time in the 19th century. Still today (as of 2019), it is estimated that at any given time 40 million people are victims of modern slavery, most of them in Muslim countries and central Africa. Christianity stresses the importance of the individual, individual rights and individual responsibilities.

Most of the world, including the world's religions, minimize the individual and stress collective obligations. They are cultures of shame (dishonoring the group) rather than cultures of guilt (personal wrong-doing). "There is not even a word for freedom," says Stark of Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam, "in the languages in which their scriptures are written."[55] Islam in particular faces the insurmountable obstacle that Muhammed himself bought, sold, and captured slaves.

Third, the brutality of antiquity was moderated. The ancient world crucified petty thieves, made sport of public slaughter and practiced unlimited warfare. By the end of this period, the gladiators were gone forever and warfare had rules. The "peace" of God required warriors to respect churches and not attack non-combatants. The "truce" of God forbade fighting on Sundays and primary feast days. Europe was gradually civilized and Christianized. Chivalry was established as the ethos of society, establishing the principle that it is the responsibility of the powerful to *protect*, not *plunder* the weak. The proverbial knights in shining armor are to rescue, not ravage damsels in distress.

Christianity did not produce a perfect world in medieval Europe. Often the gap between Christian ideals and the reality "on the ground" was wide. Yet the Christian religion preserved the best and improved upon the worst of the world of antiquity. As Joseph Sobran (1946-2010) wrote,

> The so-called Dark Ages were a period when Europe was becoming gradually and profoundly civilized . . . 'The Dark Ages' were a period of moral progress with no parallel in all of human history.[56]

Challenges

The challenge of Islam

We cannot leave the Middle Ages without commenting on the rise of Islam and the Christian response. In 622 Muhammad and his 70 followers were forced to flee Mecca to Medina (as it was renamed). The year 622 is known as *Hegira,* year one in Islam's calendar. From Medina, Islam expanded rapidly by the method of *jihad*. Enemies were conquered by Islamic military power and then subjected to Islamic political rule, though they were allowed to practice their own religion. Rapidly much of the Mediterranean world fell to Islam.

- 630 Mecca & all of Arabia
- 632 Jerusalem (to the shock of the Christian world) and Palestine
- 642 Alexandria (Egypt) & Syria

[54] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 247.
[55] Stark, *How the West Won,* 125.
[56] Joseph Sobran, "The Good Old Dark Ages," in *Human Life Review,* Vol. XVII, No. 2, Spring 1991, 20-22.

- 650 Mesopotamia (old Persian empire) & North Africa
- 697 Carthage

In 711, Islamic armies invaded the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) and by 718 its conquest was complete. Those armies then progressed into central France. Charles Martel (grandfather of Charlemagne) finally stopped the Muslims in the Battle of Tours a mere 148 miles from Paris in 732, saving Western Europe for Christianity. German military historian Hans Delbrück wrote that there has been "no more important battle in world history."[57] An army of 80,000 Muslims attacked a well-positioned, well-armored army of Franks, charging uphill over and over again. The Muslim force of light cavalry, carrying lances and swords and largely without armor, attacked the Frankish heavy infantry, wearing mail armor and with shields. The Muslims suffered severe casualties. Late in the afternoon the Franks counter-attacked with heavy cavalry, slaughtering the Muslim army.

The Muslims attempted to attack Gaul again in 735 and were again soundly defeated by Martel. His victories, coupled with those over European opponents, laid the foundation for what history calls the Carolingian Empire.

Earlier (718) Leo III, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, still standing three centuries after Alaric and the Visigoths sacked Rome (and would survive another seven centuries!) stopped the Muslims at the gates of Constantinople, saving central and eastern Europe from Islam. However, as can be seen below, much of the old Roman and Persian Empires were now under the control of Islam. The Muslim threat to Europe would continue for nearly 1000 years, being stopped at the gates of Vienna in 1687!

[57] Stark, *Rise of Christianity,* 89.

The Crusades

Islamic factions fought amongst themselves for several centuries after the successes of the 7th and 8th centuries. But Islam was reinvigorated by the conversion of the warrior people, the Seljuk Turks. By the end of the 11th century, Christendom had been fighting a defensive war against Islam for 450 years. Three additional factors set the crusades in motion:

- The Muslim threat to Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor asked Pope Urban II for help.
- The stories – some exaggerated – of the persecution of Christians by their Muslim rulers living in the Holy Land as well as Christian pilgrims visiting. According to Stark, "Christians persisted as a large, if repressed majority" in those lands conquered by Islam.[58] Hundreds of years were required for Muslims to become a majority. Many were forced to choose between conversion or death. In 1009 Muslims destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem which had been built by Constantine.
- The opportunity to reunite the eastern and western halves of the church, which had separated in 1054.

Pope Urban II issued a call to arms at the *Council of Clermont* in 1095. He promised the full remission of sin for all who participated in ridding the Holy Land of the Muslim infidels. It should be noted that the crusades were not profitable ventures. They were undertaken at great personal sacrifice and great personal expense.

The *1st Crusade (1096-99)* was actually two crusades. The first of these was an unofficial enthusiastic response to Urban II's call led by self-appointed leaders Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless. This "Peasants Crusade" recruited thousands, reached Constantinople, was transported to Asia Minor by the Byzantines, and promptly slaughtered by the Turks. The second crusading wave consisted of an army of mostly French knights, who arrived in Palestine with several thousand cavalry and 10,000-foot soldiers. They captured Antioch in 1098, Jerusalem in 1099, and established four crusader states: Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli, Jerusalem. After 460 years, Jerusalem was again in Christian hands.

The *2nd Crusade (1147-1149)* was called for by Bernard of Clairvaux after the fall of the crusader state Edessa in 1144. Though it was led by Europe's monarchs, it was largely unsuccessful.

The *3rd Crusade (1189-1192*) was a reaction to the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslims led by Saladin in 1187. Holy Roman Emperor Frederick of Barbarossa (1152-1190), King Richard I the Lionhearted of England (1189-1199) and Philip II Augustus of France (1180-1223) led this crusade, which met with some initial success.

The *Fourth through Eighth Crusades (1202-1270***)** were also largely failures. The fourth managed to do what the Muslims had failed to do for 500 years – sacked Constantinople in 1204,

[58] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 200, 204.

fatally weakening the Byzantine Empire. The Sixth retook Jerusalem without a fight. In the middle of crusades 4-8 a "Children Crusade" was inspired by a Nicholas of Cologne, who said God had told him to launch such a project to the Holy Land. Thousands reached Rome where the Pope told them to go home. Another 20,000 hymn-singing youth boarded ships in Marseilles bound for the Holy Land. Two of seven ships sunk. The remaining five arrived in North Africa where the children were sold into slavery. In 1291, Acre, the last Christian outpost in Palestine, surrendered. The crusades, in the end, failed.

Yet, because of the crusades, fascination with the East and the products of the East was sparked. Marco Polo (1254-1324) traveled the Silk Road between 1271 and 1295, publishing his *The Travels of Marco Polo* around 1300, further enflaming European's appetite for the products of the East. When Constantinople fell to the Muslims in 1453, severing the land route to Asia, the search for an alternative route by sea began. The Portuguese led the way south discovering the route around the Cape of Good Hope to India in 1497. The Spaniards headed west in search of the West Indies (India), Columbus discovering America in 1492.

Conclusion
What did the Middle Ages achieve? We may summarize with these 15 points:

Religiously

1. Pagan Europe was converted to a form of Christianity.
2. A civilization based on important Christian values had been established, where monogamous marriage was the norm and chivalry was esteemed.

Socially

3. Slavery disappeared.
4. Gladiatorial games were abolished.

Culturally

5. Cathedrals were built.
6. Institutions such as universities, banks, representative government, and trial by jury had been established.
7. The learning of the classical past was preserved.
8. The greatest epic poem, Dante's *Divine Comedy* was written.
9. High culture was developed in music, art, and architecture.

Economically

10. Europe's resources were developed.
11. The crusades were launched, and from them, the spirit of exploration was sparked.
12. The horse collar, horse shoes and iron plow were invented; crop rotation was introduced, leading to increased agricultural production. Also, high quality weapons were introduced.
13. Windmills, watermills and dams were introduced, producing an energy revolution and enabling productive activity.
14. Carts with brakes and front swivel axels were invented and strong horses bred, leading to a transportation revolution.

Militarily

15. Gunpowder was introduced, guaranteeing the military superiority of Christian Europe.

Politically

16. The *Magna Carta* established the principle of limited government.

Stark quotes distinguished medievalist Warren Hollister (1930-1997):

> To my mind, anyone who believes that the era that witnessed the building of Chartres Cathedral and the invention of parliament and the university was 'dark' must be mentally (challenged) — or at best, deeply, deeply ignorant.[59]

[59] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 250.

The Renaissance and Reformation
The Renaissance (1350-1517)

The word Renaissance means "rebirth." Beginning in Italy in the late 14th & early 15th centuries, a number of features of the civilization of the ancient Greco-Roman world were re-emphasized: its philosophy, art, architecture, literature, language, and ideals. Renaissance Italians saw themselves as living in a new era, lying between the glories of Greece and Rome and their current enlightened times. One Renaissance man exhorted a contemporary to "thank God that it has been permitted to him to be born in this new age, so full of hope and promise." It is more correct to see the Renaissance as standing in continuity with the achievements of the Middle Ages. Yet these achievements accelerated and gain a critical mass, such as gave many the sense of awakening to a new era.

The motto of the Renaissance was *ad fontes,* "to the sources" of the various disciplines in the classical world. If we visualize Renaissance architects digging in the ruins of Rome in order to understand how they constructed domes and vaulted ceilings, we have a picture of the Renaissance spirit. The Renaissance came to emphasize:

- humanism in philosophy
- realism in art
- discovery and exploration, particularly in Africa and the New World
- *classical* Latin, Greek, and Hebrew
- classical virtues (e.g. *gravitas*)

The Renaissance brought a much-needed emphasis upon the importance of this world. It sparked a new appreciation for nature, for the human body, and for beauty. However, whereas the Middle Ages may have emphasized the next world to the neglect of this world (people were not portrayed realistically and nature was ignored), the Renaissance tended to miss the biblical balance and make the opposite mistake. It tended to *overemphasize* this world to the detriment of the next. This tendency will be checked by the Reformation and Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, both of which will strike a truer balance. A generation after the Reformation, the "worldly" tendency of the Renaissance will be fully realized in the Enlightenment, when regrettably, man for many becomes "the measure of all things."

The Early Italian Renaissance (1350-1480)
Because of the growth of Mediterranean commerce, the Italian states grew rich and developed a wealthy class which became the chief supporters of art and culture.

Christian Humanism
The Renaissance produced a "humanism," what Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) called *studia humanitatis,* the study of human endeavors, an emphasis upon humanity that was yet "Christian." It aimed to appreciate man while still honoring God. It was also an educational approach that

took medieval educational practice a step further. Its goal was the "Renaissance Man," the well-educated, well-rounded and virtuous individual. He was to be a scholar, athlete, artist, musician, and civic minded. The Roman statesman and scholar Cicero (106-43 BC) was the Renaissance ideal.
As with the medievalist, the liberal arts were studied (grammar, rhetoric, poetry, ethics, history, etc.) but in addition to studying Scripture, the church fathers, and the church's theologians, classical authors were emphasized.

Petrarch (1304-74) played an important role in the revival of classical Latin, the Renaissance literary ideal being patterned after the prose of Cicero and the poetry of Virgil and many others. Bruni furthered the massive manuscript copying labors of the medieval monks by translating Plato, Thucydides, Euripides, Sophocles, and other Greek writers into Latin, thereby to be studied again in the West for the first time in 1000 years (again, note the medieval beginnings of these efforts).

Schools were founded to promote the Renaissance ideals. The most famous of these was founded in 1423 by Vittorino da Feltre at Mantua, a small Italian state whose leader, Gian Francesco Gonzaga (1395-1444), wished to provide a humanist school for his children. Students in schools such as these studied:

- liberal arts
- classical languages (Greek & Latin)
- art & music
- physical education (e.g. javelin throwing, archery, dancing, running, wrestling, hunting, swimming)
- and they attended daily mass

Again, the purpose was to produce educated Christian citizens who would pursue virtue and wisdom, and who had the rhetorical skills to persuade others to follow that same path.

The invention of the printing press with movable type is attributed to Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz (Germany) between 1445 and 1450. It accelerated the spread of literacy and the availability of books. The first book produced from movable type, known as Gutenberg's Bible, was printed in 1455 or 1456. By 1500 Venice alone had almost 100 printers who together had produced almost two million volumes. Also, by 1500 Europe had more than 1000 printers who had published almost 40,000 different books (between 8-10 million copies).

The realism in art that had begun with Giotto (human faces, emotions), was taken up by the Renaissance artists. Leonardo da Vinci said, "Those who take for the standard any one but nature . . . weary themselves in vain."[60]

Among the most important artists were:

[60] J. P. Richter, *Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci,* Vol . I (London, 1883), 660.

- *Masaccio's* (1401-1428) massive frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence are regarded as the first masterpieces of the early Renaissance. He used a realistic style with perspective and proportion, shade, and shadows
- *Sandro Botticelli* (1445-1510) painted *Primavera* or *Spring.*
- *Donato di Donatello* (1386-1466) produced a bronze sculpture of David after studying the ancient statues in Rome.
- *Filippo Brunelleschi* (1377-1446) designed the huge dome of the Cathedral of Florence (the largest dome since the Pantheon in Ancient Rome), then the Church of San Lorenzo, after studying ancient ruins in Rome.

The early Renaissance was a period of experimentation and learning. The Italian painters, sculptors, and architects mastered new/old techniques of classical antiquity.

Classical		Renaissance
Painting		Giotto & Massacio
Sculpture		Donatello
	(Middle Ages)	
Architecture		Brunelleschi
Literature		Petrarch

The High Renaissance (1480–1520)
The scene shifted in the later years of the Renaissance from Florence to Rome, from discovery to individual expression, and from realism to idealism. Among the leading figures were the following:

- *Leonardo da Vinci* (1452-1519) is regarded as the epitome of the "Renaissance man." Leonardo displayed genius as a painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, and musician. He wrote books on anatomy, mathematics, and astronomy. He is best known for his paintings the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper.*
- *Raphael* (1483-1520) is best known for his painting, *School of Athens,* with Plato and Aristotle in the center of his depiction. Raphael displays the classical themes of balance, harmony, order. Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo served as models (i.e. they are the *new* School of Athens).
- *Michelangelo* (1475-1564) achieved greatness as a painter, sculptor, and architect. Among his works:
  - ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
  - marble statue of David
  - dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

Regarding sculpture, he maintained that the statue already resided in the uncarved piece of

stone. He said, “I only take away the surplus, the statue is already there.”[61]

The Northern Renaissance (1500–1600's)
The Renaissance eventually spread north into France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and England. Among its noteworthy leaders with whom we may familiarize ourselves were the following:

- *Jan van Eyck* (1390-1441) of Flanders was among the first of the Northern Renaissance painters
- *Albrecht Dürer* (1471-1528) and *Hans Holbein the Younger* (1497-1543) studied under the Italians and brought their artistic techniques back to Germany.
- *Desiderius Erasmus* (1466-1536) of the Netherlands was the greatest Renaissance scholar of northern Europe
- *John Colet* (1467-1510) and *Sir Thomas More* (1477-1535) who spread Renaissance ideas in England
- *William Shakespeare* (1564-1616) is a later figure of the English Renaissance in literature
- *El Greco* (1541-1614) was the greatest of the Spanish Renaissance painters.
- *Miguel de Cervantes* (1547-1616) wrote *Don Quixote,* regarded by many as the greatest novel ever written.

We have provided but a sketch of the Renaissance. Much more, multiple volumes more needs to be said. However, we haven’t the time to do so now. We must press on to tell the religious side of the story.

[61] Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization* (Australia: Wadsworth, 2014), 355.

The Renaissance and Reformation
The Reformation (1517-1662)

The Reformation should be understood as resulting from the same interests that produced the Renaissance. The Renaissance motto of *ad fontes*, "to the sources," inspired theologians to return to the original documents of the Christian church. For a thousand years the normative Bible in Christendom had been a Latin translation, the Vulgate. The same spirit that prompted scholars to study the sculpture, architecture, art, and literature of the Greco-Roman world prompted them to also read the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). The desire to revive the ancient civilization of Greece and Rome was paralleled by the desire to restore the primitive church of Jesus, the Apostles, and Augustine. Indeed, it was only one year after Erasmus published his Greek New Testament in 1516 (Greek is the original language of the New Testament Scriptures), making it available to western scholars for the first time in 1000 years, that Luther, studying that New Testament, unwittingly launched the Reformation.

Indeed, the Reformation may be understood as an argument between the Patristic church (the church of the first 3-4 centuries) and the medieval church. The Protestants argued for a return to the sources, the church of the Apostles and Fathers, the Roman Catholics for retaining the innovations of the Middle Ages. The Reformers drew inspiration from the simplicity of the life and worship of the early centuries, rejecting the novelties introduced during the 1000 years of the Middle Ages.

Church fathers Middle Ages Reformers

The Reformation is one of the most important movements in the history of the world. From it came the following:

- Religiously – it gave birth to Protestant Christianity, with its scriptural emphasis on
  - biblical preaching (i.e. expository preaching)
  - congregational singing (especially of Psalms)
  - vernacular Bible
  - communion in both kinds
  - the doctrines of grace
  - church discipline

The Reformation gave further momentum to the following:

- Socially – it further emphasized the importance of the individual conscience and the fundamental rights to assemble, speak, and write free from external constraints
- Politically – its consistent recognition of the essential equality of all persons gave impetus to the development of representative government

- ❖ Economically – its emphasis on Christian freedom led to free-markets and emphasized the dignity of labor
- ❖ Educationally – it gave impetus to universal literacy

The Reformation also played a crucial role in the founding of the United States. Nearly all of the American settlers from 1621–1821, or for 200 years, were Protestants. At the time of the American Revolution, still 85% of the American population was not only Protestant, but Reformed Protestants, leading one German historian to call John Calvin "the virtual founder of America."[62]

Foreground and forerunners of the Reformation
The period preceding the Reformation was a time of extreme corruption in the church. The moral, financial, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical abuse of the Renaissance Papacy in particular led to widespread calls for reform.

Papal decline
Much damage was done to the prestige of the Papacy by what history calls the Avignon Papacy (1305-1377) and the "Great Schism" (1378-1417). King Philip IV of France pressured the college of cardinals to elect a French pope, Clement V (1305-1314). He then forced residence of the papacy to move from Rome to Avignon, in southeastern France. There the "Avignon Papacy" as it was known, was dominated and controlled by the French crown and church for 72 years (1305-1377).

This then was followed by the "Great Schism" (1378-1417). French Pope Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome in 1377. He sought to restore the loss of power and prestige that resulted from what some called the papacy's "Babylonian Captivity" in Avignon. Many saw the church as *compromised* – a captive of the French monarch; *ostentatious* – the pope and the cardinals were living in splendor; and *bureaucratic* – more concerned with revenue than the care of souls. However, when Gregory died shortly thereafter, the Roman populace insisted on the election of an Italian pope (if the cardinals wished to remain living). As a result, Urban VI (1378-1389), an Italian, was elected. However, four months later, the French Cardinals declared the election of Urban VI invalid because their votes had been coerced by the Roman mob. They elected a Frenchman, Clement VII, who immediately returned the papacy to Avignon.

As a result, Christendom had two popes, each of which declared the other to be the antichrist and each of which excommunicated all of the followers of the other. France and her allies (Spain, Scotland, southern Italy) supported the French pope; England, Germany, Scandinavia, and most of Italy supported the Italian. This had a devastating impact on the church, further politicizing it and undermining its spiritual credibility. There were two popes for over 30 years from 1378-1409.

[62] Cited in Paul Carlson, *Our Presbyterian Heritage* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1973), 19. The historian was Leopold von Ranke; see also Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 350.

Church councils attempted to resolve the impasse. Medieval theologians such as Marsiglio of Padua (1290–1342) and William Occam (1295–1347) had forwarded the theory that the authority of a council of the whole church is superior to that of a pope. The *Council of Pisa* (1409) deposed the two popes and elected a new one, Alexander V. Result: the two popes refused to step down, leaving the church not with two but three popes! All of Christendom was excommunicated twice. There were three popes from 1409-1415.

A second council, the *Council of Constance,* was called by Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund and met from 1414-1418. It deposed all three popes and elected Pope Martin V (1417-1431), yet required that he accept that "even a pope" must obey an official church council. The council enacted a number of other reforms as well. A later council, the Council of Basel, would eventually depose Martin V's successor Eugene IV in 1439. This was the high point of councilarism (Eugene IV was later reinstated). This ended the Great Schism in 1417, but not without serious damage to the reputation, even the credibility of both the Papacy and the Church.

Ultimately these papal reforms failed. The church subsequently plunged into the depths of corruption during the period known as the Renaissance Papacy (1447-1513), when the popes were overtaken with secular rather than spiritual concerns. Downward the church continued to spiral.

- *Pius II* (1458-64) condemned "councilarism" (the above idea that the authority of a church council was superior to that of a pope) in 1460 with his papal bull *Execrabilis* (bull is from the Latin *bulla*, "seal" referring to the seal affixed to papal edicts), calling it **"**an execrable outrage unheard of in earlier times."
- *Sixtus IV* (1471-84) made six of his nephews cardinals (this is called patronage or nepotism). He was implicated in the assassinations of two of the Medici's (perhaps Europe's most powerful family) in 1478, and sold church offices and indulgences to build Sistine Chapel.
- *Innocent VIII* (1484-92) held wedding services for his illegitimate children at the Papal palace and like Sixtus, sold church offices
- *Alexander VI* (1492-1503) was widely known for his debauchery and sensuality. He had four children by his mistress (who had been married three times previously). He also had five children by two other women. He made cardinals of one son, one nephew, and the brother of a mistress, and was alleged to have obtained his office by bribery.
- *Julius II* (1503-1513) was known as the "warrior pope" because he personally led armies into battle against his enemies. He tore down the Basilica of St. Peter (built by Constantine) and built St. Peter's Basilica (which still stands).
- *Leo X* (1513-1521) was made archbishop at age 8, made cardinal at age 13. He was celebrated as a patron of Renaissance culture, but was not up to the challenge posed by Luther.

Monastic and clerical decline

The calamities of the 14th century (plague, famine, 100 years' war) dramatically reduced Europe's population (about 60%) leaving monasteries desperate for manpower, leading to a decline in standards. Ignorance of the most basic biblical texts and doctrines was epidemic. Many could not recite the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer. Corruption was widespread. Priests had little training beyond mechanics of the mass, hurriedly said. Immorality was rampant. According to Yale historian Kenneth Scott Latourette, the era was characterized by "lethargy, luxury, laxity, and even stark immorality."[63] One small diocese saw dozens of children born to its priests in a single year.

Parish life

Parishioners were if anything increasingly religious, in the sense of pilgrimages to shrines and relics (e.g. visits to see a piece of the burning bush, a vial of Mary's milk, thorns from Jesus' crown, wood from His cross, tablecloth from the Last Supper, etc.). At the same time there was less true religious devotion or piety. Standards for priests declined. A mechanical view of salvation was typical and even endorsed by the church. Sacraments were said to work *ex opere operato.* Immorality was widespread. Europe was virtually "de-christianized" during this period. Pagan superstition and unbelief replaced faith. Boccaccio's (1313-75) *Decameron* mirrors the ethics of the day, one which ignores Christian standards; Machiavelli's (1469-1527) *The Prince* urges expedience as the norm for political rule.

Attempts at radical reform

Increasingly the need for reform was recognized. We may focus on three of those who advocated thorough-going reform in the church.

❖ *John Wyclif* (c. 1328-1384) spent most of his life as a student and teacher at Oxford.

However, the last 8-9 years of his life began to attack corruption in the church. Known as the *"Morning Star of the Reformation,"* he anticipated all the Reformation doctrines except justification by faith.

He maintained:	He attacked:
*Popes may err	*corruption
*priesthood of believers	*saints
*vernacular Bibles	*pilgrimages
*true presence of Christ	*relics
*importance of preaching	*indulgences
	*medieval rituals
	*mass and transubstantiation
	*prayers for dead

He sent out "poor preachers" called Lollards who had considerable effect, particularly in East Anglia, a future fertile field for Puritanism. Though Wyclif died in peace in 1384, the Council of Constance condemned him in 1415 on 260 counts, his writings were

[63] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity,* Vol. II (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), 640.

burned, his bones exhumed and burned, and his ashes scattered.

- *John Hus* (1373-1415) was an accomplished scholar and rising star in the church. He was named Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Rector of the University of Prague at the age of 28, and the following year (1402) he was named Rector and Preacher of the Chapel of Holy Innocence of Bethlehem in Prague. He preached both in Latin and Czech, denouncing corruption and papalism. His messages appealed to all classes of persons, for example he was the confessor of the Queen. He was influenced by Wyclif, though he was more moderate in his calls for reform. Yet in 1412 he was ex-communicated by the Pope. In 1415 he was condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake. "Hus" means "goose." The church had "cooked its goose," as we still say today. Yet the movement he spawned grew in strength into the 1430s when its remnants finally were crushed.

- *Girolamo Savonarola* (1452-1498) was born in Ferrara. He came to Florence in 1481 and entered a Dominican monastery. Ten years later he began to win fame as a preacher. He preached judgement and repentance. He attacked the immorality and worldliness of Renaissance Florence. Crowds thronged and the moral life of Florence was transformed. For example, women set aside their finery and dressed plainly. Merchants restored ill-gotten profits. There was an increase in Bible reading, church attendance, and increased numbers entered monasteries.

  Yet his message brought opposition as well. In 1495, the Pope Alexander VI ordered Savonarola to cease preaching. However, in 1496 he was permitted again to preach. By 1497, the carnival time in Florence had become a religious festival. Indecent books were burned. Masks and obscene pictures were burned to the sound of hymn singing. May of 1497 Pope Alexander VI excommunicated Savonarola and he was burned at the stake in 1498. Both Botticelli and Michelangelo were influenced by him. He influenced biblical and patristic studies and was praised by Luther for his righteousness.

Attempts at moderate reform

The Christian humanists of the late Renaissance attempted a more moderate reform.

- *Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples* (1455-1536), a leading scholar at the University of Paris, Lefevre saw Scripture as a primary source of authoritative teaching for the church. He called for a return to primitive Christianity. He had a profound influence on the early Protestant reformers, including John Calvin.

- *John Colet* (1467-1519), Dean of St. Paul's London, Colet began lecturing on Romans at
  Oxford in 1497. These lectures influenced both the early reformers and such men as Thomas More and Erasmus. He broke with the medieval allegorical approach to interpretation in favor of a textual-historical reading and treated the Apostle Paul as an historical figure. On 1511 his sermon at convocation at Oxford attacked the corruption of the priests of his day.

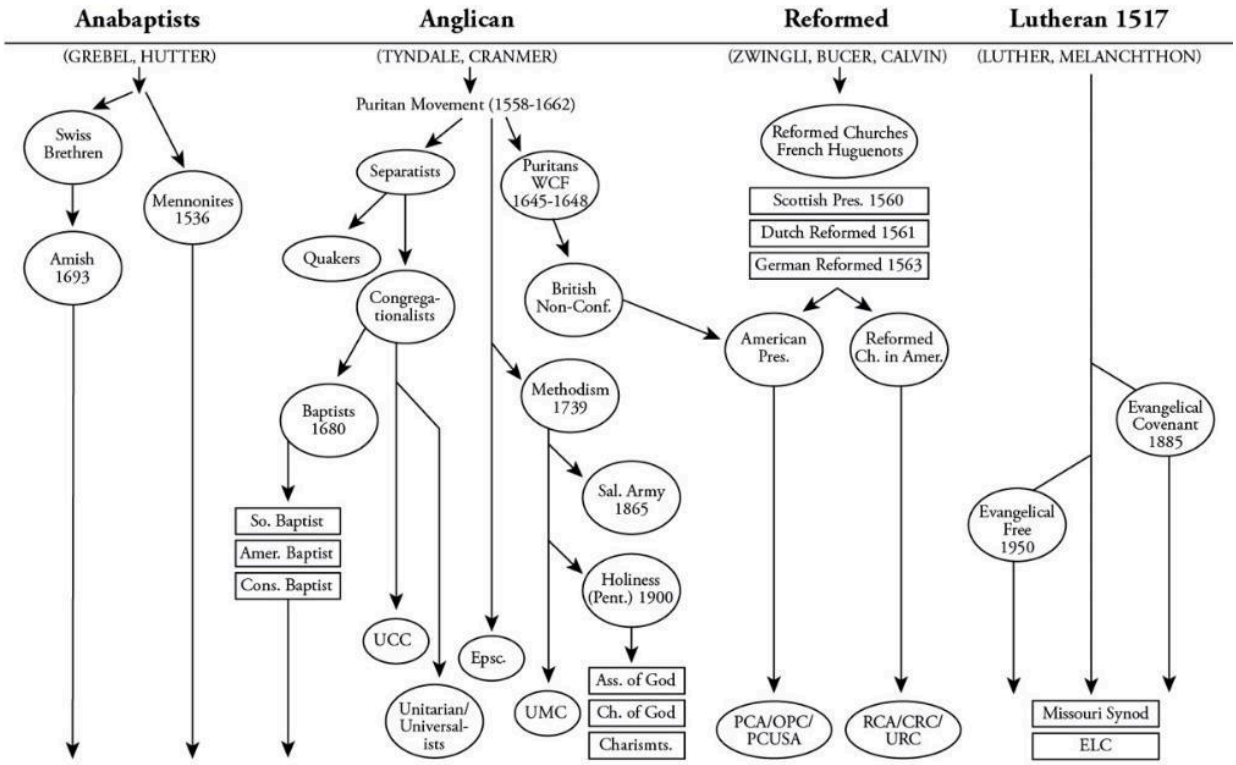
- *Desiderius Erasmus* (1466-1536) (mentioned earlier) was the leading humanist scholar of this period. His circle of scholars in Basel edited/produced Latin works of the church fathers such as Basil the Great, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Ambrose, Origen, Lactantius, Athanasius, and Augustine. Among the scholars and future reformers that worked with Erasmus included Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), who would become the Reformer of Zurich; Wolfgang Capito (1478-1541) and Kaspar Hedio (1494-1552), who would become the reformers of Strasburg; Konrad Pellikan (1478-1556) who from Basel would publish Luther's writings; and John Oecolampadius (1482-1531), working primarily from Basel and Augsburg. Erasmus' editions of the church fathers would also have an extensive influence upon Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and John Calvin (1509-1564) and most all of the Reformers.

  Erasmus was at Cambridge 1509-1516, from which he published his critical edition of the Greek New Testament. This New Testament was profoundly influential. His annotations were highly critical of the medieval church's doctrines and practices: formalism, ceremonialism, scholasticism, moral laxity and ignorance among the clergy and indulgences. His critique can also be seen in his *Moriae encomium, Praise of Folly* (1511). It was said then and now, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched."

The problem with the moderate reformers was that they didn't go far enough. Corruption remained intact and the momentum towards Reformation continued to gain strength.

Martin Luther and the German Reformation

We will look more closely at the details of the Reformation in subsequent chapters/sessions. For now, we merely will explain the sources of the various Protestant denominations using the following chart:



The Reformation began with Luther's posting of the 95 Theses in Latin on October 31, 1517, intending only to initiate an academic debate regarding the state of the church. Instead, he sparked a revolution, as his Theses were translated into vernacular languages. Following several encounters with church authorities, on June 15, 1520 Leo X issued his Papal Bull (*bulla,* "seal"), *Exsurge Domine,* giving Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated. Luther received it on October 10 and responded by burning it on December 10, 1520, and publishing *Against the Execrable Bull of Antichrist*, claiming, "The bull condemns Christ himself."[64] Consequently, in January 1521 Luther was excommunicated. It is important to note that Luther did not intend schism. He did not leave the church. He was forced out.

On April 16, 1521 Luther agreed to appear before the Diet of Worms, the assembly of the Holy Roman Empire, including the Emperor, Charles V, and all the German princes. At his "trial" he was guaranteed "safe conduct," yet as Hus before him learned, if convicted it would mean nothing. A stack of his books was placed before him and he was asked to repudiate his writings. He refused. His interrogator pushed him and Luther responded with his immortal words,

> Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.[65]

Luther's safe conduct was allowed and his life was preserved by the intervention of Elector Frederick the Wise. His excommunication launched the massive exodus from the Papacy and the formation of a new church. However, it was not long before the Protestant movement divided into four major streams. As those streams over time fragmented further, we are able to identify the origins and emergence of the major denominations.

Anabaptist

The left wing of the Reformation (and the left side of our chart) is made up of groups known as Anabaptists (ana = re; baptist = baptize). Known as the *radical reformers*, they rejected infant baptism, never did fully grasp justification by faith, were separatists and some were pacifists. They formed communities of the saints, separated from the world. Early leaders included Conrad Grebel (c. 1498-1526), co-founder of the Swiss Brethren, Jacob Hutter (c. 1500-1536), who gave his name to the Hutterites, and Meno Simons (1496-151), for which the Mennonites are named. The roots of today's Baptists are *not* Anabaptist, as we will see. Rather, the Anabaptist legacy is found in the continuing Amish and Mennonite communities of today.

Anglican

Moving one step to the right, the Church of England, or Anglican church, proved to be an extremely fertile field for the growth of denominations. This can be explained by reference to the unusual way in which the Church of England became Protestant. Whereas the continental reforms were driven primarily by biblical and theological study, the Church of England's separation from Rome was initiated by King Henry VIII's (1491-1547) insistence on divorcing

[64] Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (1950; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978) 160.
[65] Ibid., 185.

his Spanish wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536). Because she failed to provide him with a male heir. He sought from the Pope an annulment, which normally would not have been a problem. However, with the conflicts with the Reformation increasing in intensity, Pope Clement VII could not afford to alienate the Spanish crown, his chief source of military support. The annulment was refused.

Henry responded by bullying Parliament into a series of legislative actions which removed the Church of England from the jurisdiction of the Pope and declared Henry the supreme head of the church (the "Acts of Supremacy," 1534).

The initial result was a church which, like the Protestant churches on the continent was separated from Rome, yet unlike them was still Roman Catholic in doctrine and practice. A struggle ensued that would last over 100 years between those who wanted to reform the doctrine and practices of the Anglican church and those who wanted to retain its medieval Catholic forms. The most persistent of the advocates of reform became known as 'Puritans."

The Church of England became officially Protestant during Henry's reign. Its commitment to Protestantism was *solidified* during the short reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) with the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the "Articles of Religion" (1549 and 1552), written and assembled by Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556); *challenged* under Queen Mary's "bloody Mary" brief reign (1553-1558); and *secured* under Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603). Many were content for the Church of England to be a *via media,* a middle way in church practices and forms between Rome and Geneva. However, the Puritans continued to press for a more thoroughgoing, Calvinistic reform throughout Elizabeth's reign, and throughout the reigns of James I (1603-1625), who authorized the publication of what became known as the "King James Bible," and Charles I (1625-1649). Both James and Charles suppressed and persecuted the Puritans, some 20,000 of whom fled to North America between 1620 and 1640.

This struggle for and against further reform continued until Charles I attempted in 1638 to impose an episcopal government and the *Prayer Book* on Presbyterian Scotland. The first Sunday it was read at St. Giles Cathedral (July 23, 1637), a woman named Jenny Geddes, who sold goods on the streets of Edinburgh, picked up her stool (there were no pews in those days – each brought his own seat) and threw it at the presiding priest yelling, "Popery, popery. Dare ye say a Mass in my lug (ear)." A riot ensued, the violence spread to other cities, and resistance to Episcopacy and the *Prayer Book* formalized by the signing of the National Covenant and the raising of a Scottish army. This forced Charles to call Parliament in 1639 in order to finance what became known as the "Bishops Wars." However, Parliament was dominated by the Puritans who refused to cooperate and was quickly dissolved by Charles (history's "Short Parliament"). The Scots defeated Charles' army and occupied Newcastle. This forced Charles to recall Parliament which thereafter refused to be dissolved (history's "Long Parliament").

Civil War broke out leading ultimately to Parliament's victory over the monarchy, the execution of Charles I, and the rule of the commander of the "New Model" army, the "Lord Protector" Oliver Cromwell (who held this title from 1653-1658). After Cornwell's death in 1658, the monarchy and Episcopacy were restored in England, Prayer Book uniformity enforced in 1662, and the persecution of the Puritans and Scottish Covenanters renewed until the Glorious

Revolution of 1688 and the extension of toleration to dissenting Protestants (Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians). However, during the Civil War came an attempt at religious uniformity in Britain with the writing of the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, its Directory for Worship, and its Directory for Church Government (1645-1648),

We have labored to tell this story because of the impact of this ecclesiastical struggle upon denominational development. As we follow along the chart, out of the left wing of Puritanism came the "separatists," a group of which settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621, known to Americans as the "Pilgrim Fathers." The most extreme of those separatists, so extreme as to be persecuted by the Puritans themselves, were the Quakers, a group of which were led by William Penn (1644-1718) to North America to found the colony of Pennsylvania in 1681, what has been called the last great Puritan political experiment. More mainstream Puritans were led by John Winthrop (1588-1649) to Boston in 1630 to found the New England colony. They established Congregational churches. Congregationalism traces its roots to Puritanism and their version of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* known as the *Savoy Declaration* (1658). Sadly, in the 19th century many of these churches became Unitarian. Out of those Congregational churches came pastors such as Roger Williams (1603-1683), who did not believe in baptizing infants and was forced by the authorities in Massachusetts to find refuge in Rhode Island, which he founded in 1636, including the First Baptist Church in America in 1638. Today's Baptists with few exceptions trace their roots to Puritanism and their version of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* known as the *London Confession* of 1689, also known at the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742).

This era also saw the flowering of English Puritan devotional literature. Some examples are:

- Richard Baxter (1615-1691), *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650)
- John Owen (1616-1683), *On the Mortification of Sin* (1656)
- William Gurnall (1616-1679), *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1669)
- John Bunyan (1628-1688), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1682)
- Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), *The Existence and Attributes of God* (1682)
- Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1714)

Also the era featured writers still published such as Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), John Flavel (1628-1691), Thomas Watson (1620-1686), and the last of the Puritans, John Howe (1630-1705) among others.

A hundred years later another reform movement known as Methodism emerged from Anglicanism. Out of Methodism came both the Salvation Army (in 1865) and those who, like John Wesley, conceived of the Christian life as consisting of two stages, or two works of grace. This subsequent movement, beginning in 1900, added to the "second blessing," the second work of grace, the gift of "speaking in tongues." These became known as the Pentecostal and later (1960's) charismatic churches.

Reformed

This leads us to the third stream, the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. They trace their roots to Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich (1484-1531) and John Calvin in Geneva (1509-1564). His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) was the great work of Protestant theology and one of the most influential books every written. All of today's Presbyterian (PCUSA, PCA OPC, RPCNA, EPC, etc.) and Reformed (RCA, CRC, URC) churches (French, Dutch, German, Swiss, Hungarian) trace their roots in particular to Calvin.[66] Yet we also see important cross fertilization arising out of Anglicanism, as the Church of England, produced at the behest of the Puritan-dominated Parliament, the Westminster Confession of Faith and accompanying documents, which were then adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1646-47, and which became foundational for all subsequent Presbyterians.

Lutheran

Finally, Luther and his brilliant assistant Philip Melancthon (1497-150) are the source of all of today's Lutheran denominations (ELCA, Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod), and out of Lutheranism the various "Free" churches (e.g. Evangelical Free).

When we move on to study what we mean by an "Evangelical" and "Reformed" church, we will look at various doctrinal and practical distinctives. We pause again to highlight the pervasiveness of Calvinistic influence. Early Protestantism characteristically was Reformed, with Calvinism at the roots of the Baptist, Congregational, Anglican, (its 39 Articles, in particular Article 18, being explicitly predestinarian), and Presbyterian churches. Luther, in his debate with Erasmus over the freedom of the will, wrote *On the Bondage of the Will* in 1525, a book that if anything is more Calvinistic than Calvin. Even John Wesley may be regarded as a "confused Calvinist," as J. I. Packer claimed. When we look at the Reformed distinctives, we must keep in mind that though we may be a few today, historically we are the Protestant mainstream.

[66] Calvinistic churches on the continent were called "Reformed." In the English-speaking world, because of the conflict over church government, they were called Presbyterian, as opposed to Episcopal.

The Enlightenment (1662-1900) to Modern Times

Protestants were not allowed quietly to leave the Roman church. Wars were waged as Roman Catholics attempted to suppress Protestantism throughout Europe. The Dutch Reformed took up arms against the Spanish crown (Spain controlled the Netherlands in the 16th and into the mid-17th centuries) in what is called the "Eighty Years War" (1568-1648). The French Reformed, known as Huguenots, warred against the French monarchy in the 16th century (1562-1598), and again at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 by King Louis XIV. The English and Scottish Reformed (primarily Presbyterian) resisted and finally rebelled against the Stuart monarchy (as we've seen, the English Civil War, 1642-1651). The Roman Catholic "Counter-Reformation," through military and other means, successfully reversed many of the Protestant gains. These "Wars of Religion" (especially the terrible "Thirty Years War") that raged on the continent of Europe, 1618-1648. left many in Europe disillusioned with religion. An estimated 8 million were killed when the population of Europe fluctuated between at about 78 million in 1600 and had fallen to 74.6 million in 1650. One-third of the pre-war population of Germany perished. Devastation of this magnitude in central Europe would not be equaled until World War I.

The *Peace of Wesphalia* of 1648 along with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 and the *Act of Uniformity* of 1662 in Great Britain mark the beginning of a new era. Many of the leading minds of the Western world began to search for a more "reasonable" approach to religion and the civil order. This new era would be called the *Enlightenment* or the *Age of Reason***.** Reason, not divine revelation, would become the organizing principle of society. Dogma would be de-emphasized in favor of that which was held in common by all and could be demonstrated by reason. More and more Western Christian Civilization would be characterized by a divided outlook: reason would apply to the material world, faith to the religious. Faith would be seen as held without reason, and the content of faith (the teachings of the Bible) would have nothing to say about the material world, where reason was thought to rule. The unified world of medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation Christendom increasingly was divided along the following lines:

religion vs. science
faith vs. reason
God vs. man
eternal vs. temporal
spiritual vs. natural

Beginnings

The seeds of the Enlightenment may be said to have been sown on what Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944) called the most disastrous moment in European history. In the winter of 1619-20, the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) resolved to doubt everything, even his own existence. He concluded that the only thing he could not doubt was that he doubted. Since

he doubted, he must exist. He concluded, "*Cogito ergo sum,"* "I think, therefore, I am." Upon this foundation then, he began to build other certainties, other things which can be known.

Why is this a disaster? Because the ground of epistemology, the science of how we know what we know has shifted from the word of God to the individual. Luther's conscience was captive to the word of God. "Here I stand," he said. He was certain only of those things that God had declared to be true in His word. Descartes is certain only of those things that he is able to demonstrate through reason. This is a radical shift from the previous 1500 years of Western Christian civilization.

Initially the "Rationalists" used reason to defend Christianity. Beginning with self-evident (*a priori*) truth (like mathematical principles), they would reason deductively from those truths to new ones. New truths could then be verified by experiments. Empiricists such as John Locke (1632-1704) countered rationalists arguing that all knowledge is *a posteriori,* after-the-fact, that is, based on experience. The human mind, Locke maintained, is a *tabula rasa,* a "blank slate" on which perceptions plus reflections write data. Rationalists and Empiricists arrive at knowledge through different routes, yet for both reason is supreme. Intellectuals such as Locke, Galileo (1564-1642), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) Isaac Newton (1642-1727), and George Berkeley (1685-1753) all identified themselves as Christians. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant French mathematician said, "The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing," and familiarly, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the creator, made known through Jesus." A number of academics (e.g. Alfred North Whitehead [1861-1947]) have argued that the so-called "Scientific Revolution," the beginning of which is identified with the publication of Copernicus' *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres* in 1543 and completed with the publication of Newton's *Principia* in 1687 arose only in the West because Christianity was essential to its birth. Rather than a "revolution," the scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment should be seen in continuity with medieval and Renaissance discoveries.[67] Stark refers to the "enlightenment" as "that utterly misnamed era," invented along with the "Dark Ages" by French and British intellectuals "in order to glorify themselves and vilify the church."[68] As Newton himself famously said, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Whitehead placed its roots in "the medieval insistence on the rationality of God."[69] A rational and immutable God created a rational and orderly world and placed rational man in it with the capacity to understand its functioning. The gods of the non-Christian religions are too impersonal or non-rational or even irrational to sustain science. Christians believed that God was an Intelligent Designer whose works could be comprehended through investigation.

The Christian view of God contrasts with the Muslim, where there is no cause and effect, only the will of Allah. What happens takes place as the direct result of Allah's will. Attempts to establish causation are seen as blasphemous, as they place limits on Allah's authority. According to Stark, the idea of a "Golden Era" of Muslim science is a myth.[70]

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[67] Stark argues that "the notion of a Scientific Revolution was invented to discredit the medieval Church" (*How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2014], 169-170).
[68] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity, 214; How the West Won,* 309ff.
[69] Cited in Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 285.
[70] Rodney Stark, *How the West Won,* 44; 160-161; 316.

A number of innovations and inventions originated in China (e.g. the mechanical clock, gunpowder, magnetic compass). However, most of these ultimately were abandoned or even outlawed due to "Confucian opposition to change on grounds that the past was greatly superior," as Stark explains.[71] Contact with the outside world was discouraged lest the Confucian social order be unsettled. Chinese farmers in 1900 were using the same methods that had been employed for the previous 3000 years. "Science arose in the West" — and only in the West, says Stark, "precisely because the Judeo-Christian conception of God encouraged and even demanded this pursuit."[72]

Nevertheless, it was not long before Enlightenment principles primarily were utilized to attack Christianity and supernatural religion. Empiricist David Hume (1711-1776) leveled a devastating critique of miracles, and rationalists Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (1647-1716) were increasingly skeptical. The French intellectual movement known as "Philosophes," led by men such as Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), Diderot (1713-1784) and Rousseau (1712-1778) was particularly hostile. Voltaire infamously hoped to see "the last king strangled with the guts of the last priest." At this stage it was not clear where this fashionable skepticism would lead. The French Revolution, Robespierre, the "Reign of Terror," anarchy, followed by order-restoring strongman Napoleon still lay decades in the future.

This increasingly inhospitable, intellectual environment of the late 17th and early 18th centuries signaled a period of religious decline throughout Christendom for nearly 75 years. Rationalism made deep inroads into English non-conformity, leading to Unitarianism (denying the Trinity) and skepticism. Latitudinarism (disregard for all doctrines in favor of Christian morals) dominated the Church of England. The historian Herbert Skeats said that the over-zealous non-conformists (also called "dissenters") now preferred, "The chatty, easy-going, careless 'parson' to the 'severe Presbyterian' or 'godly Independent.'"

Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) complained of the early 18th century,

> It has come to be taken for granted that Christianity is no longer a subject of enquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly it is treated as if, in the present age, this was an agreed point among all persons of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principle subject for mirth and ridicule.[73]

[71] Stark, *How the West Won,* 294-302; 317, where he argues that prior to the ninth century nearly all scholars in Muslim lands were Nestorian Christians. The same is true of physicians as late as the middle of the 11th century.

[72] Stark, *How the West Won,* 321.

[73] Bishop Butler, cited in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield, the Life and Times of the Eighteenth Century Revival*, Volumes I & II (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970-1980) I:31.

Montesquieu said of England (which he visited in 1729-31) that "If anyone spoke of religion, everybody laughed."[74] The 19th century Scotsman Thomas Carlyle said of the period, "Soul extinct, but stomach well alive."[75]

It was a worldly, religionless period. Yet throughout history the Christian religion repeatedly has shown an ability to renew itself. In the midst of the Enlightenment came the Evangelical Awakening, from which would flow the Modern Missionary Movement, social and educational institutions, and political reform.

The Evangelical Awakening
Simultaneously four crucial events occurred in the midst of this increasingly skeptical environment which sparked what history has called the "Great Awakening."

- *Jonathan Edwards* (1703-1758) began preaching on justification by faith in Northampton, Massachusetts, and "revival" erupted with great conviction of sin and deep concern for godliness.
- *Daniel Rowland* (1713-1790) and *Howell Harris* (1714-1773), the two main leaders of the Welsh Revivals, were converted.
- *George Whitefield*, a student at Oxford, was converted. He had been a member of the Holy Club," a group of religious zealots at Oxford that included John & Charles Wesley. They practiced lengthy devotions, rigorous self-discipline, and self-examination, while still unconverted! Whitefield nearly starved to death during the 40 days of Lent and had to be confined to the bed by physicians for six weeks. But in May, 1735 he was converted. He said of that day,

  > God was pleased to remove the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold of His dear Son by a *living faith*, and by giving me the Spirit of adoption, to seal me even to the day of everlasting redemption.
  >
  > O! With what joy – joy unspeakable – even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled, when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith, broke in upon my disconsolate soul![76]

- *William Tennant, Sr.* (1673-1746) started what detractors called the "Log College" in order to educate his three sons and Samuel Blair for the ministry. It would ultimately become Princeton College.

Edwards published his "Narrative of Surprising Conversions" in 1737, spreading news of the revival in Northampton, revival following in those places where it was read. Whitefield began preaching in London in 1737, and thousands flocked to hear him. *John Wesley* was converted in

[74] Found in Montesquieu's "Notes on England."
[75] Found in *The People's Edition of Thomas Carlyle's Works,* Vols. 1-37, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1888), 25:27.
[76] Dallimore, *Whitefield,* I:77.

London the next year after fleeing Savannah, Georgia and realizing on the return voyage to England that he was not a true Christian. While in the midst of a frightful storm on his return voyage, he overheard Moravian fellow-travelers calmly singing hymns of trust. He, however, was terrified. He later reflected,

> "What have I learned? Why, what I the least of all suspected, that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God."[77]

Back in London, at a meeting on Aldersgate Street, as Luther's preface to his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans was read, he said,

> I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.[78]

A few months before John's "Aldersgate Experience" Charles Wesley was similarly converted. Two days later he wrote the hymn "And Can It Be," describing his conversion:

> Long my imprisoned spirit lay
> Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
> Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray;
> I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
> My chains fell off, my heart was free;
> I rose, went forth, and followed thee.[79]

In February of 1739, Whitefield began "open air" preaching in England. Being increasingly excluded from the churches he preached to the coal miners in Bristol, England on February 17. "It was a brave day for England when Whitefield began field preaching" said C. H. Spurgeon.[80] Whitefield said of the occasion,

> Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of Jesus who was a friend of publicans, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions, which, as the event proved, happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion. The change was visible to all, though numbers chose to impute it to anything, rather than the finger of God.[81]

In November, 1739, Whitefield returned to America (at age of 25!) and preached from Georgia to Maine from November, 1739 to December, 1740. Thousands heard him.

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[77] Ibid., I:186.
[78] Ibid., I:185.
[79] Ibid., I:145.
[80] Ibid., I:248.
[81] Ibid., I:263-264.

- 20,000 in Philadelphia (population 12,000)
- 23,000 on Boston Commons
- 8,000/day for 30 days in New England

June and July, 1740, Whitefield wrote,

> O what wonderful things God is doing in America...
> Surely our Lord intends to set the world aflame. [82]

On July 8, 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached at Enfield, Connecticut a sermon entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," perhaps the most famous sermon in American history. In the summer of 1741, Whitefield made a short visit to Scotland which sparked spiritual concern. In January, 1742 the Cambuslang revival erupted, five miles southeast of Glasgow. In the summer of 1742, Whitefield returned to Scotland. An open-air communion service in June served 20,000, in August 30-40,000. Whitefield wrote to Howell Harris:

> I and the people have been in the suburbs of heaven. Blessed be God! I live in heaven daily.[83]

The Great Awakening encountered fierce opposition from society and the religious establishment. This plus fanatical excesses among those revived calmed the flames of revival, and by 1750 the Awakening had receded into the background. Yet the effects were considerable.

- ❖ Evangelical Christianity was revitalized. The Methodist church was founded by the Wesleys, and the Baptist church grew spectacularly.

- ❖ Evangelical educational institutions were founded in America.
  - Princeton, Presbyterian (1746)
  - Brown, Baptist (1764)
  - Rutgers, Reformed (1766)
  - Dartmouth, Congregational (1769)
  - Penn, non-denominational (1740)

- ❖ Social societies were organized for the purpose of reforming society.
  - Orphanages
  - Abolition of Slavery
  - Temperance
  - Literacy

[82] George Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield, for the Period 1734-1742* (United Kingdom: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 184, 200.
[83] Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, Vol. 2 (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1877), 2:31

- Poor Relief
- Labor

❖ America was democratized. The Revivals knew no class distinctions, the converted as likely to be poor as rich.

❖ The conversion of the working class in England to revival Christianity is considered to have spared Great Britain a French-styled revolution of the workers and peasants.

❖ The "Modern Missionary Movement" was launched, as we will see later.

Despite our focus on the English-speaking world, the Awakenings were worldwide, led by people called "pietist" on the continent of Europe. Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf was a leader among them. He also was very influential in the lives of the Wesleys. John Wesley translated his hymn, "Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness," still widely used today.

Cultural Achievement

The "Enlightenment" period also was one of considerable cultural achievement, much of it religiously inspired. We will limit ourselves to the particularly noteworthy achievements beginning with music with what history calls the Baroque period.

Music

❖ *Johann Sebastian Bach* (1685-1750) served as church organist and music director at a number of churches and then at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Bach is perhaps the greatest composer who ever lived. Each of his compositions were signed with the letters S-D-G, *Soli Deo gloria.* Among his works are both the religious and the non-religious:
- St. Matthew's Passion
- Mass in B Minor
- Brandenburg Concertos
- Sheep May Safely Graze
- Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring
- Sleepers Awake
- Orchestral Suite #2
- Minuet Tocatta & Fugue in D Minor
- Air from Suite #3

❖ *George Frederick Handel* (1685-1759), like Bach, was born in Saxony, Germany in 1685. He composed a large number of works during his life including, like Bach, both religious and non-religious:
- Messiah

- Water Music
- Music for the Royal Fireworks
- Solomon: Arrival of the Queen of Sheba
- Harp concerto in B-flat
- Concerto Grosso in C (Alexander's feast)
- Largo from Xerxes

❖ Other noteworthy composers include:
- Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706) – Canon in D-major
- Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) – The Four Seasons: Spring (Concerto in B minor)
- Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) – Christmas Concerto (Concerto in G-minor)

A new musical period, known as the classical era (1750-1830) saw the introduction of new instruments (e.g. piano) and two new geniuses emerge. Religious inspiration continues to shape the work of these composers:

❖ *Franz Joseph Haydn* (1732-1809) – also born in Germany, Haydn wrote 104 symphonies (!) among many other songs, string quartets, etc. He developed the modern form of the symphony. Among his beloved works are:
- Creation (oratorio)
- Surprise Symphony (#94)

❖ *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (1756-1791) – an Austrian born child prodigy who gave his first harpsichord concert at age six and wrote his first opera at 12, Mozart was a musical genius who died at only 35. His melodies are unequaled. Among his most appreciated works are:

- His 40 symphonies
- His 23 original piano concertos
- His 4 horn concertos, plus those for clarinet and bassoon.
- His operas, including The Marriage of Figaro, The Magic Flute, Don Giovanni
- His Requiem in D Minor

Literacy and Political

A remarkable galaxy of talent appeared in the American colonies in the 18th century which produced political documents of enduring value. The Christian concept of basic human rights (based on the image of God in man), and democratic forms of government inherited from Classical Greece and Rome came together in an unprecedented generation on the American continent.

❖ Thomas Jefferson of Virginia (1743-1826)
❖ John Adams of Massachusetts (1735-1826)

- Thomas Madison of Virginia (1746-1798)
- George Mason of Virginia (1725-1792)
- Alexander Hamilton of New York (1755-1804)

There were many, many others including, of course, the indispensable leader of them all, George Washington (1732-1799). The overwhelmingly Christian context of the 13 colonies meant that the necessary ingredients were in place for a thriving Christian civilization. Yet tensions were there from the beginning. In many ways Ben Franklin and Jonathan Edwards, both born in the first decade of the 1700s, represent the two strands of American civilization, the Evangelical and the Enlightenment, the believing and the skeptical.

Nineteenth century philosophical earthquakes

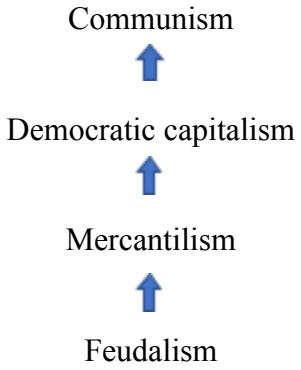
The seeds of skepticism sown in the 18th century resulted in four great philosophical earthquakes that shook the foundations of Western Christian civilization in the 19th century. The tremors of these earthquakes continue to rock our world today.

Marxism

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was born in western Germany in a prosperous middle-class family. He was a disciple of the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Frederich Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel argued that the world spirit (*zeitgeist*), history, philosophy, etc. move forward, progressively, positively by a dialectical process of evolving ideas. Still today many are concerned to get on "the right side of history," that is, history's progressive march.

Thesis (e.g. "A" is white)
Antithesis (e.g. "B" is black)
Synthesis (e.g. "C," gray, a synthesis of thesis and antithesis, is correct)

Marx argued that Hegel's "world spirit" was not ideas or spiritual as Hegel had said but was material, that final reality was matter, and that Hegel's dialectic should rather be a "dialectical materialism." History demonstrates a class struggle (dialectic) resulting in progress from feudalism and communism.



Each of these stages, short of communism, represents inequality, injustice, privilege, and oppression; the 99% vs. the 1%. Humanity is divided into two classes: the oppressors and the oppressed. Only with communism will a perfect just, equal society be achieved. He teamed with

Frederich Engels (1820 – 1895), son of a wealthy German cotton manufacturer. Marx, with Engels wrote his *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, on the eve of the revolutions of '48. He began by saying,

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

He envisioned the overthrow of the bourgeoisie (middle class) by a revolution of the proletariat (workers), resulting in the dictatorship of the proletariat and eventually producing a classless society. The state will then wither away, wealth will be shared by all, competition will be replaced by cooperation. He warned,

> A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of Communism. All the powers of Old Europe have entered a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police spies.

He was anti-religious, seeing religion as a drug, *das Opium des Volkes,* "the opium of the people," anesthetizing common people to the oppression under which they were suffering. He closed his *Manifesto* with these words:

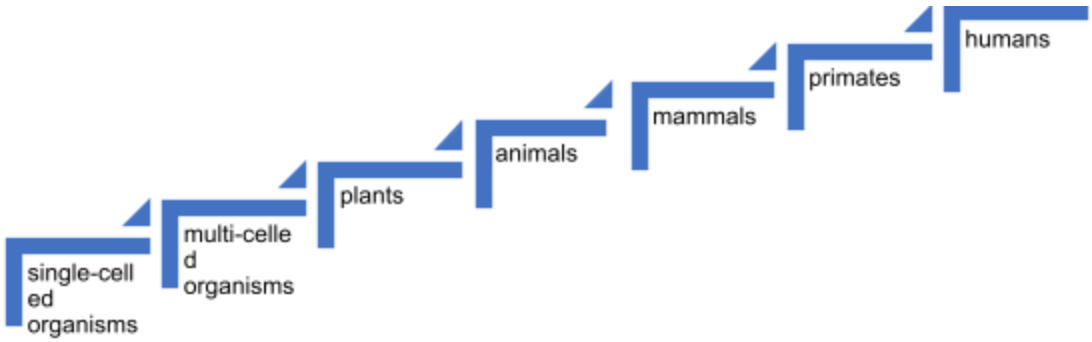
> The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. *Workers of the world, unite!*

Revolutionary movements in 1848 were suppressed and Marx was forced to flee the continent and live from 1849-1883 in London. In 1869 he published, *Das Kapital (Capital.* He (through his writings*)* has been responsible for the suffering of more people than any other single person in the history of the world. His theory of class struggle has been re-christened in the mid-1970s by legal scholars such as Derrick Bell (1930-2011) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (b. 1959) as Critical Race Theory, replacing class with race, society being divided into two races, white oppressors, and "people of color," the oppressed.

Evolution

Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) applied Hegel's dialectic to biology. Born in England into an upper-middle-class family, he studied at Cambridge University. In 1859 he published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. He argued that in a finite environment with many species struggling for survival, the result was the "survival of the fittest," the survival of the strong. Those which adapted best to the environment survived whereas the others perished. Species evolve by passing along to their offspring the variations that they have acquired. For example, the giraffe develops a longer neck by stretching for the higher leaves. The longer neck is transmitted to its offspring. Gradually the species evolves. Later evolutionists developed a theory of mutations. One starts with a finite environment in which various species struggle for existence. In this environment, various adaptations, "variants," develop, resulting ultimately in survival of the fittest as new species emerges. By this method, the various species evolved from simple organisms to more complex.

In 1871 he published *The Descent of Man* arguing for the completion of the process in the evolution of man.



Each of Darwin's major books initially met sharp criticism. Church leaders attacked evolutionary theory because it contradicted the Bible and undermined confidence in biblical infallibility. One clergyman described Darwin's theory as a "brutal philosophy — to wit, there is no God, and the ape is our Adam."[84] A Cambridge professor of geology said his theory would "sink the human race into a lower grade of degradation than any into which it has fallen since its written records tell of its history."[85] Evolutionary theory eliminated purpose and order in the universe, eliminated morals, and reduced life to a struggle of nature "red in tooth and claw" as the poet Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) described.

However, within a decade of the publishing of *The Origin of Species*, evolutionary theory was the accepted orthodoxy among intellectuals. George Bernard Shaw said, "The world jumped at Darwin."[86] Why? Because people were looking for a way to escape God and religion. Marx wanted to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Darwin (he wouldn't let him). Marx said, "Darwin is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the struggle in history."[87] Big businesses were able to justify their cut-throat business practices by referring to evolutionary theory. The oilman, John D. Rockefeller said, "The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest."[88] Steel producer Andrew Carnegie said of his first exposure to evolutionary theory, "Light came in as a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I found the truth of evolution."[89]

In addition, Darwinism provided justification for both colonialism and racism. The full title of his 1859 classic was *The Origin of Species and the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life.* The white race, he argued, is superior to all colored races and should rule. Hitler will later make use of this theory. Subsequent social Darwinists will argue that because the "fit" survive, the rich *should* dominate the poor, superior races the inferior.

Psychology

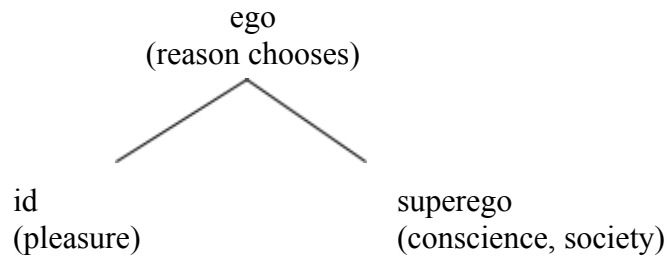
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a Jewish doctor from Vienna, was the father of modern psychiatry. His theories would undermine confidence in man as a rational and responsible being. He

[84] Cardinal Manning, cited in Robert R. Mathisen, *Critical Issues in American Religious History.* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 399.
[85] Adam Sedgwick, cited in I. Bernard Cohen, *Revolution in Science* (United Kingdom: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 284.
[86] Cited in George Charles Roche, *A World without Heroes: The Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 1987) 239.
[87] Felton C. Shortall, *The Incomplete Marx* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994), 144.
[88] Cited in Michael Spindler, *Veblen and Modern America: Revolutionary Iconoclast* (London: Pluto, 2002) 16.
[89] Cited in Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 365.

maintained that human conduct was strongly determined by the subconscious, by past experiences, and inner drives. "I do what I do not because I want to or choose to but because of hidden reasons of which I am unaware for which I am not responsible." In his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he divided the human personality into three parts:

- the *id*
  - the center of unconscious drives
  - ruled by the *pleasure* principle
- the *ego*
  - the seat of reason
  - governed by the *reality* principle which controls the *id*
- the *superego*
  - the seat of conscience, the inhibitions and values of society and family that are imposed on the individual

The following chart illustrates Freud's theory of decision-making.



The inner life of the individual is a battleground between the id, the ego, and the superego, said Freud. The civilized person learns to suppress the id (pleasure) and channel his desires in directions approved by society (superego). This suppression causes psychological pain, physical maladies, fears, and obsessions. Human behavior is often the result of the hidden drives and desires of which one is not conscious. Psychoanalysis uncovers these hidden desires bringing the conscious self into contact with the subconscious, which is the key to mental health and healing. Freud too was anti-religious.

One increasingly important implication of Freud is the very modern notion that the real "me," the authentic me, the me unsuppressed by social constraints is the internal "me." Who I am is determined by my internal sense of self, which sense is utterly autonomous and even disconnected from all external and even biological realities. This will play an important role in paving the way for the sexual revolution of the 1960's right through to the transgender revolution of the 21st century.

The result of these three "earthquakes," Marx, Darwin, and Freud, was to undermine belief in God, belief in man as a unique and responsible being, and belief in Christian morals. As the philosopher Frederich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) said, "God is dead." Nietzsche was a nihilist,

meaning life is meaningless. Nietzsche despised weakness. Those with the "will to power" should destroy the unfit and develop a race of *übermensch*, supermen, who rule the weak and cowardly. Christian virtues are "slave virtues" he said, because they allow the unfit to survive and weaken the human race with their "bad blood." Better, he said, were the ancient pagan German virtues of strength and bravery. Nietzsche is regarded as the philosophical father of Nazism, a political philosophy, which like communism is unbridled by moral restraint. Compare this with the moral reasoning of Martin Luther King, writing in his 1958 essay "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in which he described his encounter with, and rejection of, Marxism.

> Since for the Communist there is no divine government, no absolute moral order, there are no fixed, immutable principles; consequently, almost anything – force, violence, murder, lying – is a justifiable means to the 'millennial' end . . . I am convinced now, as I was then, that man is an end because he is a child of God.[90]

This reflects a Christian and American moral code. The world of Marx, Darwin, and Freud knows no transcendent moral code. As Dostoyevsky wrote:

> If God does not exist, then everything is permitted.[91]

Theological liberalism

German theologians joined the pile-on further eroding the Christian foundations of Western Civilization by attacking the Bible itself. This is our fourth earthquake.

- *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (1768 – 1834), theology professor at the University of Berlin, attempted in his groundbreaking work *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799), to save Christianity from the attacks of the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804). Kant argued that we cannot know anything in itself, only our perception of it. Schleiermacher adapted Kant, saying that we cannot know God in Himself, only our experience of Him. Consequently, all religious language is subjective not objective. The Bible tells us nothing about God, only about how we feel about Him. Problems and historical inaccuracies and error in the Bible make no difference because we still get from reading it *feelings of dependence*, which are the essence of religion. Scholarly criticisms don't impact the Bible's subjective value. Schleiermacher is known as the "Father of theological liberalism." He opened the door for succeeding theologians to attack biblical veracity and authority directly while still claiming to be Christians. J. I. Packer called him "the demon-king of Christian theology."

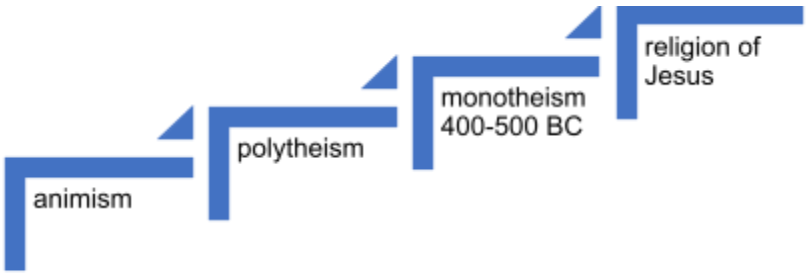
- *D.F. Strauss* (1808 – 1874) published a *Life of Jesus* (1835) in which he described all the miraculous and supernatural as myth. He contrasts the Christ of faith (as found in the Bible with all its made-up stories) with the Jesus of history. The Jesus of history lived

[90] Martin Luther King, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (United States: Beacon Press, 2010).
[91] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 1879.

in the early 1st century, was a carpenter's son, a teacher, a popular preacher, who was executed and entombed. However, the Christ of faith is the Messiah, the Son of God. He performed miracles, died an atoning death, was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, was seated at the right hand of God, and will return. The Christ of faith is not the Jesus of history.

❖ *F.C. Baur* (1792 – 1860) wrote *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ* (1845) attacking the historical foundations of the New Testament and denying the supernatural. Only Jesus' moral teaching remained viable.

❖ *Julius Wellhausen* (1844 – 1910) published his *History of Israel* in 1878 in which he denied that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy). Instead, he argued it was written over a long period of time by four different sources — "J" (Jehovah writers), "E" (Elohim writers), "P" (priestly writers), and "D" (the Deuteronomist). He also argued for an evolutionary development from primitive Old Testament religion to the advanced religion of Jesus. So once again we see Hegel's dialectic at work.



Because Moses lived in the period of polytheism, and because the Pentateuch teaches monotheism, Moses, he insisted, could not have written it.

❖ *Adolph Harnack* (1851 – 1930) — The search for the Jesus of history leaves so little of the Jesus of the Bible left that he can only be described by Harnack as, a man who has found rest and peace for his soul, and is able to give life and strength to others.[92]

The gospel message is reduced by the liberals to:

> the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul.

Christian civilization saw its religion reduced to myth in the hands of the liberals — no Christ, no cross, no resurrection, no miracles, no supernatural, and no Bible. Theologian H. Richard Niebuhr mocked the liberal message as,

[92]Cited in Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Messag*e (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998) 15.

> a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a cross.[93]

These four "earthquakes" created a new world for modern man, a world without God, where man is an animal, where his goal is not heaven but utopia on earth, where he is not responsible for his actions, where there is nothing within him or outside of him to constrain his quest of meaning, and where there is no Bible to inform or guide him.

Christian resurgence

Not all the news was bad coming out of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period. The Christian religion reasserted itself against the growing skepticism of the day in science, in the spiritual awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries, and through the modern missionary movement.

Christianity and science

Not all 19th century intellectuals were agnostic or atheists. Indeed, not all science was hostile to Christianity. A number of the top scientists of this era were devout Christians, many of whom pushed back convincingly against the intellectual trends.

- *James Clerk Maxwell* (1831–1879), a Bible believing Scottish Presbyterian and lover of the Puritans, Maxwell strongly opposed Darwin. His discoveries in physics were said by Einstein to be "the most profound and most fruitful that physics has experienced since the time of Newton."[94] He discovered that energy existed apart from matter and could be changed from one form to another (e.g. electricity into heat).

- *Lord Kelvin* (William Thompson) (1824–1907), another devout Presbyterian and opponent of Darwin, discovered the new laws of thermodynamics dealing with the relations between heat, energy, and matter.

- *Michael Faraday* (1791–1867), yet another devout Christian, discovered benzene, invented the generator and the first electric motor. He laid the foundation for the use of electric power.

- *Louis Pasteur* (1822–1895, a Frenchman, formulated the germ theory of disease, which had an enormous impact on medical practice.

[93] Cited in Tim Dowley (ed.), *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity,* (Hertfordshire, England: Lion Publishing 1977), 598.
[94] Albert Einstein, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-scientist* (Germany: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951) 378.

❖ *Joseph Lister* (1827–1912) developed the antiseptic principle. Following Pasteur, he reasoned that bacteria might enter a wound and cause infection.

These are but a few of the many whose scientific works show that there is no final conflict between faith and reason. We may again cite Stark: "The truth is not only did Christianity impede the rise of science; it was essential to it, which is why science arose only in the Christian West!"[95]

Christianity and World Mission

Ironically, as Christianity began to contract in the West in the 19th century, it simultaneously was expanding rapidly in the non-western worlds of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands as a result of what history knows as the "Modern Missionary Movement." The 19th century Protestant missionary impulse arose out of the Great Awakening, the 18th century worldwide revival, and its post-millennial vision of a converted world. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), an important leader of the Awakening, published two works that proved to have a profound impact on missions: *Call to United Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth* (1748) and *The Life and Diary of David Brainard* (1749). These both influenced the early leaders of the 19th century missionary effort, stimulating the next generation to think globally about the Christian missions.

Aggressive Roman Catholic missionary endeavors began in the Reformation era led by such men as Jesuits Francis Xavier (1506-52) in India and Japan, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China, and many others in the Americas. Protestantism did not see much missionary activity before 1800. Before 1700 there were a few efforts by French Huguenots in Brazil and North America, by Dutch Calvinists in Indonesia, by John Eliot (1604-1690) and New England Puritans among the Indians. In the 1700's Lutheran pietistic missionaries went to India, Virgin Islands, Greenland, and South America. August Herman Francke (1663-1727) sent men to India (Count Zinzendorf was a student of Francke for six years). John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Johnathan Edwards were all missionaries in North America to the Indians and others.

The direct impetus for world missions came from William Carey (1761-1834), known as the "Father of the Modern Missionary Movement." Carey was the apprentice of a shoemaker as a young man. Following his conversion at 18, he joined the Baptists and before long began to preach. He read voraciously and taught himself Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French and Dutch. During the week he mended shoes and taught school. On Sundays he preached. His interest in missionary work was first aroused by reading *The Last Voyage of Captain Cook!*

In 1792, Carey published *An Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,* an 87-page book calling for the formation of a society to promote world missions. This became one of the most influential books ever written in the history of the church. Culminating eight years of discussion and prayer on May 31, 1792, Carey preached an epochal sermon from Isaiah 54:2-3, summarizing the message as:

> Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.

[95] Stark, *Triumph of Christianity,* 275.

The effect of the sermon was profound. Five months later (October 2, 1792), the Baptist Missionary Society was formed by 12 ministers, one student, and one deacon, including John Ryland, Andrew Fuller, and William Carey. Eight months after that (June 13, 1793), Carey left for England for the last time with his reluctant wife and four children. Five months later he arrived in India and began his 40 years work in that land. Five and a half years passed without a single convert. There were immense obstacles – poverty, disease, ignorance. Finally, in 1800 Krishna Pal was converted. Carey's conviction was,

> He was only one, but a continent was coming behind him. The divine grace which changed one Indian's heart, could obviously change a hundred thousand.[96]

In 1801 the first Bengali New Testament was published. By 1813 500 Indians had been baptized and the New Testament was available in 15 languages. The College at Serampore was erected in 1818 to train native evangelists. At the time of Carey's death, he left behind 26 churches in India, 40 co-laborers, and 36 versions of the New Testament, including six translations of the whole Bible!

Largely through the influence of Carey's labors and letters, the 1790's and following saw rapid growth of mission societies among Protestants. For example, in 1795 the *London Missionary Society* (LMS) founded by English non-conformists (congregational and Presbyterian) David Brogue, Rowland Hill, and John Love. In 1796, the *Scottish and Glasgow Mission Society* was formed, and in 1797 the Dutch founded the Netherlands Missionary Society. In 1799, the *Church Missionary Society* (CMS) (of the Church of England) was formed by Henry Venn, John Newton, Richard Cecil, and Thomas Scott. The Church of Scotland lagged behind, but finally in 1824 formal approval was given. Yet in between the first overture and final approval, the prayers of evangelicals were answered: John Wilson (b. 1804), John Anderson (b. 1805), Alexander Duff (b. 1806), David Livingstone and Alexander Sommerville (b. 1813), William C. Burns (b. 1815), and John G. Patton (b. 1824), were all born during this period and eventually went to the mission field with dynamic results. In 1810 the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) formed. Also in 1804 *The British and Foreign Bible Society* and in 1816 the *American Bible Society* were founded.

The Pioneer Missionaries of the early 19th century laid the foundation for what Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1968) called "The Great Century" of Christian Missions.[97] Often the early missionaries saw little success. Rather they understood that they were sowing the gospel seed of future fruitfulness. They went in droves and died by the thousands. West Africa was known as "the white man's grave." Alexander MacKay's (1849-1890) party of eight in Uganda saw five die within a year, seven within two years, leaving only MacKay alive. One missionary who died four months after arriving in Liberia said as his last words, "Let a thousand fall before Africa be given up."[98] In 1805, the Englishman Henry Martyn went to India (with CMS), dying just seven years later in 1812 at 31 years of age with little success. When challenged by a Muslim as to why Christianity was so weak in the world, he said, "I rejoiced that he has not yet come to the end of

[96] Ian Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (1975; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 141.
[97] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity,* Volume II: AD 1500 - AD 1975 (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 1061.
[98] Cited in Kane, *Concise History*, 98.

things."[99] In 1807, Robert Morrison went to China (with LMS) and waited seven years before he saw the first convert. Adoniram Judson, the first American foreign missionary headed for Burma in 1812 (with ABCFM). He waited six years before he won his first convert. He remained in Burma for 38 years, burying three wives and marrying a fourth. His name became a household word in the Untied States. By the end of his life, he had been joined by 163 other missionaries and the church in Burma had 7000 members.

Robert Moffat traveled to Africa (with LMS) in 1816 and Alexander Duff was ordained as the first Church of Scotland missionary, arriving in Calcutta, India in 1830. He did more than any other to make Scotland a missions-minded nation. John Wilson of the Church of Scotland went to Bombay in 1830. By 1842 there were 2000 scholars and 14 missionaries in Church of Scotland schools in India. Between 1829 and 1877 there were 1071 converts.

David Livingstone of the Church of Scotland sailed to South Africa in 1841 and then plunged into the interiors of Africa. He traveled 29,000 miles in his lifetime in order to bring "unknown nations into the sympathies of the Christian world." There were few converts, little fruit. In a letter to his faithful wife, the daughter of Robert Moffat, he wrote,

> I will go, no matter who opposes: I know you wish as ardently as I can that all the world may be filled with the glory of the Lord.[100]

John Patton went to the South Pacific in 1858. Within months, he lost his newborn child, then his wife. Yet he persevered. Hudson Taylor in 1865 began the work of the *China Inland Mission.*

This has been mainly a review of British and American missionary efforts. Yet from the continent of Europe, the Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, and Free churches sent scores of missionaries to the field. The interiors of China, India, and Africa were evangelized. By 1910 British and American overseas missionary work had established 86 colleges and universities, 522 teacher colleges, and thousands of elementary schools in Asia and Africa. Herbert Kane summarized the impact of the 19th century missionaries:

> By all odds the missionaries of the nineteenth century were a special breed of men and women. Single-handedly and with great courage they attacked the social evils of their time: child marriage, the immolation of widows, temple prostitution, and untouchability in India; footbinding, opium addiction, and the abandoning of babies in China; polygamy, the slave trade, and the destruction of twins in Africa. In all parts of the world they opened schools, hospitals, clinics, medical colleges, orphanages, and leprosaria. They gave succor and sustenance to the dregs of society cast off by their own communities. At great risk to themselves and their families they fought famines, floods, pestilences, and plagues. They were the first to rescue unwanted babies, educate girls and liberate women. Above all, they gave to the non-Christian world the most liberating of all messages - the gospel of Christ. They converted savages into saints; and out of this raw material they built the Christian church, which is today the most

[99] Cited in Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 154.
[100] Cited in Murray, *Puritan Hope,* 179.

universal of all institutions. By the end of the century the gospel had literally been taken to the ends of the earth. Never before in a period of equal length had Christianity or any other religion penetrated for the first time as large an area as it had in the nineteenth century. The emissaries of the cross were to be found in all habitable parts of the globe, from the frozen wastes of Greenland to the steaming jungles of Africa. Churches, chapels, schools, and hospitals were scattered with great profusion from Turkey to
Tokyo, from Cairo to Cape Town, from Monterrey to Montevideo, from Polynesia to Indonesia.[101]

[101] Kane, *Concise History,* 110.

Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Evangelical decline

The Evangelical and post-millennial optimism of the 19th century largely had been liberalized and secularized by the beginning of the 20th century. European cultural and racial self-confidence was evident in the colonialism of the period. The British Empire alone encompassed 24% of the earth's total land area and 23% of the world's population. By 1914 Europeans had conquered or colonized more than 80% of the entire world.

This unwarranted confidence was shattered by World War I and World War II, the Soviet and Chinese Gulags (in which millions perished), the Holocaust (in which millions more perished), a and the Cold War (in which the extinction of humanity was at risk).

There have been opposite and equally ineffective responses to the challenges of modernity by the church. One was the Roman Catholic near universal rejection of all things modern from 1800 to the 1960s. As Darryl Hart explains, "A series of popes condemned the conditions of liberal society that Protestants in the United States took for granted." He names specifically, "the value of free inquiry, unrestricted markets, the separation of church and state, and popular sovereignty."[102] Pius IX issued his *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864, a list of eighty propositions condemning virtually all modern development. It rejected the idea that the Pope ought to "reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization."[103]

Thirty-five years later (1899), Pope Leo XIII made explicit what the *Syllabus of Errors* merely implied by condemning Americanism as a heresy. Pius X in 1909 condemned higher criticism and liberal theology in his *Pascendi Dominici Gregis,* yet connected these theological trends to the political ideals of separation of church and state and freedom of conscience. From the French Revolution to the 1960s the "overwhelming tendency of popes," says Hart, was to condemn democracy, republicanism, and religious toleration.[104]

The second approach was that of mainline Protestants, infected by the theological liberalism of the 19th century, later joined by the Roman Catholics in the post-World War II period. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) met for the purpose of updating Rome's approach to ministry in an increasingly secular world. The liturgy was reformed, lay participation encouraged, and ecumenical outreach initiated. However, the effect also was to break down church discipline and compromise both Catholic doctrine and practice. Rome joined mainline Protestantism in this second approach to modernity by attempting, more or less, to embrace all things modern, including biblical higher critical theories, modern ideologies (eg. Marxist-inspired "Liberation Theology") and modern gender roles (equality between the sexes, diminished importance of motherhood and childrearing, condemnations of "patriarchy," and flirting with women's ordination) and modern morals (normalizing and celebrating homosexuality, pre- and extra-marital sex, and gender confusion).

[102] Cited in Hart, *Still Protesting,* 154.
[103] Hart, *Still Protesting,* 154.
[104] Hart, *Still Protesting,* 155.

By this accommodationist approach the *mainline* Protestant denominations have emptied the churches and become the *sideline,* and Roman Catholics have suffered precipitous declines in lay participation in the life of the church. Three-quarters of the lay Catholics report never going to confession and less than 25% are in attendance at Mass each week. These numbers are down from 90% participation pre-Vatican II. When the church mimics the world, when it adopts the world's agenda, it loses its *raison d'etre,* its purpose for existence, and becomes an irrelevance, and unnecessary extra. The world needs the church to be the church, not baptize the current cultural *zeitgeist.*

Meanwhile, evangelicals in the United States were humiliated by the Scopes Monkey Trials in 1925. This legal battle in Dayton, Tennessee over the teaching of evolution pitted the clever ACLU lawyer Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) against an aging and ailing William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925). Journalist H. L. Mencken's account of the proceedings and later the play (1955) and the film *Inherit the Wind* (1960) made a mockery of the fundamentalist cause. As a consequence, conservative Christians retreated socially and politically for a generation. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) preached in 1922 what might be the second-most famous sermon in American history, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Win what? The "Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy" that raged from the 1880s through the 1920s over authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, miracles and the resurrection of Christ. The answer to Fosdick's sermon by the mid-20s clearly was, "No!" Perhaps the Evangelical low point was reached when Princeton Seminary, the bastion of Protestant orthodoxy, was reorganized in 1929 in order to broaden its theological commitments. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) led a number of the seminary's faculty out of Princeton in order to form Westminster Theological Seminary. Machen eventually was defrocked by the PCUSA in 1935 leading to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1936. An America which in the late 1800s had been described as an "Evangelical Empire," by the 1930s regarded Fundamentalism as an aberration, as "orthodoxy gone cultic" as Fuller President E. J. Carnell (1919-1967) described it.[105] Worse yet was the anemic condition of all forms of Christianity in Europe. One can speak accurately of a de-Christianizing of the entire continent.

Almost simultaneously, Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) tossed what has been called a bomb "on the playground of the theologians" with the publication of his *Römerbrief,* his commentary on the Book of Romans, in which he attacked the movement known as theological liberalism, indicting his former teacher Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930) and many others. His bombshell utterly discredited the liberals and launched what came to be known as neo-orthodoxy, a sophisticated, if flawed back-to-the-Bible movement.

Evangelical resurgence

Following World War II, Evangelicalism, distinguishing itself from the older and more rigid fundamentalism, saw – of all things – a resurgence. Leaders such as Billy Graham (1918-2018) rose to public prominence through simple gospel preaching. New evangelistic and discipleship organizations were formed such as Navigators (1933), InterVarsity (1941), Wycliffe Bible Translators (1942), Youth for Christ, (1946), and Campus Crusade for Christ (1951).

[105] E. J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 113.

New seminaries were founded or consolidated including Fuller Seminary (1947), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1949), Talbot School of Theology (1952), Reformed Theological Seminary (1966), and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (1969).

Perhaps most surprising of all, in the midst of the cultural upheavals of the 1960s arose the "Jesus Movement," beginning in California and reaching world-wide. Thousands of young people were converted. New fast-growing charismatic denominations such as Calvary Chapel, now 1700 churches, and the Association of Vineyard churches, which claims 2400 churches in 95 countries were founded. New contemporary Christian music, such as Maranatha! was created. Behind this new charismatic movement was an older Pentecostalism, the birth of which is identified with the "Azusa Street Revival" of 1906. Pentecostalism's explosive growth, joined with the number of charismatics, has produced an estimated 644 million adherents worldwide.

Evangelicals began to emerge from their cultural and political isolation in the 1970s. Jimmy Carter, an avowed Evangelical, was elected President in 1976, which *Newsweek* declared "The Year of the Evangelical." The "Moral Majority" was founded by Jerry Falwell Sr. (1933-2007) in 1979 out of concern for America's moral decline. As its influence began to wane Pat Robertson (b. 1930) took up the mantle, forming the "Christian Coalition" in 1987. Both organizations found a home for their traditional Christian morals in the Republican Party.

We largely have focused on the first 400, then the first 1600 years of church history and hurried through the last 400, and especially the last 100. This is intentional. We hope to cultivate an interest in and appreciation for the early centuries about which today's Christian knows so little. What we largely wish to recognize about the modern world is the sharpness of its division. The two major trends that we identified in the 19th century continue.

The western world is divided into two opposing camps, the secular and the Christian. This division is the legacy of the Enlightenment which we earlier identified. In addition to the box we reviewed on page 82, we may also characterize today's divisions with the following:

Religious	**Secular**
God	Man
Revelation (Scripture)	Reason
Scripture	Science
Moral absolutes	Moral relativism
Objective truth	Subjective values (opinions)
Identity declared from outside self by God	Identity found within self

This divide is in the media every day. It knives through all of the institutions of our society, including the churches: the schools, the media, the political establishment, big business, and so on. Our congregation and our denomination stand clearly on the left side of the ledger. God, not man is the measure of all things. God's *revelation* in Scripture, not *reason* or *science* is the final authority in assessing all truth claims. Morals are absolute, not relative. Truth is objective "true truth," not merely subjective values (i.e. what one values) or opinions. Christians in the West have been fighting a losing battle for the last 200 years.

It has been said that we inhabit a post-modern world. It is more accurate to say that our world is hypermodern.[106] The toxic trends that created the maladies of the modern world have reached their logical extremes. Carl Trueman has traced these trends to two foundational sources: Rousseau, whose philosophy of the "noble savage" placed all responsibility for evil on the world outside of the self, on the institutions, social organizations, and class structures of society.[107] In a state of nature, humanity left alone by outside influences, a utopian paradise exists; and Freud, for whom all psychological "neurosis," all unhappiness, all frustration is a result of the suppression of the desires of the id (the true self) in favor of the ego and superego (expectations that are foreign to the true self, and especially as imposed by others). This outlook is in the air that we breath and the water that we drink. Sin as a category of personal activity simply disappears. This is why Western society has come so quickly to approve and normalize and even celebrate that for which for millennia it disapproved and regarded as abnormal and condemned, namely pre-marital sex, homosexuality and gender confusion. The average person today understands himself to be what he perceives himself to be without regard to any *external* influence of family, church, school or society, and without any regard for *internal* influence (of physiology, biology, genes, physical organs, or bodily design). This is why the church's traditional morality is seen as hate-speech and oppressive and threatened with legal action. This is why many churches are tempted to compromise or at least silence its moral message. To disapprove the behavior is seen as violence, an assault on who that person is, what defines him or her, namely their sexual orientation and sexual identity.

It remains to be seen whether the Western church will go the way of the North African church of the 7th and 8th centuries and virtually disappear, or reassert itself and enjoy a revival that reverses the current trajectory. A robust, faithful Christian response to modernity is the need of the day.

Yet we must note that outside of the Western world, Christianity is thriving. There are reports of there now being 100 million Christians in Communist China. Korea as of 2014 is 29% Christian, up from 1% in 1900. There are 685 million Christians in Africa, nearly 50% of the population of the continent. There are now more Christians in Africa than in any other region of the world. Evangelicals now are 19% of the population of Latin America (up from 9% in 2014), or over 160 million total. There are 28 million Christians in Indonesia (out of 275.4 million), or over 10%, and another three million in Malaysia (out of 31.6 million), or about 10%. There are nearly a million Christians in Singapore (out of 5.7 million), and nearly 26 million in the Pacific Islands (out of 36.7 million), or 70% of the total population. Surely the knowledge of the glory of God

[106] As suggested by J. V. Fesko, *The Need for Creeds Today: Confessional Faith in a Faithless Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 44, 73-74.
[107] Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (United States: Crossway, 2020).

will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. What is there left to say? Onward Christian soldiers.

The Evangelical Faith[108]

Introduction

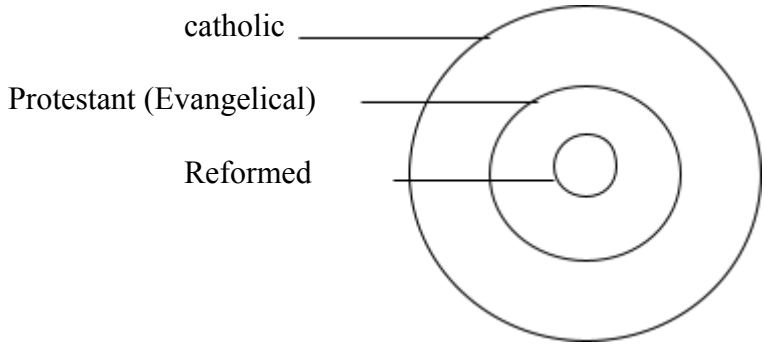
1. Scripture Alone
2. Christ Alone
3. Faith Alone
4. Grace Alone
5. God's Glory Alone

[108] For a book-length treatment of historic evangelicalism see T. L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), in which each of the "solas" is treated.

Introduction

Our review of church history makes the point that our church is a "catholic" church. Church history is our history. Our saying this may cause some to raise their eyebrows. Yet we are pleased to recite the Apostle's Creed each week, and thereby associate ourselves with the "holy catholic" (that is, universal) church. We identify with the great Christian mainstream, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox, which affirms the history of the whole church and the doctrines of the Creed.

Yet within the "catholic" church, we belong to the branch that is "Evangelical" or "Protestant." Furthermore, among Protestants, we are Reformed (as opposed to Anglican, Lutheran, or Anabaptist). We may illustrate this with a series of concentric circles.



The "Reformed" faith is a subset of Protestantism, which is a subset of the catholic (small "c") church. We are at once *catholic, Protestant,* and *Reformed.*
Denominational differences are distressing for some people, almost invalidating of Christianity's' truth claims. We understand this dismay, and aim to hold two almost conflicting aspirations in dynamic tension. First, we wish not to make *too much* of the differences between churches, recognizing the great body of doctrine, represented by the Creed, that we hold in common. Second, we wish also to *highlight* our distinctive doctrines, seeing them as strengths that we may offer to the whole church. The Reformed tradition has expressed some truths with greater clarity than have others. We commend those strengths to you. We will look first at the distinctives we cherish with other Protestants or Evangelicals, then those which are peculiar to Reformed Protestants.

The "solas"

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church "95 Theses" or "Complaints" against abuses in the church of his day. Unwittingly Martin Luther started a revolution which forever altered the face of Western Civilization, and through it the world.

In a word, the reformation led to greater freedom: The freedom of the beleiver, of the individual conscience, political freedom, economic freedom, and intellectual freedom. Because Protestantism is a more consistent and truer form of Christianity, it accelerated the trends that began slowly in the Middle Ages.[109]

Yet its chief effects were *religious*. Do I enjoy *congregational singing*? Then thank the Reformers for reviving it. Am I pleased to have the *Bible* read in the vernacular? Then thank Martin Luther and his German Bible for paving the way for a host of new translations of the Hebrew and Greek Scripture into the language of the people. Is my soul spiritually fed by *preaching*? Then thank the Reformers for restoring the preached Word to its central place in the life of the people of God. Do I think *communion* should be received in both kinds? Then thank Martin Luther and the Reformers for restoring the communion cup to the laity. Do I believe in the *ministry of the laity*? Then thank the Reformers for emphasizing it. Do I know the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Then thank the Reformation for rescuing the biblical answer to that question from the fog of confusion, contradictions, and corruptions by which it had been obscured for centuries.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and other Reformers endeavored to do no more than restore the church to its Apostolic purity. Theirs was called an "evangelical faith" because like the early church before them they stressed the "evangel," the Gospel, the Good news of Jesus Christ.

Evangelicals today continue to stand where they stood. The five cries of *sola* (Latin for "alone" or "only") which served as rallying-calls for their era continue as the fundamental principles of evangelicalism today. We affirm them, and now review them, not as a historical exercise but because they continue to be central commitments of our church today. On the basis of them we uncover the heart of the gospel, and what it means to be an Evangelical Christian. Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, God's glory alone, upon these the Reformers stood, and upon these we continue to stand today.

Scripture Alone

There have been a number of high-profile converts from evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism including former Gordon College professor (and Elisabeth Elliot's brother) Thomas Howard (1935-2020), Notre Dame's Christian Smith, longtime *Christianity Today* editor Mark Galli, and my classmates at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Stephen Wood, Marcus Grodi, Scott Hahn, and Gerry Matatics. They convert not so much for theological reasons[110] as for what they perceive to be historical rootedness, ecclesiastical unity, aesthetic richness, doctrinal certitude, and moral backbone of Rome. Writing (in part) in response to Mark A. Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism,*[111] D. G. Hart writes that "the Reformation is not a historical relic or anachronism. It still matters to anyone who cares about the gospel, worship that pleases God, a proper administration of the sacraments, and church government that assists believers in leading lives of

[109] For further discussion of the Reformation's impact upon the family, vocation, education, politics and Christian arts, see *The Case for Traditional Protestantism,* 144-162; for an expanded treatment of the "Solas," see the same, pages 1-124.

[110] See Scott Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism* (United States: Ignatius Press, 2016).

[111] Mark A. Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

holiness and righteousness."[112] These are our concerns as well.

By what means do we determine the faith and practice of the church? This was the fundamental battle between the Reformers and the church authorities. Rome determined that faith and practice were to be determined by the Bible plus the tradition of the church. It affirms both "holy writ" and "holy tradition." "Tradition" included a host of extra-biblical practices and beliefs which had been received into the church over the centuries whether by common acceptance or by the decisions of Popes and councils. Protestants not infrequently are puzzled by Roman Catholic doctrines such as the immaculate conception, Mary's bodily assumption, Purgatory, oracular confession, and so on. Protestants will ask, "Where do you find these doctrines in the Bible?" Roman Catholics are not troubled by the question. They are not disturbed by the lack of biblical support for their distinctive teachings because of their dual source of authority: holy writ and holy tradition. The church, it is argued, has been the caretaker of an oral tradition that dates back to the apostles themselves. Some of what the apostles taught was in written form and we have it in our Bibles. However, some of their teaching was transmitted orally and has been preserved only by the church. The above extra-biblical teachings are considered part of that oral tradition.

Against this position the Reformers insisted upon *sola scriptura*. They did not believe by doing so that introducing anything novel. They found support for the final and decisive authority of Scripture from the church fathers (such as Tertullian [c.155 – c. 220 A.D.], Cyril of Jerusalem [c. 313-386 A.D.], and the great Augustine [354-430 A.D.] and even from late medieval and Renaissance Catholic theologians.[113] Scripture, they argued, alone is to determine what the church believes and practices. We may examine the Protestant doctrine of Scripture under five headings.

Inspired by God

First, the Scriptures alone are given by inspiration of God. When we say that the Scriptures alone are inspired, we are not saying that they alone are "inspiring." Indeed, they are inspiring, but so are Shakespeare, and Solzhenitsyn. Sunsets and fireworks may be "inspiring." This illustrates the problem with the English word. "Inspiring" says as much or more about our subjective response to an item as about its objective qualities. The Greek word indicates not something about *my response* to Scripture, but *its source*. We read in 2 Timothy 3:l6,

> *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness* (NASB).

The word "inspiration" is the Greek word, *theopneustos*, meaning literally, "God-breathed." The NIV translates it just so, reading, "all Scripture is God-breathed," the ESV "all Scripture is breathed-out by God." It is not that the Bible is "inspiring" (though it certainly is), but that it comes from the mouth of God. It is divine in origin. It is an extension of His creative breath. It is an expression of His lips. The Apostle is saying that Scripture is not just a collection of wise human sayings. Scripture comes to us from Almighty God.

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[112] D. G. Hart, *Still Protesting: While the Reformation Matters* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 28.

[113] See collections of citations on Hart, *Why the Reformation Matters,* 31-40; also Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism,* 26-28, with citations.

Similarly, we read from the Apostle Peter,

> *[20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter l:20, 21).

The Bible is not a merely human product or "an act of human will" (NASB). No, it was written by "men… (who) were carried along by the Holy Spirit." When they spoke, they "spoke from God." The word "carried along" (*pheromenoi*) is used in Acts 27:l5 of a ship being driven along by the wind. The great Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) says it indicates that the prophets were "taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by His power to the goal of His choosing."[114]

This is not to say that the Scriptures were dictated to the biblical writers, who acted as no more than secretaries. Rather, God worked in and through the unique circumstances and personalities of the biblical writers in such a way that the writings reflect the personalities and gifts of each of the authors. The prophets were all different men with different capacities. J. Alex Motyer (1924-2016) regarded Isaiah's Hebrew to be Shakespearian, the most beautiful Hebrew ever written. The apostles John and Paul write very different Greek prose. Students of New Testament Greek learn by reading John, whose writing is simple. He obeys all the rules of grammar. Paul's, by way of contrast, is difficult, with run-ons sentences, broken sentences, and sophisticated vocabulary. Inspiration did not bypass the personality of the authors. Yet when the biblical authors each wrote, they wrote the very word of God. There is in the Scripture the union of the human and the divine, and as with Jesus Christ, the union is such that it is without sin or error.[115]

During the late l9th century heated debate was taking place in the church concerning the nature of biblical inspiration. C. A. Briggs (1841-1913) of Union Theological Seminary in New York employed the metaphor of sunlight, arguing that the word of God was like the pure light of the sun, which when passing through the human personality was colored, like sunlight shining through stained glass. It may be beautiful, but it is not the pure word; it is corrupted by the coloration of human ignorance, human misconceptions, and human errors. The task of the interpreter, then, is to filter out the color and restore the pure light. The student, in this conception of inspiration, stands over Scripture, assessing its contents rather than being subject to its judgments.

Warfield adapted Brigg's metaphor and answered that when an artist creates a stained-glass window, the effect of the sunlight passing through it is not corruption, but a work of art. The artist arranges the colored glass so that the effect is exactly the one intended. So it is with divine inspiration. Passing through the human personality it is *colored*, but not *corrupted*. God created the human authors. He governed their development and so superintended their circumstances that

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[114] B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1948), 137.

[115] J. I. Packer develops this thought in his important work, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958).

when they spoke or wrote, it was exactly what God wanted them to speak or write.[116]

Our confidence is this: in our Bibles we have the very word of God. Its words are not simply the words of man. It is not merely a human book. It is to be received "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13). The Bible is God's message to humanity, a gift of His grace, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Inerrant

The doctrine of inerrancy is a necessary corollary of inspiration. Jesus said succinctly: "Thy word is truth" (Jn l7:l7). The church may err. Clergy may err. Councils and Confessions may err. However, Scripture does not err. If Scripture is from God, it must be true, and all true, down to the individual letters of each particular word. If it has come to us from God, who is Himself all Truth, it must be free from error. On whatever subject the Scriptures touch, they speak truly, whether in the area of religion, of history, of science, psychology, or morals.

What is our answer to those in the broader church today who wish to deny the inerrancy of the Scripture? What do we say when they speak of the limitations of the human authors, of an ancient cosmology, of mistakes in historic detail, and of enculturation? What do we say when they claim that the Bible is "full of contradictions."

Our conviction, and that of the church through the centuries, is that all limitations are perceived limitations, all mistakes are perceived mistakes, and all contradictions are perceived contradictions. They are perceived, and not real. For every problem, there is an answer, a solution, a harmonization. Most scriptural difficulties already have been adequately resolved. For the few that remain, we await the fresh insight which God may yet give. However, never do we locate the problem in the Bible itself. All problems are ultimately our problems: problems caused by mistakes in transmission, poor translations, our limited understanding and abilities, and not by Scripture itself.

We stand with Augustine in saying of the canonical books of Scripture,

> I most firmly do believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.[117]

Augustine's conviction was the conviction of the Church Fathers, of the Medieval Church, of the later Roman Catholic Church, and of the Reformers. Luther said,

> St. Augustine, in a letter to St. Jerome, has put down a fine axiom - that only Holy

[116] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority,* 156.
[117] Cited by Richard Lovelace, "Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives," in Roger R. Nicole & J. Ramsey Michaels, eds. *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 20.

> Scripture is to be considered inerrant.[118]

Again,

> Everyone knows that at times [the fathers] have erred as men will; therefore I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture *which has never erred*.[119]

This is the view of Calvin, of Knox, of historic Protestantism, of American Presbyterianism until the l920's. Universal, catholic Christianity has always believed the Bible to be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

If some modern churchmen find this to be hard to swallow, it has more to do with their acceptance of worldly assumptions than it has to do with anything inherently wrong with the Bible. The modern world, with its bias against the supernatural, its hatred of external authority, its humanistic assumptions, scoffs at the idea of an inerrant Bible. Some churchmen find the spirit of the age to be irresistible. We, however, unashamedly stand in the mainstream of historic Christianity in affirming that the Bible is free from error in all that it affirms, the inerrant, infallible word of God.

Authoritative

Because the Bible is the inspired word of God and free from error, it is authoritative in all that it says. This really is the crux of the matter. At no point may I say that the Bible is wrong about such and such and so I may ignore its teaching. At no point may I legitimately deny its authority. We have an infallible rule for faith and practice. We have an unerring standard by which to judge our lives. We have absolutes by which to live. Jesus said,

> ***18*** *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* ***19*** *Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:l8, l9).

Jesus identifies even the smallest letter of Scripture as accurate and certain. Even the smallest letter of Scripture is to be kept and taught. Every "jot and tittle" is authoritative (KJV). It is the absolute standard of belief and behavior for the people of God.

Jesus affirmed "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). This statement follows the quotation, "you are gods," from Psalm 82:6. Warfield pointed out that even this "casual clause," from out of the middle of the Psalms is considered authoritative by Jesus.[120] This raises a point: if the Scripture is regarded as such by Jesus, how can we consider it any less authoritative and true?

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[118] Cited by John Warwick Montgomery, "Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ," in Montgomery, ed. *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1973), 68..

[119] Cited by R. C. Sproul in "Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelism," James M. Boyce, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 117, n4 (my emphasis).

[120] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority,* 140.

Can we consider ourselves as disciples of Christ and yet have a lower view of scriptural authority than He did? Conversely, we can be quite secure in holding the same high view of biblical authority that Jesus Himself held.

Luther set the tone for the Reformation's view of scriptural authority at the Diet of Worms in April 1521. There before the assembly of the German Princes and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Luther's theology was examined by the church and condemned. When the authorities demanded that Luther renounce his books and their teaching, he asked that his alleged errors be *demonstrated from Scripture.* He conceded, "If I am shown my error, I will be the first to *throw my books into the fire.*"[121] As the hearings came to their dramatic close, Luther was asked:

> Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgement above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance, and which now we are forbidden by the pope and the emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate.

Then finally knowing that his life probably depended upon how he answered, it was put to him,

> I ask you, Martin - answer candidly and without horns - do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?

Luther answered:

> Since then your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.[122]

Evangelicals are thrilled by Luther's words because he articulates our own convictions. We endeavor to stand where he stood. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* identifies the Scripture as "*the* rule of faith and life" (I. 2). When Presbyterian officers are ordained, they affirm their belief that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." We do not look to reason or common sense for authoritative guidance. We do not look to clergymen or scholars. It is not that any of these are considered irrelevant. We honor the creeds and councils of the church. We respect the church's ancient theologians. We have a very high regard for tradition and scholarship. However, to look in these directions for *final* authority, or *infallible* authority, is to look to man and not to God. Whenever there is conflict, all other

[121] Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (United States: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 184.
[122] Bainton, *Here I Stand,* 181-182.

sources of knowledge must be subservient to Scripture. We take this view confident that this is the view that Jesus took. With His own mouth He condemned the Pharisees saying,

> *8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men..." 9 "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!* (Mk 7:8,9).

In our weekly services we recite the Apostles' Creed. We do so because we believe it faithfully represents the teaching of Scripture. However, it is not our final authority in any matter of faith; Scripture is. We are a Presbyterian church. In a Presbyterian church, the Session has governing authority. However, the Session is not the final authority; Scripture is. Presbyterians will regularly cite the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. However, they are not our final authority. As wonderful as they are, they are not final. In fact, they are called "subordinate" standards, that is, subordinate to Scripture. So also do we consider books of church order and church constitutions. Yes, they are important. Yes, we learn from them and use them as guides. Yet their authority is not final, indeed, they are subject to revision. The Reformers affirmed that the true church is *semper reformatio*, "always reforming," by the unchanging word of God.

We, like most churches, have many fine traditions. Yet tradition is not the final authority in matters of faith and practice. If it were, we would not have an organ or any musical instruments in the church. Presbyterians didn't for over 200 years. However "the way things have always been done" has never been the principle upon which Protestants have determined these things. How then do we determine doctrine and policy and practice in the church? How do we settle disputes and controversies?

> The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined...can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (*WCF* I.10).

We believe that the Bible is inspired by an all knowing and eternal God, it is true, and it is authoritative in all that it affirms. This leads us to our last point.

Sufficient

We may return to 2 Timothy 3:16, 17:

> *16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

All that we need in the way of doctrinal, moral, ecclesiastical "training" is provided in the Scripture. The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are sufficient to equip the people of God "for every good work." Not just "some good works." Not "most good works." No, the Bible equips us for every situation. The Bible is complete, unique, adequate, sufficient for the people

of God.

As we make decisions regarding our personal lives, the Bible gives to us the answers we need. As we face problems regarding the life of the church, it is to the Bible that we turn for solutions. As we for direction for our families, it is to the Bible that we turn for guidance.

A sure way to neutralize Scriptural authority and reduce it's role in the lives of believers is to depart from the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture. Every corruption of true Christianity begins by compromising this principle. Every deviation from Christianity as Christ and the Apostles established it begins by adding to the Bible, or by taking away from it.

Some have been guilty of adding to Scripture. Christian Science added Mary Baker Eddy's *Key*. The Mormons added *The Book of Mormon*. Jehovah's Witnesses added the *Watchtower*. Seventh Day Adventists added the revelations of Ellen White. The Roman Catholic Church added its oral tradition. Modernists have added common sense, logic, or the latest scientific discoveries. Our contemporaries, even church-going contemporaries are tempted with doubting the relevance of Scripture. The modern world differs so dramatically from the ancient context of Scripture that doubts are raised about its application to modern technological society. Calvin's question of all extra biblical practices and beliefs is this: "By what word of God, by what revelation, by what example, is this done?"[123] Unless a doctrine or practice is based upon Scripture, it has no place in the church. The Bible does not need to be supplemented by post-apostolic revelations, intutions, or traditions.

Others are guilty of subtracting from Scripture. The sexual revolutionaries have challenged traditional, historic, biblical sexual ethics. Population growth, the availability of contraception, plus the ethos of personal pleasure and fulfillment all conspire to raise doubts about the relevance of scriptural norms. Many are tempted to practice an "everything but" form of Christianity: believing everything except in those places when Scripture deviates from one's own personal convictions and preferences.

As an old Scottish minister told a parishioner, "Madam, you have to eat it whole." We are not to pick and choose what we want and don't want from the Bible. That's not historic Christianity. It may come close to Christianity. Yet it's not. Christianity plus or minus our personal preferences is not Christianity. J. Gresham Machen made this point in his landmark book *Christianity and Liberalism*.[124] When modernists cut the supernatural out of the Bible; when they deny the miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, they may still want to call it Christianity. Yet it's not. Hence the title, *Christianity and* (this new religion called) *Liberalism*. No, the Bible is inspired, true, authoritative, and sufficient for the times and all times. The Bible is ever contemporary, ever up to date, ever adequate, ever complete.

Perspicuous

Finally, some may wish to hide behind the cloud of obscurity. The Bible is so hard to understand. So much is unclear. There are so many differences of opinion. How can one know?

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[123] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.v.10.
[124] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

History affords an example of this. John Knox, in one of his many meetings with Mary Queen of Scots, was challenged by her:

> You interpret the Scripture in one way, they in another. Whom shall I believe? Who shall be the judge?[125]

Knox answered for all Protestantism, and for us today:

> Madam, you shall believe God who speaks plainly in His Word. Further than the Word teaches you shall not believe the one or the other. The Word of God is plain in itself. If there is any obscurity anywhere, the Holy Spirit explains it more clearly in other places. No one can remain in doubt, save those who remain obstinately ignorant.[126]

The principle to which Knox appealed and which Protestants have insisted upon is that of the perspicuity, or clarity of Scripture. The Scriptures are clear enough that the ordinary Christian, without the aid of an ecclesiastical (or scholarly) magisterium can understand the main thrust of the Scripture. This is not to say that there are not difficult texts in Scripture or difficult doctrines. Yet the main message is simple and clear and the difficult places are explained more clearly in other places. The Apostle John assures us,

> *But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.* (l Jn 2:27)

The ordinary believer, with his Bible and the indwelling Holy Spirit, can understand and apply the central teaching of the Bible and profit by its reading. This is why the Reformers translated the Scripture into the language of the people, and why we continue to encourage the so-called laity to study their Bibles for themselves. The opposite conviction explains why, for 400 years, Rome discouraged vernacular services and lay Bible study. At Vatican II Rome finally came around "to the ideas that Luther and fellow Protestants proposed," in the sixteenth century, notes Darryl Hart. He continues, "In other words, even the Roman Catholic church now concedes that the Bible should be central to the life and teaching of the church. Protestants knew that in the sixteenth century."[127]

The real problem, to paraphrase a saying attributed to Mark Twain, is not the parts I don't understand that trouble me, but the parts that I do, and find hard to obey. Am I willing to submit my mind and will to the word of God? Am I willing to rest upon Scripture as certain truth? In a day of moral and religious chaos, we have an infallible source of teaching. We must not be shy about proclaiming this. We have answers for the family. We have answers for the church. We have answers for society. The answers are found in the old paths of biblical Christianity. With

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[125] William Croft Dickinson, ed., *John Knox's History of the Reformation,* Volume 2 (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc.), 18. I have taken the liberty of modernizing the English.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Hart, *Why the Reformation Matters,* 43.

Luther let us say, "my conscience is captive to the Word of God". With Luther let us say, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

Authority in the church is not based upon creeds or councils or clerics, not common sense, logic, intuition, science or even new revelation. Scripture alone - the infallible, inerrant, completely sufficient written word of God is our only rule of faith and practice.

Christ Alone

We've gotten ahead of our Reformation chronology. Let's back up for a moment. On October 31, 1517, All Hallowed Eve (the evening before All Saints Day), Martin Luther placed a printed placard consisting of 95 theses (in Latin) for debate on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. This was a common practice in those days among scholars. However, it was quickly copied, translated, and spread like wildfire across Europe. Luther's primary complaint was against sale of "indulgences" promising full remission of sins and deliverance of souls from Purgatory, a practice developed only in the relatively late dates of the late 14th century and 15th century. The Dominican Johann Tetzel, the Pope's salesman since 1502, promised contributers,"When a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." The crude abusiveness of Tetzel's tactics can be seen in the following pitch:

> Don't you hear the voices of your dead parents and other relatives crying out, 'Have mercy on us, for we suffer great punishment and pain. From this you could release us with a few alms . . . We have created you, fed you, cared for you, and left you our temporal goods. Why do you treat us so cruelly and leave us to suffer in the flames, when it takes only a little to save us?'[128]

The point of the "fund-raising" effort was the building of St. Peter's in Rome. The effect was to undermine and obscure the gospel.

Where do these Scriptures everywhere and always direct us for salvation? To Jesus Christ alone. "How may a person be in the right before God," Job asked (Job 9:2). This is the fundamental question of human existence - the question of the ages, the question of all questions. Universally people know that God exists. Universally humanity senses that He is not pleased and something must be done to appease Him (Rom1:18ff). The history of religion is the history of attempts to do so. Some religions direct one toward an "internal" sacrifice such as enlightened moral conduct or ascetic practices such as prayer, fasting, and physical deprivation in order to please the deity. Others devise "external" sacrifices, such as human or animal blood sacrifices, in order to satisfy God and begin the journey down the road of salvation, whatever the particular religion may conceive of that journey to be. The problem with approaching God on these terms is that one never senses that one has done what is required or done enough. There remains the nagging reality of God's disfavor.

In this respect the Medieval church was much like the rest of humanity's religions. The average citizen of Christendom viewed God as unapproachable and unappeasable. He did what the

[128] D. Kagen, S. Ozmont, and F. Turner, *The Western Heritage,* Seventh Edition (New York: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), 358.

church instructed him to do. He attended services. He kept the Ten commandments. He observed the church calendar. He went to confession. He tithed. He helped those in need. Yet for all he did, it was never enough to soothe his soul. He may even have gone further, visiting shrines and relics, purchasing indulgences promising the forgiveness of sins. Even then the church taught there would await him hundreds and thousands of years in Purgatory.

The Reformers jettisoned the vast bulk of this religious system and proclaimed in its place *Solus Christus*, by Christ *alone* we are saved. Justification, a right standing with God, is by faith alone. What they meant by this we may summarize under two headings.

Sacrifice

First, *Christ's sacrifice alone,* saves. There is no other satisfactory way to deal with one's guilt. There is no other way to be right and reconciled to God. There is no other way, no other truth, no other valid approach to God. His sacrifice alone can remove the guilt that lies behind my guilty feelings. This was the position of the Reformers and as difficult as this is to maintain in our relativistic age, it remains our conviction today. Jesus said, "I am *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life, no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:16). The definite articles make the claim of Christ emphatic. He is the one and *only* way, the one and *only* truth, the one and *only* path to life.

The Apostle Peter preached that,

> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

There is *no one else, no other name* by which sinners may be saved. Jesus Christ is the only Savior for sinners. We, with the Reformers, look to no other and proclaim no other. The writer to the Hebrews says,

> *But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.* (Heb 10:12)

He "offered… a single sacrifice for sins." He then "sat down," His work completed. Its efficacy is "for all time" (Heb. 7:27; 9:12,25-28; 10:10,14). His atoning sacrifice was a *once for all* accomplishment. In His death He bore the sins of the *whole world* committed in the *whole of history*. His sacrifice was substitutionary and forensic. Through His death Christ satisfied the requirements of God's justice and turned away His wrath, as the Apostle Paul explains in detail from Romans 3:22-4:25. His sacrifice was propitiatory (see also 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). The benefits of Christ's death are received by faith alone, as we shall see momentarily. Justification is a declaration of right standing with God, by God, not a process or goal toward which a believer now begins to journey, Rome maintains. Justification is by faith, by grace, a gift, not by works, not by law, not earned or merited. It is "to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" (Rom 4:5).

Christ's sacrifice needs no supplementation. It is complete. Jesus declared on the cross, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Nothing need be added to it. It is totally sufficient for all of our sins.

Because the Scripture teaches this, the Reformers rejected the Medieval concept of the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice (as Roman Catholics affirm in their 16th century Council of Trent), because His death was once for all.[129] It need never be repeated or reenacted. Consequently, the Reformers rejected the *mass as a sacrifice and good work*. In some ways this is the most important reform of all because the sacrificial mass brought "an endless host of other abuses in its train," as Luther argued.[130] The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice offered upon an altar to God which He counts as a good work, but a gift given by God to be received by faith alone. "It is a gift of God to man, not a gift of man to God," 19th century historian Philip Schaff explains of Luther's meaning.[131]

Further, the Reformers rejected the *doctrine of transubstantiation.* Luther calls transubstantiation "a monstrous word and a monstrous idea," based on the "pseudo philosophy of Aristotle," unknown to the church for 1200 years.[132] Contrary to the then accepted view that the "accidents" or appearance of the bread and wine remain unchanged while the "substance" becomes Christ's body and blood, Luther argued "It is real bread and real wine in which Christ's real flesh and real blood are present . . ." [133] They rejected *withholding of the cup from the laity*. Basing his argument on the biblical texts (1 Cor 11, Mt 26, Mk 14, Lk 22), Luther argued that "Christ gave the whole sacrament to all his disciples."[134] Did He not say, "Drink ye all of it?" Moreover, "it is wicked and despotic to deny both kinds to the laity."[135] They rejected the sale of "indulgences," whereby one could purchase the benefits of the "merits of the saints" toward the remission of one's sins. One need not go to saints for merits (even if they had any; they don't), because Christ's merits are sufficient. They rejected the doctrine of Purgatory, where the souls of believers are alleged to go to be purged of the guilt and stain of unpaid (or unatoned) for sins. In Christ there are no unatoned sins. His sacrifice is for all sins for all time. They rejected prayers for the dead, because as Calvin put it "the entire law and the gospel do not furnish so much as a single
syllable to pray for the dead."[136] They did not pray for the dead because the dead are in eternity. Their future is sealed. Either by Christ's sacrifice they are in Heaven or because of rejecting Him they have descended into the Abyss. His sacrifice was once for all and sufficient for all our sins.

Further yet, Reformed Protestants rejected the Lutheran notion of consubstantiation, arguing that Christ's physical presence is in heaven. The words of institution "This is my body… this cup is the new covenant in my blood" should be understood in the natural, metaphorical sense, no more to be taken literally than "I am the door." His presence is a spiritual not physical presence in the Supper, a "true" not a "real" presence. We shall have more to say about this as we study worship. For now, we may summarize the difference between an Evangelical and Roman Catholic understanding of the eucharist with the following chart:

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[129] Council of Trent, Session 22, Chapter II; also Canons I & II.
[130] Martin Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in James Atkinson (ed.), *Three Reformation Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 152.
[131] Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vols. I-VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1858), V:217.
[132] Luther, "Babylonian Captivity," 147.
[133] Ibid., 145.
[134] Ibid., 134.
[135] Ibid., 142.
[136] Calvin, *Institutes,* III.v.10.

Lord's Supper[137]

is	is not
meal	mass
supper	sacrifice
administered on a table	not an altar
by a pastor	not a priest
a true presence	not a real presence
received seated	received kneeling

Mediation

Second, *Christ's mediation alone,* saves. "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5). Likewise, "He always lives to make intercession" for His people (Hebrews 7:24). He is "at the right hand of God… interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). Where am I to get what I need from God? Who can assist me in my search for the forgiveness of my sins and peace of conscience? The answer of the Reformation and of the Scriptures and Evangelicals today is "Christ alone." He alone mediates the blessings of redemption. He alone *justifies*. He alone declares forgiveness. He alone *sanctifies*. He alone *adopts* us into the family of God. I may go directly to God through Jesus Christ. I need no celestial mediators, such as angels, or saints, or Mary. I need no earthly mediators such as clergymen and priests.

The Reformers affirmed the *priesthood of all believers*. Luther eliminated the need of a priestly class (there is no transubstantiation, no sacrifice to offer, and no need for a priest to offer a sacrifice, no altar on which to offer the sacrifice), denying the clergy any priestly function beyond that of any other Christian. "We are all priests, as many of us as are Christians," he continues. And what are priests? They are but "ministers chosen from among us," says Luther. "The priesthood is nothing but a ministry." What then is ordination? It is "nothing else but a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers."[138] What are priests then to do if not offer masses? "The duty of a priest is to preach, and if he does not preach he is as much a priest as a picture of a man is a man."[139] Again, "It is the ministry of the Word that makes the priest and bishop."[140] Each believer has the right of direct access to God. In Christ are "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Christ "has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev 1:6). Our privilege, joy and right is to go directly to God through Jesus Christ without the help of any created being.

The Roman Catholic church may be an important force for good in our world today. We may thank God for the uncompromising stand that it has taken on a variety of moral issues, especially in the area of sexual ethics. However, when the Pope dismisses the "widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God" and exhorts the faithful to confess their sins more often to their priests, we must continue to say in return that to *Christ alone* we confess our sins and by Christ alone we are forgiven. When the Pope continues to say "Mary is the source of our faith and our hope," we must continue to say in response that our hope "is built on nothing less than

[137] For more on Reformed eucharistic theology, see *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Johnson, [United Kingdom: EP Books, 2014]), 47-49; 149-179.
[138] Luther, "Babylonian Captivity," 244-245.
[139] Ibid., 247.
[140] Ibid., 119.

Jesus' blood and righteousness." Christ alone makes us partakers of the blessings of redemption. He alone is the Savior. He alone is the Mediator. For these tasks He is entirely sufficient and without need of assistance. We Evangelicals look not to the saints or Mary, but to Jesus Christ alone.

Faith Alone

Let's push our timetable back further. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was born on November 10, 1483 to a middle-class family. Recognized as a gifted student, he earned his A.B. in 1502, and M.A. in 1505, and was intending to enter law school, as his father had planned. But in July of 1505, at the age of 21, while caught out in a rainstorm he was nearly hit by a lightning bolt. In a flash, he saw horrible visions of fiends in Hell and in terror cried out, "St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk."[141]

That week Luther entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt and began there his pilgrimage in search of the assurance of God's love and favor and that he might escape from the terrors of His wrath and hell. One year later he took his monastic vows and continued his preparation to become a priest.

He enjoyed nearly two years of relative peace of mind until the time came to say his first mass. As he was handling the body and blood he was overcome by "fear and trembling," unable to finish the service. "How could a pygmy stand before divine majesty? How could a transgressor confront divine Holiness?" he asked.

An earnest young man, he thought that through *ascetic practices* he might bridge the gap between himself and a holy God. He fasted. He prayed. He slept without blankets. He deprived himself of all worldly comforts and pleasures. Yet all he did seemed to fall short. All his efforts could not compensate for the weight of his guilt. He could sense only God's anger and displeasure. He later said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, it was I." Yet his best efforts, his greatest works, were not enough.

In November of 1510 he journeyed to Rome, the "Holy City," where he thought surely he would find peace with his maker. There he sought to appropriate the *merits of saints.* He viewed relics. He conducted masses and he repeated the *Pater Noster*. He visited Holy sites. While he earned considerable merits from the "treasury of the saints," he still could find no enduring peace. Still he felt alienated from God. While crawling on his knees up the supposed steps of Pilate's Palace, saying the *Pater Noster* on each step, he arrived at the top and said, "Who knows whether it is so."

April 1511 Luther was transferred by his monastic superior, Johannes von Staupitz, to Wittenburg in eastern Germany. There he began to seek peace with God through the *confession of sins*. And confess his sin, he would, sometimes for up to six hours a day, terrified that he should forget even one.

Seeing the futility of this approach he then began to study the *German Mystics.* Their writings urged him to stop striving. Instead they urged, he must surrender himself to the love of God. He

[141] The following quotations are from Bainton, *Here I Stand,* 34, 37-51.

must yield. He must surrender all ego and all assertiveness. He must let go and let God do it for him. Luther now was coming close to the answer, but not quite. Mystical contemplation would work for a while. He would feel himself at peace with God and with himself for a season. And then he would crash. Again, he would fall under the burden of his guilt. God's anger was too great! The distance between his sinful soul and a holy God was too great.

The turning point came when he was asked to study for his doctorate and to take the chair of Biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg. The more he studied, the clearer the gospel became. He taught the Psalms (1513), then Romans (1515), and then Galatians (1516). Yet he continued to wrestle with the phrase "the justice of God," which he took to mean God exacting His pound of flesh, which everyone owed and no one could escape. Finally, Luther had what has come to be known as his "Tower Experience," where at long last he came to understand the gospel. Let us pick up his own account of his conversion:

> I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.
>
> Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven . . .
>
> If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and should look upon His fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see Him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.[142]

Sola fide means we are saved, or more specifically, we are justified by faith alone. Luther and Lutherans would come to speak of justification by faith alone as the *articulus stantis vel cadentis*, "the article by which the church stands or falls." It was his conviction that

[142] Ibid., 65.

> This article is the head and cornerstone of the Church, which alone begs, nourishes, builds, preserves and protects the Church; without it the Church of God cannot subsist one hour.[143]

It was this article of faith more than any other which brought the Reformers into conflict with the medieval church. "It was the substantive and core issue of the debate," says R.C. Sproul.[144] Calvin, in his debate with Cardinal Sadoleto (1477-1547) said justification by faith was the "first and keenest subject of controversy between us." Remove the knowledge of this doctrine, he argued, and the "glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown."[145] It was faithfulness to this article of faith that determined the outcome of the conflict. "At the beginning of our preaching," Luther said,

> The doctrine of Faith had a most happy course, and down fell the Pope's pardons, purgatory, vows, masses, and such like abominations, which drew with them the ruin of all Popery . . . And if all had continued, as they began to teach and diligently urge the article of justification – that is to say, that we are justified neither by the righteousness of the Law, nor by our own righteousness, but only by faith in Jesus Christ – doubtless this one article, by little and little, had overthrown the whole Papacy.[146]

Luther spoke of the "wonderful exchange" that takes place, as Christ takes our sin and we receive the *righteousness* of Christ in Him. Protestants speak of the minus and plus of justification. The minus: guilt is removed as Christ bears the penalty of our sin. The plus: the righteousness of Christ is credited to us, or "imputed," to use the theological term. We receive what Luther called an "*alien*" righteousness. We are at once *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time just and sinner." God "justifies *the ungodly*," as the Apostle Paul insists, justifying them while they are still ungodly, before they have done any good works (Rom. 4:5). Indeed we are *semper peccator*, *semper penitens*, *semper justus*, "always sinner always penitent, always righteous" (or justified).

Moreover, faith is not mere *assentiō,* but *fiducia*, personal trust. The medieval theologians divided faith into two parts: *knowledge* – one must know gospel truth; and *assent* – one must assent to the truth, acknowledge that the gospel is true. The Reformers argued that this was inadequate. By this definition the devil could claim faith. He knows the gospel and knows it to be true. "The demons believe – and shutter!" (Jas 2:9). What is lacking? Personal trust. Personal repentance. Personal commitment. Personal surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Mere intellectual assent does not save. Saving faith involves receiving the whole Christ, Christ as both Savior and Lord.

Evangelical Protestants stand with Luther and the Reformers because this too is our conviction. What must I do to receive what Christ alone accomplished on the cross? Good works? Religious

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[143] Quoted by Sinclair Ferguson in *Know Your Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 71.
[144] R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 18.
[145] John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin,* Calvin's Tracts, Vols. 1-5, Henry Beveridge, ed. (1844; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 1:41.
[146] Quoted in Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (1867; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 23.

works? Social works? No, never. What we must do is believe. This is what the Bible has taught us and what we have found to be true. It is the one "who does *not* work but believes" who is saved (Rom 4:5). It is by faith alone that we are saved. It is by *faith alone* that we receive Christ's word of forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life.

What about our works? What about keeping the Ten Commandments, attending church, being helpful to others, and doing one's best? Isn't salvation by faith plus works? Don't our good works contribute? We say with Calvin, "Assuredly we do deny that in justifying a man they are worth *one single* straw."[147]

Why should God let sinners into His pure and perfect heaven? Evangelicals continue to answer, only because of what Christ has done for us on the cross which we have received not because of any good works of ours but through empty-handed, beggarly faith. So when the Pope says "It would be . . . foolish, as well as presumptuous . . . to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the sacrament of penance," we must respond "whoever believes in Him shall not perish." It is by faith *alone* apart from works that we are saved.

Grace Alone

At the height of the Reformation conflict with Rome, the great humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus (c.1426–1536) published his *Discussion concerning Free Will* (1524), attacking Luther and casting his lot with the Papacy. Erasmus had been sympathetic to the Reformation. He published the first printed text of the New Testament in Greek in 1516, with accompanying notes that were highly critical of Rome. It has often been said that "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched." Erasmus had waited long (too long, according to Henry VIII and the Pope himself) to choose sides. It had been seven years since the publishing of the Ninety-five Theses. When he finally did declare himself, it was surprising that the issue was that of 'free will', rather than one of the more burning issues: the sacraments, justification, or church authority. Instead he attacked Luther's understanding of sin's impact upon the human will.

Yet what may be surprising to us was not to Luther. 'You alone have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue', he told Erasmus.

> You have not worried me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like trifles, rather than issues in respect of which almost all to date have sought my blood . . . you, and you alone, have seen *the hinge on which all turns*, and aimed for the vital spot. For that I heartily thank you; for it is more gratifying to me to deal with this issue.[148]

Does the human will have the capacity to believe and obey the gospel? Does a positive response to Christ require God's gracious enabling, or do sinners have this ability on their own, without help? This question is the 'hinge on which all turns", as Luther puts it, because it determines whether Christianity shall be a religion of grace or of merit. For Luther, it touches 'the very heart of the gospel', explains J. I. Packer. Indeed, "The whole gospel of the grace of God . . . was

[147] John C. Olin (ed.), *A Reformation Debate: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 67.
[148] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525; London: James Clarke & co. Ltd., 1957), 319 (my emphasis).

bound up with it." For Luther, Packer adds, it was "the cornerstone of the gospel and the very foundation of faith."[149] Packer summarizes the debate:

> Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort… The principle of sola fide is not rightly understood till it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of sola gratia. What is the source and status of faith? Is it the God-given means whereby the God-given justification is received, or is it a condition of justification which is left to man to fulfill? Is it a part of God's gift of salvation, or is it man's own contribution to salvation? Is our salvation wholly of God, or does it ultimately depend on something that we do for ourselves?[150]

Erasmus' perspective was quite modern. He exalted human freedom. Belief that salvation depends upon the human will was consistent with his philosophy. Even so, he saw the issue as tiresome and divisive. Better to get on with the practical issues of life than to weary oneself in theological nit-picking, he thought. Luther correctly perceived that far more was involved. The gospel, no less, was at stake.

Lest saved sinners be tempted to claim credit for their faith, the Reformers taught in addition to "faith alone" that we are saved by "grace alone." The Reformers understood that to stop at "faith alone" could have the effect of turning faith into a work. In other words, if the one required response to Christ is faith, and we are saved because we have faith, then faith becomes a work. It is minimal work, effortless work, but nevertheless a work, the exercising of which earns salvation.

So the Reformers were careful to remove the last possible ground of human merit by saying that while faith is the *instrument* by which we receive eternal life, the *ground* or *basis* of our salvation is "grace alone." Faith does not save us. Christ does, on the basis of the unmerited mercy of God which He has shown toward the undeserving. Our response of faith is itself a part of what God Himself gives in salvation. Far from being meritorious, faith is a gift. It is not our own. If we believe, it is because God gave us the ability to do so. The *locus classicus* of *sola gratia* is Ephesians 2:8:

> *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Eph 2:8, 9)

We are saved "by grace . . . through faith." What faith? The faith that is "not your own doing." God gave faith to us. Evangelicals affirm in addition to salvation by "faith alone," we are saved by the unmerited mercy and grace of God alone.

Sola gratia assumes the hopelessness of the human condition. The Apostle Paul's account of the human situation, his lead into Ephesians 2:8a, is sobering:

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[149] J. I. Packer, "Historical and Theological Introduction," in Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* 41-43.
[150] Ibid., 59.

> *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* [2] *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* [3] *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* (Eph 2:1-3)

The Apostle says that "by nature," that is, inherently and necessarily, we are "children of wrath." We are spiritually "dead" in sin. We are in bondage to the world, the devil ("the prince of the power of the air"), and the lusts of the flesh. Sin slavishly is indulged. God is thoroughly displeased. The Apostle's discussion of the "flesh" in Romans 8, that is, of fallen human nature, is equally sobering:

> [6] *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* [7] *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* [8] *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* (Rom 8:6-8)

The unbelieving, unregenerate mind set on the flesh is "death," is "hostile toward God;" "does not submit" to the law of God and furthermore, "it cannot" and finally, "those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God." This is the hopelessness of the human condition. We are naturally hostile to God, not able to subject ourselves to Him, not *wanting* to be, and utterly *unable* to please Him. Often the Scripture likens the situation to slavery. Jesus said, "truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (Jn 8:34; cf 2 Peter 2:19). We from birth are in bondage. We are blind. "Grace alone" reminds us that "it is by His doing" that we are "in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:30 NASB). If I believe, it is because God gave me the ability to believe. If I have chosen Christ, it is because He first chose me (Jn 15:16). If I love Christ, it is because He first loved me (1 Jn 4:10). It was while I was dead and blind and ignorant and helpless that Christ died for me and then began to work decisively in my life.

Let me provide a personal illustration. The church of my teenage years enjoyed a booming youth program. Many of my closest friends and I attended Sunday School and church week in and week out for years, and participated in periodic retreats and music-group tours. Today I believe and my youthful friends don't. Why? Was it because I was smarter than they? Or because I was a better person? Or because I was more virtuous? Was it because I was more diligent in examining the facts? If the answer to any of the preceding questions is yes, the basis of salvation has shifted faith to works. If the answer is yes, I am saved because of some good quality in me: my attitudes, my motives, my behavior, my actions have saved me. *I* have saved me. Good works have saved me. *Sola gratia* is delivering us from these wrong-headed conclusions. The Reformers, and we with them, must never lose sight of the fact that it is by the sovereign, initiating, electing love of God in Christ that we were saved. Calvin in his only statement regarding his conversion, found in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, shows the biblical perspective in our salvation in saying,

> God drew me . . . God at last turned my course by the secret rein in His providence… by an unexpected conversion He tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years . . .[151]

"God drew," he says. "God turned… He tamed." Why am I saved? Because "God so loved." And why did God so love? One can plunge no deeper than Deuteronomy 7:7 - He loves us because He loves us. Nothing we have done, nothing He might have seen or foreseen has attracted, earned, or merited His favor. Our salvation is of God's sheer mercy and grace alone.

God's Glory Alone

Patrick Hamilton, a noble blooded 24-year-old Scotsman returned home early in 1528 from studying in Germany a convert to the Protestant faith. He returned knowing that his new convictions meant for him certain death. For six weeks he preached, and as Knox said,

> Neither the love of life, nor yet the fear of that cruel death, could move him a jot to swerve from the truth once professed.[152]

He was arrested, tried and condemned. On February 29, 1528, Patrick Hamilton was burned in St. Andrews. For six hours, on a cold and wet winter day the fire struggled to burn. Finally he cried out, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."

Patrick Hamilton, with all of life before him, came to a tragic end.

Eighteen years later, February 28, 1546, George Wishart, a mighty preacher of the gospel and John Knox's mentor, was burned in front of St. Andrew's castle. The little book, *Seven Men of the Kirk*, describes his moving end:

> When he came to the fire he prayed: Father of heaven I commend my spirit into Thy holy hands." To the people he said: "For the Word's sake, the true gospel given me by the grace of God, I suffer this day by men; not sorrowfully, but with a glad heart and mind. For this cause I was sent, that I should suffer this fire for Christ's sake. This grim fire I fear not. If persecution comes to you for the Word's sake fear not them that slay the body, and have no power to slay the soul." The hangman knelt beside him and said: "Sir, I pray you forgive me." "Come hither to me," he answered and kissed him on the cheek. "Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee. My friend, do thy work."[153]

What possesses men to make such sacrifices? Certainly this is where the previous point, and indeed all other points have been leading us. The Reformers lived and died for Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, and grace alone because they saw in these principles that which gave all of the glory to God and none to man. God's word and God's work alone were glorified by the cry of *sola*. Indeed, the goal of *everything* we do is to be God's glory – "for from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever and ever" (Rom 11:36).

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[151] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), xi.
[152] Cited in Beatrice M. Sawyer, *Seven Men of the Kirk* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Youth Committee, 1959), 11.
[153] Ibid., 25.

The Westminster divines spoke for all believers when they formulated the first question and answer of their *Shorter Catechism.*

> Q1: *What is the chief end of man?*
> A1: *Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

God's glory (and its enjoyment) is our "chief end," our chief *aim,* our *purpose* in life. The Reformers were among the most bumble, self-effacing, God exalting men who ever lived. They cried out with the psalmist,

> *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory.* (Ps 115:1)

Soli Deo Gloria became the motto not just for the church, but for all of life. Johann Sebastian Bach represented the Protestant tradition well when he famously signed his musical scores "S.D.G.," Soli Deo Gloria. This was true whether he was writing the "secular" Brandenburg Concertos or the "religious" St. Matthew's Passion. All our work is to be pursued to the glory of God.

Calvin, by his instruction, was buried in a simple pine box and an unmarked grave. His grave site is unknown to this day. Why? Lest anyone should be drawn to him and not to God alone; lest in death anyone should make a hero of him and have their eyes drawn away from Christ.

The four previous *solas* have the fifth as their ultimate aim. God is glorified when we look to *His word alone* as our rule and faith and practice and not to human authorities. God is glorified when we look to *Christ alone* and not to other saviors and alternative paths of salvation. God is glorified when we recognize that only as we open the empty hands of faith to receive Christ may we be saved, apart from any imagined contribution on our part. God is glorified when we recognize still further that "salvation is of the Lord," that even our faith is His gift to us.

It is our aim to stand where they stood. We seek not the glory of our church, and not the glory of our own names, and not our own fame and fortune. Our teaching is for God's glory. Our evangelism is for God's glory. Our giving is for God's glory. "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). That is our motto. We are here to live, no longer for ourselves, but for Him who died and who rose again on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

We celebrate our Reformation heritage because we stand where they stood, squarely on these fundamental principles of biblical, Protestant, and Evangelical Christianity

The Reformed Faith
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The Reformed Faith

Reformed Christianity, we must admit, has a significant public relations problem. The word "reformed" itself has negative connotations. "He is a reformed alcoholic" means what? Or "He is a reformed gambler." "Reformed" implies a thing negative in the past, a thing which has been corrected. It means he once was an alcoholic or a gambler and has recovered. What then is a reformed Christian? Someone who has recovered from Christianity? Or perhaps recovered from something terrible to become a Christian? Regardless, the connotations are pejorative, or at best obscure.

Reformed churches are also known as Calvinistic churches, tracing the roots to the Genevan reformer John Calvin. Given the bad press that has plagued Calvin beginning in his own lifetime, there's not much in the way of public relations help here. Then there are our most famous disciples of Calvin known as… wait for it… *Puritans*, as in *Puritanical*. Who were they? English writer T. B. Macaulay (1800-1859) said scornfully that the Puritans were those who "hated bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." According to 20th century American pundit H. L. Mencken (1880-1958), puritanism is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." Puritans were a dull, gloomy, rigid, harsh, joyless people, or so goes the popular image. Even Huckleberry Finn complained of the "pretty ornery preaching" of those who have "a powerful lot to say about faith and good works, and free grace and preforeordination, and I don't know what all."

The bad press aside, what is Reformed Christianity? What were they reformed from? What does it mean to be a Calvinist and an heir to the Puritan heritage? As we noted in the earlier sections, we appreciate our "catholic" heritage, affirmed regularly as we recite the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and which includes the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ. We are grateful as well for our Protestant heritage, summarized in the preceding pages in our review of the "*solas*" of the Reformation -- *Scriptura, Christo, Fide, Gratia,* and *Deo Gloria*. Now we focus on our Reformed heritage. What are the distinctives of Reformed Protestantism and why do they continue to be important today?

Reformed in doctrine

First, Reformed Protestantism has a number of doctrinal distinctives. To be Reformed in doctrine is not to be Lutheran or Anglican, Pentecostal or Baptist. We may highlight a few of our distinctive doctrines.

Sovereignty of God

1. We believe in the *sovereignty of God over all things.* Presbyterians likely are more known for this than any other single belief, even though this distinctive is more of a return to the teaching of Augustine (354-430) and Aquinas (1225-1274), the two most important Roman Catholic theologians. The God of the Reformed Church is a great God. B. B. Warfield, the greatest of the old Princeton theologians, said, "It is the vision of God and His Majesty… which lies at the foundation of the entirety of Calvinistic thinking."[154] Calvinists are convinced that we live in a universe in which there is not even "one maverick molecule," as R. C. Sproul puts it.[155] God is sovereign over all of creation, decreeing, ordaining, and permitting "whatsoever comes to pass."[156] He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11). He causes all things to "work together for good" for His people (Rom 8:28). Jesus teaches that not a single sparrow falls from a tree apart from His will. He has numbered even the hairs upon our head, which means, among other things, that not one of them falls to the ground apart from His

[154]1 B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 491.
[155] R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (1986; Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 27.
[156] *Westminster Confession of Faith,* III.1; *Shorter Catechism* #7; *Larger Catechism* #12.

sovereign will either (Mt 10:29, 30). Though the wicked may mean something for evil, as Joseph told his brothers when they had sold him into slavery, "it was not you who sent me here, but God...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 45:8; 50:20).

We believe in the *sovereignty of God even, or especially in salvation.* It would be a mistake to think that God is sovereign in everything except salvation. We touched on this briefly last time under the heading of *sola gratia*, grace alone. Reformed Protestantism often has been identified by what history calls "the Five Points of Calvinism." These five points are concerned with the sovereignty of God as applied to redemption. The God who is sovereign over all things is also (naturally enough) sovereign over salvation. We have a separate pamphlet on the subject which we may commend to you.[157] For now, let us briefly introduce the concerns of the "Five Points."

For a number of reasons, the association of Calvinism with the "Five Points" is regrettable. Calvinism, or Reformed Protestantism is much more than the "Five Points," as we shall see as we progress in our current journey into the regions of worship, piety, and church government. The "Five Points" are not Calvinism's best foot forward, but a negatively framed response to the five points of Arminianism, named for the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a leader of the *Remonstrant* movement in the Netherlands. The Dutch church responded to the Arminians by organizing an international gathering of Calvinistic theologians known as the Synod of Dort (1618-19). They rebutted the Arminians with their own five points, which by an accident of history have been popularized in English by the sometimes helpful and often misleading acrostic TULIP! While TULIP aids the memory, its capacity for confusion led Reformed theologian Roger R. Nicole (1915-1910) to propose "certain rewording" which might "prevent misunderstanding."[158]

T – "total depravity."

The effects of sin upon human nature are comprehensive. "Total" means pervasive. No human faculty has been left uncorrupted, no aspect of human endeavor is left unstained. As Nicole explains, sin "darkens (man's) mind, corrupts his feelings, warps his will, moves his affections in wrong directions, blinds his conscience, burdens his subconscious, afflicts his body."[159] Humanity is inherently anti-God, haters of God, hostile to God, lovers of darkness, thoroughly evil, both unable and unwilling to turn to God, and uninterested in doing so (Rom 1:30; 8:7; 3:10-12; Jn 3:19). This is the condition of humanity, enslaved to the flesh and the devil, hopeless and helplessly lost (Eph 2:12; Rom 5;6). The letters U-L-I-P presents God's solution to the fundamental problem of humanity.

U – "unconditional election." This point emphasizes God's initiative in salvation.

Out of this race of rebels, God has been pleased to save some. He has determined to choose *some* for salvation, not *all* from out of the mass of fallen humanity. Why some and not *all*? Why is it some, not *none*? The answer: for reasons sufficient to Himself. God is not obligated to save any. Yet He kindly, graciously has chosen to save *some*. We call that decision "election" – God has elected to save a people. This election is "unconditional" in that His choice was not determined by anything outside of Himself, and in particular, nothing seen or foreseen in those chosen. He didn't see or foresee some virtue in those chosen that was the basis for His choice. The elect are not better or worse than others. Salvation then, is all of grace and not of merit, not of anything found in those chosen. As Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn 15:16; cf Rom 11:6).

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[157] "The Five Points of Calvinism," also available at http://www.reformationtoday.org/articles/the-five-points-of-calvinism/.
[158] Roger R. Nicole, *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002), 429.
[159] Ibid, 430.

L – "limited atonement."

God has provided a means of "atonement." This is the emphasis of this point. He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). He "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:12).

Christ's atonement is *definite,* designed to save those whom the Father had given Him (John 6:37,39; 10:28; 17:2,6,11,12,24), and *particular* in its purpose. It is *effectual,* it actually saves. Redemption was *accomplished*, secured, and guaranteed on the cross, awaiting only to be *applied* upon the moment saving faith is exercised.[160] Consequently, the extent of that atonement is "limited," not universal. Not all people will go to heaven, a point which all should concede. Some will die and go to hell. Christ died specifically for His people, for His sheep, whom He knows by name and for whom He lays down His life (Jn 10:3, 11, 14-15, 27-29).

I – "irresistible grace."

"The emphasis here," says Nicole, "is upon the fact that God accomplishes his design."[161] His purpose to save cannot be thwarted. Grace is *effectual.* God draws otherwise disinterested and hostile sinners to faith in Christ. He does so irresistibly, infallibly, certainly. We should not imagine God dragging resisting sinners kicking and screaming into heaven. Rather by the work of the Holy Spirit He makes Himself "irresistible" to them by transforming their nature, causing them to be born again, giving them a new heart with new desires, appetites, aspirations, and hopes, and renewing their wills (Jn 3:1ff; 1:12, 13). Because we are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins" and "children of wrath," we can only live spiritually if "God… makes us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:1-5). It is only "because of him (that we) are in Christ Jesus" (l Cor 1:30). We love only because He first loved (1 Jn 4:19). Even our faith is "not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8, 9).

P – "perseverance of the saints."

Those whom the Father draws to Christ (Jn 6:44, 65), He also keeps. Their salvation is guaranteed. The saints, that is, believers, for their part *persevere* (Mt 24:13; 1 Jn 5:4). They overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11), even as the Father *preserves* them. He is able to "keep (us) from stumbling" (Jude 24). Jesus said of His sheep:

> *27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* (Jn 10:27-29)

This, in brief, is the Calvinistic gospel. These are the "doctrines of grace": electing grace, atoning grace, effectual grace, preserving grace. God saves helpless sinners by sending Christ to die for them, drawing them to Christ, and preserving them in their faith. This is the gospel pure and simple. "It is a nickname to call it Calvinism," said the English Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892). "Calvinism is the

[160] See John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (1955; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2015)
[161] Nicole, *Standing Forth,* 433.

gospel and nothing else."[162] Calvinism is "religion in its purity," said B. B. Warfield. "We have only to conceive of religion in its purity and that is Calvinism."[163]

Unity of the Bible

2. We believe in the *unity of the Bible*. We believe that the Bible is one book about one God, one Savior, and one way of salvation. It speaks with one voice from Genesis to Revelation. We believe that Jesus on the Emmaus Road was able to explain "in *all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself" because *all the Scriptures* are about salvation through faith in Christ (Lk 24:27). The Scriptures "bear witness *about me*." "He (Moses) wrote *of me*." "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see *my day*. He saw it and was glad," Jesus declared (Jn 5:39, 46; 8:56). "David... spoke about the resurrection," Peter proclaimed at Pentecost, speaking of Psalm 16 (Acts 2:31). The Scripture "preached *the gospel* beforehand to Abraham," said the Apostle Paul (Gal 3:8). Speaking of the generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness, the writer of the Hebrews says, "For good news came to us *just as to them*" (Heb 4:2, 6). All the Scripture is about salvation by faith, by grace, by Christ. All the characters in the Bible, from Adam and Eve to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to Elijah to Ezra to Malachi were saved by faith alone, by grace alone, by Christ alone.

Because of this *unity* in the Bible, we see *continuity* in the Bible. Reformed theology often is called *covenant theology.* There is one plan of salvation, sometimes called a covenant of grace, that undergirds the differences in administration that one may see in the various biblical dispensations (e.g. the Adamic, Noahic, Mosaic, Davidic, Ezraic, and the New Covenant in Christ). All believers are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29; cf. Romans 4:1-25). Particularly instructive for our understanding of continuity is 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, in which the Apostle Paul maintains that the Old Testament saints had the equivalent of baptism and the Lord's Supper and Christ Himself. They were "all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

The differences between the covenants and various dispensations are *external* and *superficial*, merely matters of *administration*, not substance. The fundamental principles of redemption remain unchanged.

On the other hand, some Christian groups overplay the theme of continuity. They find altars in the Old Testament, so they place altars in their churches. They find priests, and priestly garments in the Old Testament, and so they provide the same for their clergy. They find incense and sacrifices in the Old Testament, so they burn incense and conceive of the Lord's Supper as a sacrificial mass in which the body and blood of Christ are offered to expiate sin. They fail to understand the *discontinuity* between the Old Testament and New Testament, which, as we will see, is found especially in the area of worship (John 4:21ff).

Sacraments

We understand this principle of continuity, properly understood, to have important implications for our understanding of the administration of the sacraments, which we will begin to discuss now, and elaborate more fully in Chapter V. "Covenant theology is Reformed sacramental theology," says Hughes Old (1933-2016).[164] A covenantal understanding of Scripture first began to be developed in Ulrich

[162] C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography,* Vols. 1 & 2 (1897-1900; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 168.
[163] B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings,* Vol. 1 & 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1973)*,* I:390.
[164] Hughes O. Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture,* Revised and Expanded Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 175.

Zwingli's (1484-1531) debates with Anabaptists in Zurich. From there it was elaborated further by Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Calvin, and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Zwingli's successor in Zurich.[165] Presbyterians baptize their infants because they are convinced that family has the same privileged status in the New Testament as it had in the Old Testament. We are in an era of a better covenant with better promises (Heb 8:6). It is inconceivable to Reformed Protestants that a lesser covenant would *include* the children of believers in the covenant community and the better covenant would *exclude* them. As for the former, God told Abraham, "I will… be God to you *and to your offspring after you*" (Genesis 17:7). On the basis of that promise, circumcision, an adult ordinance that for Abraham symbolized his faith, was applied to Isaac who could not exercise conscious faith on his own behalf. The Apostle Paul even calls circumcision a "sign and seal" of justifying faith (Romans 4:11). Yet it was applied to an eight-day-old infant. Why? Because the covenant with Abraham includes his children.

The Apostle Peter made it plain (as we see it) at Pentecost, in the first Christian sermon, that the children of believers would continue to have a privileged place in the New Covenant as they did in the Old. He said, "The promise is for you *and your children*" (Acts 2:39). His Jewish audience would certainly have heard the echo of God's promise to Abraham in these words. Given the continuity between the covenants, it is natural to understand the "household" baptisms of Acts to have included young children and infants (Acts 11:14, 16:15, 16:31-34, 18:8). The Apostle Paul could only tell believing parents their children "are holy," if their children have a distinctive status, set apart from the world (1 Cor 7:14).

Continuity in the central role of the family implies continuity in the function of the sacraments. The Old Testament had a rite of admission, circumcision; the New Testament has a rite of admission, baptism; the Old Testament had a covenantal meal, Passover; the New Testament has a covenantal meal, the Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ" (Col 2:11). The role it plays in the life of the people of God is the same as that played by circumcision. We baptize our children because we see the continuing validity of the gospel promises first announced to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ.

We live in an era of fractured families. We affirm, nonetheless, the indispensable role of parents in transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation. How will we see our children come to faith in Christ? Primarily this happens through the family. We don't believe baptism regenerates our children (Roman Catholics and Lutherans affirm "baptismal regeneration) or guarantees their salvation apart from their personal faith in Christ. However, we do believe that when baptism faithfully is administered to the children of believing parents who promise faithfully to rear their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4; KJV), it signals God's intention to save our children, and for that we hope and pray.

As for the Lord's Supper, Jesus signaled its covenantal nature when He declared in His words of institution "the *new covenant* in my blood" (1 Cor 11:25). Like Passover, it is a meal which seals or confirms a covenant. Even today in the Middle East after contracts are signed and agreements are reached, the terms are ratified or finalized by a meal. The meal seals the contract, it confirms the covenant. Each time the Lord's Supper is administered, God reaffirms His gospel promises to us in Christ: of the forgiveness of sin, of reconciliation with our Maker, and of the gift of eternal life. We in turn reaffirm our intention faithfully to serve, honor, and obey God in all of life.

[165] For further discussion of a Reformed view of the sacraments, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 149-206.

Reformed in worship

Second, Reformed convictions lead to a distinctively Reformed worship. The mass, as we have seen, begged to be reformed. In particular, we believe in the *regulative principle of worship*.[166] We believe that the elements of a worship service ought to be restricted to those which God has revealed in His word. We cannot know of ourselves what is pleasing to Him. The Reformed view is more restrictive than that of other Protestants, who also reformed the medieval mass, yet not as thoroughly as did our Reformers. The Lutherans and Anglicans hold to what may be described as the "normative" view. They say of the extrabiblical postures, symbols, and ceremonies of the mass, whatever is not forbidden is allowed. As a result, they retained more of the forms inherited from the medieval church. By way of contrast we say, whatever is not positively enjoined by precept or example is forbidden. As a result, our reforms were and our restrictions are much more rigorous. We only are to do in worship that which God has ordained that we should do. We are to pray, read the Scripture, preach, sing God's praises, administer the sacraments, and little else. There may be other activities which are appropriate, such as taking up a collection, and perhaps there are others that may be defended. Yet basically the list is set and restricted. To these basic elements, nothing may be added or subtracted. We are to *read* the word, *preach* the word, *sing* the word, *pray* the word, and *display* the word in the sacraments, as seen in the following chart:

Elements of Worship
Read the word
Preach the word
Sing the word
Pray the word
Display the word

As for the manner in which these *activities* are to be done, or more correctly, these *elements* are to be administered, Jesus said that we are to worship God in "spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "Spirit" refers to spirituality of our worship, that is, that we primarily worship God not through ceremonies and postures and rituals and buildings and sacred hardware, but with a right heart and right motives. "Truth" refers to God's self-revelation, to whom the Bible reveals Him to be and what it says about what pleases Him. The writer to the Hebrews refers to us worshiping God with "reverence and awe" (Heb 12:28). There is nothing superficial or light or flippant about meeting with God. The worship of God's people is to be simple, spiritual, and reverent. It is not a time for creativity and fanfare.

Why is regulated worship important? Because nothing we do is so important as worship, and nothing today is dividing the people of God so much as worship. The "worship wars" are now decades long. True worship, worship as we have defined it is all but disappearing. Some have turned their worship services into artistic performances. Some have turned them into revival meetings. Some have turned them into entertainment for "seekers." Some have reduced them to Bible lectures. Most church buildings look like stages for performers. Everywhere churches have been divided into "contemporary" and "traditional" factions, each vying for the upper hand. Chaos reigns. We have one question to ask which few, on either side, are posing. Our question is, is it worship? We ask not if the service of a given church is successful, or appreciated, or exciting, or well-done. Rather, does it qualify as worship?

We are reminded of the story about Willie MacDonald, a Scottish "Free Church" boy who had recently moved to London. The Free Church of Scotland practiced a particularly austere form of worship: it was a psalm-singing, pray, preach, and that's about all no-nonsense Presbyterian denomination. Willie was a bright boy and he had just graduated from college. However, the part of London into which he had

[166] For further discussion of the regulative principle, see my *Reformed Worship,* 33-44.

settled was far from the London Free Church congregation and it was impractical for him to attend regularly. So he began to attend the local Anglican church. Not only was Willie MacDonald a bright boy, he was aesthetically inclined as well. The Anglican church which he began to attend was in fact a very high church, an Anglo-Catholic congregation, complete with processionals and incense and altars and priests and all of the trappings of high liturgy. Willie found to his surprised that he quite liked the service and went back week after week. One day, he got a letter from his mother saying she would be coming down to visit him on a weekend and would be going to church with him on Sunday. Willie then began to fret about where they would go to church. He thought it would be best to take her to the Free Church across town, but felt that would be somewhat hypocritical in light of the fact that he had been attending the Anglican church. Finally, he decided to go ahead and take her to the parish church and let the chips fall where they would. The weekend of her visit came, and on Sunday morning they went off together to church. As expected, it was a high-church service, complete with clerical regalia, processionals, the whole repertoire of "smells and bells." Willie sat nervously throughout the whole service wondering what his mother was thinking. At the conclusion of worship, they walked together back to his flat. Not a word was exchanged between them. He fixed her tea and brought it to her and still not a word was said. Finally he sat down with his mother and said, "Well, mother, what did you think?" She immediately answered, "Oh Willie, it was *wonderful*."
"But," she added, "what a thing to be doing on the Lord's Day!"

All that is *wonderful* is not *worship*. We will have much more to say about worship in Chapter V. The question raised by the Reformed church is, "Is it worship?" If not, what is it doing in the Lord's house on the Lord's day? We believe that Reformed worship is just what the church needs today: order without tedium, joy without frivolity, reverence without stuffiness. The regulative principle has the potential to end the "liturgical Trotskyism," the perpetual innovation and revolution that now destabilizes and divides our churches.

Reformed in piety
Third, the Reformed doctrine leads to a distinctively Reformed piety. There are several hallmarks of Reformed *spirituality*, or to use the older and better word, *piety*, which we may now introduce.

Justification and sanctification

1. A Reformed piety understands the vital distinction between justification and sanctification. We already have looked in detail at justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). We are saved by faith in Christ the moment we believe apart from any works. Justification proper has to do with God's judicial declaration, not moral renovation. Yet those who are justified invariably are sanctified, meaning sin is mortified as they grow in holiness (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). Sanctification is the fruit of justification. It flows from justification. Calvin spoke of the *duplex gratia,* the two divine works of grace, the grace of justification and the grace of sanctification. Justification and sanctification are inseparable, yet they are distinct. While justification is *monergestic,* God's work done, we cooperate with God in sanctification, working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 12:12, 13).[167] Again, justification is a *declaration* by God in a moment of time; sanctification is a lifelong *process.* They are united, yet different.

These distinctives are crucial yet often obscured. On the one hand, the spirituality that goes by various names such as "higher life" or "victorious life," or "Keswick" confuses sanctification with justification,

[167] See *When Grace Comes Home,* chapter 1, for more on sanctification.

maintaining that like justification, sanctification may occur in a moment, instantaneously, as soon as one properly trusts God, yields entirely to Him, ceases to strive, and is otherwise fully consecrated. At such time one experiences a second work of grace, a "second blessing." This experience subsequent to justification may be called "entire sanctification" and it is said to end the struggle with sin. Various strains of "perfectionism" have developed out of this, insisting that Christians may reach a state in which they no longer consciously sin.

On the other hand, there are those who confuse the reverse, who confuse sanctification with justification. Roman Catholics, for example, maintain that justification is a lifelong process. One's justification is never complete. As a result, one can never know if one is justified. Assurance of salvation becomes impossible, and indeed, Rome insists it is presumptuous and undesirable, likely to lead to passivity and carnality.

Reformed Protestants have insisted that justification is an unalterable declaration by God of the righteous status of those who have faith in Christ, yet those who place their faith in Christ begin a lifelong process of sanctification, a process that is never completed in this life. We never arrive. We ever "press on" (Phil 3:12-14). The following chard summarizes the Reformed distinction between justification and sanctification:

Justification	**Sanctification**
Declaration of God	Process in time
Penalty of sin	Power of sin
Condemnation of sin	Corruption of sin
Guilt of sin	Control of sin
Righteous status	Personal holiness

Third use of the Law

2. Closely related to the theme of sanctification is the Reformed understanding of the role of the law of God in the life of the believer. We maintain that the *law of God remains normative* for the disciples of Christ.[168] As we've seen, we believe there is continuity between the covenants in the relationship between law and grace. The Law never was given as a means of redemption. Pursing salvation through legal principles was the mistake of the Pharisees and Judaisers, and their modern-day children. God gave His law to an already redeemed people: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). The people of God have always been saved by grace, by

[168] See *When Grace Comes Home,* chapter 9, for more on the relationship between law and gospel.

faith, by Christ and yet always been required to keep God's commandments. There has never been a time when this was not the case.

The discussion among the theologians divides the law of God into three uses, the first two of which generally are agreed upon. The "first" use is the "civil" use, the law as a guide for the laws of civil society: prohibiting murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and so on. The "second" use is the "tutorial" use, the law as a schoolmaster, showing sinners their sin and leading them to Christ (e.g. Rom 3:20; 7:7; Gal 3:24ff). The Reformed church has gone on to speak of the 'third" use, that of providing a "rule of life" for the believer. No one is saved by the keeping of the law of God. Yet those who are saved do keep it. "It is of great use to (believers)," says the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* as a "rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty…"[169] About this the Congregationalists (in the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658) and the Baptists in their *London Confession* of 1689 and their *Philadelphia Confession* of 1742 agree. Even the Lutherans affirmed the "Third Use" in the *Formula of Concord* of 1577 (Article VI). Each of these denominations have more or less moved away from their confessional position, yet it was there at the beginning and remnants of the faithful in each continue to affirm it.

Why is this important? Because the world today is awash in levels of carnality, vulgarity and perversion not seen since ancient times. Even among evangelical, Bible-believing Christians one observes heretofore unacceptable levels of worldliness. Divorce, sexual immorality, materialism, consumerism, gluttony, Sabbath-breaking, and banal dishonesty such as would never have been tolerated by previous generations are now commonplace.

What is needed? The Reformed balance between law and grace. No group of Christians has ever more strongly stressed the graciousness of salvation in Christ, grace apart from even a hint of works or merit. Yet we have also maintained, in Jesus' words, that "if you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). While the law leads us to Christ, Christ then sends us back to the law of God to know His will for life. This has given to Reformed Protestants a moral rigor, a moral exactitude that has not characterized other strains of Christianity. Our people, after all, were known as "Puritans," even as "Precisionists." Some wrongly have pit love against law, claiming that the Christian does what love requires, not what the rulebook says. Rules and laws and commands sound like legalism to them. Yet this is a false dichotomy. Christian love is *defined* by the law, summarized by the commands to love God and love one's neighbor. Listen to the Apostle Paul:

> *8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* (Romans 13:8-10)

The law, in other words, teaches us what loving conduct consists of. To love means to not commit adultery against one's neighbor, or to murder, steal, and so on. Love is what the precepts of the law require.

Neither do we conceive of the "leading of the Spirit" in a way that renders the law of God superfluous. Rather we believe that the Spirit always works through the word, including God's law-word. The Spirit who inspired the law leads us into conformity with that law. "The righteous requirement of the law [is to] be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but *according to the Spirit*" (Rom 8:4). By

[169] *Westminster Confession of Faith,* XIX.6; cf *Larger Catechism* #97.

walking "according to the Spirit" we will fulfill "the requirement of the Law." The law of God is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We are directed to love the law and meditate upon it day and night (Ps 119:105, 97). The law gives to us the moral absolutes that are needed by both the church and society. "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31).

The revival of Christianity is unlikely until the law of God is restored to its rightful place as the standard of life for the people of God. Only then will we see true repentance and thorough cleansing. Only then will the church be purged of its awful worldliness which now obstructs the outpouring of the Spirit. It is vital that we preserve and promulgate the message of the unity of the Bible as understood by our heritage.

Ordinary means of grace

3. We affirm the importance of the ordinary means of grace. Jesus died long ago and far away. How do we receive the benefits of what He accomplished on the cross in Judea back in about 33 A.D.? The events of the cross occurred all the way across the Atlantic Ocean and across the Mediterranean Sea in an outpost of the Roman Empire. How are His benefits brought to us across all that time and all that space? The answer is, God has provided means. What means? *Extraordinary* means like signs and wonders were provided for the apostolic church. The ascended Christ calling out to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road accompanied by a blinding light is one example. (Acts 9). Extraordinary times called for extraordinary means (1 Cor 13:8). After the apostolic age, what might be called *ordinary* times, the church utilizes *ordinary* means. They are the word, the sacraments, and prayer. These are the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," the keys which unlock and open as well as lock and close the doors of heaven (Mt 16:19; 18:18).[170]

Word

The unbelieving are *born again* by the "living and abiding" word (1 Peter 1:23-25), come to *faith* by hearing the word of Christ (Rom 8:17), *grow* by the pure milk of the word (1 Peter 2;2), and are *sanctified* by the truth of God's word (Jn 17:17). The gospel message itself is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16). This is why Reformed Protestants historically have given careful attention to the word read, preached, sung, prayed, and displayed (in the sacraments). All spiritual good comes through the Holy Spirit applying the benefits of Christ thorough the ministry of the word as expressed through these various forms.

Sacraments

The sacraments rightly are understood as "visible words" (Augustine's definition). They put on display the gospel message for the eyes to see, the hands to touch, the skin to feel, the mouth to taste, in addition to the ears hearing through the words of institution. The enhanced presentation of the gospel is "the epitome of the whole Christian religion," as the Scottish Presbyterian John Willison (1680-1750) said on behalf of the Reformed Church.[171]

Prayer

[170] See *Larger Catechism* #154; *Shorter Catechism* #88.
[171] Cited in Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin,* 179.

Grace also is mediated to us through prayer. As we ask we receive, as we seek we find, as we knock, doors are opened to us (Mt 7:7). As we "draw near" to God through prayer, we receive grace and find help in time of need (Heb 4:16). There is a sense in which *anything* can be a "means of grace," a means by which spiritual awakening and growth can occur, whether a great blessing or a great tragedy, or anything along the spectrum between these two. We know of a man who was converted in the context of an emotionally devastating divorce. Consequently, we also speak of the *primary* means of grace. The primary means are the word, sacraments, and prayer. The Holy Spirit utilized these, "especially the preaching of the word" as the "effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation."[172]

We shall have more to say about "ordinary means" and the nurturing of Reformed piety in Chapter VII. For now we simply point out our understanding of the ordinary means helps explain why we give the emphasis that we do to the public services of the church, and why we fill those services with the content that we do. This explains further why we give the emphasis that we do to family worship and private devotions. Christ can bless His people through any means He chooses. Yet the church is wise to emphasize the means which He has promised to bless: His word, the sacraments, and prayer. Reformed piety is a church-centered and word-centered piety.

Reformed church government

Fourth, we believe in a *representative form of church government*. The entire late Medieval church, both what later became Protestant and what later became Roman Catholic, was unhappy with the political intrigue and moral corruption that had come to characterize the hierarchy of the church. The Avignon Papacy (1309-1377) followed by the Great Schism (1378-1417) discredited the episcopal government of the church. This led to the conciliar movement culminating in the Council of Constance (1414-1418) which resolved the schism. But in doing it also claimed that the authority of church councils was superior to that of Popes. Councils, they argued, preceded Popes (Acts 15). It is of interest that the same council that affirmed an earlier condemnation of John Wycliffe, that also ordered the burning of Jan Hus, the Czech reformer. It was not a council given to bucking church tradition. Yet it rendered this pro-council decision. Even so, Papal supremacy eventually won the contest with the conciliarists. The Fifth Lateran Council of 1512-1517, on the eve of the Reformation, condemned conciliarism. The dogma of papal infallibility did not become official until the First Vatican Council of 1870.

How then is the church to be governed? What form is most biblical? Which is most sensible? Essentially there are three options when churches decide how to govern themselves, options which mirror the political order:

- *monarchy* – Nations have kings and princes, churches have popes, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops. Authority rests in the hierarchy, not in the people.
- *democracy* – Authority rests in the people themselves. The New England town meeting is an example of pure democracy. The whole town votes on everything. The Baptist church in which I was reared held a monthly business meeting in which everything from budget to program to personnel was approved by a congregational vote.
- *representative democracy* – The American democracy is an indirect, representative form of government. The people elect representatives who make the decisions about budgets, programs, and personnel. The tyranny of the mob thereby is minimized by removing them one step from the decision-making. That is how Presbyterianism works.

[172] *Shorter Catechism,* #89.

What does the Bible say? “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you,” the twelve told the Jerusalem church, “and *they* chose...” (Acts 6:3, 5). As the Apostles began to pass from the scene, they were replaced not by new apostles, and not by individuals exercising apostolic authority (such as bishops), but by elders. The Apostle Paul directed Titus to “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5; cf. Acts 14:23). Apostles were succeeded by elders (plural) who were sometimes called overseers or bishops (Titus 1:5,7; Acts 20:17, 28). Elder was the name of the office they held, oversight the function. The post-Apostolic church was governed by a representative body of men called elders, who, if the “deacons” of Acts 6 can serve as an example, were to be chosen by the people. In this system, there is an essential parity between teaching elders (called ministers or pastors) and ruling elders (for the distinction, see 1 Tim 5:17). The ministers are *primus inter pares*, a “first among equals,” yet when it comes to decision-making, cast only one vote, same as that of the ruling elders. Hierarchical bishops did not arrive on the scene until the second century.

In addition to which is most biblical, which is most sensible? What the corruptions of episcopal forms revealed was that one-man rule is particularly vulnerable to corruption. We add to our summary of Presbyterian church-government the dimension of what is called “connectionalism.” There is an umbrella of authority arching over all the churches. No church is ultimately independent or anonymous. The churches are accountable to one another, as in Acts 15 where the counsel of the whole church made a decision which was binding on all of the
churches (see Acts 16:4). Even an “independent” Presbyterian Church, because its ministers are members of Presbytery and under its authority, participate to a degree in this connectionalism.

Why is this important? Because we live in a day of a scandal-a-day evangelicalism and scandal-a-day Roman Catholicism, whether moral, financial, or otherwise, often committed by highly visible leaders. Among evangelicals, a cult of personality often has been allowed to develop around highly charismatic leaders. Because of their media-driven popularity, because of the numbers of followers they gather and the amounts of money they raise, they become untouchable, so to speak, by peers. They become too big to criticize. They come to have too
much authority and not enough accountability. They answer to no one. Scandal is inevitable. Financial mismanagement or moral indiscretion are absolutely predictable on the part of those who are above questioning or challenge. This corresponds to the problem of untouchable bishops, archbishops, and Popes.

Our form of government, because it is biblical, is the answer to this problem. Because of the principle of parity among ruling and teaching elders, the system tends to keep ministers accountable.

Ministers are surrounded by peers and critics. Moreover, so are churches. It is possible for a whole church to get off track, often because of a high-powered, manipulative leader. When it does, it is subject to the oversight of the other churches of the presbytery and even of the whole denomination. These principles check the corrupting influence of power and money, and thereby pave the way for greater fruitfulness in the future.

Reformed doctrine of vocation

Reformed Protestantism has the effect of heightening the appreciation for, even the honor of the ordinary. Preaching was “plain-style,” as was the administration of the sacraments, church architecture, church music, and public attire. Even its artistic expression gave unprecedented attention to landscapes, seascapes, and still-life depictions of ordinary people engaged in ordinary activities.

Behind this elevation of the ordinary was the Protestant doctrine of vocation. The medieval and Roman Catholic church was and is committed to an understanding of Christian discipleship that results in a two-tiered form of Christianity. The truly committed, the truly serious Christians enter the priesthood or the monastery, devoting themselves to a life of service and prayer. What we might call "full-time Christian work" was the only sure way to secure the favor of God. "If you were not a monk, nun, priest, or bishop, the path of salvation was murky at best," Hart explains.[173] If one was a miner, a shopkeeper, a farmer, a miller, a homemaker, little guidance, and very little assurance was available.

Moreover, according to medieval piety, the ideal Christian life was lived in a monastery. Marriage was honored, but rated below the cloistered life of perpetual virginity. When the Reformers affirmed justification by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone, it rejected the ascetic ideal and affirmed marriage. Harvard professor Stephen Ozment (1939-2019) claims that for both the German and Swiss Reformers, "Clerical marriage was as prominent a tenet as justification by faith."[174] The Reformers' rejection of the celibate ideal "was as great a revolution in traditional church teaching and practice as their challenge of the church's dogmas on faith, works, and the sacraments."[175] "The Protestant Reformers were… the first to set the family unequivocally above the celibate ideal," continues Ozment, "and to praise the husband and the housewife over the monk and the nun in principle."[176]

Where is the ideal Christian life lived? Not in a monastery but in a house with a family. Luther criticized the older theologians (Jerome, Cyprian, Augustine, Gregory) for "never having written anything good about marriage."[177] According to Ozment, Luther "exalted the family in all its dimensions and utterly without qualification."[178] Against the Medieval tendency to either denigrate women as temptresses (like Eve) or exalt them as virgins (like Mary), the Reformers praised their divine vocation as wives and mothers. "There is no power on earth that is nobler or greater than that of parents," said Luther.[179] The greatest service that one could perform for humanity was to rear godly children. "When a father washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child," said Luther, "God with all His angels and creatures is smiling."[180] The new Protestant family was seen, not as a necessary concession to weakness, nor as a grace-inhibiting burden, but as the foundation of society. Fathers were seen as priests, families as "little churches," the home as "the cradle of civilization." Child rearing was understood as more than nutrition and hygiene. The spiritual welfare of the children was at the center of the family's concerns. During the Middle Ages the monasteries were communities of prayer. Wherever the Reformation took root, the responsibility for daily prayer shifted to the Christian home. Family worship in the home became a hallmark of Protestantism for generations and right up until the recent past. Few practices of our forefathers are in more need of reviving today than this.[181]

As for ordinary work, its value was determined by calling. Each person was said to have his or her calling from God, to be pursued to the glory of God. This was one of the many insights flowing from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Paul Marshall summarizes the impact of the new outlook: "It

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[173] Hart, *Still Protesting,* 82.
[174] Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 151.
[175] Ibid., 153.
[176] Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 12.
[177] Quoted in Ozment, *Protestants,* 152.
[178] Ozment, *Protestants,* 165.
[179] Ozment, *Fathers,* 132.
[180] Ibid., 8.
[181] See Terry L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1998, 2003), and *Understanding Family Worship: Its History, Theology and Practice* (United Kingdom: Christian Focus Publications, 2022).

was through the idea of calling that everyday work acquired religious significance. The peasant and the merchant came to be seen as doing God's work as much as the nun, the priest, and the magistrate."[182]

Closely associated with the preceding point is the insistence on the dignity of labor. All legitimate work was seen as God's work and good. Because the Reformers denied the distinction between clergy and laity, they also denied the distinction between sacred and secular work. The superiority of a 'religious' vocation was denied, the legitimacy of a 'secular' vocation was affirmed. Life in the work-world was no longer a lesser kind of life, as it had been with Augustine (354–430) and Aquinas (1224–274). "With Luther there came a different world," says Paul Marshall. "The workshop was a sphere of the highest Christian service."[183] Luther insisted, "A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and offices of his, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops."[184] Both in their secular activities, and in the spiritual gifts that are spread throughout the congregation and shared by every member (as taught in 1 Cor 12, Rom 12, and Eph 4) they too contribute priestly, spiritual service. The priesthood is of all believers. The Council of Trent explicitly condemned this doctrine (Seventh Session, ch. 4). Not until 400 years later at Vatican II did Rome affirm the laity in ways Protestants had done since the 16th century.

These five articles of faith together outline the substance of our distinctive Presbyterian heritage. It is a blessed heritage. We are thankful for its strengths. We are grateful that at point after point it provides just what the rest of Christendom needs in our day. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is crucial to the preserving of the gospel of grace itself. The Reformed law-grace balance is vital to the sanctification of the church and, even broader, society. The regulative principle is the key to protecting the purity of the church's worship as well as its accessibility to a participating laity. Our representative form of government protects the church from the oppression of hierarchy and the tyranny of democracy. Our doctrine of vocation affirms the everyday concerns of our ordinary believers. Given these convictions, it should be no surprise that we think that it is a heritage worth preserving, a witness worth spreading.

[182] Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation & Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 97.
[183] Ibid., 3.
[184] Cited by Hart, *Still Protesting,* 85, from Luther's "Open Letter to the Christian Nobility," as found in C. M. Jacobs (trans.), *Works of Martin Luther* (1915; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 2:66.

Reformed Worship
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Reformed Worship

It has been commonplace today to regard forms or ways of worship as being primarily a matter of "style." One person prefers *this* way of worship, be it liturgical, seeker-friendly, charismatic, contemporary, or traditional and another prefers *that* way of worship. These differences are seen merely as matters of personal taste. What is important, it further is assumed, is sincerity. As long as one is earnest, as long as one's heart is right, as long as one is sincere in wanting to praise God, the way one worship is secondary, if not irrelevant. Furthermore, those who challenge the validity of a given form of worship or perhaps simply the wisdom of utilizing a given form, often are seen as raising narrow, divisive, legalistic concerns that are devoid of the Christian spirit of charity.

We have had much to say about worship over the years, in both short form and long form. Those who wish to pursue our thinking on worship may consult the following, in order from the most brief to the most extensive:

> *Contemporary Worship,* a mere 23 pages providing a sketch of the strengths of historic Reformed worship in the process of critiquing contemporary worship.[185]
>
> *Reformed Worship,* 84 pages explaining the basic principles of worship based on Jesus' insistence that the Father be worshipped in "spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). The regulative principle is explained in detail.[186]
>
> *Worshipping with Calvin,* 433 pages presenting the biblical, theological, and historical basis of historic Reformed worship.[187]
>
> *Serving with Calvin,* 400 pages detailing how practically to implement in the local church the historic Reformed worship presented in *Worshipping with Calvin.*[188]

For now we may begin with Jesus' foundational words in John 4, then go to the theology behind historic Reformed worship, and finally briefly survey each of the primary elements of historic Reformed worship.

Biblical foundation[189]

John 4 may serve as the primary text for our discussion of worship. Remember the setting. Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well. He offers her living water, which she wants. However, then Jesus brings up her current living arrangements. She has had five husbands and is now living with a man not her husband. Trapped, she then diverts the direction of the conversation away from morality to

[185] T. L. Johnson, *Contemporary Worship: Thinking about its implications for the church* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014).
[186] T. L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship that is According to Scripture* (2000; Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2015).
[187] T. L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2014).
[188] T. L. Johnson, *Serving with Calvin* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2015).
[189] For a more complete discussion of John 4, see *Reformed Worship,* 29-82.

religion, asking if the right place of worship is in Samaria or Jerusalem. She says, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship" (Jn 4:20). His startling answer is, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father" (4:21). Jesus partially sides with the Jews in that debate saying,

> *You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* (Jn 4:22)

Samaritans, Jesus says, "do not know" what they're doing in worship. According to Jesus, knowledge counts. Truth counts. Samaritan worship was in error. Samaritans and, by implication, all people, must look to the Jews, and in particular the book of the Jews, the Bible, in order to learn how to worship God. Jesus then connects right worship with "salvation" underscoring by so doing its importance, then repeats the substance of verse 21while adding to it,

> *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.* (Jn 4:23,24)

We may perhaps regard this as the single most revolutionary statement that Jesus ever made. Clearly, He is saying that the *place* of worship no longer matters, rather the *spirit*. We have had much to say about continuity between the testaments. Here is a radical point of *discontinuity*. Jesus is marginalizing the *externals* of worship while giving prominence to the *internal.* Jerusalem, remember, was important because the temple was there, and with the temple, the altars, the priests, and the sacrifices. If the *place* of worship is no longer significant, the whole external system of Old Testament worship is being swept away. Typological Old Testament worship, designed to anticipate and visibly represent both our Great High Priest as well as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, is abolished with a word and contrasted with that which shall stand in its place. Over against that which is temporary, typological, and external shall be new covenant worship offered in "spirit and truth." What does this mean? Simply this: over against Samaritan errors, worship must be "in truth," that is, according to God's revelation of truth; and over against concern for the externals of place and procedure, worship must be both simple and "in spirit," that is, a matter of the right spirit, of the heart, of the motive.

What theological justification is given for these sweeping changes? A profoundly theological one: the nature of God. The only explanatory word that Jesus gives, beyond the bare assertion that the changes are coming, is "God is spirit" (v 24). This single statement alone provides the foundation, the orientation, the principle from which all the rest flows. Worship begins with the doctrine of God. Because God is "spirit," the worship of the people of God "must" be in "spirit and truth." The "mustness" of worship is the direct result of the unchanging nature of God. Worship must be as Jesus says it must be because God is who He is. There is a true sense in which we can say nothing more fundamental about worship than this. There is but one God. That God is "spirit." The essential questions about worship are answered in relation to Him. If we start our discussion about worship on some other foot, then we shall end up walking the wrong worship path. We must follow Jesus on this. The Samaritans and Jews were having their own "worship wars." Questions about worship were answered not with reference to the culture of Jews or Samaritans or any other people group. The critical issues in worship all flow from the existence and nature of God.

This is to say that worship is designed *by God* and is *for God.* We do not worship utterly without consideration for the congregation. The Apostle Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 14 for edification in praying, singing, and preaching makes this clear. However, the primary concern in worship is that which God wants or requires, not the preferences of the people. Indeed, what the people of Samaria or Jerusalem might find meaningful or appealing is not raised by Jesus even as a consideration. The critical issue is God, His nature, and His requirements. We take "God is spirit" as the critical orienting principle which shall guide us through all of our considerations of the church's worship.

According to Jesus, there are these two sides to worship, and we "must" get them both right. There is the *heart* of worship (its spirit) and its *content* and *form* (its truth). Both are necessary. Both are commanded. Form matters. Truth matters. Periodically the question is raised, "Are you saying that God isn't pleased with the worship of such and such group of very earnest, sincere, devout Christians?" The answer we give is that form is not irrelevant. God cares about the form and content of worship as well as its spirit. One may be very sincere, and yet sincerely wrong, offering to God worship in a form that He has not authorized. The extreme case of this is found in pagan worship, such as the worship of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, who practiced self-mutilation amidst their ceremonial dance and frenzied cries (1 Kings 18:25-29). Were they earnest, sincere, devout? No doubt. Likewise, the ancient Canaanites offered their infants to Molech in human sacrifice. A more zealous expression of religious devotion can scarcely be imagined. However, the form was utterly unauthorized, uncommanded, and evil.

Spirit matters. Jesus says worship *must* be conducted with both the right *attitude* and the right *form*, with both spirit and truth. That Jesus required that worship "must" be "in spirit" means that one can never settle for right form as though that were all that mattered. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "They honor me with their lips," they say the correct words, they use the right forms, "but their hearts are far from me" (Mk 7:6). Their worship was technically correct, but detached from the soul: rote, mindless, heartless. "All this is within (us)" is to "bless his holy name" (Ps 103:1).

Jesus' seminal words provide us with the foundation for our conviction that worship must be "according to Scripture,' determined by God's own scriptural revelation, regulated by Scripture. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* summarizes this principle.

> But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. (*WCF,* XXI.1)[190]

A survey of the New Testament finds that the worship of the church is nothing like the elaborate ritual and ceremony of the temple. Unlike the Old Testament, we find no ritual of approach, no prescribed ceremonies, and no calendar of holy days.[191] Rather, we see simple gatherings around the word, sacraments and prayer. The Reformers often pointed to Luke's description of the early Christian worship:

[190] We may refer the reader again to *Reformed Worship,* 33-44.
[191] Quite the opposite: Gal 4:9-11; Col 2:16-23.

> *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* (Acts 2:42)

"The apostle's teaching" (the ministry of the word), "the breaking of bread" (the Lord's Supper), and "the prayers" in the context of "The fellowship" describe those early church assemblies. We may add the singing of praises to this (Acts 4:24-26; Eph 5:18; Col 3:16; Jas 5:13) and of course baptism (Acts 2:39, 41; 8:12, 13, 36 etc.; Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13-17; 12:13; Gal 3:27).[192] All of this the Apostle Paul regulates in 1 Corinthians 10-14 as he specifies decorum and procedure regarding the Lord's Supper, singing, praying, and preaching (prophesying). Both spirit and truth, both attitude and action, both motive and form *must* be right in God-pleasing worship.

Theological foundation[193]

Let's now think further about where our theology leads us as we seek to determine how God is to be worshipped. We do so convinced that *theology drives doxology.* All worship ultimately is doctrinally determined. The Roman Catholic mass is what it is because of Roman Catholic theology of the eucharist and the priesthood. Eastern Orthodox worship is what it is because of Eastern Orthodox theology of icons. Historic Reformed worship is what it is because of Reformed theology. The ancient formula is *lex credenda lex oranda,* the law of faith is the law of prayer, creed determines praise, doctrine determines practice. Reformed doctrine, rightly understood, leads inexorably to Reformed worship. The choices we make in worship are never simply matters of style, taste, or personal preference. Consequently, critical evaluation of the way we worship is not legalism, but logical. It is not optional but obligatory. We may use the Reformation mottos as a convenient way to reference central Protestant and Reformed doctrines, asking of each one how it influences what takes place in a worship service.

Sola scriptura

Does this principle, that Scripture is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice, have anything to say to us about how we are to worship God? Of course it does. Roman Catholics were not restricted to Scripture when they devised their liturgy. They could draw upon "extra-biblical" tradition for authorization. As we have seen, fellow Protestants such as Lutherans and Anglicans were guided by what history calls a "normative" principle as they reformed their worship. They argued that whatever from the medieval service was not forbidden might be retained. Consequently they included a number of postures and gestures (genuflecting, sign of the cross, facing the east) as well as a number of ceremonies (liturgical use of incense, processionals, elevating the host, etc.). Why should we not? they asked. None of these are forbidden.

Reformed Protestants argued for a more narrow "regulative principle," urging that whatever was not positively enjoyed by command or example was forbidden. For the Reformers, it meant that all extra-biblical ceremonies, symbols, postures, and gestures were to be eliminated. It meant that worship of the church was to be greatly simplified. It meant that only as much ritual would be allowed as was necessary for an orderly administration of the elements of worship. It meant that worship would consist

[192] See also Acts 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19;5; 22:16.
[193] For further discussion, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 44-60; also *Case for Traditional Protestantism,* 125-132.

simply of the word read, preached, sung, prayed, and displayed (in the sacraments). It meant that worship services no longer would require sacred places, but could be held anywhere, from the catacombs of Rome to the igloos of the Arctic Circle.

Solus Christus

Does this principle, that Christ alone *saves*, that His atoning death is a once-for-all event, final and complete, and that He alone *mediates* His benefits, have any impact upon how we worship? Of course it does. As we have seen (chapter III), it transforms what we imagine is taking place at the Lord's Table, absolutely prohibiting a sacrificial view of the "mass." Because of the finality and sufficiency of Christ's atonement, as well as Jesus' words of institution, we properly understand that the eucharist is a covenantal meal ("the new covenant in my blood"). The piece of furniture on which it is served is a table, not an altar. The job description of the clergyman administering the Supper is adjusted. He is a pastor and preacher, not a priest. Prayers are offered through the mediation of Christ alone, not through Mary or the saints (1 Tim 2:5). Prayers for the dead will not be uttered at all since, again, the atonement is "finished" and there are no unatoned sins that must be purged (Jn 19:30). The theology of *solus Christus* brings about substantial changes in our worship.

Sola fide

Does this principle, that justification is received by faith alone apart from works (Eph 2:8, 9), have any impact on how we worship? Of course it does. Since "faith comes by hearing the word of Christ," the word of God must play a central role in the worship of the church (Rom 10:17). It must provide the content of each of the elements of worship. We must read not the lives of the saints or the Apocrypha, but Scripture. The theology of "faith alone" requires that we preach, sing, and pray Scripture. Each of the elements of the worship service will be filled with Scripture. Why? Because the people of God are regenerated by the word (1 Peter 1:23-25) and grow by the milk of the word (1 Peter 2:2). The word of God in its various forms is able not only to make us "wise unto salvation," but is profitable for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training in righteousness. It equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:15-17).

Because this is so we also will rearrange the interior of the church building. No longer will we design long, narrow naves, intending no more than that congregation should gaze forward at the mystery of the mass. Auditory purposes will be in view as pulpits are placed in the center and pews are brought around the pulpit so as to enhance the hearing of the word. The interior design for worship spaces will be of a "plain style," eliminating whatever might distract the attention of worshippers away from the ministry of the word, sacraments, and prayer, the God appointed means of grace. Services will be conducted in the vernacular because the understanding is paramount (1 Cor 14:1ff). Sermons, not sermonettes, will be preached and whole psalms, not versicles (single verses extended out over an entire musical score) will be sung. Why? So that all may be saved and sanctified (Jn 12:17).

Sola gratia

Does this principle, that Christ saves by grace through faith, that even faith is a gift that God gives, that salvation is God's work at God's initiative, have any impact on how we worship? Indeed it does. It means that the whole work of the church is undertaken with a sense of absolute dependence upon Christ

(Jn 15:1-5). Knowing that "apart from (Him) we can do nothing," we cannot but give substantial time to prayer, asking that He might do that which He alone an do as we faithfully administer His ordinances.

This means that we will include in our services what Hughes Old called a "full diet" of biblical prayer. We will utilize the six basic prayer genres (praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, illumination, benediction) and the five-fold intercessions revived by the Reformers (and found in all of their orders of service, e.g. Bucer, Calvin, Knox, Westminster).[194]

Those who understand the theology of *sola gratia* will be "devoted to prayer" (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Col 4:2). You will hear all of these prayers in all services, sometimes several of them combined (as in the "pastoral prayer" on Sunday morning), at other times separated (as on Sunday evenings).

Sola Deo Gloria

Finally, does this principle, that God alone is to be glorified, have any impact on our worship? Yes, this too effects how we go about worshipping God. For example, the minister will not wish to draw attention to himself, lest he diminish the glory that God alone should receive. Worship itself will not be allowed to degenerate into something else, certainly not into sacred entertainment with worship leaders as performers on stages and congregations as audiences. Worship will not even be allowed to degenerate into sacred lecture, or an educational hour, or fellowship occasion. These things which are byproducts of worship will not be allowed to become the focus. All that takes place in the context of worship will be devotional in nature.

Why have Reformed churches worshipped as they have throughout the years? Reformed theology has been the driver of Reformed worship. We have determined how we are to worship, not by consideration of style or personal preference. We worship as we do because of the implications of the core of our doctrine.

Elements[195]

It remains for us now to discuss each element of a biblically regulated service of worship. Rather than repeat the biblical, theological, and historical reasons for each of the five elements that are detailed in the 433 pages of *Worshipping with Calvin,* let me instead describe my actual pilgrimage from the revivalistic Baptist services of my childhood and youth to historic Reformed worship.

Psalms and biblical hymns[196]

The churches in which I was reared, like those of most American Protestants, never, not even once sang a metrical psalm as part of our public worship. Consequently, I had no awareness of psalm-singing as an element of worship, or as part of any ecclesiastical tradition. However, as a freshman in college an event

[194] See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961).
[195] For a more complete discussion of the elements of worship, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 80-221.

occurred during a student Bible study that made a lasting impression. Marshall Foster, the minister leading our Bible study asked us to turn to Psalm 92, which he then began to lead us in singing to the tune "If I Were a Rich Man" from the musical "Fiddler on the Roof:"

It is good to give thanks,

And sing praises to the name of the Lord O' Most high;

To declare Thy lovingkindness,

In the morning and by night

(repeat)

And with the ten-stringed lute and with the harp;

With resounding music on the lyre.

For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by what Thou hast done,

I will sing for joy at the works of Thy hands.

How great are thy works O Lord!

Thy thoughts are very deep.

It worked. In my California Christian way, I thought that it was "neat." The psalms are songs. They were meant to be sung, and we were singing them—or, at least one of them. What could make more sense? It was for me a self-authenticating, self-testifying experience of the normativity of an element of historic Christian worship. Congregations ought to sing the word, especially that part designed to be sung, the psalms.

A one-month internship at the St. David's Broomhouse Church in Edinburgh was a part of my program of study at Trinity College, Bristol, England. The first Sunday at St. Davids in March of 1978 I discovered that more psalms than just the 92nd had been put to music. The hymnal of the Church of Scotland had nothing but psalms in the first 190 pages – all 150 rhymed and metered for singing. Frankly, I was startled. Where had these been hiding? Why did American churches not use them? It seemed odd to me. Why would Bible believing Christians in America not care about singing the psalms? For me this was straightforward. God wrote the psalms. He wrote them to be sung. Therefore, we ought to sing them. I returned home from Bristol determined that wherever I ended up, I would be an advocate for singing the psalms.

The psalms may be the 800-pound gorilla of Evangelical worship. They occupy the middle of our Bibles and make up the longest book in the Bible. The Book of Psalms is our only canonical hymn book. Yet singing of the psalms is mostly ignored even by those with high views of Scripture. Nearly 30 years have passed since the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) produced the *Trinity Psalter*, setting the

[196] For a more complete discussion of psalms and biblical hymns, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 123-148.

words of psalms to familiar and singable tunes.[197] The whole Psalter is easily and inexpensively accessible to hymnal-using congregations. Though over 50,000 copies have been sold, this number represents less than 15% of the membership of the PCA, the largest conservative Presbyterian denomination. The anecdotal evidence is that few PCA congregations sing psalms from any source on a regular basis. Extend the survey to include the broader evangelical world and it may be that the typical worshiper is more likely to be struck by lightning on Sunday morning than to sing a psalm in church. What has been obvious to me for the last quarter of a century, that psalms should be sung, is obvious to only the tiniest of remnants. The 800-pound gorilla sits, largely ignored.

What are the implications of a Psalter in the canon of Scripture? Is it not that they should be sung as a regular part of our worship? That indeed is what most of the church has believed and practiced over the centuries. It is also what Reformed Protestantism has believed and practiced for most of the last 450 years. We practice what might be called "inclusive psalmody." We do not sing the psalms exclusively (as some do), rather we sing one psalm in each service.

We also sing biblical hymns. By "biblical" we mean filled with biblical content. Why? For the sake of edification through the word of God, which the Apostle insists our songs must be, that is, edifying (1 Cor. 14:15-ff). This means that we have a decided preference for classic hymns, not because of the antiquity of their lyrics but the superiority of their content. They are rich in biblical content.

What about tunes? Do we only use old tunes? No, our main criteria is that of excellence with a companion principle of appropriateness. Aesthetic judgements are inevitable. Churches make them every week as they plan every single worship service. The "best" songs are chosen each week in light of a variety of factors (e.g. sermon theme, available musicians, time of year, time of day, familiarity of tunes, previous week's selections, subsequent week's selections, etc). *When* a tune was composed is not a consideration.

At the same time, we recognize that it is exceedingly difficult to write a good hymn/psalm tune. After 2000 years there are perhaps 200 or so. Over time, new lyrics and tunes may be added to those that currently are in use, though we expect that process to be slow. New hymns in the meantime may be tested in small groups (especially youth, college, Sunday School) or informal settings and gradually gain acceptance.

For these reasons and more we have a decided preference for the traditional hymnal. Singing from the hymnal 1) helps ensure quality – its selections have stood the test of time; 2) helps ensure catholicity and the communion of *all* the saints. What we mean by this is that the hymnal features what may rightly be called the church's music. The activity of worship is a distinctive activity unlike anything else we humans do. Consequently, the church has developed its own distinctive music for that activity. It is not the music of old people, or young people, of white people, or black people, or of any class of persons. It is the church's music. Each generation has been taught to know and love this music. Because it belongs to no single demographic, all of God's people can unite together in worship without preferencing one group over another.[198]

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[197] *Trinity Psalter* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 1994); "His Mercy Fills the Earth" CD (Philadelphia: Crown & Covenant Publications, Disc Makers, 1995); "Psalms of the Trinity Psalter" CD, Volumes I and II (Savannah, GA: The Independent Presbyterian Church Press, 1999 and 2002).

[198] For more details on what goes into hymn selections see *Serving with Calvin,* 229-249.

Scripture reading[199]

Should not substantial portions of the Word of God not be read in public services of worship? Sometime in the school year of 1977-78 I attended a Sunday evening service at St. Mary's Redcliffe, in Bristol, England. The church has had a long and varied history, including some notoriety for having once refused to allow George Whitefield to preach within its walls, though later, they reconsidered and received him with great effect.[200] The church was built before Columbus sailed and is a beautiful, spacious place in which to conduct a worship service.

I was none too pleased with a liturgical service when I first arrived in England. I was not accustomed to the reading of prayers and with rote congregational responses. I regularly got lost in the Prayer Book, and typically was confused. Yet that Sunday one part of the service made a powerful impression. At the appropriate time a reader stood to read the Old Testament lesson, and later another to read the New Testament lesson. The readers read slowly, deliberately, and beautifully. The Old Testament text was from Isaiah. I recall being moved by the power of the word as it was skillfully read. I also recall thinking that the experience of hearing an extended reading of Scripture was new. I couldn't recall in 22 years of church-going at evangelical churches (whether Brethren, Baptist, Congregational, Independent Bible, or Presbyterian) of ever hearing a text of Scripture being read other than the sermon text. Obviously, it made an impression. I can still speak of it over a quarter of a century later.

The disappearance of the public reading of Scripture in evangelical churches has been a gradual and disappointing development in evangelical Protestantism. Liturgist James F. White, addressing Protestantism more generally, has called the current situation of selective reading or minimal reading of the Bible "apostasy."[201] The Bible largely remains an unread book in the public gatherings of what we ironically call the "Bible-believing" churches. No empirical study yet exists upon which to base this claim, but personal experience and anecdotal evidence from the "Bible" churches, the seeker-friendly churches, the charismatic churches, the old revival-format churches, and the contemporary churches is overwhelming. The Bible simply is not being read, and has not been, to any substantial degree, for a very long time.

This is surprising because the church universal is unanimous regarding the value of public Bible-reading, and Reformed Protestants were unanimous even with respect to the method by which texts were to be selected, rejecting selective readings (*lectio selecta*) in favor of sequential reading through books of the Bible (*lectio continua*). Evangelical Christians, presumed theological heirs of the Reformation, have dropped a major plank in the Reformer's program of "church revitalization" (as we might call it today), without, one imagines, calculating the spiritual cost of omitting this public discipline. Substantial Bible reading has always been a central feature of the worship of the Christian church.

We are committed to reading a chapter from the Bible, *lectio continua,* in every of our services, over and above the text upon which the sermon will be based. It's not that reading Scripture merely is a good idea, it is actually commanded. The Apostle directs Timothy,

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[199] For further discussions on Scripture reading, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 83-98.
[200] Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield,* Vol. I (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 253, 257.
[201] James F. White, "Our Apostasy in Worship," *Christian Century,* September 28, 1977, 842.

> *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* (1 Tim. 4:13)

The text literally reads, "give attention to *the* reading." The definite article indicates that the practice of reading Scripture in the public services of the church had a known pattern. That pattern was likely to be the same as that of the synagogue, after which so much of the practice of the early church was based. We see a reflection of this in the Apostle Paul's visit to the synagogue at Antioch, where "the reading" was *lectio continua* from "the Law and the Prophets" (Acts 13:14-15). The exhortation or sermon followed. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 4 the Apostle goes on to urge that Timothy "devote" himself not only to the reading, but also "to exhortation, to teaching," the latter two requirements placed in close proximity to the reading because the sermon arises out of the reading. It too is *lectio continua*, which brings us to our next point.

Expository preaching[202]

My freshman year at the University of Southern California, in the spring of 1974, I began to attend the Grace Community Church in California's San Fernando Valley, pastored by John MacArthur, Jr. On Sunday nights he was preaching verse-by-verse through 1 John, and likewise through 1 Corinthians on Sunday mornings. The preaching was expository, sequential, simple, and powerful. I had never before heard preaching like it. The preaching in the revivalistic churches in which I was reared was of a generally high quality, but exclusively evangelistic. Every sermon was a gospel sermon, followed by an altar call. MacArthur's sermons were addressed, not to the stray unbeliever who might wander in, but to me. I can remember walking into Grace Community Church one person and walking out another *week after week*. I also remember thinking, "This is what a sermon is supposed to be." In other words, hearing expository preaching had another self-authenticating, self-testifying, and self-confirming impact on me. A preacher, I thought, is supposed to explain the Bible. He is not to share his political views, or give book or movie reviews, or tell heartwarming human-interest stories. He is supposed to do what John MacArthur was doing. He is to explain and apply the Bible.[203]

As a part of my internship at St. David's in Edinburgh, the Rev. C. Peter White introduced me to the work of the Rev. William Still (1911-1997) of the Gilcomstrom South Church of Aberdeen, Scotland. He assigned for my reading Mr. Still's *The Work of the Pastor*. Still powerfully argue for that which John MacArthur had been modeling: verse-by-verse, *lectio continua* preaching through books of the Bible. Reading Still had the effect of confirming my conviction that this was what the preacher was meant to do.

Later I learned the Zwingli abandoned the lectionary in January of 1519 in what has been called the first liturgical reform of Protestantism, announcing his intention to preach straight through Matthew's gospel. His model for doing so: the Patristic homily (e.g. Origen, Jerome, Augustine), specifically John Chrysostom's sermons on Matthew. He was followed in his method by other Reformers (d.g. Capito, Bucer, and esp. Calvin), in what became the normative practice of Reformed Protestants.

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[202] For further discussion on expository preaching, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 98-108.

[203] See Hughes Old's evaluation of MacArthur in *The Reading & Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Our Own Time,* Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 551-558.

Our congregation has preached through almost all of the New Testament (much of it more than once) in the last few decades and great swathes of the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis-Job, multiple psalms, chapters of Proverbs, and the Minor Prophets. We are committed to verse-by-verse preaching through the books of the Bible.

Prayer[204]

My first serious thoughts about public prayer began somewhat dramatically for me in the spring of 1978, again while serving as an intern at the St. David's in Edinburgh. One Sunday the Rev. White fell ill, leaving me to lead the two services and preach. The leadership of the congregation gathered each Sunday thirty minutes or so before the beginning of worship to pray for the services of the day. A group of about fifteen members took their seats in a large circle in a Sunday School classroom. When it appeared that all who were coming were present, they arose, turned and faced their chairs, knelt down on their knees, and began to pray. Though this was a working-class congregation, and though few of those present were college educated, and even a few were functionally illiterate, I soon realized that spiritually I was in way over my head.

I came to Scotland from Southern California via Trinity College, Bristol, England, arriving full of naïve hope that I might be the means of ushering in a measure of revival in Scotland (I blush as I write these words). After all, I had studied "church growth," knew the essential principles of small-group discipleship, and was armed with all the latest choruses and "Scripture-songs." As the Scots began to pray, I realized that something was seriously deficient in my spiritual development. I had never heard such prayers. They were full of God, full of Scripture, full of passion, full of reverence, and full of humility. My prayers, by comparison, had always been of the "just really" variety—trite, self-centered, and overly familiar. The spiritual maturity of their prayers exposed my spiritual poverty. The God that they knew was almost a different God from the One I contemplated.

That short experience had an unsettling but sanctifying effect on me. I persuaded myself to go on and lead the services, though with considerable discomfort. I knew I had no business leading these saints in worship. They, rather, should have been leading me. I returned to Trinity College for the last quarter of school year 1977-78 humbled, seriously questioning my call to the ministry, and spiritually disoriented for a number of months. That summer I returned to what was then my home church, the Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena, California, a church in which I had served as an intern the previous summer, and refused to be involved in any leadership in ministry. I sensed the need to sit quietly, pray, and learn.

The next fall, back in Bristol, I began to attend the Buckingham Baptist Church pastored by the Rev. Ron Clark. He was preaching on Psalm 23. Week by week, his sermons were profoundly moving, using Scripture in a way that gave him a unique unction. Equally moving were his prayers. I was not consciously aware of why they were so moving, but looking back I now recognize their distinctive qualities – they were full of passion as well as scriptural language and allusions. I could not recall ever

[204] For further discussion on prayer, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 108-122.

truly hearing a preacher's prayers before. Public prayers, insofar as there were any, were endured, not heard. I certainly hadn't paid any attention to them. Public prayers in my experience had been limited to quick prayers at the beginning of the service, at the end, and in connection with the collection. These prayers were different. They were powerful, authentic, from the heart, edifying, urgent and engendered in me a love for the practical, spiritual application of Scripture in prayer.

Years later at Independent Presbyterian Church I began to notice that several of the laymen who gathered weekly for our 6:30 Tuesday morning men's prayer meeting prayed with particular unction, and made, not coincidentally, pointed use of Scripture as they prayed. One man in particular arrested my attention as he began his prayer, "Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps 8:1).

The conviction both that prayer ought to have a prominent place in our public worship services and that one ought to use Scripture in prayer grew through the years. The case was clinched in the mid-1990's when I read Matthew Henry's *A Method for Prayer*.[205] Over a fifteen-year period I had slowly come to recognize the insight that inspired the prayer manuals of Matthew Henry, Isaac Watts,[206] and Samuel Miller that *the Bible is the church's prayer book*.:[207]

Those coming out of a "low" or "non-liturgical" church tradition are often amazed at the amount of Scripture found in the high-church services. The church of late antiquity responded to various heretics by banishing from her liturgy all non-scriptural language, especially hymns, which the heretics (such as Arius) were especially skilled at composing. The prayers found in the liturgies of the Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox, and Roman churches still reflect this scriptural emphasis (more on this later). One reason that previous generations of low-church Protestants did not find the scriptural quality of liturgical church services so remarkable because their own pastors' prayers were enriched with the language of Scripture. However today, even those churches which are not on the "Durham Trail," as D.G. Hart calls it, that is, the churches that are not deconstructing traditional worship in order to appeal to tastes shaped by America's popular culture, retain very little prayer, never mind Scripture-enriched prayer in their services.[208] What prayer remains often is artlessly delivered. J. I. Packer complains of the "earnest incoherence" of extemporary prayer in even the "liveliest Christian groups today."[209] "One has to admit," says Hughes Old, "that the spontaneous prayer one often hears in public worship is an embarrassment to the tradition."[210]

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[205] Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer* (1712; Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Heritage, an imprint of Christian Focus Publications, 2015); O. Palmer Robertson has published an updated version of Henry entitled *A Way to Pray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010).

[206] Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer* (1715, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

[207] Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (1849, Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1985).

[208] Originally entitled, "Evangelicals on the Durham Trail," it appeared as "Post-Modern Evangelical Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995) 451-59; it is now available in D.G. Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk*, 81-89.

[209] J. I. Packer, "Introduction: Why Preach?" in Samuel T. Logan, Jr., *The Preacher & Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 5.

[210] Hughes Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Ministers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 5.

We are committed to committing substantial time to prayer in our public services. We include the six prayer genres:

- praise
- confession
- thanksgiving
- intercession
- illumination
- benediction

All of these are included in the ordinary services of the church. Following the pattern established by the Reformers, we also include the five-fold categories of intercession (as esp. in 1 Tim 2:1-4).

- for sanctification (Eph 1:3-23; Phil 1:3-13; Col 1:3-14)
- for the church and its ministry ("that we might lead a peaceful and quiet life")
- for the sick (Jas 5:14)
- for the civil authorities and nation ("kings and all who are in high positions")
- for Christin mission ("all men")

Sacraments[211]

Finally, we have arrived at the fifth of the essential elements of worship, that of the sacraments. We'll begin with baptism and then move on to the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

Beginning with the "red-eye" flight from Los Angeles to New York, followed by a 12-hour layover at Kennedy Airport, then six hours' airtime from New York to London, another two hours by bus from London, and finally I had arrived in Bristol. It was late September 1977. An American Episcopalian couple picked me up at the bus terminal and began to show me the town on our way to the Stoke-Bishop area of Bristol, England where Trinity College was located.

The inevitable theological discussion began after I surveyed the Bristol Downs and the local fish and chips shop. "You (as then a Baptist) don't mind that the faculty teaches infant baptism?" I was asked. "No," I answered, "I'm here to study with J. I. Packer and Packer doesn't believe in it." "Oh yes he does." "No," I confidently responded, "he goes along with it because that is what his church practices. But he doesn't *believe* in it." I made this claim because up to that point in my Christian life I had never met a serious Christian who believed that infants born into Christian homes *should* be baptized. By "should" I mean that they believed that it was biblically based and obligatory for parents. "Ask Packer," my host said, "he'll tell you he does." His insistence was inconceivable to me, sharing as I did the outlook of Spurgeon who once said he would as soon baptize a bell as a baby, for there is as much Scripture support for the one as for the other. Yet here I stand, 40 years later, having spent the past four plus decades baptizing babies in Presbyterian churches.

[211] For further discussion on sacraments, see *Worshipping with Calvin,* 149-221.

What happened? How did I come to change my mind? Four texts proved decisive: Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39; Romans 4:11 and Colossians 2:11. The crucial event in altering my convictions came six months after my arrival in England. I was assigned a paper on the biblical theology of covenant. Without getting bogged down in the details, the important insight gained from the paper was understanding the covenant as the (here it comes again) unifying theme of the Bible. God has always "been pleased to express by way of covenant" the path of blessedness and reward (*Westminster Confession of Faith,* VII.1). God enters into a covenant with Abraham and his offspring (Gen 12:1-3), formalizes that covenant with a blood sacrifice (Gen 15:7-21), and confirms it with a covenant sign, circumcision, promising, "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17:1-14).

What I came to see was the continuity between Old and New Testaments. There is one basic covenant that underlies the various covenants, the Noahic (Gen 6:18; 9:9-16), Mosaic (see above), Abrahamic (see above), Davidic (2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:3, 28, 34, 39), and in Christ (1 Cor 11:25). We speak of this as a "covenant of grace" or "covenant of life" (as in *Larger Catechism* #20), a covenant of redemption that unites God's saving purposes.[212] In light of this unitary purpose and theme, we are able to go back and see that God's purpose from the beginning was to redeem in Christ (Gen 3:15).

Jesus Christ is sent from God "to show the mercy *promised* to our fathers and to remember His holy *covenant*" (Lk 1:72). Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth through his offspring (Acts 3:25-26). Jesus is the mediator of a "new *covenant*," which is the fulfillment of the promises of the old (Lk 22:20; Heb 8:6-10; 10:16; 12:24; 13:20). Believers in Jesus are no longer "strangers from the *covenants* of promise" (Eph 2:12). Believers are the true sons of Abraham, the true circumcision, "heirs according to the *promise*" (Gal 3:29; Phil 3:3). The covenant made with Abraham, says Matthew Henry, "is no other than the covenant of grace still made with all believers in Jesus Christ."[213]

What does all this have to do with the sacraments and baptism specifically? It means that we should expect continuity. It means that primarily the differences between the testaments (i.e. covenants) are external and superficial, not substantial. They are matters of administration, not essence. The Old Testament covenant meal, Passover, gives way to the New Testament covenant meal, the Lord's Supper. This is clear enough from the context, the observance of Passover, during which the Lord's Supper was instituted (Matt. 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:14-23). The Old Testament rite of admission, circumcision, gives way to the New Testament rite admission, baptism (Col 2:11, 12). The *Westminster Confession* expresses this continuity this way:

> The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the new (XXVII.5).

What does this have to say about the baptism of infants, given that we all agree that unbaptized adult converts should be baptized? We should not fail to note that there are no infants mentioned in Acts or

[212] I merely cite a few of the explicit references to the covenant. The covenant is implicit throughout the prophetic writings.
[213] Henry, *Exposition,* on Genesis 17:1.

the Epistles. What one does with infants born into Christian homes must be based on broader theological considerations. This is where continuity proves decisive. Hebrew infant boys were circumcised on the eighth day. My Baptist upbringing led me to believe that circumcision primarily was a national rite, not a religious one. Was it? Our reading of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, surveyed above, leads to a different conclusion. Circumcision represented far more than mere national citizenship. Circumcision, as a sacrament, was an external physical sign of an inward spiritual reality, a circumcised heart. Hence the Old Testament prophets call to the Old Testament people to circumcise their hearts (Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Deut. 10:16; 30:6). The Apostle Paul underscores the spiritual meaning of circumcision in Romans 2:29: "circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." "Circumcision," he says, is not "outward and physical" (Rom 2:28). Rather, it "is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit." Circumcision primarily represented the circumcised or cleansed heart, even the regenerated heart. Yet it was applied to Hebrew infants. Why?

Even more startling is the Apostle Paul's discussion of Abraham in Romans 4:

> *11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.* (Rom 4:11a)

Circumcision, he says, was a "sign" and "seal" of justification by faith. This understandably is the case for adults, but why was it applied to infants? Why would a sign of faith be applied to infants who are incapable of exercising personal or informed faith? At this point my arguments against infant baptism collapsed. I could see that every argument against infant *baptism* was an argument against infant *circumcision*. Yet there can be no doubt that Abraham and his descendants were commanded to apply circumcision, a sign and seal of justification by faith, to infants who could not exercise conscious faith. Where does this lead us in connection with baptism? "It appears incontrovertible," says Calvin, "that baptizing has taken the place of circumcision."[214] The Apostle Paul makes the connection himself, calling baptism "the circumcision of Christ."

> *11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* (Col 2:11, 12)

These last two texts, Romans 4:11 and Colossians 2:11-12 proved decisive in altering my convictions. My arguments against infant baptism evaporated. Baptism is New Testament circumcision, equivalent in meaning and function, differing only in external administration. "The apostle intimates," says Matthew Poole, "that baptism is the same to us Christians which circumcision was to the Jews."[215] It "succeedeth in the place of circumcision," says another Puritan commentator John Trapp.[216] If we approach the question of baptism convinced of continuity, we will deduce that it should be applied to infants as was circumcision. We naturally will hear the echo of Genesis 17:7, "I will be a God to you and your descendants," in Peter's assurance in his Pentecost sermon: "this promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2:39). It is as though Peter was saying, explains Henry, "Your children shall still have, as

[214] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* John T. McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960)*,* 4:15:4; pp 1306-1307.
[215] Poole, *Commentary,* III:717, on Colossians 2:11.
[216] Trapp, *Commentary,* V:616, on Colossians 2:11.

they have had, an interest in the covenant." Indeed, "That great promise of God's being to you a God is as much to you and to your children now *as ever it was*."[217] It is in this light that we should understand the "household" baptism of the Book of Acts (Acts 16:31-33; cf 11:14). It is in this light that we understand the assurance that the Apostle Paul gives to one believing parent that "they (your children)… are holy" (1 Cor 7:14).

Does baptism do infants any good? Indeed it does, though we cannot quantify it. Baptism is a means of grace. Through it Christ imparts grace to His people. Did Jesus not take infants (*breph*, not mere children, but infants) into His arms and bless them (Lk 18:6)? Was that a pious fiction or was true, spiritual blessing transmitted to these infants? Does Jesus not do the same today through His church? Cannot our children, like David, trust in God while still nursing infants (Ps 22:9)? Cannot our children, like John the Baptist, be filled with the Spirit from their mother's womb (Lk 1:15)?

Is it conceivable that in an era of a "better covenant" (Heb 7:22; 8:6; 12:24), with "better promises" (Heb 8:6), that we would have fewer privileges than our spiritual predecessors? Is it conceivable that *they* should be invited, no, commanded and blessed to bring their children into the covenant community, apply the sign of the covenant and the promise it represents, the promise that God will be their children's God as well as the God of the parents, and we should be denied such a promise, *no greater than which there could ever be for a believing parent*? Infant baptism provides another symbol of the lavishness of God's grace. He loves us in Christ, and He loves our children: passive, undeserving, unaware though they be, as we once were before them.

We baptize our children, and then pray on the basis of their baptism and its promises. If they are for a time unbelievers, we boldly remind the Father that the mark of Christ is upon them and that they belong to Him. We pray that He will fulfill the promise of their baptism to be a God both to us and our children after us.

Lord's Supper

Quarterly communion was the practice of the church in which I was reared. Like most American Protestants (Episcopalians and Lutherans excepted) we assumed a memorialist view of the Lord's Supper. We suspected something significant was happening at communion, but that sense only slightly outweighed our annoyance at the extra 20-30 minutes required for its administration. It was for us an add-on, something extra in the life of the church but in no way occupying space in the center of our congregational life.

The 1980's brought some changes in sacramental practices to the evangelical world. The burgeoning mega-churches adopted the strategy of moving communion to a weeknight. The rationale, not surprisingly, was the alleged irrelevance of the Lord's Supper to seekers who would find its administration off-putting and confusing. This pushed Lord's Supper even further to the periphery of the life of the church. Yet it also led to a counter-reaction. There was some experimentation with private communion, served in homes among prayer and Bible study groups without ecclesiastical sanction. Perhaps more widespread were the widely publicized moves to Rome, Canterbury, and Antioch by high-profile evangelicals who sensed that they were being deprived of something profound by the

[217] Henry, *Exposition,* on Acts 2:39 (my emphasis).

diminished role the eucharist was being given in their churches. These "Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail" left in search for a more hospitable environment for a sacramental piety.[218]

It is regrettable that a reduced status of the Lord's Supper should ever have been tolerated in the churches of the Reformed tradition.[219] There is a proper Reformed sacramental piety which places the sacraments at the center of the Christian life and the life of the church without supplanting the ministry of the word. Indeed, the Reformers and the Puritans attempted to stake out their position on the sacraments between the Anabaptists to the left, and the Roman Catholics to the right. With apologies to Queen Elizabeth and the Anglican settlement, the Reformed saw themselves as the true *via media* between the denigration of the sacraments among the Anabaptists and the idolatry of the Roman Catholics. The sacraments, they argued, are central but subordinate; they are a means of grace but always and only if accompanied by the word and faith and never *ex opera operato*. The pendulum today need not swing to the extreme of high-church sacramentalism to see a true sacramentalism in the historic Reformed practice.

We administer the Lord's Supper on a monthly basis as a symbolic, spiritual meal, as a means of fellowship with the ascended Christ, and as a time of covenantal re-ratification. We moved from quarterly communion to monthly because of our conviction that one who missed a single quarterly service would go six months without the sacrament, which we believe involves unacceptable loss. Our practice is once a quarter in the morning and the other eight Suppers in the evening.

* * *

Our worship, the worship of Reformed Protestantism, is supported by Scripture, theology, history, and in each of its elements is self-testifying or self-confirming as to its validity and normativity. If it is new to you, different than that to which you are accustomed, our booklet entitled "Our Order of Service" briefly explains item-by-item what we do and why we do it.[220] We invite you to test the waters here for a couple of months and see if our God-centered, gospel-driven, biblically enriched service isn't deeply satisfying to your soul.

[218] Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishers, 1985).
[219] See Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 1-2.
[220] This booklet is also available in *Serving with Calvin,* "Appendix A," 339-353.

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Introduction

For 1700 years the Christian religion supplied the moral code for western civilization. Our ancestors agreed about the importance of marriage and family. They crafted laws protecting life and property. They insisted on public decency and truth-speaking. The Christian ethos shaped commonplace views of hard work and generous charity. Certainly, hypocrisy also was commonplace. Christian ideals were at times honored only in the breech. Yet as it has been said, hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. Vice was forced by the Christian consensus to wear the mask of virtue. Evil was forced into closets and underground. From the 4th century to the 21st century Christian ethical norms dominated the culture of old Christendom; its nations, its colonies, and wherever its missionaries were successful.

We have witnessed the collapse of this Christian moral consensus in recent times. The "sexual revolution" launched in the 1960's opened a pandora's box of moral anarchy. Pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, homosexuality, abortion, and no-fault divorce were all unleashed with unintended yet predictable results. Spikes followed in illegitimacy, single-parent households, unsupervised young males, crime, and violence. Respect for older people and older ways, for life, marriage, property, and truth plunged. The triumph of the revolutionaries came with the American Supreme Court's Obergefell decision of 2015 mandating same-sex marriage nationwide. Confusion has spread into the heretofore unchallenged biological certainties of gender identity. Children and youth are being encouraged to teachers and counselors to consider whether or not they might be a boy trapped in the body of a girl, or vice versa. Society's so-called victims are now the victors.

How are we to establish right and wrong? Are morals to be determined by cultural consensus, by mere opinion poll? What happens when opinions change? What if the majority turns on a minority and for high-sounding reasons (the benefit of the majority over against the perceived crimes of the minority, as defined by class, race, religion, or sex)? Morals, in such a scheme, are reduced simply to power, the ability of one group to impose its will upon another.

Thankfully, our Christian ancestors were right in believing that God has spoken. An infinite authority from outside of us has declared right and wrong to us, the sum of which is found in the Ten Commandments. The moral principles embedded in these Ten are not mere opinion. They are not an expression of individual or group preferences. They are not semantic tools by which one group is able to oppress another. Rather, they are eternal and unchanging ethical standards designed by God for the benefit of all humanity.

Reformed ethics

God calls His people to be holy even as He is holy (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). We are to be His imitators (Eph. 5:1, 2). His will for us is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:2-8). The obvious question to ask of these imperatives is, by what standard? How is holiness to be measured? What are the marks of sanctification? What does the moral behavior of those who are sanctified look like?

The answer of the Bible and the Reformed church is the standard provided by the law of God. God's law provides the details. It provides the norms. We look to the law in its "third use," which we introduced earlier. God's laws are not arbitrary, but rooted in the nature of God Himself. God's laws are what they are because God is who He is. My revered Old Testament lecturer J. Alec Motyer (1924-2016) explains,

> The law is a divinely given pattern of life for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.[221]

Again,

> What exists as a principle in the divine nature is expressed as a precept for the people of God.[222]

This relationship between the divine principle or precept, between the nature of God and the laws of God, is demonstrated in the life of Christ. He fulfilled *all righteousness* (Matt. 3:15). We are instructed by the apostles of Christ to "follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21-33), to have the same "attitude" as was in Christ Jesus, who regarded others as more important than Himself, who looked out not merely for His own interests, but for the interests of others also (Phil 2:5-8). We are to love as He loved (Jn 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn 4:11). He lived in constant submission to the will of God (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 12:4). He honored God's laws by obeying God's laws. So also must we.

Law and Gospel

This claim of ours does not go undisputed. There are those who see the line-up of biblical terminology: law-commandment-works-flesh vs. grace-faith-gift-spirit (see especially Romans 3:21-8:26) and conclude that there is no obligation to keep God's laws. They associate all law with legalism. After all, they argue, doesn't the Apostle Paul say that we are *free* from the law (Rom. 7:9); that we're not *under* law but *under grace*? (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:18); and that Christ is the *end* of the law (Rom. 10:4)? We don't need rules and codes and laws to guide our conduct, they claim. "If you are led by the Spirit, you are *not under the* law" (Gal. 5:18). The will of God in any situation is to be known through the Spirit's leading. He is our guide, they maintain, not a rule book. Our only law is to *love* - in every situation we are to do what is *loving.* We are not to ask "What does the rulebook say?" Rather, we are to ask "What loving thing would the Spirit have me do?"

This approach makes for popular teaching in an antinomian (*anti* = against; *nomian* = law) age such as ours. External sources of authority are fiercely resisted. Any claim that there are moral norms outside of the sovereign self to which one must be subject is bitterly opposed. Yet as this lesson unfolds, we'll see that the Scripture teaches exactly that. We will see that the people of God have always been saved by *grace,* saved by *faith*, saved by *Christ*, and yet always their conduct has been governed by God's *law*. People of God *have always* been and as long as the earth shall last *will be* obligated to do things *God's ways* and Gods ways are written in *God's commandments.*

Biblical teaching

We may begin our brief survey of the place of "law" in the life of the people of God with Abraham, the father of all the faithful. God sovereignly, graciously, and freely chose Abraham, one man from out of the whole human race (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21). He "believed God," and his faith "was counted to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3-5). Thus "God… preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham" (Gal. 3:8). The promises of God are repeated again in Genesis 17, yet this time Law comes into the picture:

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[221] J. A. Motyer, *Old Testament Covenant Theology* (London: Theological Students Fellowship, 1973), 17.

[222] J. A. Motyer, lectures on "Major Themes of the Old Testament," Trinity College, Bristol, Fall, 1977; Also, Yale Old Testament professor Brevard Childs (1923-2007): "The commandments were not arbitrary stipulations which had unwittingly assumed an importance. Rather, they reflected the essential character of God himself." *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary.* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 397.

> *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." [3] Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* (Gen. 17:1-7).

Don't miss the opening verse. "Walk before me, and be blameless." It is not a very *informative* law. It lacks details. Yet it is a *comprehensive* law. No *moment* of life is exempted from the word "*walk"* and no action or thought is exempted from the word *"blameless."* Abraham is saved by grace, and yet he is required to act in a way which corresponds with the nature of God.

Fast forward to Mount Sinai, the most foundational of all texts regarding the law of God. There we read the preface to the Ten Commandments:

> *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* (Ex. 20:2)

The law of God is given to a redeemed people. They were not given the Ten Commandments so that through obedience to these requirements God might count them worthy of deliverance. No, it was only after they had been saved from bondage that the details of the law were given. The law never was given that the people of God might be saved, but because they were saved.

Fast forward again to the New Testament? Is there a fundamental change in the relationship between God and His people? Are we *free* from the law as the source of behavioral norms? Is Christ the *end* (*telos*) of the *norms* of the law? Jesus teaches quite the opposite.

> *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matt. 5:17).

"Do not think," Jesus says. Apparently, people were thinking (and saying!) exactly that: He had come to abolish the law. They had seen Him socializing with sinners. They had seen the disciples pick grain on the Sabbath. Jesus often healed on the Sabbath. Consequently, Jesus clarifies:

> *"I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matt. 5:17b).

What does "fulfill" mean? What it cannot mean is to overthrow, nullify, or remove, since that is precisely what Jesus says He has not come to do. Rather, it means to rightly interpret so as to declare its true meaning. It means to explain its true intent so that its intended purpose might be realized. It means to fill out its meaning and rescue it from the warped interpretation which prevent its correct application.

Jesus comes, Calvin explains, as "a faithful expounder of a law which had already been given."[223] This can be seen in what follows,

> *"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."* (Matt. 5:18).

As to the Law's *permanence*, how long is the Law still valid? How long is it authoritative for the people of God, disciples of Christ? "Until heaven and earth pass away," that is, forever. The gospel does not abolish law! How much of it is still valid? How *comprehensive* does the law remain? "Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." Again "Not the smallest letter or stroke will pass away until all is accomplished" (NASB). Jesus has "jot and tittle" (KJV) concern, detailed concern for the authority of the law of God. How is it to *function*? What part is it to play among the disciples of Jesus? It is to be *taught* and *observed, kept* and *obeyed.*

> *"Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 5:19)

Its stipulations are not to be *relaxed* by the disciples of Jesus. They are to be *obeyed* and *taught*.

How *important* is the law? It is the basis, the criteria for rank in the kingdom of God. It is even the basis of inclusion and exclusion from it.

> *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 5:20).

How could Jesus have maintained the normativity of the law of God any stronger than He did? *God's people* are to do things *God's way* and God's ways is found in *God's law*. Jesus goes on to provide six applications of God's commands in Matthew 5:21-48 which confirm our understanding of His teaching. We see two guiding aims:

1. He *deepens* the meaning of laws which were interpreted too superficially (e.g. murder and hate – vv. 21-26, adultery and lust – vv 27-32). God's laws are concerned not merely with external behavior, but with internal attitude and motive.
2. He *corrects* current interpretation of laws which were *misunderstood* (e.g. oaths, vengeance, love of enemy – vv 33-48).[224]

By deepening and correcting their current misinterpretations of God's laws, Jesus restored His commands to the original intent. Far from abolishing the law of God, He extended its application. We can sum up Jesus' outlook toward the law by his own words in John 14:15:

> *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

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[223] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – Vol. 1 & 2, in John T. McNeill (ed.) The Library of Christian Classics, Volume XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I.viii.7; It means "getting at the comprehensive principles which underlie the narrowness of the letter" (Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1909, 1953], 76); "bringing out its original intent" (Childs, *Exodus*, 429); "He means… the Old Testament finds in him its completion, its fulfillment, its confirmation, its validation" (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* [London: The Tyndale Press, 1957], 150).

[224] Jesus "is presented as the true interpreter of the Old Testament law which is eternally valid, but which has been obscured by the sinful devices of men." Childs, *Exodus,* 429-430.

What about the rest of the New Testament? We've already read several of the Apostle Paul's "anti-law" statements. Let's look at some very different ones.

> *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* (Rom. 8:1-4)

The freedom described in verses 1 and 2 above is freedom from the law in terms of its "condemnation," from "the law of sin and death." Then in verses 3 and 4, the Apostle explains that the purpose of our being set free, the purpose of His sending His Son, the purpose of condemning sin in the flesh, is

> *…in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* (Rom. 8:4)

Those who "walk… according to the Spirit" fulfill the "righteous requirement of the law" in their walking, in their characteristic behavior. Are Christians led by the Spirit *away* from the law as some claim? No, they are led by the Spirit into *conformity* to the law. What characterizes the behavior of those who walk "according to the flesh?" The Apostle continues:

> *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* (Rom. 8:7)

Contrary to those led by the Spirit, "the fleshly mind does not submit to God's law." However, the spiritual man will be led by the Spirit into obedience to and conformity to *God's holy law.* Again, the freedom from the law, or not being "under" the law, of which the Apostle speaks elsewhere is freedom from the Law's *condemnation* not its *obligation* (as in Rom. 7:9; 6:14; 10:4; Gal. 5:18). Lest we misunderstand, he himself asks and answers,

> *Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.* (Rom. 3:31)

Some have sought to drive a wedge between doing the *loving* thing rather than the *legal* thing? This too is a false dichotomy:

> *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. [9] For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* (Rom. 13:8-10)

The loving thing to do is to do that which God commands. Left to ourselves, we don't know what love is! Does love mean "never having to say you're sorry" as it became popular to say in the 1970's?[225] Is biblical love "free love"? Does love mean to "make love"? Or is it to be "in love"? Our word "love" is

[225] This of course was a line from the hit 1970 movie, "Love Story."

ambiguous to say the least. What the Apostle teaches is that the law instructs us as to what love is. It provides the content. It provides the details. If I love my neighbor, I will not murder him, or violate his marriage, or steal his property, or lie about him or covet anything about him, or wrong him in any way. God's law provides the principles that guide the expression of love.

The rest of the New Testament confirms the same. James refers to the law of God as "the perfect law, the law of liberty," by which one will be blessed if one obeys (Jas. 2:25). Peter says "we are to be holy as He is holy" (1 Pet. 1:15). John says "by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Hebrews 8:3-13 says Christ has ushered in "a new covenant" in which God says "put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts," in fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:31.

It bears reminding ourselves that the New Testament was written in the context of polemics against legalism. Jesus throughout the gospel record is crossing swords with the Pharisees, and the Apostles with the Judaisers (see especially Galatians). This helps explain why so much of the New Testament treatment of the law is tilted negatively. We do better to go to the Psalms to learn what our positive outlook ought to be. "Oh how I love your law!" the psalmist exclaims. "It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97); also 119:113, 163, 165, 167). He "delights" in God's law, we are told repeatedly (Ps. 119:14, 16, 35, 47, 77, 92, 143, 174). Likewise, the Apostle Paul: "I *delight* in the law of God in my inner being" (Rom 7:22). God's law is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:65). Through meditation upon it, we become wiser than our teachers, the aged, and our enemies (Ps. 119:97-100). As the Puritan Samuel Bolton (1606-1654) summarizes, "The law sends us to the Gospel, that we may be justified, and the Gospel sends us to the law again to enquire what is our duty being justified."[226]

Types of law

At this point someone might ask, if God's commands are still normative, then why don't we still have temple services and offer sacrifices? Weren't they commanded? The answer is that some of the Old Testament ordinances were by intention and design for a limited time only. Traditionally, the law of God has been divided into three categories.

Ceremonial laws

The entire system of sacrifices, with its temple priests, altars, lavers, animals, were typological and temporary, meant to portray and foreshadow the Christ who was to come. The blood of bulls and goats cannot and never could put away sin (Heb. 10:4). Jesus Christ is our true high priest (Heb. 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:14; 10:21). He is the true Lamb of God (John 1:29), and the one acceptable sacrifice (Eph. 5:1-2).

Ceremonial laws include laws of separation. An aspect of the law's function was to separate Jew from Gentile, to mark physical and cultural differentiation. Food laws separate (see Acts 10-11:18; Gal. 2:11-14). It is difficult to socialize with those with whom one cannot share a meal.

Other kinds of mixing were forbidden (e.g. plowing with an ox and donkey – Deut. 22:10; breeding two types of cattle or wearing garments made of two types of material; sowing a field with two kinds of seed – Lev. 19:19). Even as one looked out upon the fields or looked at one's own clothing one was to be reminded of Israel's separation from the nations. The Apostle Paul contrasts these ceremonial and

[226] Samuel Bolton, from his work *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom,* cited in Ernest F. Kevan, *Keep His Commandments: The Place of Law in the Christian Life* (1955; London: The Tyndale Press, 1964), 29; "On the one hand, the Law continually makes way for, and points us to, the Gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the Law" (John Wesley, also cited in Kevan, *Keep His Commandments,* 35).

consequently temporary laws which he describes as "the law of commandments expressed in ordinances."

> *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility* **15** *by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,* **16** *and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.* (Eph. 2:14-16)

These "ordinances" were the laws against mixing, cleansing and dietary laws which kept Israel separated from the nations. These are abolished in Christ. This distinction between moral and ceremonial can be seen in the Apostle Paul's assertion,

> *For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.* (1 Cor. 7:19, see also Gal. 5:6; 6:15)

Circumcision, of course, was among the things commanded, yet the distinction can be made between ceremonial requirements (which circumcision represents and which were temporary by design) and moral requirements (which are permanent and unchanging). Hence "commandments" are to be kept, but not (as a religious requirement) circumcision.

Civil law

The particularly severe civil Old Testament penalties (eg. the stoning of adulterers, homosexuals, and incorrigible children) were designed and intended for Israel as a nation state. Since the people of God no longer are organized as a civil body, its civil codes no longer apply. They "expired together with the State of that people," says our *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "not obliging not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require" (XIX.4). Like the ceremonial law, the civil laws were designed for a particular time (prior to the people of God being reconstituted as the church) and a particular place (the borders of ancient Israel), neither of which continue to exist.

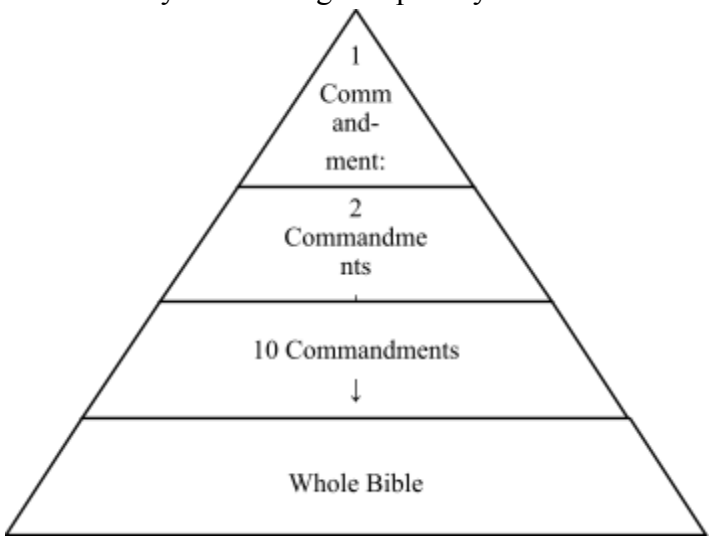
Moral law

What remains is the moral law, which (continuing in our *Westminster Confession of Faith*) "doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation." (XIX.5).

Ten Commandments?

Going all the way back to the second century, the Ten Commandments were one of three forms that new Christians were expected to memorize before being admitted to the Lord's Table: the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments. The latter of these alone of all scriptural revelation were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, underscoring their importance and permanence (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). The Bible itself thereby *sets the Ten Commandments apart from the rest of Scripture*, even giving them their own name, the "ten words" or "ten commandments" (especially Ex. 31:18; Deut. 4:13; 9:9; etc.). The Bible itself gives to the Ten Commandments a central and enduring role in the life of the people of God. The Decalogue (as they also are called) provides a convenient and comprehensive summary of the whole moral law (as *Shorter Catechism* #41 and *Longer Catechism* #98 teach). Moreover, the Ten Commandments may be further summarized by the two commandments that Jesus identifies as the greatest of all: to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-33; Luke 10:25-28; citing Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18).

Note what is being said. What is the law of God all about? Again we insist, it is all about love. Indeed, this is what the whole Bible is about: God's love for us, and our responsive love for God and our neighbor. There is really only one commandment in the Bible: love. This can then be further elaborated by the two greatest commandments: love God and love neighbor; further elaborated by the Ten Commandments: love God (commandments 1-4) and love others (commandments 5-10); and finally, even further elaborated by the whole Bible. The Bible is merely filling in the details of what it means to love. We may use a triangle to portray what we mean:



We will proceed now to look briefly at each of the Ten Commandments, outlining what the moral life of the believer is to look like.

As we proceed we will look briefly first at what each commandment forbids, and then at what it requires.

First Commandment

> *You shall have no other gods before me.* (Ex. 20:3)

No other gods are to be "before me" or "besides me," in my presence or literally "to my face." God is demanding absolute *exclusivity.* There can be no rivals because of the *covenant relationship* ("your God") and because of His work of *redemption* ("who brought you out of Egypt"). Therefore, in gratitude we are to remain absolutely loyal to Him.

What it Forbids
According to the *Shorter Catechism* #47,

> The First Commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying the true God, as God, [and our God,] and the giving of that worship and glory to any other which is due to Him alone.

The First Commandment forbids transferring to another the ultimate concern or loyalty or service and thereby denying what is due to God alone. It forbids attributing to another that which

is true only of God or attributing to Him that which is not true of Him. Consequently, the First Commandment forbids all of the following:

1. *Atheism* – we must not deny that there is a God who created and sustains the world and attribute all that there is to the operation of matter plus chance plus time. To do so is to rob God of His glory, to deny the display of His wisdom, power, and goodness as is evident in His creating and governing all things. The same may be said of agnosticism. To deny that there is sufficient evidence in the natural order to know if God exists is to deny the display of glory, to deny the clarity with which His "invisible attributes… his eternal power and divine nature" may be "clearly perceived" in creation and leave the agnostic as well as the atheist "without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20; Ps. 19:1).

2. *Polytheism* – we must not divide our loyalty between God and other so-called gods. We may not serve the God of the Bible and other deities. We are not to "cover our bases," or worship other gods *just in case* we're wrong and others are right. This was the sin that ancient Israel constantly was committing prior to being exiled to Babylon. The prophets denounce polytheism as spiritual whoredom and adultery (es. 2 Chron. 21:11,13; Jer. 3:2-9; 5:7; Hos. 1:2; 2:2-4; 4:11; 5:4; 6:10; and especially Ezek. 16).

3. *Subtheism* – we are coining a term in order to refer to the service of that which is not a deity but which nonetheless is otherworldly and to which divine characteristics are attributed. For example, we are not to pray to the saints or to Mary. To do so is to:

    - Attribute the them the divine characteristics of omniscience and omnipresence. It is to assume that they can know our thoughts and desires and prayers.
    - Seek from them that which only God can give. They do not possess or have access to the powers attributed to them.
    - Usurp Christ's intercessory office. It puts them in the place of Christ and assigns to them the role that He alone is to fulfill.

"We must not transfer to another what belongs to Him," says the 16th century Reformer John Calvin.[227] We must not credit others with the attributes, offices, or blessings which belong to God alone. "Any homage…which involves the ascription of divine attributes to its object, if that object is a creature, is idolatrous," says the great 19th century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge.[228] Our petitions, praise and thanks are to be addressed to God alone.

4. *Syncretism* – we must not combine the biblical revelation of God with the teaching of other so-called authorities, religious or otherwise. We must not remake God into our cultural preferences. The Apostle John warns that any deviation from the fullness and finality of the truth found in Christ is idolatry (1 John 5:21). To *deny* what He *is* or *affirm* what He *is not* is idolatry. It is to worship our own imaginations, the idol in our heart (Ezek. 14:3). This was another persistent temptation for ancient Israel. The ancient Hebrews were not only serving other gods but attributing to the true God the characteristics of the pagan gods surrounding them. They combined the religion of the Bible with that of the surrounding peoples. For us today, syncretism consists not in bowing before blocks of wood or stone, but in absorbing the "*spirit of the age"*.

[227] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 2 vols., ed. By John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)*,* II.viii.16.
[228] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* Vols. I-III (1871; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), III:281.

"You thought I was altogether like you" (Psalm 50:21). That is, idolaters had created God in their *own image.* They *imposed* their *own* ideas of what He must be like and what He can and cannot do. God goes on to warn through the Psalmist, "But I will rebuke you and accurse you to my face. Consider this, you who *forget God,* or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue" (Psalm 50:21,22).

5. *Pseudotheism* – we must not worship or serve pseudo-gods, *non-gods,* those things which are not deities *per se,* but which we serve as though they were. There may be "idols" in our hearts which include those things which are not gods at all. Inevitably this includes a compromising of God's self-revelation in His word and as with syncretism, a refashioning of Him into our desired image. Often this takes the form of taking permitted things and turning them into ultimate things, thereby usurping the place of God.[229] We may identify eight of these pseudo-gods.

    - *Sensuality* – Philippians 3:19 speaks of those whose "god is their belly." The "belly" here represents not just eating but the whole realm of sensual desire. When we are obsessed with satisfying our appetites, when our chief concern is fulfilling our lusts, when scratching every itch consumes our time, energy, money, we have an idol. We live in a *sex-obsessed* age, which looks for happiness, peace, satisfaction, and fulfillment in erotic and exotic behavior. In so doing we have made idols of sex, food, and drink.

    - *Statism* - A state which claims absolute authority and power is an idolatrous state. When the civil government claims itself as the source of absolute law it is usurping divine prerogatives. The beast in Revelation is a government which exercises total control. It is an economic power, prohibiting buying and selling by anyone who will not take the mark of the beast and worship its image (Rev. 13:11ff). When we look to the government as the highest source of *authority* and the highest source of *provision*, we are worshiping a false god.

    - *Society* – When our source of *authority* and right thinking is our social circle, what "everyone" is doing what the 51 percent say, what is politically correct, we have an idol. When *good* is defined by what is good for "the people," or what is expedient or what benefits society, we are following in the footsteps of the high priest Caiaphas who said of the greatest crime that humanity has ever committed that it was "better for you that one man should die for the people" (John 11:50).

    - *Sport* – The Apostle Paul speaks of those who were lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). If our consuming passion is that of entertainment, if entertainment is our greatest source of pleasure and good, if it is our top priority, then God is being usurped and replaced here too. Ecclesiastes 7:4 warns, "The heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." Our society has made an idol of football and all the other diversions offered by the world of entertainment. Nothing grips the heart and affections of Americans like sports – not *anything.* What John Lennon said years ago of the Beatles is true of entertainers in general: "We are more popular than Jesus."

    - *Science* – When we trust science as that which has all the answers, as that which will ultimately never fail and therefore as an object of faith; when we trust science as that which will ultimately provide, as that which is the ultimate source of truth and the center of authority, even when it

[229] See Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods, The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (United States: Penguin Publishing Group, 2011).

contradicts Scripture, it has become an idol. "Science" easily and frequently usurps divine prerogatives in terms of *authority, provision*, *security,* and *trust.*

- *Stuff* – Material acquisition and retention easily can become our greatest goal, our consuming passion, our ultimate concern. The love of money is a *root* of all sorts of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Jesus warned we cannot serve *God* and *money.* We can only *love* and be *devoted* to one or the other (Matt. 6:24). Yet according to statistics gathered years ago, by high school the average youth will have seen 350,000 commercials promising love, fulfillment, and joy through means of one product or another. This number is likely to have increased given the ubiquity of advertisements on smartphones. Our culture preaches to us "If we only had *this*, then we'd be happy:" this car, or this house, or two cars and two houses, plus a new wardrobe and new household furnishings, and spectacular vacations, plus a boat or two boats. Sociologist Robert Bellah (1927-2013) warned years ago,

  > That happiness is to be attained through limitless material acquisitions is denied by every religion and philosophy known to man, but it is preached incessantly by every American television set.[230]

  - Today, fulfillment through "stuff" is preached on-line through a constant bombardment of images of happiness through products, all of which stirs up covetousness. The Apostle warns, "covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Eph. 5:3). Covetousness is idolatry, he warns. As also is greed (Col. 3:6).

- *Self* – we might call this form of idolatry autotheism. The Apostle Paul warns of those who are "lovers of self" as well as "lovers of money" and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:2-4). Self, money, and pleasure are interrelated false gods. The "me-generation" of the 1960s passed on to each successive generation cult of self-worship and self-love. I am my own God, many would have to admit. The vast proportion of my money, time and energy is spent on me.

- *Success* – some make a god out of their personal success in their business or profession or vocation. We pursue success at all costs. We've got to "make it." This is our greatest goal, regardless of *what* we must *compromise,* or *who* we must *hurt*, or who we must neglect.

These are just a sampling of the false gods of our age. Let us beware of their subtlety and enticements.

What it Requires

We've looked at the first commandment negatively, now the positive. What does this commandment enjoin? *Shorter Catechism* #46 gives us this answer:

> The First Commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify Him accordingly.

It is required that we maintain an absolutely exclusive allegiance to God in which He alone is worshipped and served as our greatest good, our source of provision and our center of authority. This may be delineated as follows.

[230] Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (1975; Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 134.

First, o*f our minds,* that we *submit* our minds to God's word; that we *believe* what God says about Himself and His world; that we consider *everything* a *loss* compared with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (Phil. 3:8).

Second *of our wills, o*ur *submission* to God as our *authority.* What He says goes. If He says don't, then *we don't*, no matter what. If He says do, then *we do*; no matter what. He is our King and we recognize *no other.* It requires also our *commitment* to His *cause.* We agree to labor, working for His kingdom. We pledge our loyalty to Him. Our commitment to God is unqualified and absolute. It requires our *trust* in His provision. It ever remains true that "God will provide" (Gen. 22:8). It is required that one look not to the state, not to earthly means or lesser goods, but God is our greatest good, our *summum bonum,* and our source of all good (Jas. 1:17). "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

Third, of *our affections,* that we *fear Him*, knowing that He sees all and knows all and will one day judge us according to the deeds we have done (2 Cor. 5:10, Matt. 25:31; Rom. 14:10). "Fear him," Jesus says (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4,5). "Have such a holy awe of God upon our hearts that we *dare* not sin" urges the Puritan Thomas Watson (1620-1686).[231] We are to *love Him*, seeking His fellowship, seeking to bless Him and to please Him in all things (2 Cor. 5:9). He is to be loved above *all else* with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27). Finally, we are to *thank Him,* recognizing that all we have is a gift from Him, our health, wealth, family, job, and church; our life, our salvation, and everything (1 Thess. 5:18).

In a word, in terms of our minds, wills, and affections, we are to *worship God*, bow down before Him and confess He is *all in all,* that He is the true and living God, the creator of heaven and earth, the Lord and giver of life. We are to acknowledge that He formed the hills and mountains, the oceans and seas, that He is *King over His creation.* He *sustains* it, holding its existence, and *controls* it, working all things after the council of His will (Eph. 1:11), determining whatsoever comes to pass. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the heavens are His throne, and the earth is His footstool (1 Tim. 6:15; Isa. 66:1). None can stay His hand. None can restrain Him. He does whatever He wills (Ps. 115:3). Yet all this awesomeness is controlled by absolute holiness, justice, and goodness. He is a holy God who hates sin, whose eye is too pure to look upon evil (Hab. 1:13), who *rights* the *wrongs,* who is fair and just, who judges according to what we've done (1 Pet. 1:17), who is good and does good (Ps. 119:68) and is the source of all good, of all we have, and of all we enjoy. He is to be honored as *Creator, Sustainer, Provider, and Savior* in our public worship, our family worship, and in private worship, as well as in our moment by moment living. "The recognition of Jehovah as our God," says Charles Hodge,

> Involves a constant sense of his *presence,* of his *majesty,* of his *goodness*, and of his providence, and of our dependence, responsibility, and obligation.[232]

The First Commandment is foundational to all that we find in the Bible, and foundational to all of life. There is but one God, and therefore there is but one truth, one right and wrong, and one final reality.

Second Commandment

If we can say that the First Commandment has to do with *who* we are to worship, the second commandment has to do with *how* God is to be worshipped. By what kind of worship does the God of

[231] Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (1692; 1890; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965)*,* 51.
[232] Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* III:278.

the first commandment, the God of Israel, wish to be honored? The short answer is, He requires that He be worshipped without images. Indeed, He is not to be represented by any physical or visual form. "We are not," says J. I. Packer in his 20th century classic *Knowing God,* "to make use of visual or pictorial representations of the Triune God or of *any person* of the Trinity for the purposes of Christian worship."[233] The commandment forbids not only the worship of other gods (as does the first commandment) but goes a step further. "Idolatry," says Charles Hodge, "consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images."[234] Matthew Henry explains,

> Though the worship was designed to terminate in God, it would not please if it came to him through an image.[235]

What it forbids

> *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.* (Ex. 20:4)

First, the Second Commandment forbids the *making* of any "carved image," whether of wood or stone or any other material that might be the product of human imagination; or any "likeness" found in or modelled after what we might find in nature. Together "image" and "likeness" indicate that God is forbidding making any kind of symbolic representation of Him whatsoever. He is not to be represented by any picture or symbol, or statue, whether it be found "in heaven above," such as birds, stars, the sun and moon, or "in the earth beneath," such as humans, animals, or other living creatures, or "in the water under the earth," such as fish, shell-fish, whales, dolphins, etc. (see also Deut. 4:15-19). All visible representations of God, whether two dimensional or three dimensional, are forbidden.

Second it forbids *worshipping* God through images.

> *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,* (Ex. 20:5)

Such images and likenesses are not to be vehicles for worship. We are not to "bow down to them or serve them." They are both not to be made and not to be utilized as aids or helps in our worship. We are not to justify them as means of facilitating our worship of the true God.

Third, it forbids *all humanly-devised worship.* The sanctity of God's worship is the underlying principle. Why does God forbid images of Himself? We can answer this in several different ways. Yet the "bottom-line" answer, the ultimate answer, is because God says so. He decides how He is to be worshipped. He decides what pleases Him. He decides what service is consistent with His nature. He is Spirit and therefore all true worship must be spiritual in nature. We are not to imagine that our own collective wisdom, or common sense, or personal ideas are adequate guides for designing worship. Rather, we must go to His word to determine what He wants. We might have thought that a picture or symbol would be helpful. After all, when we pray it often is difficult to focus our minds. We easily are distracted. An object of some sort might help us. Why shouldn't we employ such an aid? Simply this: because God says so. When we attempt to impose our own agenda upon God, we are guilty of what the

[233] J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (United States: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 39.
[234] Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* III:291.
[235] Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, nd.), I:210.

Apostle Paul calls "will worship" (Col. 2:23, KJV). After describing the extreme asceticism common to so many religions ("Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"), the apostle goes on to describe what in fact are common humanly-devised approaches to placating the gods as "the commandments and teaching of men." He continues:

> *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.* (Col. 2:23)

Biblical religion is not "self-made." It does not consist of physical deprivations, asceticism, "severity of the body," or anything else that our imaginations might devise or our creativity might manufacture. The *Shorter Catechism* summarizes our understanding:

> The second commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images, *or any other way not appointed in his Word*. (#51)

The Second Commandment establishes the principle that all true worship must be according to Scripture.

Why it forbids it

First, the Second Commandment forbids fashioning one's own worship because doing so *denies the sufficiency of God's chosen means of self-revelation*. God did not reveal Himself in images. He revealed Himself through the *word.* A passage in Deuteronomy makes this emphatic:

> *12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. 13 And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.* (Deut. 4:12-13)

Note the emphasis: "you heard… words." You "saw no form." You heard "only a voice." Verbal communication was God's chosen means of self-revelation. He used words, not pictures or symbols. To create images is to reject God's self-revelation as inadequate, as insufficient, as incomplete. To add images and symbols of God to it is to presume to supplement the verbal (His means) with the pictorial (our means). Adding to His revelation is what God strictly forbids:

> *You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.* (Deut. 4:2)

We must not create what He has not created, or say what He has not said. God is saying to His people, "I did not reveal myself in forms and images, therefore you are not to take it upon yourself to create them. To do so is to say I've done an inadequate job of making myself and my will known. It is to reject me as I have revealed myself which has been simply through a *voice,* through *words.*

Second, image-making *violates the covenant relationship.* The primary stated reason is found in verse 5:

> *for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,* (Ex. 20:5b)

God identifies Himself as "jealous." Jealousy can be evil, as when one is jealous for that for which one has no rightful claim. However, there is a proper jealousy for that which does rightfully belong to one. A husband or wife are rightfully jealous for the exclusive affections of his or her spouse. God is zealous in protecting His love relationship with his people, like a husband protecting his marriage from attack (see e.g. Ezekiel 16 and Hosea 1-2). He reacts with wrath against all who would dare to violate it. "He will not permit his honor to be violated," says Calvin.[236]

What will happen if we do violate this commandment? The consequence, we are warned, will be felt for multiple generations. The Lord is emphasizing the *seriousness* of violating this command. If we do, if we worship God through images, the repercussions felt by those we hold most dear, our children, their children, and children's children. There will be disastrous consequences for generations to come.

Yet there is also in this commandment a promise for the obedient.

> *but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.* (Ex. 20:6)

Notice the contrast between the curse that endures for 3-4 generations and the blessing that is extended to "thousands," that is, thousands of generations. His "steadfast love," His *hesed* is lavished upon the obedient. Two options are placed before us, the threat and the promise, the whip and the carrot stick. If not the one, then the other is meant to motivate, to prod us to obedience.

Why jealousy?
What, then, is the connection between God's jealousy and idols? Why should He be jealous of a picture or symbol or image of Himself? If I were to place a picture of my wife, on my desk at work, she would not be jealous of the picture. Why is God? He is provoked to jealousy because the creation of a picture or form of God involves the rejection of God as God. The visible portrayed leads inevitably to idolatry. Why is this so? For two reasons.

1. It leads inevitably to the transfer of one's affections and loyalties to the symbol or form. The *object* or *picture* of God becomes the center of one's affections and loyalties and therefore a rival god. There have been those in every age who say it helps them to pray when they look at a *picture of Christ* or a *crucifix* or some other symbol. It helps *focus their minds.* Their relationship with God is more *real,* they say. It's as though the image places Him there with them. They can pray better and they're more sincere, they maintain. Over time the picture comes to be very dear to them. It carries great meaning and inevitably becomes an object of care. They clean it and protect it and treat it with *reverence.* They are careful not to let the children mishandle it. It becomes the *focal point* of their *spiritual life.* They grow to see a connection between their well-being and their treatment of the object. They begin to attribute to the object the powers that belong to God alone. They in effect enthrone a rival god. *If* they care for this picture or object, they reason, and treat it with reverence and care, and if they dust, clean, protect it, *then* they will get what they desire and things will go *well* for them. As time progresses, that which began as a symbol of God becomes a second god, a rival god, a substitute god. It is the focal point of one's spiritual life. It is the one who delivers the goods. It is the one through whom they are blessed. This is why God is provoked to jealousy.

Not only is the idolatry of transferred affections and misattributed benefits *inevitable,* but second, idolatry is also *necessarily* the case in terms of misattributed *attributes.* An image must forever be

[236] John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on The Ten Commandments,* ed. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 68.

inadequate and *insufficient* as a representation of God. What created thing can adequately portray God? The answer is, nothing. "To whom then will you liken Me?" God asks of us (Isa. 40:25).

> [15] *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,*
> *and are accounted as the dust on the scales;*
> *behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.*
> [16] *Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,*
> *nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*
> [17] *All the nations are as nothing before him,*
> *they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.*
> [18] *To whom then will you liken God,*
> *or what likeness compare with him? (Isa. 30:15-18)*

"The question," says Packer, "does not expect an answer, only a *chastened silence.*"

> Its purpose is to remind us that it is an absurd as it is impious to thing that an image modeled, as images must be, upon some creature could be an acceptable likeness of the creator.[237]

All pictures and images fall short of what they pretend to portray. It is the glory of God that should motivate us to worship, yet pictures cannot capture that glory. 'His glory is precisely what pictures cannot show us," Packer explains.[238] Because all representations of God are inadequate and insufficient, they *mislead*. They say more that is *false than true,* therefore they create a false God. Habakkuk calls an image "a teacher of lies" (Hab. 2:18). Images do not *represent*, they *misrepresent*. The material cannot represent the spiritual; the finite cannot represent the infinite: the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent; the lifeless cannot represent the Source of life; the created cannot represent the Creator. Packer cites Calvin:

> A true image of God is not to be found in all the world; and hence… His glory is defiled, and his truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form… Therefore, to devise any image of God is itself impious; because by this corruption His majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is.[239]

We may cite examples. Think of Michelangelo's picture of God imparting life to Adam, His finger stretching to touch the finger of Adam. How many people think of God as an old man with a beard? Consider the most common picture of Jesus by Warner Sallman (1892-1968). His portrait along with others of the late Victorian and early 20th century have a common quality. What does Jesus look like in these portraits? Simply this: a woman with a beard. Sallman's Jesus is a very feminine Jesus. This is how whole generations of Christians were taught to think of Jesus, not as a powerfully built carpenter, capable of overturning tables of the moneychangers in the temple and chasing them out with a whip. The feminine Jesus, I would maintain, reinforced a perception among many men that Christianity is for women and children. The Jesus of Sallman's painting is not a manly man and therefore not appealing to men as a man worthy of respect. Femininity is wonderful in a woman, but not in a man, any more than masculinity is in a woman.

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[237] Packer, *Knowing God,* 41.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 40.

Similarly, a picture of Jesus that came out of the Jesus movement of the late 1960's and 70's looked like a surfer-dude. He looked like a fellow who had just come off the beach, board under his arm, hair wind-swept. This is the problem with these and all portraits of Jesus. They all involve a projection of our ideals. The fact is *we don't know what Jesus looked like.* The only portrait God has given us is that painted with words (Gal. 3:1). He could have inspired painting and sculptors and playwrights, but He didn't. Again, Packer warns us,

> Psychologically, it is certain that if you habitually focus your thoughts on an image or picture of the One to whom you are going to pray, you will come to think of Him, and pray to Him, as the image represents Him. Thus you will in this sense 'bow down' and 'worship' your image; and to the extent to which the image fails to tell the truth about God, to that extent you will fail to worship God in truth. That is why God forbids you and me to make use of images and pictures in our worship.[240]

Does the prohibition include pictures of Jesus for educational purposes? As in Sunday School materials? In what sense is a picture of the physical body of Jesus a picture of His divinity rather than exclusively His humanity? If His physical presence is not represented, is that in effect a denial of the incarnation? Do we imply that He did not inhabit a physical body? Hughes Old (1933-2016) has suggested that we might picture His body but should avoid portraying His face since again, facial representations always involve a projection of our ideals. These are difficult questions. Still, the *Heidelberg Catechism* warns us,

> 98. Q. But may images not be tolerated in the churches as "books for the laity"?
> A. No, for we should not be wiser than God. He wants His people to be taught not by means of dumb images but by the living preaching of His Word.

What it requires

At this point what it requires should be obvious. We may allow *Shorter Catechism* #50 to answer for us:

> The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his Word.

It requires image-less worship. It requires that we worship God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "In spirit and truth," as Jesus says God must be worshipped (John 4:24). It required that we worship God according to Scripture.

Third Commandment

If the first commandment is concerned with *who* (the person) is to be worshipped, and the second commandment is concerned with *how* (the form) He is to be worshipped, the third commandment is concerned with the *attitude* (or motive) with which He is to be worshipped. It teaches us that God is to be worshipped, and more generally served, reverently, respectfully, and sincerely.

> *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.* (Ex. 20:17)

What does it say?

[240] Ibid., 41.

"You shall not *take,* that is "lift-up," "take-up," as one lifts up a *prayer* or *song* in an act of worship, or in the more general sense of "use," … the name." *Name* is considered not merely as a *label* it often is for us, but the person *Himself,* all that He is, His *attributes* and *character* as revealed; "… *in vain*," the root idea of which is that which is *groundless* or *unsubstantial.* In the material realm "in vain" indicates that which is unreal. In the moral realm it indicates that which is *empty, frivolous, insincere,* even *thoughtless* and deceitful. The name of God is not to be tossed around lightly, superstitiously, irreverently, or frivolously. "Fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and truth" (Josh. 24:14). God's name is not to be used in a vain or empty or thoughtless fashion, "… for His name is a *glorious* and *awesome* name" (Deut. 28:58).

Then to emphasize the seriousness of His command there is a *warning* attached: "for the Lord will not leave him *unpunished,*" that is, will not consider him innocent or guiltless. There will be punishment for anyone who *misuses* the name of God. This is the only other of the Ten Commandments (besides the second commandment) that contains a threat or warning, emphasizing again that it is our immediate relationship to Almighty God which is most important. We must worship Him only. We must worship Him without images, that is, as He have ordained. We must worship Him and serve Him sincerely, and not misuse or dishonor His name.

What does it forbid?
We'll begin with the obvious. First, the commandment forbids the *profane* use of His name (Lev 20:3). His name is not to be used as a *swear word.* I am not in rage to call upon God to damn someone or something, or to shout out His name to express surprise, shock, pain, and anger. Instead, we are to love (Ps. 5:11), praise (Joel 2:26), walk in (Micah 4:5), think upon (Mal. 3:16), wait upon (Ps. 52:9), give thanks to (Ps. 54:6), fear (Mal. 4:2), call upon (Ps. 99:6), proclaim (Is. 12:4), and bless His name (Ps. 145:1,2).

Second, it forbids an *irreverent* use of His name. The Triune God is not be the subject of our attempts at humor. He is not to be referred to as "the big guy" or "the man upstairs." God is dishonored when His name is used in a flippant or *lighthearted* fashion. What will not pass muster when we stand before Him on judgment day should not be indulged any ordinary day. It is a cop out to say or think, "*I'm sure God has a sense of humor*." Who says He does? If He does what makes us think that His sense of humor matches our own? The only time He laughs in the Bible is in consideration of the destruction of His enemies (Ps. 2:4; 33:13; 59:8). This verse tells us precisely what he doesn't have a sense of humor about: the treatment of His name. It is to be *honored and revered.*

Third, it forbids an *empty* use of His name. We are not to use God's name in trivial and irreverent circumstances and occasions. His name is not to be used frivolously. His name is not become an exclamation point in our conversations, as in "oh my ____." Even devout believers use the Lord's name vainly when they mindlessly repeat at every turn, "praise the Lord." Martin Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) tells the story of preaching in some churches where nearly everything results in a chorus of "Amen." Even when the hymn number is called out the crowd responds, "Amen." It is mindless. "The Doctor's" confidence that the Spirit was at work corresponded with the moment when the "amens" ceased and the congregation grew silent. The same can be true of our use of the names of "God," "Lord," "Jesus," and "Father."

Neither should we use the Lord's name as a *punctuation mark* in prayer. It shouldn't become the syllable or word before and after "just" and "really," at the beginning and end of every sentence. This too is an

empty, meaningless, and mindless use of His name. When His name is uttered it is to be expressed in the fullness of its meaning and the fullness of our affections.

Fourth, it forbids an *insincere* use of God's name. The *formalist,* who worships with half of his heart, who repeats the Creed and Lord's Prayer with a wandering mind and a cold heart is using God's name vainly. So also do those who redefine God as the God of love and forgiveness and deny His wrath and justice and moral concerns, and yet call upon His name. They use the name to mean something other than who He has revealed Himself to be. The *hypocrite* who pretends a right and healthy relationship with God while living elsewise also violates this command. His life dishonors the name of God. By *idolatry, immorality,* and *injustice* (the trinity of wickedness), Israel is said to have *profaned* (Lev. 20:3), *cursed, blasphemed* (Lev. 24:16), *defiled* (Ez 43:8), and *dishonored* (Prov. 30:9) the name of God. Indeed, said the Apostle Paul of Israel's disobedience (quoting Is. 52:5), "The *name* of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Rom. 2:24). The tragic thing about public and notorious sin by Christians is that it brings *so much* ridicule and scorn upon the cause of Christ and so upon the name of Christ.

Fifth, it forbids a manipulative use of His name. By this we have in mind two things.

1. It forbids a magical or superstitious use of His name. The ancients believed that by pronouncing the name of a thing one could compel it to do one's bidding. To know its name, and hence its nature, is to define it and to acquire power over it. This is word magic and an attempt to manipulate God. Joy Davidman points out the parallels in medical science. To label a thing is to control it. For example, by identifying and labeling a mental condition such as schizophrenia or dementia is to gain power over it. If we can classify it, and put it into a box of cognition, it is no longer as serious a threat to us. We, like the ancients, play a kind of word magic. This may be the primary application in its original context.

We are not to think that by calling upon God's name that He is compelled to serve us. On the contrary, we must serve Him, we must do His bidding. God retains His sovereignty. He always can say no.

Is there any of this kind of manipulative superstition around? It seems to me that when we rush through to the conclusion of our prayers with a quick "In Jesus' name, amen," as though that phrase were a formula that guarantees that we will be heard rather than a way of recognizing the irreplaceable mediatorial role that Jesus plays, we are relating to God superstitiously. When we rattle off our prayer lists like shopping lists this too can approach superstition. When we become loud and demanding in prayer, like we've seen some charismatic television personalities, repeating over and over "In the name of Jesus," claiming healing, or cars and houses, this is not prayer but an attempt to manipulate the power of God. To pray in these kinds of ways and with these kinds of attitudes, we pray as Gentiles who use *meaningless* or *vain* repetitions, superstitiously thinking God will hear them for their many words (Matt. 6:7). We have wondered also what is communicated by the words of the song that says, "There's just something about that Name." What is that *something?* Is it just those syllables? Is there power in the syllables? Or is it the *person,* rather, the *Person.*

2. It forbids the *dishonest* use of God's name. We are not to add credence to our words by invoking God's name promiscuously or dishonestly. This is using God's name for the purpose of manipulating other people, for getting them to believe us when we otherwise have undermined our credibility, or persuading them to do what we want them to do. This can be as subtle as falsely enlisting God in our causes, as when we claim without scriptural warrant that "God doesn't like ____ or does want ____." It

also can be as blatant as swearing false oaths. "You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God" (Lev. 19:12).

This moves us into the who area of *oaths* which we will now treat briefly. It is sometimes said that Jesus forbade not just swearing falsely, but all oaths, all swearing.

What is an oath? There are two kinds.

i. *Affirmatory oath* – this is to call upon the name of God to bear witness to the truth of what we are affirming or denying (e.g. courts).
ii. *Promissory oath* (or *vow*) is one in which we appeal to God to witness to the sincerity and certainty of the promise which we purpose to perform.

An oath, then, is a religious act. It acknowledges existence of God, implies His attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, justice, power, and implies his government over the world, and our accountability to Him as Sovereign and Judge.

What did Jesus say?

> *33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.* (Matt. 5:33-37).

Jesus is addressing the then contemporary practice of holding that promises were not binding unless breaking them profaned the name of God directly. Consequently, if God's name was bypassed with euphemisms then one need not feel obligated to fulfill one's oath. One might swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by temple, and then feel free to break the promise. The oath-taker thereby got the benefit: a Godward reference and all the credibility and emphasis that goes with it without the obligations and sanctions involved. To all oath-abusers Jesus insists, "make no oath at all," that is, no oath which circumvents the name of God, no oath that uses swearing as a pretext for lying. Also, "make no oath at all," means dispense with oaths which are trivial in nature and without adequate or weighty reasons for employing them. Why? Because heaven is God's throne, earth is God's footstool, Jerusalem is the city of the Great King. Do not swear even in one's own head, because God controls our fate. What is meant by all this? We cannot keep God out of *any* of our transactions. He is everywhere. All promises are made in His presence. All promises involve Him whether His name is mentioned or not.

The normal practice for the disciples of Jesus is for our yes to be yes and no to be no. Normally there should be no reason to swear because we have a reputation for honesty. Our words need no extra support. What Jesus is condemning is "all irreverent, needless, disguised, and surreptitious swearing" as violations of the third commandment, says John Murray (1898-1975).[241] Jesus thereby gives the third commandment universal application. *Any* promise breaking is a violation of the third commandment, because it is made in His presence and therefore an affront to His character.

[241] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 173.

Does Jesus prohibit all oaths? No. Such an interpretation is not possible because i) it is inconsistent with the rest of Matthew 5. Jesus does not come to overthrow the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:18). He correctly interprets the law. He does not change it. Also, ii) it is inconsistent with the rest of Scripture. The Old Testament sanctions and even commands oaths by name of God (Deut. 6:13, 10:20). God Himself is represented as having sworn (Gen. 22:16; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:17,18). He Himself swears by His own name (Is. 45:23; Jer. 12:16; Heb. 6:13-16; 7:21). The Apostles regularly appeal to God as their witness to the veracity of their assertions (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5,10). Christ consented to an oath when commanded by the High Priest (Matt. 26:63,64). Therefore, not all oaths are forbidden. Rather the point is that all promises are binding (whether or not a direct appeal to God), and any oath which makes an appeal to God must be of a *significant* nature.

What does it require?

We've seen most of what the Third Commandment requires already from the negative perspective. Let's briefly review the positive.

- *Attitude*

First, the third commandment requires a serious attitude in our use of God's name. We should invoke His name carefully and reverently. We should be grieved when God's name is slandered. We should be grieved when God's name is taken in vain. We should be grieved when God's name is not honored. When we cite the name of God we are on holy ground. His name must be treated with reverence, awe, and honor, as the name at which *every* knee will bow and every tongue confess (Phil 2:10,11). A.W. Pink (1886-1952) states the case compellingly:

> Whensoever we make mention of Him before whom the seraphim veil their faces, we ought seriously and solemnly to ponder His infinite majesty and glory, and bow our hearts in deepest prostration before that Name… O my reader, form the habit of solemnly considering whose Name it is you are about to utter, that it is the Name of Him who is present with thee, hearing thee pronounce it, who is jealous of His honour, and who will dreadfully avenge Himself upon those who have slighted Him.[242]

- *Actions*

The third commandment requires that we keep our promises, even ordinary promises to do such and such, to go there, to stop that; that we honor our contracts, that we do what we said we'd do; that we work with efficiency and consciousness; and that we keep our covenants: our *marriage* covenant (for *better* or *worse*); our *baptismal* covenant (to raise our children in the Lord); and our *covenant* of loyalty at the Lord's table. Of all people Christians should be known for our honesty and integrity, as people of our word.

- *Intentions*

The third commandment requires that our aim in invoking the name of God be that we glorify God, and that we edify others.

Fourth Commandment

> *8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your*
> *work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any*
> *work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or*

[242] A.W. Pink, *The Ten Commandments* (United States: Baker Book House, 1975), 25.

> *your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.* [11] *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.* (Ex. 20:8-11; cf. Deut. 5:12-15)

The children of Israel are about to be constituted as a separate people in a separate place. What will be the principles by which their life together will be governed? What way of life will ensure the blessing of God and human flourishing (those two always go together)? The Ten Commandments are those principles. As we have seen, the First Commandment established that there is but one God to be acknowledged and worshipped. This means that there is but one unrivaled authority, law, and truth. The nature of the one true and living God is the foundation of all righteous law. Then what we may call a series of "sanctities" are established. The first table of the law affirms:

- Second Commandment – the sanctity of God's worship
- Third Commandment – the sanctity of God's name
- Fourth Commandment – the sanctity of God's day

Upon this foundation the commandments then transition to the second table of the law, dealing with love for neighbor.

- Fifth Commandment – sanctity of family
- Sixth Commandment – sanctity of life
- Seventh Commandment – sanctity of marriage
- Eighth Commandment – sanctity of private property
- Ninth Commandment – sanctity of truth

The Tenth Commandment then internalizes the whole:

- Tenth Commandment – the importance of the heart, the motive that underlies obedience, the spirit in which one conforms to the commands of God

These ten "words" provide the foundation for a godly and healthy community. Where these are honored and observed, God is pleased and the people will flourish.

Among the Ten, the Fourth Commandment is perhaps the most widely ignored and pervasively misunderstood by today's Christians. This is tragic in the first instance because of what is implied by the Fourth Commandment. The requirement that we set aside our secular activities (both work and play) and hallow the Lord's Day by devoting it to the things of God assumes that this is what we need if our souls are to flourish. While the Fourth Commandment doesn't discount the value of personal daily devotions consisting of prayer, praise, and Scripture reading, or of daily family devotions consisting of the same, it does imply that a full day devoted to the public and private worship of God is necessary if we are to thrive spiritually. The Christian Sabbath is virtually a means of grace, a divine provision for the nourishment of our souls.

It is tragic in the second instance that the Fourth Commandment is widely misunderstood and ignored because doing so would seem disturbingly arbitrary. Which of the other nine commandments can we safely ignore? Which of the other nine commandments may we knowingly disobey? May we disregard the First? Second? Third? How about the Fifth? Sixth? Seventh? These questions are of course

rhetorical. Since we are not free to ignore Commandments 1-3 or 5-10, what makes us think that we can reach down into the heart of the Ten and pluck out the Fourth and consign it to the trash bin? Does it not seem arbitrary and self-serving to disregard a commandment simply because it has become inconvenient and culturally limiting to do so? What has the neutering of this commandment cost us? What have we lost in the process? Restoring the Christian Sabbath may be one of the great spiritual needs of our day.

What is says

We are commanded to "remember" the Sabbath, meaning not to recall, as though one had forgotten it, but to commemorate, as to observe and keep it. The word "sabbath" comes from a Hebrew root (*sabbot*) meaning to cease, to desist, or to rest. "To keep it holy" means to keep it set apart, separate from other days, set apart for sacred use. All at once the command requires both that there be a cessation from ordinary labor, and that there be positive religious practices.

First, there is a *religious requirement.* This was the day of "solemn rest, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3). On the Sabbath the number of daily sacrifices doubled (Num. 28:9, 10). It was the day upon which both the Passover and the Day of Atonement fell (Lev. 23:4-8; 26-36).

Second, there is a *rest* requirement. "Six days you shall *labor*," that is, conduct your ordinary business, conclude your secular activity. "And do all your *work*," this second term being the more comprehensive of the two, and according to Keil and Delitzsch may be "applied to the performance of any task."[243] There are a number of Old Testament examples of the kinds of activities that were to cease: collecting manna (Ex. 16:26), kindling fires (Ex. 35:1), plowing and reaping (Ex. 34:21), gathering sticks (Num. 15:32), buying and selling (even from foreigners who lived across the border – Neh. 10:31), wine pressing and transporting goods (Neh. 13:15), carrying heavy loads (Jer. 17:19), indeed, all commercial work was to cease (Am. 8:5).

Those included in the observance of these prohibitions are "your son… your daughter." These restrictions are to be enforced by heads of households in their own families. Also included are "your male servant, or your female servant," indicating those who work for you or that you might hire to serve you in some capacity; "your livestock" are even to rest; "the sojourner," the foreign laborer that is living and working "within your gates," within villages, towns, and cities, are also not to work. This is meant to be "a sabbath of *complete* rest" throughout the entire community, the entire society, even the entire civilization (Ex. 35:1). Even the land was to be rested every seventh year (Lev. 25:1-8).

Third, there are *reasons* given for these requirements. This command (along with the Second Commandment) does more than declare the prohibition, but gives reasons for it. We may identify four.

1. The divine *possession* of the day (which is to be honored). "The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God," or "*of* the Lord your God" (NASB) in the possessive sense. It is "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). God declares it is "*My* Sabbath." In one sense every day is His, yet He makes a special claim upon this day. Emphatically He makes clear the contrast in between doing "*your* pleasures" and going "*your* own ways" and enjoying "*your* own pleasures" on "*my* holy day" (Is. 58:13). God and the things of God are to be our heart's focus, not our own interests, occupations, and pleasures.

2. The divine *pattern* of behavior (which is to be imitated). "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth… and rested on the seventh day." The "for" is important. It is providing the reason why we are

[243] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volumes I-X. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), I:119.

to rest on the Sabbath. Why? Because God did. We are to be imitators of God. Verse 11 cites Genesis 2:2, 3:

> *[2] And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. [3] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.* (Gen. 2:2, 3)

The rest that God enjoyed upon cessation of His creative acts was not the rest of inactivity, but a rest of joy, satisfaction, and delight in His completed work. As Jesus said,

> *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."* (John 5:17)

On the Sabbath God took up new work, the work of governing all that He had created. His rest was what the *Westminster Confession of Faith* calls "holy rest," time set apart for sacred tasks (*WCF* XXI.8). So it was that God "blessed" the Sabbath, even as He "blessed" the man and the woman (Gen. 1:28; 5:2; cf. 9:1).
From the beginning, before the fall and even before Moses and the law, God claimed a day for Himself which is designed to be beneficial to humanity. The human race is meant to share in God's rest. God is the Lord of His Sabbath, declaring its purpose and use. Yet it is for humanity to join in, to share in its benefits. As God "rested and was refreshed," so His people are to rest and be refreshed (Ex. 31:17).

3. The divine *provision* of redemptive rest (which is to be remembered and enjoyed). The second giving of the law (*Deutero* – second; *nomos* – law) provides a different reason, a different purpose for our observance of the Sabbath:

> *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.* (Deut. 5:15)

Rather than repeating the divine *pattern* of action that is to be imitated, Deuteronomy places emphasis upon God's redemptive work which is to be recalled. "You shall remember that you were a slave," you were in bondage, you had not rest. Yet God rescued you, He "brought you out from there" to a land of rest. "Therefore," for this reason, for this purpose, "the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." The Sabbath is a token of their new rest, even a sign of the covenant, as it is called in Exodus 31:16, 17. Moses promised the people of God *rest* in the promised land (Deut. 3:20; 12:10). Joshua urged the armies of Israel forward citing God's promise of *rest* (Joshua 1:13-15). Upon completion of the conquest of Canaan he declared to the eastern tribes "now the Lord your God has given *rest* to your brothers" (Josh. 22:4).

This recollection of redemption imposes active obligations. The day is to be set apart and sanctified for the purpose of recalling God's works of creation, providence, and redemption. As the day was set apart, so also Israel was to be set apart and sanctified. God calls it "a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you" (Ex. 31:13). Ezekiel repeats this principle:

> *Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.* (Ez. 20:12)

It is to be a holy day, a day of "solemn rest, holy to the Lord," in which God is praised for His work of redemption (Ex. 31:13-16).

4. The divine *promise* of the ultimate, consummatory rest (which is to be anticipated and enjoyed). Canaan was not the ultimate rest. There was still a greater rest to be anticipated, of which the weekly Sabbath was a foretaste and reminder. We see this in Psalm 95:

> *10 For forty years I loathed that generation*
> *and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,*
> *and they have not known my ways."*
> *11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,*
> *"They shall not enter my rest."* (Psalm 95:10, 11)

David speaks here of the wilderness generation, "that generation," which did not enter into what we may call typological rest of the land of Canaan. Yet in verses 7b-8 he speaks of "today" and of the hearing of the voice of God in the worship to which they were called in verse 1-7a.

> *Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness* (Psalm 95:7b-8).

David's generation had already been in the land for multiple generations. Therefore the "rest" of which he speaks in verse 11 must be another future and greater rest which they might miss if they fail to listen to the voice of God which they hear each Sabbath *when they gather for worship and Scripture is read*. The present Sabbath rest is a foretaste of a future rest, a time in which God's people hear God's voice in the reading of Scripture and about which they are warned not to harden their hearts.

We may summarize: as *creation* has a sabbath structure of work and rest, built, as it were, in the very "fabric of the universe,"[244] so also *history* has a Sabbath structure, a goal, a Sabbath rest towards which history is moving.

Transition to New Testament

As we cross over into the New Testament we will wish to distinguish in the Fourth Commandment that which is particular to Israel and that which is universal and meant for the people of God in all ages. We may turn to Ephesians 6:2-3 as our guide:

> *2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."* (Eph. 6:2-3)

We should not fail to recognize that the Apostle Paul takes the authority of the Fifth Commandment for granted. He quotes it without comment, assuming that it would be understood as normative for the disciples of Christ. He then places the other commandments on the same authoritative plane with it, distinguishing the Fifth Commandment from the rest only as "the first commandment with a promise." The early Christians understood the moral authority of the Ten Commandments.

[244] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary,* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 416.

Yet he does subtly set aside in the elements of the commandment that which are peculiar to Israel and universalizes what replaces it. Rather than repeating the wording found in Exodus 20:12, "that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you," it reads, "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Eph. 6:3), dropping the explicit reference to Canaan. Indeed, the actual word for "land" is *gē*, the earth, as it is translated in the KJV, NASB, and NIV. While the commandment and all the Ten Commandments once had in view life in Canaan, now their application is extended to the whole earth. Keeping this in mind we may now begin to ask ourselves a series of questions.

1. Does God still claim *possession* of one day in seven? Yes, He does. Jesus declares, "the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath" (Matt. 2:28). Unless one is willing to say that He emphatically and confrontationally is asserting His lordship over an institution that no longer exists, it should be obvious that He is declaring that the Sabbath is His day and no one else's. There is a Sabbath, and He is its Lord. He determines its normativity. He determines what constitutes proper and improper, allowed and disallowed activities on His day. Further, the Apostle John says, "I was in the Spirit *on the Lord's day*" (Rev. 1:10). There are seven days in a week. Yet one of those seven is set apart and identified particularly as *the Lord's day*, as peculiarly His.

2. Is there still need to imitate the divine *pattern* of behavior? As we have seen the Sabbath is established in Genesis 2:2, 3. It is a creation ordinance, its roots are pre-Mosaic, and therefore universal, in application. Jesus declared that the Sabbath was "for man" for *anthropos,* for all humanity, not merely for Israel. It was instituted by God at creation, prior to the ceremonial law, prior to the fall, in paradise, and "undoubtedly rooted in nature; in our human nature, and in the nature of the created universe," says the great Old Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield (1851-1921).[245] God created for six days and rested on the seventh. Why did God rest? He rested, not because He was tired or needed rest, but in order to provide a pattern for humanity. The proportion of one day of rest out of seven is ongoing, is universal.

3. Is there still a divine *provision* of redemptive rest to commemorate? Yes, there is. Our rest is in Christ who is our peace. He has delivered us from bondage from sin through His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14). Therefore, the early Christians changed the day of rest to resurrection day, the first day of the week, not by explicit command but by example. Because of the resurrection, post-resurrection appearances on the first day of the week (John 20:1, 19, 26), and the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (also the first day of the week – Acts 2), Sunday became the *Christian* Sabbath, the day on which the early church met (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:1, 2; Acts 20:7). The Apostle Paul directed that the collections were to be made on the "first day of the week" (1 Cor. 16:1, 2). He designated the first day, an instruction that J. C. Ryle finds "wholly inexplicable" if, as some maintain, "the Apostles kept no one day more holy than another."[246] Why not just "when you meet?" Why not the second, or third, or fourth day of the week? That is what we might have expected if the day of worship were a matter of indifference. Instead the Apostle specifies the first day because it had been established as the day of Christian worship from the very beginning, a practice confirmed by the unanimous testimony of the church fathers.

4. Is there still a divine *promise* of consummatory rest for which we are to anticipate and enjoy? Is there a greater rest to which our Sabbath rest is to serve as a foretaste? Yes, there is. We find this

[245] B. B. Warfield, "The Foundations of the Sabbath in the Word of God," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield,* Volumes 1 & 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970)*,* 1:309.
[246] J. C. Ryle, "The Christian Sabbath," in *Knots Untied: being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion from an Evangelical Standpoint* (London: James Clarke & Company, 1954)*,* 210.

described in Hebrews 4:1-11. Citing the verses from Psalm 95 which we have just cited above (esp. 95:7 and 11), the writer then says,

> *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.* (Heb. 4:8)

Joshua did not give them *rest*, the writer insists, because Canaan was not the ultimate rest which God's redemptive acts promised. It merely pointed to that rest. The writer explains the implication of this:

> *9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.* (Heb. 4:9, 10)

There was a future, greater rest for them and for us of which we only partially partake in our earthly Sabbath rest. The writer then exhorts us:

> *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.* (Heb. 4:11)

Our weekly Sabbath is a reminder and foretaste of our future rest in eternity toward which we are to "strive to enter" so that we may not "fall" or "fail to enter." Those who "die in the Lord" are "blessed" because then at last "they may rest from their labors" (Rev. 14:13). Our Sundays, says A. W. Pink, are "a foretaste of that future and better life for which the present is but a probation."[247] The four answers we have given to the questions above indicate continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament in connection with the abiding relevance of the Fourth Commandment.

> It is simply unimaginable that he could have allowed that any precept of this fundamental proclamation of essential morality could pass into desuetude.[248]

How it is to be observed

We may now give our attention to how the Sabbath is to be observed, what it requires and what it forbids.

Religious component

1. We begin by acknowledging *Christ's Lordship* over the day. The Lord's Day is not my day or family day or relaxation day or golf day but the Lord's Day. Christ is the Lord of it, determining first to last, from start to finish all of that which its proper observance will consist. There is a subtlety to the Lord's Day that we must recognize. Think of Eric Liddell as he was portrayed in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Do we think of him as legalist or as one for whom Jesus is Lord, and consequently not the British Olympic Committee or the Prince of Wales or anyone else would be allowed to undermine his loyalty to his Lord. Because Christ was Lord of *all* of Liddell's life, He was Lord over his *Sabbath*.

2. Attendance at *public worship.* The Sabbath is the day for the public assembly, for the morning and evening sacrifices, as we have seen (Lev. 23:3; Num. 28:9, 10). In the New Testament era these become the morning and evening sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:15, 16; 1 Pet. 2:5). As the early church

[247] Arthur W. Pink, *Ten Commandments* (United States: Baker Books, 1995), 29.

[248] B. B. Warfield, "The Foundations of the Sabbath in the Word of God," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield,* Volume 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1970), 1:321; see also James Durham, *The Ten Commandments* (1675; Dallas: Naphtali Press and Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 162-3, 187.

met on the first day of the week, so we also do the same for congregational worship (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7).

3. *Private devotions.* This would include both personal devotional exercise as well as family devotions. Time outside of public worship should be focused on the things of God. Every sincere Christian wishes that he or she had more time to pray, read Scripture, and read Christian literature. The Lord's Day is the God-given time for these things, alone, and with our families. Beyond this, the day must be kept holy. This means that I should not allow myself to get caught up in *any* worldly or secular concerns that distract me from the things of God. I should never allow myself to miss Sunday worship because of worldly activity. It is wise to cancel the Sunday paper, to turn off the television, to minimize the use of the smart phone (avoiding everything except interpersonal communication). Why? Because all such distractions undermine the rest and refreshment of the soul that the Lord's Day is meant to promote. Because the Sabbath is "for man" does not make it a free-for-all, each one doing what is right in his or her own eyes. We are free to "do good" and "save life" (Mark 3:4), yet it is still uniquely His day and He its Lord.

Rest component
We also observe the Sabbath by resting from our week-day, regular, secular labor. This means two things.

1. *Not working* – The day is a blessed break from the stress of everyday work. It is a time of refreshment, revitalization, and restoration. It is a vacation day built into every week. Don't let *vacation* day become *vocation* day. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." Don't let it become a day for housework or yard work. Six days are given to get all of that done.

2. *Not causing others to work* – The inclusion of servants and livestock in the Fourth Commandment most naturally transfers into the New Testament era into the principle of avoiding employing others. I am not to hire others to prepare my food, deliver my newspaper, sell me groceries, or provide entertainment. All commercial activity should cease. Some of us may be undermining our own cause by contributing to making it profitable for business enterprises to remain open. This can have a snowball effect in the economy, more and more business along the supply chain remaining open, and the result: more and more believers being forced to work on Sundays making it increasingly difficult for the church to gather its members for worship.

3. Engaging only in *approved works* – What work is permitted on the Lord's Day? To answer this we must turn to Mark 2:23-26.

> *[23] One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. [24] And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" [25] And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: [26] how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"* (Mark 2:23-26)

The disciples are walking through grain fields. They are hungry. The law permits them to pluck grain by hand from one's neighbor's fields (Deut. 23:25). However, it does not allow one to reap on the Sabbath

(Ex. 34:21). That would be work. Is plucking by hand for personal needs the same as reaping? Is it work and a violation of the Fourth Commandment?

Jesus answers by citing the example of David in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. Twelve fresh loaves of bread were placed on a table before the Holy of Holies each day. Only the priests were allowed to eat them after they were removed (Lev. 24:5-9). However, Jesus declares that this restriction only applied under normal circumstances. David and his men ate the bread when they were hungry and there was no other bread available to them, and they were "guiltless" or "innocent" (Matt. 12:5, NASB). Why? Because basic human need takes precedence over ceremonial design. In Matthew's account, Jesus cites Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 12:7). "Sacrifice" is ceremonial, "mercy" is moral.

What was designed for the well-being of the body must not be interpreted as forbidding, as Henry says, "in a case of necessity, from fetching in the necessary *supports* of the body."[249] It is *for* man. Don't construe it in such a way as *harms* man. Similarly, we not only *may*, but *must*, forfeit our blessing of rest when a human need is involved. It is "lawful," says Jesus to "do good" and "save life" (Mark 3:4). "Whatsoever in short, is necessary to preserve and maintain life in or to do good to the souls of men, may be done on the Sabbath Day without sin," says Ryle.[250] Traditionally this principle has led to the identification of works of necessity, mercy, and piety.[251]

Works of necessity

Soldiers may work (fight) on Sunday. The refusal of an army to fight would subject a civilian population to enormous suffering and death. Similarly, the police may work. To allow Sunday to be a day of unrestrained criminal activity would not be "good for man." Pilots may guide their ships. Firefighters may work. Power company employees may work and spare the populace needless suffering.[252] So may those who make provision for the needs of travelers. Guests in our community need not sleep in their cars or on the streets. We may prepare and serve meals. One need not to be subjected to hunger pains because it is Sunday. Cows may even be milked, livestock may be fed, diapers may be changed. There are a number of these sorts of works which are necessary for the orderly living of life, and cannot be avoided and should not be avoided. One may make the bed, wash and groom oneself, hang up one's clothing, turn off the lights, drive the car, defend oneself and one's family from harm, and discipline the children.[253] Necessity, then, does not mean absolute necessity. One could abstain from eating and not suffer harm from 24 hours of fasting. Rather, necessity includes that which is necessary for the ordinary well-being and comfort of life.

Works of mercy

> *Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. [2] And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. [3] And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said*

[249] Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* Vol. V – Matthew to John. London: James Nisbet & Co., on Mark 2:27.
[250] Ryle, "Christian Sabbath," *Knots Untied,* 215.
[251] The Westminster catechisms speak of two types of permitted works, those of necessity and mercy, to which the Westminster Seminary professor John Murray (1898-1975) added a third, for the purposes of clarification, that of piety (see Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day* [Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1997], 78); John Murray, "The Sabbath Institution," in *Collected Writings of John Murray,* Volume I. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976., I:213; the three-fold distinction was found previously in Durham, *Ten Commandments,* 214ff.
[252] Shepard even includes "keep(ing) fire in the iron mills" (*Theses Sabatacae,* III:257).
[253] Durham refers to these as "works of comeliness" including "putting on of clothes, making the house clean from any uncleanliness, etc." (*Ten Commandments,* 210); also Shepard, *Theses Sabbaticae,* III:259. Similarly, Boston labels these "works of decency" (*Shorter Catechism,* 2:195).

> *to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"* (Mark 3:1-4)

Jesus heals on the Sabbath because it is lawful to do good and save life. The Pharisees would allow medical care only if the life was truly endangered. They would not, for example, allow a fracture or sprain to be treated. If a finger was cut, it could be bandaged, but no ointment could be applied. One was only to do as much "work" as was necessary to keep an injury from getting worse, and no more. The legislation was quite explicit.

> *And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.* (Mark 3:5)

Jesus is angered and "grieved," the latter word indicating deep internal grief and anguish, because of the complete insensitivity and hard-heartedness of the Pharisees. "They watched Jesus, to see… so that they might accuse him" (Mark 2:27). They deliberately set out to trap Him when the issue is not some great theological or moral issue, but whether or not He will help a handicapped man. In Matthew's parallel, Jesus exposes their inconsistency, even their cruelty by asking if they wouldn't do as much for a sheep if it fell in a pit (they would and did), and yet they objected to relieving human suffering (Matt. 12:11, 12).

Sabbath rest is the means to the greater end of human benefit, both physical and especially spiritual. This benefit normally would include physical rest, but not at the expense of medical needs left unattended and suffering unrelieved. Disaster would ensue if doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and all other medical personnel insisted on Sunday rest. Sunday would become a curse rather than a blessing for many. It is lawful for all medical personnel to do good and relieve human suffering. Medical needs take precedence over our rest.

We should include in the "mercy" category those who respond to emergency needs, whether professionals or not. I need not ever worry about whether or not to help a stranded motorist on Sunday. Such help would be a work of mercy. Whenever we confront hurting, suffering, needful people, we are obliged to help, whether it is the Christian Sabbath or not.

Our duties in this regard are not just passive (i.e., if an injured pedestrian should cross our path), but active. Sunday is a day for seeking out works of mercy, of visiting shut-ins, nursing homes, and hospitals. It is a day for helping the poor, working in soup kitchens, and crisis pregnancy centers. It is lawful to do good!

Works of piety

In Matthew's parallel Jesus elaborates what we might have guessed was the case. The priests in the temple "profane the Sabbath and are guiltless" (Matt. 12:5-7). *Profane* should be understood as within quotation marks, meaning "profane" as some might understand it. Yet in truth the priests are not profaning it at all, but are *guiltless*. They are *working,* but it is necessary work in relation to the tasks of the temple. Ministers, Sunday School teachers, elders, deacons, musicians, singers, and all those connected with the services of the church such as nursery workers and kitchen and custodial help, are permitted to work.

These three categories of work illustrate our point made earlier that the "rest" of the Sabbath is not "inactivity." Rather, it requires the cessation of our daily secular labor so that we may take up religious work. We are to take up that which is for the good and benefit of ourselves and others. This includes

rest and relaxation. Yet it also means ministry: worship, Bible study, visiting the sick, helping the needy, doing whatever the Lord gives us to do that will promote the physical and spiritual well-being of ourselves and others.

4. Delighting in the *works of God* - A helpful question to ask of our Sunday activities is this: do they enhance my appreciation of God and His work? Certainly attending the morning and evening services do. So also does participating in Sunday School. Likewise does reading Christian books, reading the Bible, and listening to Christian sermons and lectures. As families we can enjoy times of singing and prayer and fellowship.

Certain leisure activities, what Ryle calls "lawful relaxation" for the body, also can promote an appreciation of God and His creation.[254] Strolls in the park and along the seashore, outdoor picnics, and other similar activities can promote love and appreciation for God and His works. "I am no admirer of gloomy religion," Ryle insists. Sunday, he maintains, should be "the brightest, cheerfulest day of all the season."[255] There is considerable room for freedom here, but within these parameters.

In sum, our rest is to be a holy rest. Our worship is to be a holy worship. Our leisure is to be a holy leisure. All Sunday activity is to promote my love and appreciation for God and His works because it is His day, and He commands that we keep it holy.

Fifth Commandment

> *"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.* (Ex. 20:12)

As it stands, this fifth commandment is a bridge command, standing between the commands to love God (1-4) and the commands to love neighbor (6-10). It seems to be primarily concerned with one's fellow man, that is one's parents. Yet it's God-ward reference can be seen in the repetition of the phrase, "the Lord Your God" found in each of the first four and none of the last five commandments. Furthermore, the word "honor" is used with reference to God (Isa. 24:15; 22:23; Prov. 3:8). Elsewhere we are commanded to *fear* or *reverence* our parents (Lev. 19:3), also used of God (Deut. 6:13), and according to Childs, it means also to "show respect," to "glory and exalt," and "is otherwise reserved for God."[256] To "curse" one's parents was to result in judicial death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), same word again used of God (Lev. 24:15) with same penalty. What might be the implications? Parents stand in the place of God in relation to children. They represent God to their children. They are the source for them of provision, law, care, love, and instruction, therefore they are to be *honored* and *feared* as He is, and to *curse parents* is akin to *blaspheming* God. We may therefore observe:

- 1 = the *person* to be worshipped
- 2 = the *way* He is to be worshipped (no images)
- 3 = the *attitude* with which He is to be worshipped (no vain use)
- 4 = *time* at which He is to be worshipped (Sabbath)

[254] Ryle, "Christian Sabbath," *Knots Untied,* 215.
[255] Ryle, "Christian Sabbath," *Knots Untied,* 216.
[256] Childs, *Exodus,* 419.

- ❖ 5 = transitional
  - honoring the One who is worshipped through His representatives on earth
  - loving my neighbor, here my parents, in the way which God says is called for'

The command is to honor *your* father and mother. We are not particularly obligated to honor every father and mother. However, we do have obligations towards *our own* parents. We are being assigned unique duties within *our own* families. This is our first obligation towards our "neighbors." Commands 1-4 had to do with love for God. Commands 5-10 have to do with love for neighbor. What is my first commitment, my first duty toward the rest of humanity? It is within *my own* family. It is to honor my family, beginning with the father and mother who are the heads of the family, the origin and source of each family, and behind them, my grandparents and with them, all of my forefathers and foremothers.

What does it say?
To "honor" (*kāvéd,* Greek *timaō*) must be interpreted more broadly than merely "to obey." Though that certainly is included. It means also "prize highly" (Prov. 4:8). It is used of a proper response to God in worship (Ps. 86:9). Leviticus tells us to rise up before the gray-headed and honor them (Lev. 19:32).

Then follows the double promise: "that your days may be long." If applied *nationally,* it promises the secure possession of the land of Canaan over a long period of time. The implication is that well-ordered families are the key to a strong, healthy well-ordered society. If applied individually, it promises a long life. Obedience to God is a key to longevity." Obey "so that you may enjoy long life" (Deut. 6:2; cf 1 Kings 3:14, Ps. 91:6). The faithful one promised, "With long life I will satisfy him" (Ps. 91:6). The blessed one lives to see one's children's children (Ps. 128:6). Deuteronomy adds to the phrase "that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you," a promise of prosperity (Deut. 5:16). Your crops will grow, your herd will multiply, your family will be healthy; you will experience the rich and full blessings of God. Where will their blessing be experienced? "In the land," the land of Canaan, "which the Lord your God gives you."

Does this promise have application outside of the Promised Land? The Apostle Paul universalizes the promise:

> *"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."* (Eph. 6:2, 3).

Even in the New Testament, there is this connection between righteousness and prosperity. Once again God helps to motivate us by using *carrot sticks*: the promise of long life and prosperity, which results in a society which will honor us when we grow old, honor and not cast us off. Gray hair, the Bible teaches, is "a crown of glory," found in the way of righteousness (Prov. 31:16).

What it requires
First, the Fifth Commandment requires that parents are to be *reverenced*. They are to be treated with respect, symbolized in the Bible by rising in their presence (Lev. 19:72). When Joseph's shepherd father Jacob came into his presence, he was not embarrassed at his old humble father (though "every shepherd is loathsome to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34), but "bowed with his face to the ground" (Gen. 48:12). When Solomon's mother came to speak to him when he was on his throne, he rose and "bowed before her" (1 Kings 2:19). We are to honor their "office" (as parents) and their achievements.

Second, we are to *value* them We are to value their wisdom, listen to their advice, and appreciate their contribution. "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). Christians should be the last to think that the elderly have little to contribute. The righteous will 'yield fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:14). We are promised of the messianic kingdom, "*old men* (will) dream dreams" (Joel 12:28; Acts 2:17; cf. Zech. 8:4). Are some elderly parents infirm and immobile? The Christian principle is, "the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary" and are to be treated with "*greater honor*" (1 Cor. 12:23). We *need* each other. We should not segregate young from old.

Third, we are to *obey* them. This has special reference to children at home (Deut. 21:18). This is what the Apostle Paul understands the command to require:

> *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),* (Eph. 6:1, 2)
>
> *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* (Col. 3:20)

Matthew Henry then elaborates:

> Come when they call you, go where they send you, do what they bid you, refrain from what they forbid you.[257]

They are to be obeyed "in the Lord," as in religions duty. The Apostle warns that in the last days "men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boatful, arrogant, revilers and *disobedient to parents* (2 Tim. 3:2; cf. Rom. 1:30).

Fourth, we owe them *gratitude* for all they've done for us. Our parents changed our diapers, fed, comforted, and held us. They stayed up with us when we were afraid or sick, applying damp cloths to our feverish foreheads. They taught us to walk, to ride our bikes, to use utensils, and to tie our shoes. They fielded our questions, even the relentless curiosities of the "why" child. They put up with our mischief, with our teens, with our "weird" stage, when we were ashamed of our parents, when we didn't want to be seen with them and broke their hearts. What about bad parents? There are bad parents, aren't there? Yes, but even then we should search for something for which we may be grateful, that "in everything" we may "give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).

Fifth, we are to *support* them. The psalmist pleads, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails" (Ps. 71:9). We are to honor our aging parents with our wealth and personal sacrifices. It may be expensive to do so. It may be a nuisance, or interfere with our plans, or exhausting. Yet this is what it means to honor our parents. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees before they refused financially to support their parents under the guise of devotion to God.

> *3 "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.* (Mt. 15:3-6; cf. Mk. 7:9-10)

[257] Henry, I:__

Among the duties Jesus requires of the Rich Young Ruler is that he honor his parents. (Matt. 19:19; Mark 10:14; Luke. 18:26), which is exactly what Jesus Himself did:

> *26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.* (John 19:26, 27)

As eldest son, He ensured proper care of His widowed mother. What he had been responsible up to this point in His life He transferred to "the disciple whom he loved," to the Apostle John. The Apostle Paul adds this admonition:

> *4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God… 8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* (1 Tim. 5:4, 8)

This is strong language, the apostle insisting that it is the responsibility of children and grandchildren to care for elderly parents and grandparents, to "make some return," that is to pay back their parents for the sacrifices that they made on behalf of their children.
May aging parents be institutionalized? This is not easy to answer. There are many variables. Yet it should be kept in mind that "senility" is often a form of depression caused by or aggravated by institutionalization. Let me cite one study:

> Institutionalization can be very destructive for many of the elderly: the very process of becoming institutionalized, living in such a total environment, can be rather dehumanizing under the best of circumstance… The care given in most nursing homes and homes for the aged is limited primarily to nursing and custodial care with no restorative or rehabilitative service. As a result, the great majority of the people in these homes deteriorate physically and mentally to the point of total disability. At one time most people assumed that the chief mental disorders in old age resulted purely from the inevitable breakdown of the person as an organism. Today, in contrast, the growing belief is that the kind of social relations experienced by the aged, such as isolation, and loss of status, help greatly to produce the disorders... No longer are we under the mistaken notion that senility is something that "just happens" to older people. Much of it is caused by the emotional repercussions of an empty and forsaken existence. At this stage of life people simply cannot take the despair in being set aside… the forsakenness that these people experience from others can be projected also to God. In fact, they may also feel forsaken by the church, which makes the projection to God that much more logical.[258]

Sixth, we are to *protect* them. We must guard them physically, emotionally, spiritually, and especially care for their *reputations.* We must not indulge criticism or ridicule of our parents, but speak highly of them whenever possible (Eph. 4:29).

Cultural hindrances
As we have seen with the other commandments, there is much in our culture today that would keep us from keeping this commandment.

[258] From a D. Min. thesis by the Rev. Michael Preg.

Denigration of parenthood

First hindrance is the common denigration of parenthood. We do have two days a year which we set aside to honor our fathers and mothers, yet this largely is a creation of greeting card companies. Parenthood, especially motherhood, gets much bad press these days and that is not just by the feminists, but nearly everyone. Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) suggested that we could judge the moral character of a culture by how it treats its very young and very old The two are connected, perhaps two sides of the same coin. How we view the *young* is shaped by the value we place on the task of parenting and vice versa. Are children confining? restrictive? a burden? Do they limit my opportunities and options? Do they keep me from realizing my full potential and becoming a whole person? Do they prevent me from experiencing personal fulfillment, pursuing my dreams, finding the exciting and fulfilling work that society values, and so on? If this is my view of the task of child-rearing, then I may be willing to do all I can to prevent conception, abort the child when once conceived, or when born, ship them off to day care or school as soon as possible.

What about our parents and grandparents? If I view child-rearing as drudgery, if "that's all they (my parents) did" was rear children, how much will I respect them? How much will I value their life's work? How likely am I to honor them? On the one end of the spectrum, a tragic percentage of children experience some form of child abuse each year. At either end there is both increased demands for euthanasia and popularity of retirement homes which are occupied by many who don't need to be there. What are some of the factors that have gotten us to this point?

- *Rising technology*

Technological progress has rendered the skills and crafts once passed from father to son obsolete. One generation made wooden wheels for buggies, the next drove cars. Whole generations of skills and ways of doing things have gone with the wind. Naturally enough, each new generation has tended to look down on the previous as backward, ignorant, quaint. With upward technology goes downward respect for the past, for tradition, for age.

- *Cult of youth*

Our now-oriented, future-oriented generation which has burned the bridges connecting it with the past and tradition. Youth is where fashion, advertising, and sports are focused. We aspire to look young and complement each other when we do. Not infrequently it is painful to see middle-aged persons attempting to hang on to their youth by dressing, talking, and acting like teenagers. "Woe the land whose king is a child," the Bible warns (Eccl. 10:11). Our kings today are the young. This is in sharp contrast to biblical culture where youth is a symbol of foolishness and age is a symbol of wisdom, where gray hair is honored and revered.

- *Culture of self*

Similarly, we have spawned a culture of self. Individualism, a good thing, in excess becomes a very bad thing. What has been called the "autonomous self,"[259] the individual disconnected from all external factors, from all relationships, even from one's own body, has become an ideal of the modern world. We want the freedom to pursue that which will satisfy us *now,* without constraints, without consideration of anyone or anything else. What inhibits this freedom: the expectations of society, parents, marriage, children, and others. What can we do about these inhibitors of our freedom? Reject them. Instead of marriage, we can co-habit. Instead of staying married, we can divorce. To avoid children, we can use contraceptives or abort. Instead of caring for the elderly, we can euthanize them or export them to

[259] See Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2020).

nursing homes. The marriage rate in the United States is at an all-time low. The divorce rate has risen from 1 in 37 in 1870, to 1 in 7 in 1924, to 1 in 2.7 in 2020.[260] As for children, birth rates have plunged from 7.04 in 1800, to 4.55 in 1900, to 3.70 in 1957, to 1.8 in 1980, to 1.6 in 2020, well below replacement rate.

Abortion was illegal in the United States until January 1973. That first year of legal abortion saw 745,000 children aborted. The number peaked at 1.5 million a year in the 1980's and thankfully has dropped to about 850,000 a year in recent years. Still, nearly 60 million abortions have been performed since 1973.

- *Usurpation of parenting*

Recent decades have seen the place which was once the exclusive domain of parents usurped.

- *State* – the state has usurped the role of the family in education and especially as the source of provision. The young can exist without the family (so it would seem) with the result of declining esteem for parents and family.

- *Peer groups and pop culture* – The young increasingly learn their values and goals and find their role models in the culture. Popular culture exerts enormously powerful and corrupting influence on our youth. Often the culture drives a wedge between its values and parental values. Our young people are bombarded by television, social media, and advertisers with a message that is highly sexualized, materialistic, and utterly godless. Hours and hours are spent gazing at images flashing before them, pounding down their resistance to the world's message. The result is our young people grow in a culture very different from the one that parent recognize. Parents, in turn, are seen as out-of-touch backward, behind-the-times, and therefore ignored.

- *Blameshifting*

  At the same time, parents are being blamed for nearly everything. Years ago the psychologist Paul Vitz wrote,

  > Many young people today have committed more psychological atrocities against their loving but bewildered parents than vice-versa. Indeed, among upper middle-class families it is time to recognize the psychologically "battered parent" as a familiar syndrome.[261]

  Nearly all the pathologies in society are *explained* or *excused* in terms of a *domineering* mother and an abusive or absentee father. Why is so and so a murderer? Why did he commit that rape? Why did he rob that store? He had an overbearing mother who suppressed his *personality* and squashed his *individuality* and didn't allow him to express himself and made him feel dependent and isolated and frustrated until finally he exploded. Or perhaps it was his absentee father. He was the problem. He was never there. He starved his children emotionally. It has become all too typical for parents to be assigned the blame for whatever problem society may be experiencing. They are at fault for why I am the way I am. Scripture says something different than this – it says to *honor* father and mother.

How this may be promoted

[260] Thankfully this is lower than the peak reached in the 1970's though at a tragically low rate, especially in lower-income groups.
[261] Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 88.

- Provide for your present and future children. "Children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for children" (2 Cor. 12;14), that is, provide an inheritance. "A good man," the Proverbs teach us, "leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (Prov 13:22).

- *Discipline* your children. Repeatedly the Bible urges the proper discipline of children.

> *"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of discipline drives it far from him"* (Prov. 22:15)
> *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother"* (Prov. 29:15)
> *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol"* (Prov. 23:13, 14)
> *"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him*" (Prov. 13:24; cf. 19:18)

Yet the Bible also warns us not to overdo it.

> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4)
>
> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Col. 3:21)

- Provide your children with a biblical education. Education is not the responsibility of state, or even the responsibility of the church, but of parents. Parents are to rear their children in the "fear and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, KJV). Their responsibility to do so was established long ago through Moses:

> *6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.* (Deut. 6:6-7)

One's children are to be taught when you "sit in house," and "walk by way," and "lie down," and "rise up." Hebrews uses contrasts to express comprehensiveness. All of life is to be a school for learning about God and viewing the world from His perspective (cf. Deut. 4:7-9; 31:10-13). What is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom? fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

- Teach them to respect and honor others. R. J. Rushdoony argues the point that,

> A person reared and schooled in the doctrine that he has a responsibility to care for his parents as need arises, provide for his children, and, to the best of his ability, leave an inheritance of moral discipline and example as well as material wealth, is a person highly attuned to responsibility.[262]

- Train your children for the responsibilities of family life.
- Teach your children to respect tradition, customs, and history.
- View your children as gifts and not burdens (Ps. 127:3).

[262] R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law,* Vols. 1-2 (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973) 1:183-184.

- Honor your parents. Model for your children in your treatment of your parents how you wish to be treated when you grow old.

"The naked and crude point of the Fifth Commandment," says Joy Davidson, is "honor your parents lest your children dishonor you. Or, in other words, a society that destroys the family destroys itself.[263]

Sixth Commandment

> "*You shall not murder*." (Ex. 20:13, cf. Deut. 5:17)

Certain things are sacred to the God whom we serve. His worship (second commandment), His name (third commandment), His day (fourth commandment), the family (fifth commandment), and now, human life. All human life, from conception to natural death, is sacred and therefore comes under the protection of this commandment.

What it says
What the King James Version translated as "kill," the various modern versions translate as "murder." This rendering is justified because not all killing is forbidden (eg. capital punishment, self-defense, accidental killing, just war), as we'll see. What is in view in the use of the terminology here in light of this broader biblical context (*rāsah*, found 47 times in the Old Testament, *phoneuō*, found 12 times in the New Testament), is not all killing but the *unjust taking of a human life.*

What it forbids
The *Shorter Catechism* explains that the sixth commandment forbids "the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto" (Q #69). The catechism wisely understands the commandment not merely the act of murder but the attitudes and actions that lead to murder, that lay at the root of murder.

- *Anger*

There can be such a thing as righteous anger. We are told that Jesus "looked around at them" (those who would prohibit his healing on a Sabbath day) "with *anger*, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mk 3:5). The Apostle Paul urges even as he cautions, "be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). Righteous indignation, anger at some gross injustice, the passion to see the evil stopped and the evildoers punished, is not sinful. However, the Apostle is cautious because it is so very difficult for fallen humanity, even redeemed fallen humanity, to prevent righteous anger from spilling over into unrighteousness. James also cautions us to be "slow to anger." Why? Because "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19, 20). Our anger, typically, is flawed.

Jesus traces murder to its root in unrighteous anger:

> *21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.* (Matt. 5:21-22)

[263] Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain,* (The Westminster Press, 1953), 60, 61)

What is unrighteous anger but the desire to diminish, to harm, to injure another? Jesus prohibits not merely the act of murder, but the attitude that precedes it, murder in the heart.

- *Hatred*

Another attitude at the root of murder is hatred. The Old Testament law commands "you shall not hate your brother in your heart" even as it warns not to "take vengeance or bear a grudge against him," which is the inevitable outcome of hatred. Instead, the law continues, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," or as Jesus understood the law to require "love your enemies" (Lev. 19:17, 18; Matt. 5:44). The Apostle John makes a direct connection between hatred and murder:

> *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* (1 John 3:15)

- *Personal vengeance*

Of a piece with anger and hatred is the pursuit of personal vengeance. Jesus rejects the *personal* application of the *lex talionis:*

> ***38*** *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* ***39*** *But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.* ***40*** *And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.* (Matt. 5:38-40)

Similarly, the Apostle Paul urges,

> ***19*** *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* ***20*** *To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."* ***21*** *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Rom. 12:19-21)

"Eye for an eye" is a judicial edict which establishes the principle of proportionate punishment. *An* eye, not two eyes for *an* eye (Ex. 21:14; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). When we suffer wrong, we are to leave the application of justice and the avenging of wrong in the hands of God and God's agents in positions of governing authority (Rom. 13:1ff).

- *Murder*

The willful, deliberate, premeditated taking of an innocent human life is forbidden. The Scriptures carefully distinguish between accidental killing and even an impulsive outburst which results in the death of another (see Ex. 21:12-32). Rather, the command forbids what J. I. Packer calls "malicious and unlawful killing."[264]

- *Cruelty*

Physical or emotional cruelty the distress of which weakens or shortens the life of another is prohibited. Why? Because life itself is a sacred gift and to reduce the longevity of the life of another is to rob them of a portion of that gift.

[264] J. I. Packer, *I Want to Be a Christian* (United States: Tyndale House Publishers, 1977), 217.

- *Abortion*

Human life must be considered sacred from conception because any distinction from conception to natural death is arbitrary, and being arbitrary puts all human life at risk. If any human life at any point along the spectrum of time or condition can be considered disposable then the same may be true of any other human life at any other point or in any other condition.

Moreover, Scripture treats conceived life as sacred:

> *22 "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. 23 But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.* (Ex. 21:22-25)

God is placing a wall of protection around pregnant women. If men are so careless as to tussle in their presence so that a woman with child is struck with the result being a premature birth but no other injury, the one who hit her must pay a fine even if "there is no harm." However, "if there is harm," to the mother or the pre-maturely born child (the text makes no differentiation), the careless one who struck her pays "life for life!"

The humanity of the unborn is described poetically in Psalm 139.

> *13 For you formed my inward parts;*
> *you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*
> *14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*
> *Wonderful are your works;*
> *my soul knows it very well.*
> *15 My frame was not hidden from you,*
> *when I was being made in secret,*
> *intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*
> *16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;*
> *in your book were written, every one of them,*
> *the days that were formed for me,*
> *when as yet there was none of them.* (Psalm 139:13-16)

David says his "inward parts" were "knitted together" in the womb. He uses the personal pronouns: "*my* inward parts;" "knitted *me* together." He speaks of *my* "unformed substance" (Hebrew *golem*), and numbers his embryonic beginnings among the days that God ordained for him "when as yet there was none". His personal history began from those earliest fetal moments.

From Psalm 51 we find the product of human conception standing in a moral relationship with God – "in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Animals, plants, minerals, and rocks do not relate to God as moral beings. Only people do. The product of human conception is human life, with human DNA, and therefore sacred life.

- *Euthanasia*

A distinction must be made between letting the body die when there is no hope of that person regaining consciousness, and actively putting a person to death. Former Surgeon General of the United States and collaborator with Francis Schaeffer in a number of his projects, C. Everette Koop (1916-2013) distinguished between prolonging life and prolonging death, and insisted that every doctor knows the difference between the one and the other. We believe in taking extraordinary steps to prolong life. We should feel no obligation unnecessarily to prolong death.

- *Infanticide*

The legal approval of abortion has led to the sanctioning of partial-birth abortion, leading further to the acceptance of infanticide. Why? Because the distinctions between trimesters before birth and birth itself are all arbitrary. Infanticide was wide-spread in the ancient world and in much of the non-Christian world until relatively recently. Modern ethicists such as Princeton's Peter Singer have advocated a two-month period after birth as a time in which newborns could be determined unfit to life. Christians cannot but be against this, but appalled by it.

- *Risk-taking*

Because human life is sacred, one should not unnecessarily put life at risk. A Christian must not live recklessly, or "flirt with death" or be known as a "dare-devil." Life is a gift to be cherished, not thrown away foolishly.

- *Suicide*

Finally, the sixth commandment forbids taking ones own life. Our life is not our own to take. It is God's gift to us. Further, as Christians, the Apostle Paul tells us,

> *You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* (1 Cor. 6:19b-20)

Those who commit suicide are deserting their post, refusing to submit to the will of God, and committing a crime which allows no time for repentance. The universal voice of the church prior to the 20th century was that those who kill themselves damn their own souls.[265] C. S. Lewis warned the writer Sheldon Vanauken, distraught by the death of his wife and wishing to join her on the other side of eternity, don't attempt to join the obedient through an act of disobedience. "You might be digging an eternally unbridgeable chasm," he warned. "Disobedience is not the way to get nearer to the obedient."[266]

What it does not forbid

We mentioned earlier that all forms of killing are not forbidden. We may now be specific.

- *Self-defense*

Defending one's self, one's family, one's home is permitted. The Old Testament law recognized this:

> *If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him.* (Ex. 22:2).

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[265] See Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* III:367.

[266] Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 210. Similarly the great abolitionist William Wilberforce warned (in a different context) of running "the risk of rushing into the presence of our Maker in the very act of offending him" (cited in John Piper, *The Roods of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* [Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002], 122).

Similarly the Apostle Paul defended himself against false accusations, and when facing the likelihood of judicial murder utilized his Roman citizenship to escape Jewish courts by appealing to Caesar's jurisdiction (Acts 25:11).

- *Capital punishment*

There are a wide-range of capital offenses in the Old Testament (negligent homicide [Ex. 21:29], adultery [Lev 20:10], homosexuality [Lev. 20:13], bestiality [Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15], and witchcraft [Ex. 22:18]). This demonstrates that the sixth commandment does not forbid all killing, but unjust killing. Capital punishment was instituted following the flood in order to restrain the evil that led to the necessity of the flood and the destruction of the whole human race less Noah and his family (see Gen. 4:24; 6:11). Good commanded,

> *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."* (Gen. 9:6)

Rob an innocent person of his life and one forfeits one's own life. Why? Because of the sanctity of all human life. "By man shall his blood be shed, for God made man *in his own image.*" Humanity alone is made in the image of God, and so attached to human life is a distinctive dignity and sacredness. Wrongfully take another person's life and one must pay the ultimate price, nothing less. Ironically, failure to do so cheapens human life.

The New Testament perpetuates the institution of capital punishment. The Apostle Paul writes of a civil authority that he is "God's servant" who "bear(s) the sword." The sword is an instrument of death and represents the role of civil government as "an avenger who carries out God's wrath on wrongdoers" (Rom. 13:1-7; see also 1 Pet. 2:14; Acts 25:11; Matt. 5:38ff). The policing and judicial functions of government are divinely instituted and necessary.

- *Just war*

What about when the "wrongdoers" cross borders? May the civil authorities use the sword to defend its citizens from invading foreign armies? Indeed, or so Christians have argued at least since Augustine and his articulation of "just war" theory. War is divinely sanctioned and Christians may justly participate when a) a cause is just; b) the intention is just; c) pursued as an official act of government; d) objectives are limited; e) means utilized are proportionate; f) immunity of non-combatants is recognized; g) war is a last resort. The main-stream of the Christian tradition is not pacifist. From Augustine to Aquinas to Calvin to Edwards to the Princeton theologians Christians have recognized the necessity of war on just occasions, and the propriety of Christians participating in such wars.

- *Just resistance or "revolution"*

Are there times when the civil authorities may be defied or even overthrown? The Reformed church has answered carefully in the affirmative. When? We may identify three major criteria.

i) When the authorities forbid what God commands or command what God forbids. As the Apostle Paul said to the Jewish authorities, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; also Acts 4:19, 20).

ii) When the authorities violate the social contract and rule unlawfully. When the civil government illegally claims power and authority which the law does not grant it (eg. by a written Constitution or tradition), it may be resisted. In a civil order where the law is king (*lex rex*), the usurpations and pretentions of kings may be resisted.

iii) When resistance is led by lesser magistrates, by regional princes and legislatures, that is, by other lawful authorities. This has been the argument of Calvinists and has made Calvinism a revolutionary faith. Calvin's famous "exception clause"[267] led to Dutch Calvinists led by Prince William I or Orange, rebelling against the Spanish monarchy, the French Huguenots led by the Princes of Navarre taking up arms against the French monarchy, and the Puritan dominated English Parliament taking up arms against the absolutism of the Stuart kings in the 1640s. Essentially the same argument can be seen in the American "Declaration of Independence," as Jefferson and the colonists accused George III of lawless rule through the imposition of a foreign legislature (Parliament) which, contrary to the colonial charters was allowed to impose taxes. All early power is limited. Caesar has realm, but it is limited.

What it requires

Because human life is sacred, there are positive steps that must be taken to preserve, not just actions and attitudes to be avoided. The *Shorter Catechism* affirms that the sixth commandment requires "all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others" (Q #68).

Safety measures

Deuteronomy 22:8 holds a homeowner responsible for not having a parapet or railing on his roof if someone falls and is harmed as a result. All reasonable steps are to be taken to make our surroundings are safe for others.

Material provision and help

When we encounter the destitute, those who are in need of food, clothing, and shelter we are to respond charitably. This is particularly true in connection with believers (Matt. 25:35, 36; 1 John 3:17; James 2:14-17), yet others also (Deut. 22:4; Matt. 12:11; Luke 10:30-37).

Advocacy

We are to intervene and advocate on behalf of the innocent. "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter" (Prov. 24:11). Again,

> [8] *Open your mouth for the mute,*
> *for the rights of all who are destitute.*
> [9] *Open your mouth, judge righteously,*
> *defend the rights of the poor and needy.* (Prov. 31:8, 9)

Leaders, and with them those who choose leaders, are commanded,

> *Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.* (Psalm 82:4)

Temperance

Preserving life, protecting life, extending life, requires moderation. Excess must be avoided. "Many dig their grave with their teeth," says Thomas Watson. "The cup kills more than the cannon."[268] Drunkenness and gluttony, for example, are two forms of immoderation which are prohibited (Eph. 5:19; Prov. 23:3, 6; 31:4-7).

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[267] Calvin, *Institutes,* IV.XX.31, p. 1519.
[268] Thomas Watson, *Ten Commandments,* (1692; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 145.

Avoiding evil
Finally, opportunities for evil are to be avoided. The Proverbs warn,

> [10] *My son, if sinners entice you,*
> *do not consent.*
> [11] *If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;*
> *let us ambush the innocent without reason.* (Prov. 1:10-11)

Seventh Commandment

> "*You shall not commit adultery*." (Ex. 20:14; cf. Deut. 5:18)

Having established that all human life is sacred (Sixth Commandment), it necessarily follows that the act by which human life is conceived also is sacred (Seventh Commandment). The procreative act could never be expressed in a casual, impulsive, or flippant manner, not if human life is sacred. One could never engage in sexual acts in an unstable or transient relationship. The biological design and purpose of sexual organs is that of procreative union. The potential product of that union is sacred human life. Sexual union is divinely meant to be limited to the stable, permanent, marital commitment of one man and one woman for life. Why? For the sake of the life potentially conceived. All other forms of sexual expression are forbidden as contrary to divinely designed biology and as inherently cheapening of human life. Hence, adultery, and with it all forms of non-marital sexual relations are prohibited.

Today's context
This commandment, perhaps more than any others, is at odds with the ethos of the present moment. The 1960s brought about a "Sexual Revolution," an overturning of the 1700-year-old dominant Christian sexual ethic in Western civilization. That revolution preached "free love," a revival of ancient pagan understanding of sexual relations as a form of entertainment, of pleasure-seeking without commitment, without responsibility, and without accountability. The evidence of the dominance of this outlook is everywhere present in popular culture. Nearly every novel, every movie, and every television program assumes that two mutually attracted young people will sleep together outside of marriage. Nearly every advertisement in print, in media, and on billboards features sensuous, provocative images. All of the above venues display more or less explicit scenes of sexual intimacy that would have been considered unacceptable a few decades ago. All of the above constantly portray homosexuality as normal, healthy, and acceptable. The widespread availability of pornography via the internet has had the effect of lowering the bar defining obscenity. We are living in a sex-crazed age that is directly and indirectly hostile to and corrupting of Christian sexual ethics. The destructive legacy of this revolution also is with us in abundance: teen promiscuity, a plague of venereal diseases, unwed mothers, abortion, illegitimacy, single-parent households, divorce, unsupervised youth, and crime.

How did we get here? We may quickly review several important factors, rooted in the 1950s, which exploded onto the scene in the 1960s, and which have been with us ever since. There are six crucial "P's."

- Development of *penicillin* – first widespread use to fight infection from wounds during World War II, was found simultaneously to be effective in curing venereal diseases. This removed a restraining fear of unrestricted promiscuity.

- Advent of the *pill* – what Margaret Sanger aggressively championed in the 1950s, became available in 1960, and legal throughout the United States in 1965 when Planned Parenthood won the United States Supreme Court decision of *Griswold v. Connecticut*. This made it possible to separate sexual intercourse from procreation, removing a second restraining fear of promiscuity, that of unwanted pregnancy.
- Early arrival of *puberty* – in the 19th century girls reached puberty at 15 and boys at 16. Today it is at 10-11 and 11-12 respectively.
- *Postponement* of marriage – in ancient and medieval times the minimum age requirements for marriage were between 12 and 14. The average age of marriage in 1960 in the United States was 20, for men 23. Today (2020) it is 28 and 30 respectively. This delay, combined with the early arrival of puberty, puts enormous sexual pressure on young people, extending the delay of marriage an additional 7-9 years on average compared with 1960, comprising a veritable playground for the devil.
- Finally, the *Playboy* philosophy of hedonism. Hugh Hefner, reared in a devout Calvinistic, mid-western home, first published *Playboy* in 1953 with Marilyn Monroe as the featured centerfold. By 1972 seven million copies were being sold each month. "*Playboy* would play a critical role in the coming sexual revolution," David Halberstam recognizes in his acclaimed book *The Fifties.* Hefner, Halberstam maintains, "was fighting that part of the Puritan ethic that condemned pleasure." Playboy "shepherded a generation of young men to *the good life*," he continues. "The spectacular rise of *Playboy* reflected the postwar decline of Calvinism and puritanism in America."[269] Indeed. These six "P's" have unleashed the furies. A pandora's box of curses have been set upon humanity by the breakdown of traditional, biblical, Christian norms since the middle of the 20th century.

What is says

The Seventh Commandment forbids "adultery" (Hebrew *naap,* Greek *moicheuō*). Strictly defined it prohibits sexual relations between a married person and someone other than his or her spouse. What is a married person? It is someone who has entered into the marriage covenant. What is a marriage covenant? It is an indissoluble, monogamous relationship between a man and a woman initiated by vows (a verbal bond) and consummated by physical union (a physical bond). The marriage covenant (as it is called in Mal. 2:14) is entered into by some form of verbal commitment whether it be betrothal, engagement, a marriage license, or vows in a wedding service, and includes a promise of "leaving and cleaving" and "becoming one" (Gen. 2:23). It is consummated (or completed) as they become "one flesh" through sexual union (Gen. 2:24; eg. Gen. 24:67). The relationship thereby established is monogamous, permanent, and exclusive. As Jesus says,

> *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*. (Matt. 19:6)

Any violation of that "one flesh" relationship breaks this command. Behind it is the *positive principle of the sanctity of marriage* as the only approved context in which the procreative act may take place, therefore prohibiting all non-marital sexual expression.

What does it forbid?

- *Adultery* – Obviously adultery is the main target of the command. The seriousness with which marriage is taken can be seen in the strength of the civil penalty in Israel: death (Lev. 18:20).

[269] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 575-576 (my emphasis).

Adultery is an act of treason against the basic building block of society, destabilizing its most fundamental unit, the family. It is as well a betrayal of the most intimate of human relationships.

- *Divorce* – Moses permitted divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus explains that to understand God's design and intention one has to go back to the beginning, to the creation ordinances, and distinguish that which God *ordains* and that which God *permits*. Moses permitted divorce "because of your hardness of heart," he explains (Matt. 19:7). However, "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). Jesus cites Genesis 2:24 to establish what was "from the beginning:"

> *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* (Matt. 19:5)

God created one man and one woman and brought them together. One should learn from this that marriage is monogamous, heterosexual, and especially, permanent:

> *"So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (*Matt. 19:6)

Jesus then identifies one, and only one legitimate reason for divorce. God approves of *one* cause: sexual immorality. Any other cause is itself adulterous:

> *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."* (Matt. 19:9)

Not for "any cause" (Matt. 19:3) may one divorce but for one cause, *porneia,* from which we get our word pornography, a broad term inclusive of all forms of sexual expression. Desertion, understood not as an additional approved grounds for divorce (esp. given the strength of Jesus's limitations just reviewed) should be seen as a form of *porneia*, as a denial of conjugal rights and an abandonment of marital obligations (see 1 Cor. 7:1-5). Hence the direction:

> *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.* (1 Cor. 7:15)

"Not enslaved" should be understood to mean released from marital obligations and free to remarry, "as if the offending party were dead" (*WCF* XXIV.5). All other divorce should be understood as adulterous. Adultery breaks the physical bond of the marriage, opening the door for the innocent party to proceed with breaking the verbal bond though legal dissolution of the marriage. When the divorce is without grounds, a subsequent contracted marriage is adulterous, as Jesus declares in verse 9 above. A divorce without grounds severs the verbal bond, the marriage contract, but leaves the physical bond intact, which sexual union with one's new spouse violates and is therefore adulterous. All divorce involves adultery.

- *Separation* – This is essentially a non-biblical category. The Apostle Paul permits separation only i) by mutual consent; ii) for a short time; iii) for the purposes of prayer. Extended separation is not contemplated and is not considered a solution to marital problems and is more likely to compound rather than resolve issues (1 Cor. 7:10).

- *Polygamy* – Again, we must follow Jesus back to "the beginning" and God's design from the start. He created Adam. He created Eve. He did not create Eve, Mary, and Esther so that Adam might have

three wives. Polygamy enters the biblical story in the sixth generation when "Lamech," a particularly evil man "took two wives" (Gen. 4:17-24). Polygamy was never approved.

- *Homosexuality* – Same sex sexual acts are specifically and explicitly condemned in the Old Testament moral law (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), and condemned again in the New Testament as "impurity," as "dishonorable passions," as "contrary to nature," and "shameless acts" (Rom 1:24-27). Notice both the *passions* and the *acts,* the *desires* and the *behavior,* the *attractions* and the *conduct* are in view. It is misleading to interpret this teaching as limiting those whom we may love, as sometimes is said. People of the same sex may love each other. Indeed, the deepest of human loves are found in families, in the love of parents for their children and children for parents. Yet never may these loves properly have an erotic component. Rather, the ethical issue is the question of with whom rightly and morally we may have sexual relations. What is "contrary to nature" is contrary to the purposes of the Creator of nature, evident in human physiology, in the design and function of human sexual organs.

- *Beastiology* – This too is classified as an abomination, as perversion, worthy of death (Lev. 18:23; 20:15). It marks a yet lower step down the ladder of moral degradation.

- *Lust* – As was the case with the Sixth Commandment, Jesus addresses not just the act but the attitude that leads to the act. Behind all sexual sin is lust. Jesus warns,

> *[27] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Matt. 5:27-28)

  Jesus speaks not of the intention to look so as to act, to look so as to plan to commit adultery, but to look "with lustful intent," look so as to fantasize, to dream, to imagine, to picture in one's mind the act of adultery with that woman. John Murray's comments are especially poignant:

> He is showing that violation of these sanctities is registered first of all in the most rudimentary inclinations and emotions. And we may well be reminded, 'him that is without sin, let him cast the first stone'.

- *Fornication* – Finally, fornication (a word not found in the ESV), defined as sexual relations between two unmarried persons is forbidden. We repeat: all forms of sexual expression outside of the marriage of one man and one woman is forbidden. Adulterers, along with homosexuals and the sexually immoral, are classified among those who "*will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21).

What does it require?

Given that the sanctity of life and the sanctity of the act by which we create life are at stake, and with them marriage, family, and childrearing, what does the Seventh Commandment require of us? It requires serious, strenuous efforts to avoid all that might lead to sexual sin. Jesus warns in connection with his teaching on adultery and divorce (verses 29 and 30 of Matthew 5 following directly upon verse 28 cited above):

> *[29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your*

right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matt. 5:29-30)

Quite literally, Jesus teaches that heaven and hell are at stake in controlling sexual passions. Extreme measures are to be taken in avoiding sexual sin, even severing the offending eye or hand.

First, the Seventh Commandment requires *vigilance.* We are bombarded by the message of casual, trouble-free, consequence-free sex. Air-brushed images glamorizing unrestricted sexual expression are everywhere. This corrupting, destructive influence must constantly be resisted if we are to obey the Seventh Commandment. How are we to do so? We must do the following.

- Guard our *environment.* We must stay away from tempting situations. The wisdom of Proverbs is – don't go near the door of the house of the adulteress (Prov. 5:3-8). The fool takes a stroll down the street near her corner. He places himself in close proximity to her. The inevitable happens. He encounters her, succumbs to her charms, and destroys his own soul (Prov. 7:4-23). "Flee from sexual immorality," is a bit of biblical wisdom (1 Cor. 6:18). "Flee youthful lusts" (1 Tim. 2:22, KJV). Don't toy with them. Don't flirt with them. Don't even fight with them. Flee. Run. Stay far, far away from that place of temptation. Change neighborhoods if necessary. Change friends. "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor 15:33). Change jobs. Change whatever needs changing in order to stay away from that place, those persons, and those occasions of temptation.

- Guard our *eyes.* Job "made a covenant with (his) eyes" not to look lustfully at a "a virgin" (Job 31:1 NASB). Every effort must be made to discipline our eyes. Eve began to give way to temptation when she "*saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the *eyes*" (Gen. 3:6). Enticements to sin typically begin with what we see. The beautiful things and beautiful people stir up our jealousy, envy, covetousness, and lust. Our passions can become all-consuming and all controlling. Peter speaks of those who "have eyes full of adultery" (2 Pet. 2:14). Everywhere and all the time they are looking around with adulterous longings at passersby, consumed with the lusts stimulated by their eyes. Returning again to the wisdom of Proverbs:

  Let your eyes look directly ahead
  And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. (Prov. 4:25)

  Those who wish to live morally pure lives must be especially vigilant to discipline their eyes not to look at the sensuous, seductive, and enticing images that are ubiquitous today.

- Guard our *lips.* The Apostle Paul warns of "foolish talk" and "crude joking," which are "out of place" (Eph. 5:4). There has never been an illicit sexual tryst that did not begin with suggestive comments or humor. Office banter has often paved the way for infidelity. Do not give life to hidden passions by speaking them aloud.

- Guard our *ears.* Closely associated with the preceding point, we must guard our ears. The adulteress "flatters with her words" (Prov. 2:16, NASB). Her "speech is smoother than oil." Her lips "drip honey" (Prov. 5:3).

  With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. (Prov. 7:21).

- Guard our *heart.* We have more control over the flow of our affections than we may care to admit. We like to tell ourselves that we "fell in love," as though we helpless plunged from emotional safety to an emotional condition over which we had not control. We convince ourselves that we couldn't help ourselves, that it just happened, that we were victims of… what? Victims of ourselves? Rather, we make decisions, conscious or unconscious, to let our thoughts and then our hearts go *there*, where they don't belong. We know this to be the case because typically we close off our thoughts and affections from illicit relationships. We don't entertain those possibilities even when we find the person in view appealing. We exclude consideration. We shut down the thoughts and their inception. This is why the Proverbs urge us to guard or keep our hearts.

  Keep your heart *with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life* (Prov. 4:23).

  Again, in the context of the adulteress,

  Let not your heart *turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths.* (Prov. 7:25)

- Our *dress*. Give the strength of Jesus' warnings about lust (reviewed above), utmost care must be taken to dress modestly. Men are particularly vulnerable to visual stimuli. Men are intensely fascinated with the female body. When the distinctives of the female form are uncovered or accentuated and put on display, often it leads to corrupt male thoughts. Consequently, it is particularly incumbent upon women to dress modestly. Every generation of humanity has known this since the beginning of time. Proverbs speaks of the immoral woman as "dressed as a prostitute," dressed to entice, dressed to seduce, dressed to broadcast her availability (Prov. 7:10). It is one thing to dress femininely, another to dress provocatively. The Apostle Paul directs Christian women to dress "in respectable apparel, with modest and self-control" (1 Pet. 2:9). The fashion industry today pushes styles that are quite the opposite, making wardrobe selections for women difficult. Nevertheless, it is vital that Christian women be distinguished from the women of the world by the modesty of their dress. Beware of plunging neck-lines, rising hemlines, exposed shoulders, and body-clinging styles.

- *Guard our reading and viewing material*. What are we reading? What are we watching? We've come a long way from "Leave it to Beaver" to the standard media programming today. Christians are watching programs that they would have been scandalized by a generation ago. Nudity, simulated sex scenes, homosexual sexuality, barrages of profanity and the normalizing of casual sexual encounters are commonplace and corrupting this generation of Christians. Unchecked, this cultural environment will not end well for our society or the church. The time is long past due for us to separate ourselves from these obscene forms of entertainment. Christians are to "abhor what is evil," not to be amused by it (Rom. 12:9, cf. Prov. 8:13). Christians are to "rejoice not in unrighteousness," rather than being entertained by it (1 Cor. 13:6, NASB). We are to "set (our) minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). We are to "think about… whatever is pure" (Phil. 4:8).

- *Guard our use of free time.* Beware of idleness. David with Bathsheba is a classic case of what can happen when we are idle (see 2 Sam. 11:4). Ezekiel warns of "carless ease" (Ez. 16:49, NASB). Amos warns of those who are "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). "Idle hands are the devil's playground," we say proverbially and wisely. If we are to remain morally pure constant vigilance is necessary.

Second, the Seventh Commandment requires *spiritual discipline.* Most of what we have considered under the heading of vigilance includes the guarding the "gates" by which corrupting influences enter our consciousness: the eye gate, the ear gate, what we see, what we read, what we hear, what we say, what we wear, and so on. Even more important is that which is prior to and foundational for these external actions. The external vigilance we've proposed is not sustainable of itself. Rather persistent vigilance requires a deeply rooted love of God, love of holiness, and a holy hatred of evil. Specifically, we propose the following.

- Cultivate the *fear* of God. "By the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil" (Prov. 16:6). When Potiphar's wife "cast her eyes on Joseph" and said "Lie with me," he understood that what she proposed was "great wickedness" and especially it was "sin against God" (Gen. 39:7-9). It was not merely unwise, or ungrateful, or dangerous for him. Adultery primarily has a God-ward reference. The writer to the Hebrews warns us as he urges us,

  > *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.* (Heb. 13:4)

  The marriage bed is not to be defiled by sexual sin. Do not stray. Do not wander from marital fidelity. Do not as a single person spoil a future marriage. Needing motivation to stay pure? "God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." God promises to be " a swift witness against the… adulterers (who) do not fear me" (Mal. 3:5). These warnings are meant to motivate the people of God to obey. The fear of God is not our only motivation, and perhaps not the highest motivation. Yet it is a valid and important motivation. A regular reminder to "put to death… sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness" because "on account of these things the wrath of God is coming," helps (Col. 3:5, 6). A regular reminder that "our God is a consuming fire" is salutary (Heb. 12:29).

- Be *filled with the word*. Jesus Himself fought Satan's temptations with his thorough knowledge of Scripture (Mt. 4:1-11). According to Jesus's "High Priestly Prayer," we are sanctified by the truth of God's word (John 17:17). The psalmist teaches us,

  > *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.* (Psalm 119:9)

  The word of God, read, meditated upon, contemplated, and memorized strengthens and empowers believers, enabling them to resist temptation. The Holy Spirit works through the word to bring the benefits of Christ to us, releasing the power of the resurrection, so that we are able to mortify the flesh and flee immorality.

- *Pray.* Jesus declares, "apart from *me* you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He is the True Vine and we are dependent branches, lifeless, fruitless, and powerless apart from Him (John 15:1-4). It is as we "draw near" to God through prayer that we "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). We are weak. We are foolish. We are vulnerable. If even a David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1) could succumb to the temptation of adultery, who can claim to be invulnerable? Who then should not be "devoted to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Who should not "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation," given that "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Who should not "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful"? (Col. 4:2)

- *Get married.* Marriage is God's provision for, outlet for, context for the expression of sexual desire. It is the proper setting, the designed circumstance for sexual activity. Think of the pleasures of a fire in a fireplace. A fire in a fireplace is a wonderful thing. it provides heat, light, and is aesthetically pleasing. However, remove the burning log from the safe confines of the fireplace, and fling it into the middle of the house, and what was once safe and pleasant becomes painful and destructive. Marriage is the fireplace of sexual relations: safe and pleasurable in marriage, destructive outside of marriage.

  The Apostle Paul hints cryptically at the destructive potential of sexual sin on two occasions. In Romans 1, he writes of those engaged in sexual sin "receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1:27). He doesn't elaborate. He merely hints at some kind of harmful consequence, "in themselves" a "due penalty" for their sin, "their error."

  Again, he writes,

  > *Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.* (1 Cor. 6:18).

  He draws a line across human experience. He places "every other sin" on one side of the line, outside of the body, and sexual immorality on the other side of the line, by itself, as a sin, "against (one's) own body." Again, he doesn't elaborate, content merely to hint at the uniquely destructive character of sexual sin. It is imperative, then, that those lacking the gift of singleness marry (1 Cor. 7:6, 7; 32ff; Matt. 19:11-12). Listen to the apostle's words:

  > *[2] But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband… [8] To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. [9] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* (1 Cor. 7:2, 8, 9)

  "Because of the temptation to sexual immorality" each one should have what? A prayer partner? That may be a good idea yet it is not the recommendation here. Temptation is to be met with marriage. Each is to have his or her own husband or wife. Our society has a thousand different ways in which to enflame lust. All the previous bits of counsel found in our treatment of the Seventh Commandment are important. However the primary provision is marriage. The Apostle Paul is so convinced of this that he instructs even married couples,

  > *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* (1 Cor. 7:5)

  "Lack of self-control?" Caused by what? Separation. The solution? "Come together again." Married couples are not to deprive each other of each other's conjugal rights except it be for a short time, by mutual consent, and for the purpose of devoting time to prayer. Why? Because prolonged deprivation will create an environment of temptation in which self-control may fail.

  "Get married" is easier said than done, one might reasonably argue. Agreed. This is especially the case for women, who rightly feel reluctant to be overly proactive. Men cannot claim this excuse. Too

often they have been lethargic in pursing marriage. Meanwhile both unmarried women and men may take active steps in becoming the kind of persons that other serious Christians will want to marry while learning to be content in current circumstances (Phil 4:12, 13).

Eighth Commandment

> *"You shall not steal*" (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19)

Social commentators speak of the cost of what has been called the "sin tax." They mean by this the "tax" that theft, vandalism, embezzlement and bribery pass on to consumers or tax payers. By some estimates shoplifting adds 10-15 percent to the price of most consumer items, adding up to billions of dollars each year. One may add to the costs of theft what we might call theft protection: locks, alarms, security guards, guard dogs, barred windows, two-way mirrors, police departments, jails, courts, prisons, lawyers, judges, and juries. Humanity universally recognizes that it is wrong to take what belongs to another. Yet theft is rampant. It has always been. Three-thousand years ago the Proverbs asked, "who can find a faithful man?" (Prov. 20:6). The presumed answer is, its not easy. A man of integrity is hard to find.

What it says

Stealing, theft may be defined as "an unjust taking or keeping to ourselves what is lawfully another's;"[270] or according to R. J. Rushdoony, "taking another man's property by coercion, fraud, or without his uncoerced consent. Cheating, harming property, or destroying its value is also theft;"[271] or simply trying to get something for nothing.

The assumption behind the commandment is *the sanctity of private property.* What belongs to me is mine and is not yours. We may define private property as "the exclusive right to possess, enjoy, and dispose of a thing."[272] According to Charles Hodge, "The right of property in an object is the right to its exclusive possession and use."[273] Properly speaking, God is the owner of all.

> *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.* (Psalm 24:1; cf. Psalm 89:11; Gen. 1:29; Acts 17:26)

We are but stewards of earth (Gen. 1:26-30). Yet as such we who are stewards under God have exclusive rights over our stewardship (eg. Acts 5:4, 5). These rights of possession and use are not absolute. For example, we cannot let our property become a nuisance for others, or use it for immoral ends. However, within these sorts of limitations, the property is ours to use as we see fit.

What it forbids

What, then, does the Eighth Commandment prohibit? We may divide our answer into seven categories.

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[270] A. W. Pink, *Ten Commandments* (United States: Baker Books, 1995), 52.
[271] R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law,* Volumes I & II (United States: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), I:452.
[272] Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary.
[273] Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* I:421.

- *Theft of property*. This would include petty theft, such as stealing equipment and supplies from one's employer (pens, pencils, tools, furniture, clothing, food); breaking and entering (Ex. 22:1-5); padding one's expense account (charging owners for illegitimate expenses); and cheating on income tax: we are to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar (Matt. 17:24-27; 22:15-22), and render tax to whom tax is due (Rom. 13:7). It would include failure to pay debts, thereby cheating lenders out of their money (we are not to owe anything to anyone – Rom. 13:8); violation of copyrights (robbing inventors of their royalties); and buying black market goods (depriving governments of due taxes and producers of profits from their goods).

- *Theft of employer's property in labor.* An employment contract stipulates an agreed upon exchange of time and labor for wages. A clock-in, clock-out system often is utilized for hourly work. It is a straight-forward system that one might have thought was difficult to cheat. However, while "on the clock" one can cheat by running personal errands, stretching scheduled breaks, and loafing. When I worked as summer help at Bekins Moving Van and Storage it was a well-known practice to "milk" an easy job by taking one's time, stopping between pick-up and delivery to grab snacks, and so on. "On the clock" one can work half-heartedly, a phenomenon known since Adam. Hence Scripture addresses the evil of it.

  Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys. (Prov. 18:9)

  A slack worker is a destroyer in the sense that wealth that would have been created by his labor (such as a field harvested or a product manufactured) remains undeveloped and in need of further labor, which in the process consumes additional wealth in the form of labor costs. The Apostle Paul warns the early Christians not to work by way of "eye service" or as "people pleasers." Rather they are to work "rendering service with good will," that is, with integrity, "as to the Lord and not to man." (Eph. 6:7). "Eye-service" refers to working diligently only when watched and otherwise loafing. Others are clock-watchers, counting down the minutes and seconds before they can sprint out the door.

- *Fraudulent sale of property or service.* When a product or service is misrepresented, the seller fails to give value for money. The seller is promising one thing and delivering another. Insofar as the product or service fails to fulfill its promised result, the value of the gap between promise and delivery is theft. Another product will have to be purchased by the buyer or another service hired, the additional cost being theft by the original seller. When producers or providers make false claims (as in a cure for baldness), or misrepresent their product (calling something milk that isn't milk or meat what isn't meat), or advertise falsely, or misrepresent the size or weight of their product (eg. the warnings regarding "false scales" throughout the Old Testament [Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-15; Prov. 11:1; 20:10; 23; Amos 8:4-8]). Cheating on tests violates the Ninth Commandment. It is stealing the answers, misrepresenting oneself (as knowledgeable), and making a false claim (about one's competence as a student).

- *Exploitation*. We need to be careful with the use of this word, since it has been abused by overuse and misuse. Nevertheless, exploitation is theft when one takes advantage of another in an area of necessity. For example, charging a drowning man $4000 for a life-preserver would be to rob him of his money. Likewise, when one knowingly takes advantage of the ignorance of another in a case where knowledge is obligated is exploitation. Often the powerful have used legal technicalities and loopholes to deny the uninformed their wages or property rights (eg. Jer. 22:11-17; Is. 5:8; 59:3ff, Am. 5:11-13; Mal. 3:5; see further below).

- *Damaging or defacing property.* When the action of one person reduces the value of the property of another, one must restore that value through repair or restitution. We may point to several examples from Old Testament case law:

> *33 "When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34 the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner, and the dead beast shall be his.* (Ex. 21:33-34)

Man #1 dug a pit and failed to cover it. The animal of man #2 fell into it and was killed. Man #1 is responsible to restore the value of the beast of man #2. His irresponsible failure to make necessary safety precautions caused the accident and so he must pay.

> *"If a man borrows anything of his neighbor, and it is injured or dies, the owner not being with it, he shall make full restitution.* (Ex. 22:14)

If a borrower destroys or loses the item borrowed, he is responsible to restore the value of it to the owner. This is the principle behind automobile insurance. Cause an accident by illegal or reckless driving and one is responsible to restore the damaged automobile to its previous value by repair or replacement. By the same principle, if I borrow my neighbor's lawn mower I must replace the gasoline I use. If I break the blade on his edger I must replace it. If I fail to restore or repair borrowed items I am stealing from my neighbor part of the value of that borrowed item. Similarly, if one defaces property with graffiti one reduces the value of that property and is responsible to make a payment by the amount that the value of the property is reduced or the amount that is required to restore the property to its original appearance.

- *Kidnapping.* The Bible does not identify slavery as inherently evil. The reason why may be that most slaves were members of nations conquered and enslaved by other more powerful nations. Throughout much of human history the alternatives for conquered nations were genocide or slavery. Slavery was the more humane alternative and not treated as inherently evil as long as those enslaved were humanely treated. However, manstealing is condemned and subject to the ultimate penalty:

> *Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.* (Ex. 21:16)

What is envisioned is kidnapping by force and selling the victim into slavery. This is evil. Moses repeats this law in Deuteronomy:

> *If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.* (Deut. 24:7)

- *Legal theft*. It often is the case that the courts, judges and the legal system as a whole can be manipulated by the powerful to the detriment of the powerless. We may cite several biblical examples, first from Micah:

> *1 Woe to those who devise wickedness…*
> *because it is in the power of their hand.*

[2] They covet fields and seize them,
and houses, and take them away;
they oppress a man and his house,
a man and his inheritance.
(Micah 2:1-2)

Micah speaks of those who "the power of their hand" makes it possible for them to "seize" and "take away" coveted fields and houses. Thus "they oppress… a man and his inheritance." We may think of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-29). False witnesses were used to bring false testimony against Naboth, leading to his legal murder by stoning, and the transfer of his property to Ahab. Likewise, Amos warns,

[11] Therefore because you trample on the poor
and you exact taxes of grain from him,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not dwell in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.
[12] For I know how many are your transgressions
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and turn aside the needy in the gate. (Amos 5:11-12)

How do the wicked "trample on the poor"? How have they come to have their grand homes and vineyards? Excessive taxation and bribery. The needy can't get justice "in the gate" where differences were arbitrated. Similarly, Isaiah warns,

Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.
They do not bring justice to the fatherless,
and the widow's cause does not come to them. (Is. 1:23)

Notice the connection between bribery and the denial of justice to the weaker and defenseless elements of society: the fatherless and the widow. Inevitably those are financial injustices, stealing legally from the powerless by the powerful (see also Jer. 22:11-17; Is. 5:8; Mal. 3:5). Other forms of legal theft may include oppressive and confiscatory levels of taxation. Property taxes can be so high as to drive people from their homes; graduated income taxes can suffocate and stifle the hardworking and successful, robbing them of the fruit of their labor; transfer payments can unjustly take wealth from one segment of society and place it in the hands of others; zoning laws can be used to deprive persons of control of their property; and "eminent domain" rulings can be used by governments legally to seize private property for public use.

What again is the principle behind the Eighth Commandment? It is the sanctity of private property. We may not deprive a person or a class of persons of the value or use of their property. To do so is theft.

What it requires

Not only are there attitudes and actions to avoid, there are also positive attitudes and actions to embrace.

- *Contentedness* with what we have. The heart attitude which underlies theft is dissatisfaction with what God has given, and coveting what others have. This is what motivates us to take it from others what is theirs. However, if I am content with my station in life, I will be neither dissatisfied with what I have nor will I covet what others have (see Phil. 4:11-13).

- *Diligence* in our labor. Christians should be the hardest working of all people. We should be highly motivated to return to our employers the full value of their property in our labor. Once we have agreed upon a task and wage, we should diligently work to see that our employer receives the full value of the work for which he is paying. We, in turn, should work "heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men," knowing that in all of our work we are representing Christ and consequently we are "serving the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23, 24).

  We are told of the workmen in the temple during the revival eras under Kings Joash (2 Kings 12:15) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:7) that no accounting was necessary because "they deal faithfully." Similarly, we are told that Daniel's enemies,

  > *sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.* (Dan. 6:4)

  May such testimonies follow all Christians wherever they work.

- *Responsibility* for the property of others. We should return what we borrow in the condition in which is was loaned. Beyond this we are obligated to protect and restore our neighbor's lost property. Old Testament case law includes lost livestock (Ex. 23:4, 5), lost clothing or "any lost thing of your brother's which he loses and you find." We are not allowed to avert our gaze, to walk past, to pretend to be unaware. "You may not ignore it… you shall help him" (Deut. 22:1-4)

- *Restitution* of property we have stolen or damaged. Exodus 22:1-7 stipulates a four-fold restitution for stolen sheep, a five-fold restitution for stolen oxen, and a two-fold restitution if caught with the stolen goods still in one's possession. Zacchaeus applies the four-fold principle to those whom he has defrauded of their wealth (Luke 19:8). If caught stealing we are not merely to pay back one for one. Such a rule would do little to discourage theft if the only consequence were to give back what was stolen. Rather, multiples of the value of what was stolen are to be paid, not only to make up for the time when the owner was deprived of his property, but also to discourage theft altogether (see also Num. 5:7; Prov. 6:31; 2 Sam. 12:6).

- *Right means* of gaining wealth. There are only four proper and approved means of gaining wealth: by labor, investment, inheritance, and gifts. Gambling is not one of them, and consequently has been universally condemned by Christians from the earliest days of the church. Gambling is yet another attempt to get something for nothing.

- *Tithing*. The roots of tithing, giving a tenth of one's earnings, one's increase in wealth to the Lord go back to Abraham's payment of a tenth of his spoils to Christ-type Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Tithes were used to support the priests and Levites (Deut. 18:1-8) and support the poor (Deut.

26:9-13). Malachi warns that when one fails to tithe we are "robbing God," that is, stealing from Him (Mal. 3:1-8).

Ninth Commandment

"*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*." (Ex. 20;16; Deut. 5:20).

Very large percentages of our citizens mistrust the basic institutions of our society, whether political, judicial, academic, the press, the media, big business, the military, the medical community, or the church. Understand that this is nothing new. By the mid-1960s the Vietnam War brought such skepticism about the claims of the government that it became popular to speak of a "credibility gap." The Watergate Affair of 1972 and its aftermath further heightened to popular mistrust of major institutions. This mistrust has only grown over the decades. Today, politicians speak of "alternate facts," judges of creating one's own reality, and celebrities of "my truth." Our leaders have become experts at "spin." Trillion-dollar budgets "cost nothing," a humiliating withdrawal of military forces is a "success," a chaotic and open border is "closed" and "secure." Wall Street often is perceived of as maximizing profit over quality of product impact upon society. The media is widely mistrusted as promoting "fake news," as aggressively pushing a highly biased and imbalanced view of events. The legally apolitical military and intelligence agencies seem to have been politicized. The medical and pharmaceutical companies repeatedly have made claims about treatments and protocols that proved to be either untrue, inaccurate, or even told deliberate "noble lies" designed to shape behavior rather than cure diseases. Even the claim to "follow the science" has proven to be highly selective, biased by political aims. Sexual and financial scandals among the clergy are weekly fare in the media, undermining the credibility of the message and mission of the church. The ability to "reframe" and "reimagine" unwanted developments is essential in today's world, where public relations are everything and truth is expendable.

The result of all this is widespread disillusionment with institutions and cynicism about truth itself. Critical theory provides philosophical justification for skepticism by denying that there is truth or justice. There is only power. Laws and institutions are not based on any higher principles, but merely to enable the powerful to maintain power and oppress the powerless. Truth is relative. Right and wrong are relative. There are no facts, only personal narratives.

The cure for this societal sickness is in the principle that lies behind the Ninth Commandment: the sanctity of the truth.

What it says

The background to the Ninth Commandment is the courtroom. To "bear" is to bring into legal proceedings a claim to be a "witness" to that which is "false" or did not happen. A "false" (*saqer*) witness is one who deceives or misleads, who says what is untrue, is a lie. A different word for "false" is used in Deut. 5:20 (*sawe*), one which places more emphasis on one's attitude. It targets a witness who is insincere, who is a cynic who intends to mislead. A "neighbor" in the first instance is a member of the covenant community, yet it includes the alien in the midst of Israel. Implicitly it includes everyone, as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

The Ninth Commandment assumes that there is a truth and that truth is knowable. Facts can be distinguished from mere narratives. Truth can be distinguished from falsehood, fiction and lies. "Thy word is truth," Jesus declares (John 17:17, KJV). The Ninth Commandment assumes that we are able to

identify truth and distinguish it from falsehood. We are able to identify fact and distinguish it from fiction. We are able to identify right and distinguish it from wrong. That we are able to make these distinctions doesn't mean that it is always easy to do so. It doesn't mean that there aren't areas of gray where truth and falsehood are difficult to separate. It does mean that truth is real, accessible and knowable.

Consequently, those who deviate from the truth are both culpable and condemned. We may cite these examples.

> A *false* witness will not go unpunished,
> and he who breathes out *lies* will not escape. (Prov. 19:5; cf. 19:9)
>
> A *false witness* will perish,
> but the word of a man who hears will endure. (Prov. 21:28)
>
> But the king shall rejoice in God;
> all who swear by him shall exult,
> for the mouths of *liars* will be stopped. (Psalm 63:11)
>
> No one who practices deceit
> shall dwell in my house;
> no one who *utters lies*
> shall continue before my eyes. (Psalm 101:7)

The portion of "all *liars*," along with others who practice wickedness, "will be in the lake of fire that burns with fire and sulfur" (Rev. 21:8). Those who do what is "detestable or *false*" are excluded from heaven and the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). Outside of the New Jerusalem are "everyone who loves and practices *falsehood*" (Rev. 22:15).

Truth is absolute, not relative, and universal, not individual or local because it is rooted in the nature of God. God is the source of all truth. He is the source of all that is real, of reality itself. He is the source of all that corresponds with, is compatible with, and conforms to all that is real. He is opposite and opposed to all that is unreal, to all that is contrary to reality, and all that is incompatible with the world as it truly is. Consequently, all untruth ultimately is an attack against God and His established order. Untruth is a denial of the world as God has made it, a denial of reality as it exists. This would include falsehoods as trivial as a child who promises he didn't sneak candy from the candy jar (which denies the reality that he did), and the scientist who denies the reality of the divine origins of the universe.

Jesus identifies eternal life as the knowledge of "the only *true* God" (John 17:3). He identifies Himself as "the *truth*" (John 14:6) and by doing so "is enunciating the astonishing fact that he belongs to the ultimate, the eternal, the absolute, the undenied, the complete," says Murray.[274] He is "full of… truth" (John 1:14). Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of *Truth*" (John 14:17; 15:26, 16:13; cf. 1 John 4:6; 5:6). The Apostle John says,

> *I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth*. (1 John 2:21).

[274] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 124.

The world cannot find the truth because it is alienated from its source. Again we cite Murray: "Where this central tenet of the truth is disbelieved, there the lie is enthroned."[275] Unbelievers are those who "exchange the *truth* of God for a lie," with devastating moral consequences (Rom. 1:25ff). They do not obey the *truth* (Rom. 2:8). They refuse to "love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10), preferring "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:12).

However believers know the truth. Through faith in Christ we have been reconciled to the God of Truth. Because we know the ultimate truth, we are able to understand the truths that are derived from that ultimate truth. Jesus promised,

> [31] *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,* [32] *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31-32; cf. 2 John 1)[276]

Because we know God, we are able to understand so much that puzzles the world. We know *who* we are (creatures of God made in the image of God), *why* we are here (glorify and enjoy God), and *where* we are going (through death into the blessed presence of God). The average university professor doesn't understand any of this. He thinks he is a cosmic accident. He thinks he is merely an animal. He is unable to identify any purpose in a life that is a product of chance. He imagines that death terminates his existence, that there is no hereafter.

However, believers follow "the way of truth" (2 Pet. 2:2). We have obeyed the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). We "practice the truth" (1 John 1:6), "walk" in the truth (2 John 4, 3 John 3), "love in truth" (3 John 1), we speak the *truth* in love (Eph. 4:15:25), and are "fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 8). The church is identified as a "pillar and buttress of the *truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Christians, then, are highly invested in the truth. Our claim of the truth puts us in direct conflict with the spirit of our age, which (as we've seen), not only denies the truth but shows utter contempt for it. We must preach it, speak it, and practice it.

What it forbids

We may identify eight categories of falsehood forbidden by the Ninth Commandment.

- *Untruth* – a lie is intentional deception, deliberate misrepresentation. The 9th commandment requires more than that. It forbids communicating what is untrue, whether untruth is intended or not. For us to fulfill this requirement it is necessary that we confirm that what we say, what we claim, and what we repeat is true. Truth must be pursued. Untruths are not deliberate falsehoods. Those who pass along what is untrue may not intend to mislead. Yet by doing so they violate this commandment. This is why we cannot repeat unverified stories about people and events. This is why we cannot allow ourselves to repeat to others our suspicions, our hunches, our biases, or our prejudices. We must verify the rumors we hear before we repeat or believe them. The truth or falsehood of stories must be authenticated with proper evidence. Murray puts it this way:

[275] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 130.

[276] We know the truth (1 John 2:21). We believe in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). We are saved by "the knowledge of the truth" (1 Thess. 2:4). Repentance leads to "a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Tim. 3:7; Titus 1:1; Heb. 10:26). We have "the *truth* of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5; 14). It is "the word of *truth*" (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jas. 1:18). "The truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). The backslidden are those "who have swerved from the truth" (2 Tim. 2:18), or even "oppose the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), who "wander off into myths (2 Tim. 4:4; cf. Titus 1:14, Jas. 5:19).

> In entertaining belief or conviction it is necessary that our minds be so informed and our judgment so disciplined that we not allow conviction to be induced, judgment registered, or representation made until adequate evidence is discovered and evaluated to ground conviction, judgment, and representation.[277]

"You shall not spread a false report" (Ex. 23:1). Years ago, Bubble Yum bubble gum nearly went out of business because of the rumor that their product was full of spider's eggs. Somehow, decades before social media, that story spread among children and youth from one end of the continental United States to another.

How much harmful speculation about others would be nipped in the bud by observing this one command. The Bible sharply condemns gossip, which one might define as unsubstantiated rumor, or idle speculation about another. The Apostle Paul lists it along with evil, malice, murder, deceit, and hatred of God (Rom. 1:29-31). He again classifies it among sins that divide churches such as jealousy, anger, slander, gossip, and disorder (2 Cor. 12:20). He joins "gossips" along with "idlers" and "busybodies" as those "saying what they should not" (1 Tim. 5:13). We should be known as a reliable source of information. People should know that what we say, what we claim, what we believe, and what we repeat is true.

- *Lies of malice* – falsehoods that are intended to harm another person are forbidden. These would include slander, which are "false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation."[278] "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord." (Lev. 19:16). Slander is deliberate *spoken* defamation. Libel is *written*. It is "defamation… by written or representational means."[279] Old Testament law required that whatever harm to the victim would have resulted from the malice of the false witness be inflicted upon the liar himself (Deut. 19:15-21).

- *False claims* – we may identify three types of false claims. The first, we may classify as *careless speech.* When we tell others, "I'll be there," or "I'll come help," or commit to the requirements of being part of an organization and then fail to fulfill those requirements, these are false claims. Parents also need to be careful when they warn of punishment and fail to follow through. Beware of making chronically inaccurate statements.

  The second type of false claim we may classify as *exaggeration*. When we embellish a story so as to make events and persons worse or better than they actually are we break this commandment. Those who are uniquely skilled at spinning a yarn are particularly vulnerable to this form of falsehood.

  The third type of false claim we may classify as *boasting*. When we inflate our qualifications or exploits or skills beyond what is true, we break this commandment. The world of sports has broken down the old Protestant virtues of humility and modesty and given rise to the chest-thumping, opponent-humiliating, look-at-me, I'm the greatest false claims. Muhammad Ali (1942-2016) was the first to popularize this form of exaggerated self-promotion that has become ubiquitous. Yet so-called greatness is at best momentary. Father time overtakes us all, making all such boasting false.

[277] Murray, *Principles of Conduct,* 134.
[278] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh Edition* (Egypt: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2004), 1170.
[279] Ibid, 716.

Inflating one's resume also has become commonplace. An entire class of persons poses as experts though they have no particular expertise, such as childrearing experts. We have allowed something like a "cult of experts" to develop. President Franklin Roosevelt had his "brain trust," academics who were the architects of the New Deal. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson gathered what journalist David Halberstam called *The Best and the Brightest* (1972) beginning with Kennedy's "whiz kids," again, creating an administration of so-called experts. Many believe Roosevelt's "experts" may have prolonged the depression by a half-dozen or more years, as well as delivered Eastern Europe to Stalin's Soviet Union and a generation of slavery at the end of World War II. Kennedy/Johnson's "experts" gave us the mismanaged Vietnam War and the so-called "Great Society" that has been a disaster for inner-city families. The misguided reliance upon "experts" led William F. Buckley (1925-2008) to say he'd "rather be governed by the first 2000 people in the Boston telephone directory than the 2000 people on the faculty of Harvard University." What is the problem with the "experts?" False claims. They too often claim to know what they do not understand.

- *Lies of silence* – Old Testament case law requires that if a crime is witnessed the witness must testify.

> *If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity* (Lev. 5:1).

We cannot be silent when falsehood is declared and we know the truth. To be silent is by our silence to bear false witness.

- *Self-deception* – the Apostle Paul warns,

> *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.* (Rom. 12:3)

We are to have a sober realistic, accurate self-estimate and not think of ourselves "more highly than (we) ought to think." An exaggerated and false concept of oneself can have disastrous eternal consequence. Hence the Bible regularly warns of self-deception. Jesus speaks of those who are utterly self-deluded:

> *"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'"* (Matt. 7:22)

They thought they knew Christ. They marshalled false evidence in support of their case. Yet what was the reality?

> *"And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"* (Matt. 7:23)

James warns us,

> *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* (James 1:22)

Those who are "hearers only" are out of touch with reality. They deceive themselves. They are lying to themselves. They are bearing false witness against themselves. This is why we are urged to "examine" and "test" ourselves to ensure that we are in touch with reality (2 Cor. 13:5, 6).

- *"White lies"* – There is much falsehood that we excuse in the name of expedience. We want to avoid what might be awkward or blameworthy. We distort the truth or even make up a false narrative. We are late so we blame the traffic, or the trains at railroad crossings, or the bridges which were drawn for passing boats. We qualify and otherwise excuse our tardiness saying "I've been so busy" or "I was interrupted." Yet the Bible says, "no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:21). *No* lie. Jesus demands that our yes be yes and our no be no (Matt 5:37).

  One test of our honesty might be to consider how often we have to tack a "really" or "honestly" or "I swear" to our statements. Regular use reinforcing adverbs may indicated that we've taught people not to trust us. We have so frequently slanted the truth that we have to say "This time I'm serious." Back in the 1972 Presidential campaign George McGovern said he backed his Vice-Presidential running mate, Thomas Eagleton, then under scrutiny for mental health issues, "1000%." Days later he withdrew his support and Eagleton resigned. We are forced to use hyperbole like 1000% when we have taught people otherwise not to trust us.

- Lies of *convenience* – a phone call comes into the office. It's one that I wish not to take. So I instruct the office manager, "Tell him I'm not in." We wish to turn down an invitation so we say "We have a conflict in our schedule." We tell ourselves that this lie is better than hurting feelings. Yet the Bible rejects the reasoning that says, "let us do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8).

- Lies of *necessity* – God *hates* the lying tongue (Prov. 6:15-19). This divine hatred of the "false witness," one "who breathes out lies," is unqualified and absolute. Consequently, when we begin to look for exceptions to the rule of truth-speaking we need to do so with great care, conscious of the ease with which we may rationalize bad behavior. Alleged biblical examples of so-called necessary lies upon closer examination prove to be otherwise (eg. Jacob [Gen. 27]; Rahab [Josh. 2]; the Hebrew midwives [Ex. 1]).

What is does not forbid

Clearly, extra nuance is necessary when interpreting the Ninth Commandment. There are subtle distinctions that must be made if we are to interpret its requirements accurately. The following are *not* forbidden by the Ninth Commandment.

- *Concealment of truth or partial truth* – We have no obligation to tell all that we know to those who have no claim upon the whole truth, particularly those with destructive or murderous intent. We may cite two examples.

  Samuel was directed by God to go to Bethlehem and anoint as king one of the sons of Jesse. (1 Sam. 16:1). Samuel protests that if Saul hears of it he will kill him. God himself directs Samuel to "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord'" (1 Sam. 16:2). Is this an untruth? We think not. There was no untruth in what he said. A sacrifice was offered (1 Sam. 16:3-5). Samuel was divinely directed to reveal only part of his mission. As Murray notes, "Samuel was authorized to say nothing more than what he actually did say and perform."[280] The narrative is explicit about this.

[280] Murray, *Principles of Conduct,* 140.

We may from this incident draw the conclusion that in some circumstances it is permissible to conceal or withhold part of the truth from those who have no right to the whole truth. Concealment of some truths in some circumstances is not the same as affirming an untruth. "It is necessary to guard jealously the distinction between partial truth and untruth," Murray maintains[281] (see also Jer. 38:24-28; 2 Kg. 6:15).

- *Military tactics* – an important part of military strategy is to mislead the opposing army. For example, Joshua feigns a retreat in connection with an ambush in battle with Ai (Josh. 8:3-29). They fled and "pretended to be beaten" (Josh. 8:15). Their retreat drew all of Ai's forces out of the city, which Joshua's troops then ambushed from behind and burned the city itself. God Himself was part of the plan (Josh. 8:18). Deception in war is permitted. Israel was under no obligation to tell the men of Ai the meaning or intent of their strategic retreat. Deception arises from the failure of Ai's reconnaissance, from a failure to discover the real purpose of the retreat.

- *Changing one's mind in light of changing circumstances* – There are times when intentions declared and commitments made must be broken because of compelling changes in circumstances. The angelic visitors to Lot declare their intention to spend the night in the town square of Sodom. Yet because Lot "pressed them strongly," presumable warning them of the dangers, they changed their minds and stayed in Lot's house (Gen. 19:1-3).

  Jesus tells the centurion "I will come and heal him," that is, the centurion's sick servant. However, once he hears the centurion's plea to Jesus to heal at a distance, Jesus commends his faith and does so (Matt. 8:5-13; see also Matt. 15:23-28; Luke 24:28, 29). Jesus does not fulfill his declared intention to go to the centurion's house in light of the believing response of the centurion.

  Intentions may be altered and commitments broken without sin when life intrudes. Loved ones are hospitalized, deaths occur, conflicting events are scheduled that require changes in plans, changes that may be made without violating the Ninth Commandment. It would be foolish to think that one could no attend a family wedding because of a prior commitment with a friend to have dinner together that same evening.

- *Literary forms of speech* – There are conventions of language which according to the strict meaning of words are inaccurate and even untrue, but because those conventions are understood by the hearers, they are not violations of the Ninth Commandment. We may identify five such.

  - *Hyperbole* – Mark 1:5 tells us that *all* of the country of Judea and *all* the people of Jerusalem came out to John the Baptist and were being baptized by him. Does "all" mean every single individual? Is Mark being untruthful? Is he exaggerating? Not at all. We understand hyperbole and we understand what he means. When we ask, "who were at the birthday party," and the answer of the guests is "everyone", we don't jump up and accuse them of lying. We know that they don't mean every single person on planet earth was there. They mean by "everyone" that it was a big crowd – lots of people were there. Mark uses and we understand hyperbole.

  - *Irony* – at times the words that we use mean literally the opposite of how we mean to be understood. For example, Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal saying,

[281] Ibid., 140.

> *"Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."* (1 Kings 18:27)

His real meaning is "He is no god at all!" That is why he is not listening and not responding (see also what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 4:8-10).

- *Figurative speech* – We regularly use non-literal language such as "sunrise" and "sunset." These are phenomenological terms, describing phenomena how we experience them, as in the rising and setting of the sun though it actually is the earth and not the sun that is moving. We are not speaking untruths when we use such terms because we all understand what is meant by them.

- *Parables* – Jesus regularly taught using stories that typically were not meant to be understood as literally true. They may be used for didactic or illustrative purposes.

- *Fiction* – As with Parables, fiction is valuable as long as it is understood to be fiction and not literal. It too may serve truth by its didactic and illustrative capacities. Murray summarizes our approach to literary forms in relation to the truth saying, "we are to make full allowance for a variety of literary and rhetorical forms of speech… truth only requires that they be understood as such."[282]

What it requires

We may not look directly at what the commandment requires, first in the courtroom, and second in our relationships.

- In the *courts* – in order to ensure that only the truth is presented in legal proceedings, the Bible requires multiple witnesses in order to accuse and convict any defendant. This is true of the Old Testament in civil courts[283] and of the New Testament in ecclesiastical courts.[284] "He said, she said" accusations, one person's word against another's, no matter who was the accuser and who was the accursed, are not allowed. Social status, class, race, or gender are not to be allowed to bias legal proceedings. As further deterrence of false witnesses in the courts, when false accusations are revealed to be false, whatever penalty would have resulted for the accused is to be inflicted upon the false witness (Deut. 19:15-21). The principle is, the courts are to ensure that only the truth is discovered and presented in the courtroom.

- In *social relations* – in addition to what we've seen so far, we may quickly identify a number of important characteristics of our social interactions. We should be able to expect from everyone *simple honesty.* We should be able to expect the truth and only the truth from each other. Our yes is to be yes and our no, no (Matt. 5:37). We should be able to expect *candidness*. We should not find out six months after the fact that he has offended or hurt another believer while the entire time he or she has been all smiles in our interactions. Don't be false. Don't be phony. David complains of one whose "speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Psalm 55:21). Again, he speaks of those "who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts" (Psalm 28:3). Never should our words be "softer than oil" while inside our hearts there are "drawn swords." A sure way to undermine others' trust of us is to pretend all is well when it is anything but.

[282] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 136.
[283] Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15-21.
[284] Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28.

We should be able to expect *tact* from each other. Nothing about the Ninth Commandment requires that we be brutally honest. If one's wife or mother asks for comments on her new haircut, one need not in the name of honesty tell her exactly how horrible it looks. There are ways to speak truthfully without being cruel. Remember Jesus didn't dump truth on the disciples all at once. He taught truth "as they were able to hear it" (Mark 4:33). He accommodated his teaching to their capacity to understand and appreciate it.

We should be able to expect *accuracy* from each other. We should be known as a reliable source of information. We should not be among those who pass along hearsay or rumors. We are to deal only in confirmed truth. Our words should be *dependable.* We mean what we say and say what we mean. We show up when we say we will, on time, ready to contribute. The Proverbs warn,

> *Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot*
> *Is confidence in a treacherous person in time of trouble.* (Prov. 25:19, NASB)

Finally, we should believe the best about others. It is a quality of love that it "believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). We should be eager to protect the reputation of others. We are not to be suspicious of others, imputing bad motives, refusing to believe that others may be sincere and honest. We are those who insist upon the truth, and so are slow to attribute to others what has not be established by facts.

Tenth Commandment

> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. (Ex. 20:17)

There are distinctive features to highlight in connection with this last of the Ten Commandments, primarily because it is the most comprehensive of the commands. "Your commandment is exceedingly broad," the psalmist exclaims, and this is the broadest of them all (Psalm 119:96). Consequently, this is the most commonly broken of all the commandments because this most clearly is dealing with our hearts, our motives, with our internal attitudes. Jesus was not introducing anything novel when He insisted that to *lust* after the wife of another is sin – it is right here in the Tenth Commandment. The Greek word used in the New Testament to translate the word "covet" (*epithumeō,* as in Rom. 7:7; 13:9) is also translated "lust" (Matt. 5:28; Rom. 1:24; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Pet. 2:10).

What it says

"You shall not *covet*" (Ex. 20:17). The word itself (*hāmad*, Greek: *epithumeō*, Acts 20:33; Rom. 7:7; 13:9) is neutral. It may be translated "desire" in connection with some positive good (eg. Psalms 19:10; 68:16; Luke 17:22; Jn 8:44; Phil. 1:23). In a negative context it indicates "an inordinate desire," "a wrong desire" (eg. Gen. 3:6; Deut. 7:25).[285] The parallel text in Deuteronomy 5:21 begins "you shall not covet," but then the succeeding clauses begin with "you shall not desire" (*āwād*, Deut. 5:21), a different word, more strongly (perhaps) stressing the subjective. In other words, not just wrong thoughts that lead to action are forbidden, but the *wrong thoughts themselves*. We continue in Exodus, "your neighbor's *house*," that is, not just the building, but his household, his family, and all that is his. The rest of the verse provides some examples: his wife, servants, ox, donkey, his field (Deut. 5:21) or "anything" that is

[285] Also Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 10:6; Gal. 5:17-24; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5; 2 Tim. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:4.

your neighbor's. We are not to have an inordinate desire for anything that belongs to another. The function of the list is to be *all inclusive*. Anything that belongs to another is not to become the focus of negative emotions. Wanting what they have is not to become a prominent desire, a lust, or an obsession. Neither is the associated resentment of them for having what we lack.

What it forbids

Do we have problems with this today? Not only do we struggle to comply with its requirements, we have whole industries promoting covetousness, often intentionally. There is much in the modern world that makes compliance with this command *so very difficult* today. What the Tenth Commandment forbids is exactly what the modern world is calculated to promote. How does it do so? We may answer this question from two perspectives.

- *Micro/Personal Level* – We can begin at the micro or personal level. We struggle today with the high visibility of wealth, beauty, and talent. We may call these the three "B's": brains, beauty (or brawn), and bucks. Those in the media, who are most looked to in the modern world to *set trends* and *sell goods*, to provide a model or image of the good life, are *beautiful people* who have *beautiful things*. The growth of social media has compounded the problem. We are able to see "the good life" all around us: beautiful people, beautiful cars, beautiful homes, perpetual happiness. Some people seem to have it all. To be beautiful, rich, clever, is presented as the purpose and goal in life. Inevitably we make comparisons. If I lack some or all of the above, if I have problems, if I am plain and ordinary me, the gap between what I am encouraged to want and what I have becomes the breeding ground for discontent.

  Within reason, the "3 B's" are accessible so we pursue them. We can exercise to perfect our bodies. We can hire surgeons lift our faces, shrink our bellies, and trim our noses. We can borrow money so as to acquire all of the latest most desirable, most fashionable things. If all else fails we can surround ourselves with the kinds of people who have what we don't have and live vicariously off of them as a part of their inner circle, enjoying the crumbs that fall from their table. Yet the inevitable result of this pursuit is growing discontent. How do I keep up with the Joneses? How do I ensure that I have the latest (and prettiest) gadgets, appliances, furnishings, wardrobe, cars, boats, and so on? We can't. There is always another Jones who has more. So we grow increasingly unhappy, resentful, jealous, covetous, and envious. We become dissatisfied with our little house and old car. Compared with the people in the movies or even in social media, our life doesn't look so fun and our spouse may not look so good. So we grow increasingly miserable, resentful (feeling trapped), jealous, covetous of our neighbors and all that belongs to them.

- *Macro/Societal Level* – If we look more broadly at society we can identify philosophical developments that compound covetousness. We are thinking in particular of the confusion of rights and privileges. We hear of rights to housing, minimum income, health care, televisions, cell phones, and air conditioners. We see the wealth of others. We see a large gap between what they have and what we have. We are tempted to say of material inequality that "it's not fair," that they have so much while we have so little. It is not right, it's even an injustice, an inequity that they have an abundance while we struggle to get by. We may become advocates of "social justice," and urge the civil government use the power of the sword to forcibly redistribute wealth. We may come to believe that wealth is a zero-sum game, that the size of the pie is static, and that the wealthy have what they have at the expense of the poor. Covetousness is an important element in the politics of our day.

The result of all of the above is an age that is obsessively acquisitive and yet miserable. We live in a consumer society, fixated upon the material, upon the toys, and cars, and boats, and planes, and houses, and wardrobes, and travel, and the prosperity that makes it all possible. These, we are sure, are the key to happiness. Consequently, discontent is epidemic. We yearn for a better job, house, care, neighborhood, and spouse. We are discontent with our plain, average, regular, dull, predictable selves. We perceive ourselves as deprived and cheated. We are resentful of the privileged few who have what we lack: the rich, the beautiful, the brilliant, the talented, the powerful, the one percent. Our bitterness becomes jealousy, our jealousy becomes covetousness (I feel cheated. I want what you have), our covetousness becomes envy (if I can't have it I don't want you to have it either). So it is that covetousness lies behind murder, adultery, theft, and slander.

Context within Decalogue

We've progressed through the second table of the law from the Fifth, to the Sixth, to the Seventh, to the Eighth and the Ninth Commandments, and seen that they are designed to protect the sanctity of family, of life, marriage, property, and truth. The Ninth Commandment focused attention on *our words*. The Tenth Commandment moves us into the area of *our thoughts,* and as such we may observe the following.

- It *encompasses* the previous commands (and attacks the source of the sins which they forbid). The First and Second Commandments forbid other gods and idols. The Apostle Paul declares that covetousness *is idolatry* (Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5). Jesus says that we can't serve God and money (Matt. 6:24). At the root of idolatry is covetousness.

  The Third Commandment forbids a vain, senseless, superstitious, manipulative use of God's name. That is, it forbids the use of God's name for one's own ends, for one's own pleasures. It forbids invoking God's name to promote the same self-centered materialistic, idolatrous orientation forbidden in the first two commandments.

  We are unlikely to observe the rest which the Fourth Commandment requires when we are driven by covetous desires and material discontent. We may determine to use the time when others rest in order to get ahead of competition. The coveting of the lineage, estate, and social status of others may lead to feelings of shame toward and therefore dishonoring of the parents we are required to honor by the Fifth Commandment. It may be that because of my obsession with wealth, that I am unwilling to support them in their old age (see Matt.15:3-9). David covets Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and therefore breaks the 7th commandment, committing adultery. Then in frustration, he arranges the murder of Uriah, violating the Sixth Commandment. Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), and therefore frames him in "court," violating the Ninth Commandment, and thereby arranging his murder, violating the Sixth. Achan covets the treasure of Jericho (Josh. 7:21), therefore stealing it, violating the Eighth Commandment. "The love of money," says the Apostle Paul, "is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Tim. 6:10). James describes the progression.

  > *14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.* (James 1:14-16)

  This movement from thought to act reads like a commentary on Genesis 3. What leads us into sin? It is our "desire," our "lust" (same word, *epithumia*) that lures and entices us. The Apostle John uses the same word to speak of "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life"

(1 John 2:16, NASB). It is our lust for these things, our desire, our covetousness that lead us into all manner of sin. As Jesus said "from out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matt. 15:19). Covetousness is the sinful inward state of mind which leads to the external sinful act.

- It also *expands* previous commandments. With the other nine commandments we can fake our way through compliance. They can be *externally observed.* We can observe a Sabbath and avoid murder and adultery. The Tenth Commandment, however, is entirely concerned with *motives,* with thoughts, with our mental disposition. As we've seen, Jesus taught us that its not enough to refrain from murder. No, we must refrain from anger (Matt. 5:21, 22). It's not enough to refrain from adultery. No, we must refrain from lust (Matt. 5:27, 28). The Tenth Commandment deals explicitly with the heart, and in doing so makes clear what is *implicit* in the rest. The law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14). It addresses *attitudes* as well as *actions.*

- It *exposes* our inability to keep the Law. The Apostle Paul himself says he was "blameless" before the Law, as far as external observance was concerned (Phil. 3:6). It was only when he pondered the meaning of the Tenth Commandment did he come to fully understand its full implications.

> *7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.* (Rom. 7:7-8)

Through the law comes the knowledge, or conviction of sin (Rom. 3:20). Ironically it also stirs up sin, further demonstrating the perversity of our nature (Rom. 7:8)! We lust for forbidden fruit. We tell our children "no" and they press all the more to do the one thing forbidden, not the thousand other things that they might do. So we try to obey God and please God, but find we can't do it. Until finally what? Until we either blaspheme or plead for mercy. Until we apostatize or plead for a Savior. So it is that they law is a tutor, a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Having taught us to seek Christ for salvation, the law of God also teaches us to continue seeking Christ for the strength to obey all the commandments. Jesus taught us that "apart from him we can do nothing" (John 15:3). Only as we are "strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" are we able to stand and fight victoriously (Eph. 6:10ff). The "self-control" that is necessary if the law of God is to be obeyed is a fruit of the Spirit's work (Gal. 5:23). As we "walk according to the Spirit" we are enabled to fulfill "the righteous requirement of the law" (Rom. 8:4).

What it requires

- *Contentedness.* We are to accept and embrace our lot. If we are poor, plain, and plebian, so be it! This is not fatalism, or indifference, or passivity, or apathy. Rather, the Tenth Commandment requires submission to the sovereign purposes of Almighty God. It requires that we be happy with His allotments. Ultimately all our discontent is directed against God. He made us. He put us here. He controls our circumstances and He loves us. He ordains only our good, and promises to withhold no good thing from us (Psalm 84:11). He promises an eternity of glory with Christ. We are co-heirs with Him of all (Rom. 8:16-17). If I don't like my physical or mental characteristics against whom am I complaining? If I don't like my present circumstances; if I am bitter about where I am in life; about the past: accidents, hurts, tragedies; against whom are my complaints and bitterness directed?

Ultimately our anger is directed against God. Finally, we are denying the goodness, wisdom, and power of God. The Apostle Paul from prison declares,

> *For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.* (Phil. 4:11b)

He has learned the secret of contentedness, whether being hungry or filled, whether abundance or suffering need (Phil. 4:12). He has learned to be content in "all things (Phil. 4:13). How? "Through him who strengthens me."

- *Joy* in my neighbor's good. If the Joneses are wealthy, beautiful, brilliant, and aristocratic, so be it. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). Beware of the subtlety of covetousness. Job covenants with his eyes not to look at a woman lustfully (Job 31:1). The battle must be won at the level of thoughts, of motives, of the eyes. If we lose here, the corrupt actions will follow.

> *[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* (James 4:1-2)

"You desire" (*epithumia*), you lust and murder to pursue your lust. You "covet" (*zēloō*) what you don't have, leading to conflict. Envy seeks to destroy. It rejoices when misfortune comes to others. The Germans have a word for this: *schadenfreude.* It refers to the experience of pleasure or self-satisfaction that comes from learning of the misfortune of others. At the same time envy grieves at the good of others.

- Finally, *appropriate regard for wealth.* Riches are not evil. Yet Scripture provides an abundance of warnings. Jesus warned of the camel and the eye of the needle (Matt. 19:24). He warned us not to lay up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). The Apostle Paul urges us to set our minds on things above (Col. 3:1-3), and the Apostle John to love not the world nor the things of the world (1 John 2:15). God therefore condemns any obsession with wealth, and any dishonest, fraudulent, deceitful, exploitive, or coercive means of getting it.

This brings us back to contentment. The Apostle Paul knew that covetousness would always be a problem among believers. This is why he gave directions to his protégé Timothy on how to deal with it. The rich are to be instructed:

> *[17] As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. [18] They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, [19] thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

Wealthy believers are to trust God not their wealth. They are to be rich not merely in a worldly sense but "rich in good works." They are to be "generous and ready to share." As for the non-rich, for regular folks and the poor, to understand that "godliness *with contentment* is great gain," even in the circumstances of material scarcity. He continues:

> *[7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* (1 Tim. 6:7-10)

We are to be *content* with *food and clothing*, not fretting and fussing and resentful and embittered because we have less while others have more. The harmful "desires" (*epithumia,* again, could be translated lust) that arise from the pursuit of wealth are destructive. Let us then not covet what others have and we lack, but rejoice with their abundance even while we are content with what we have.

Concluding thoughts
What practical shape do the Ten Commandments give to a Spirit-enabled community?

The resulting Christian community is one in which God alone is worshipped and served (First Commandment), is worshipped according to His word (Second Commandment), reverently (Third Commandment), and on the Christian Sabbath (Fourth Commandment). It is a community in which the family and each generation in the family are honored (Fifth Commandment), life is sacred (Sixth Commandment), as also are marriage (Seventh Commandment), property (Eighth Commandment), and truth (Ninth Commandment). It is a community in which not just deeds and not just words are esteemed, but thoughts and motives as well. It is a community in which work is valued, but pursued with a higher aim than mere accumulation of things and pleasures. It is a community in which marriages are intact, children are reared in a home with a mother and father, in which property is respected, truth is sacred, purity of heart is cherished. It is a community in which we would all like to live.

The Nurturing of Reformed Piety

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The Nurturing of Reformed Piety

We introduced the subject of "piety" in chapter V. Our concern now is with what we might call Christian growth. How do we grow as Christians? How do we mature? How do we grow into Christ-likeness, so that we might be characterized by the "attitude" or "mind" which was in Christ Jesus, "follow in His steps," and love as He loved? (Phil 2:5ff; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 Jn 3:16). How do we become "imitators" of God as His "beloved children?" (Eph 5:1, 2). We've seen that the benefits of what Jesus accomplished long ago and far away come to us by means of the three primary and ordinary means of the word, sacraments, and prayer. We find this principle taught in the *Shorter Catechism* #88:

> *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*
> The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all of which are made effectual to the elect for salvation. (cf. *Larger Catechism* #156)

The Holy Spirit takes the benefits of Christ's saving and sanctifying work and applies them to us through the ordinary means of grace (see also *Shorter Catechism* #89; *Larger Catechism* #155). Now we must answer the question, where are these ordinary means primarily operative? The Reformed church has addressed this issue in identifying the three venues in which God is to be worshipped: the public assembly of the church, in families, and privately (or "in secret" – see *Westminster Confession of Faith,* XXI.6). We access the word and prayer in family devotions and in private devotions, to which we add the sacraments in public church services. Using traditional terminology, we may now look at the "Family Pew," the "Family Altar," the "Prayer Closet."

The Family Pew[286]

Our conviction is that the single most important commitment that any believer has to make is that commitment to be present in public worship were in and week out month after month, year after year, over the course of a lifetime. Why would we say that? For the following reasons:

- Jesus promises uniquely to be present when the church gathers. "There am I among them," He declares (Mt 18:20). While the Son of God may manifest His presence anywhere, at any time, we especially want to be where He promises to be.
- Jesus promises to "build" His church (Mt 16:18). He says this of no other organization, no other institution, no other entity. We want to be a vital part of building that which Jesus is building.
- The church that Jesus is building is visible and concrete. In the context of describing the discipline of wayward believers, He says, "Tell it to the church" (Mt 18:17). The church that Jesus is building is an organization to which things can be told. It is expected to act in response to what it has been told, namely, to exclude the disobedient. Consequently, it

[286] See *The Family Worship Book,* (1998; Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 3-5.

must have a membership, standards of belief and practice by which members are included and excluded, a procedure of discipline, and a form of government. It necessarily follows that it is essential for our spiritual well-being that we be a part of this visible, actual, ecclesiastical organization and not settle for *ad hoc,* informal, periodic connections with other believers.

- The Apostles connect the ministry of those with word gifts with the health of each believer and the church as a whole. We read of the ascended Christ,

> *11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,*
> *the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry,*
> *for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the*
> *faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the*
> *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,* (Eph 4:11-16)

The connection between the ministry of the "shepherds" or "pastors" (NASB) and "teachers" of the church, equipping, health, growth, unity, knowledge, maturity, and proper functioning of each part (member), and the church as a whole hardly could be more emphatic.

All believers need to be under the ministry of the word as administered by those called and gifted by God. Private Bible study is important (as we'll see), but it is not enough. Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* goes so far as to say, echoing the oft quieted principle of the church father Cyprian (210-258 AD), that outside of the church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (XXV.2).

Morning and evening services[287]

The pattern of piety that we see in the Bible is that of morning and evening worship. We see this even in Bible times. The morning and evening sacrifices of the temple[288].with their accompanying prayers, praises, and Scripture reading, provided the people of God with a pattern for their own devotions. We can see in the examples of David (Ps 5:3; 88:13; 119:147; 130:6), Daniel (Dan 9:21) and Ezra (Ezra 9:5). David prays,

> *Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,*
> *and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!* (Ps 141:2)

This pattern of morning and evening prayers was adopted by the early church, the medieval church the monastic orders, the Reformers, and by Protestant orthodoxy until the late 20th century. Only in recent decades has this pattern been challenged.

Of course it matters what goes on in the services of the church which one attends. Not all church services are created equally. Nevertheless, we may use for illustrative purposes the services of a healthy twice-Sunday church (hopefully our own) to demonstrate what is at stake.

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[287] For more on the subject of morning and evening service, see *Serving with* Calvin, 65-71.
[288] E.g. Ex 29:28; Num 28:3, 4; 1 Chron 16:40; 2 Chron 2:4, 13:11, 31:3; Ezra 3:3.

There are 52 Sundays in a year. Because we gather twice on Sunday, we conduct 104 services over the course of any given year. Because we read a chapter in each service, we read 104 chapters of the Bible. Because we sing a psalm in each service, we sing 104 psalms. Because we preach in each service, we preach 104 expositions of Scripture. Because we pray in each service, we pray the "full diet" 104 times. Let's say my family is typical of today's church families and we miss one Sunday a month. Someone drops in unexpectedly from out of town, a family member is sick, the family is spending a weekend away, all adding up to an average of about a Sunday a month. Now we're down to 80 chapters read, 80 psalms sung, 80 expositions, and 80 full diets of prayer. Now let's imagine that our church follows the trend and eliminates the evening service. This reduces our intake to 40 chapters read, 40 psalms sung, 40 expositions, and 40 full diets of prayer. How are we to compensate for the net loss of the word read, preached, sung, prayed and displayed? The honest answer is, it won't be. Rather than 104 doses of the above means of grace, my family and I are reduced by over 60% to 40. If we are sanctified by the truth (Jn 17;17; Rom 10:17, etc.), this loss is catastrophic for the church universal and damaging for individuals as well as families.

Those who join with us and settle on participating regularly only on Sunday morning are not ostracized or frowned upon. We may worry about whether or not such will ever "connect" with the church, make friends and feel like they really belong. Yet if they are happy, we leave them alone. Nevertheless, our view is that the spiritual health and vitality of members is directly related to their disciplined participation in the Sunday morning and evening service. We say this without even mentioning the fellowship with other believers that one enjoys before, during, and after these services.

Sabbath observance[289]

We've argued for the normativity of the fourth commandment in chapter VI. Our spiritual ancestors understood the enormous spiritual benefit that flows from the observance of the Christian Sabbath. They often referred to it as the best of days, *regina dierum,* the queen of days, and "the market day of the soul," the day of holy commerce, a full day devoted to transacting with God in spiritual things. We must not overlook the implication of the Sabbath command itself. What might that be? The implication is that our souls need a day apart from ordinary activities and devoted to the things of God. There is no reason for a Sabbath *day,* rather than a Sabbath *hour;* or a Sabbath *morning,* except that our souls need a whole day if spiritually we are to thrive. If our souls are to flourish, if our spiritual life is to be healthy and growing, a day separated from daily, ordinary, secular concerns and focused on eternal, spiritual, religious concerns is necessary. This is why God gave us the fourth commandment. It isn't an arbitrary imposition. "He has put another means into our hands for gaining heavenly wisdom," says the Puritan Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686). "These," he continues, "are our spiritual harvest days."[290]

It is helpful to recognize in practical terms that the observance of the Christian Sabbath and attendance at morning and evening services are mutually reinforcing. Our observation is that it is exceedingly difficult to observe a day-long Sabbath without an evening service to attend. Likewise, it is exceedingly difficult to maintain regular participation in the evening service

[289] See *Family Worship Book,* 6-8*;* and *The Christian Sabbath* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2021).
[290] Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm* (1669, 1810; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), 35.

unless one believes that "the whole time" on Sunday is to be spent in "the private and public exercises of God's worship" (*Shorter Catechism* #60; see also *Larger Catechism* # 117 and 119; *Westminster Confession of Faith* XXI.8). Without an evening service, there simply is too much time between the end of the morning service and bedtime. The temptation for most people will prove too great to take up "worldly employments and recreations," such as watching television, yard work, housekeeping, shopping, or actual "work-work," which allows one to get the jump on Monday morning.

Conversely, without a high view of the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath, one is less likely to return for an evening service. If one's view is that Sunday is the "Lord's morning," or worse, the "Lord's hour," one is likely to view the remainder of the day as time for the family, or relaxation, or socializing or work. One may even come to resent the alleged "hurried" feel of the day when one is obligated to return for an evening service. Typically, commitment to the evening service will not be sustained in such a context.

However, when both are in place, Sabbath observance and an evening service, then there is a natural rhythm to the day. One's morning is filled with Sunday School and the morning service. One's afternoon consists of the mid-day meal and a beautiful Sunday nap. Light post-nap refreshments are enjoyed as the family readies itself to return for the evening service. The congregation offers its evening "sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb 13:15), and in the case of our church, we enjoy each week a fellowship supper following the service. By the time one arrives back at home, the day is over, the whole day having been filled with the worship of God, the things of God, the people of God, and in summary, having been "kept holy."

Reformed piety has been a Sabbatarian piety. We have been very deliberate about working six days and resting on the seventh. We have been careful to set aside the first day of the week for the things of God. Serious Sabbath observance, the time it devotes to spiritual things, has created the potential for a deeper piety than otherwise would have been possible.

Children in worship

What about the children? Our aim is to have them in the public worship services *as soon as they are able to participate without disruption*. Years ago, our church provided children with an alternative to the worship service through age eight. Soon after I began my tenure in Savannah we brought the age limit down three years to age five. We find that most children can be taught to sit quietly before the end of their third year.

Why are we eager to have our children participating in pubic worship as soon as is practical? For two reasons. First, young children were present in the assemblies of Israel as well as those of the early church.[291] The Apostle Paul addresses them directly saying, "Children, obey your parents" (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). Clearly they were present in the assembly to hear these exhortations. Second, they are able to profit spiritually by their presence in public worship at a young age. Many a believer is able to recall crucial life-shaping truths that they heard in church as a child. In my own case there was a sermon on hell that I heard as a young boy that drove home the urgency of getting right with God and avoiding the horrors of the lake of fire. Another I heard based on

[291] Deut 31:12; Josh 8:35; 2 Chron 20:13.

Galatians 6:7 (KJV): "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" had much to do with keeping me out of trouble in my teens.

Beyond what they may hear with profit, there is value in the overall impression made by seeing parents and other adults, as well as youth and children all reverently humbling themselves before God in worship, hearing the beautiful praises sung, the urgent prayers offered, and the fervent sermons preached. We must not underestimate the long-term impact of simply being present in a God-centered worship service.

The Family Altar[292]

During the 19th century, as Sunday Schools began to be introduced in North America, resistance was encountered in a number of traditional Presbyterian churches. Their argument? That as the Sunday School was established, it would result in parental neglect of their responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. Were they right? Cause and effect would be difficult to determine. However, if they were, it would be an example of the "law of unintended consequences," that is typical of the modern world. Our intentions are wonderful. We mean to improve life by the creation of labor-saving devices, the development of new methods and the provision of supplementary resources. However, are we careful to examine the net effect of our innovations? Do they, in the long run, really help? *If the consequence of the proliferation of Christian meetings has been the neglect of daily family worship, then the net spiritual effect of those meetings has been negative.*

Previous generations understood the family to be a "little church" and fathers to be priests in their own homes. Parental responsibility was traced by our ancestors back to Abraham, to whom God commanded,

> *For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."* (Gen 18:19)

This responsibility of fathers is repeated for the Old Testament Church (especially Deut. 4:9-10; 6:7-9, 20; 11:19) as well as the new (Eph. 6:4) The responsibility of parents to conduct family worship achieved confessional status with the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* which teaches that worship is to be conducted "in private families daily" (XXI. 6). The Church of Scotland included in its editions of the *Westminster Standards* a *Directory for Family Worship*, its General Assembly even mandating disciplinary action against heads of households who neglected "this necessary duty."[293] Indeed, many of our Reformed forefathers believed in and practiced family worship *twice* daily (following the pattern of the morning and evening sacrifice). Family worship, they all assumed, was vital to the spiritual development of both parents and children.

[292] See *Family Worship Book,* 8-10. We have borrowed heavily from here for this section.
[293] See *Family Worship Book,* appendix 3.

However today, one does not hear much about family worship. No, instead we seem to have replaced it with small-group activities. These are the key, we hear again and again, to spiritual growth. Everyone needs to be in a small group. Or, it might be said, everyone needs to be in a discipleship group. Perhaps even, one needs to be involved in both. Maybe one needs to be involved in both, plus the church's prayer meeting, plus visitation, plus the choir, plus committee meetings, etc. My point is obvious, I assume. Protestantism has become all but silent on the issue of family worship, a near universal practice in the recent past, and replaced it with meetings that take us out of the home and away from the family. Don't misunderstand us. All of the above has its place. Yet its place should not be at the expense of family worship. Not only have we given up a proven method of transmitting the faith to the next generation, one that has a built-in format for Bible study, prayer, and singing, but we have done so for alternatives that add to our already hectic pace of life and take us away from our spouses, children, and neighbors.

In our experience these small groups have played a positive role in the spiritual growth of our youth, our college and post-college young adults, and on the other end of the age spectrum, our empty nesters. Not so with our parents with children at home. Family duties (meals with their children, bedtime routines, children's extra-curricular activities, etc.) keep them occupied during the week. Yet parents with children at home do have a discipleship group. Everyday little eyes are watching. Sooner than we realize, they become aware of discrepancies between what we say and what we do. The family, in this respect, is the truest of all proving grounds for authentic Christianity. Parents either practice what they preach or become the likely means of forever hardening their children's hearts to the gospel. Daily family worship forces the issues of Christian piety before the family every 24 hours. It forces parents in the roles of preachers, evangelists, worship leaders, intercessors, and pastors. Who is adequate for this? No one, or course (2 Cor 2:16 –3:5). He who would attempt to be so, must necessarily be forced to his knees. Children growing up with the daily experience of seeing their parents humbled in worship, focusing on spiritual things, submitting to the authority of the word, catechizing and otherwise instructing their children will not easily turn from Christ. Our children should grow up with the voices of their fathers prayerfully pleading for their souls ringing in their ears, leading to their salvation, or else haunting them for the rest of their lives.

If our children are in our homes for 18 years, we have 6,570 occasions (figuring a six-day week) for family worship. If they learn a new Psalm or hymn each month, they will be exposed to 216 in those 18 years. If they hear a chapter a day, they will complete the Bible four and a half times in 18 years. Every day (if the format of the *Family Worship Book* is followed) they will affirm a creed or recite the law. Every day they will confess their sins and plead for mercy. Every day they will intercede on behalf of others. Think in terms of the long view. What is the cumulative impact of just 15 minutes of this spiritual routine each day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for 18 years? At the rate of six days a week (excluding Sunday), one spends an hour and a half a week in family worship (about the length of a home Bible study), 78 hours a year (about the length of the teaching sessions of seven weekend retreats), 1,404 hours over the course of 18 years (about the length of the teaching sessions of 40 week-long summer camps). Think in terms of the cumulative effect of the discipline of family worship upon the children. Think of the cumulative effect upon the parents after 40 or 60 or 80 years of daily family worship—all this without having to leave the home.

What is one to do in one's quarter of an hour of daily family worship? What one is to do is quite simple:

1. Sing praises. We recommend a psalm or hymn of the month.
2. Read Scripture. We recommend about a chapter a day.
3. Pray. Confess sin, claim the gospel promises of pardon, and petition God for all the family needs and concerns, and more broadly for the church and the world.

We would also direct your attention to a number of resources in the *Family Worship Book* that I wanted to have at my fingertips when my children were at home. These include a Bible-reading record-keeping chart, the *Catechism for Young Children,* the *Shorter Catechism,* and a collection of 60 metrical psalms and 60 classic hymns with charts for month-by-month learning over a ten-year period.[294]

The Prayer Closet

Finally, our souls are sustained and piety nurtured by a disciplined life of private prayer and Bible reading.

Prayer
Jesus assumes that His people pray *daily* and *privately*. Notice the language of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us *this day* our daily bread." The model of Jesus' prayer is a *daily* prayer. Each day we are to praise God, confess our sins, and seek the necessities of life and godliness that are ours in Christ (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus also assumes that we nurture a *private* prayer life:

> *When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* (Mt 6:6)

He strongly urges that we pray in our own room, and to underscore the point, that we "shut the door," and pray in solitude to a God who "sees in secret," sees us in that secret, private place, hears us, and rewards us.

"Mercy is purchased by Christ's blood," says Watson, "but it is conveyed by prayer."[295] Through private prayer we fetch the blessings of God. By private prayer, as well a public, we "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

How do we go about establishing this discipline? First, establish a *routine.* Consider how we find time or make time for everything we deem important. Most of us will not fail to brush our teeth each morning. It is part of our routine. So also for other matters of bathing, grooming, and dressing. What about the cleansing, grooming, and dressing of the soul? Is it important? If so, we will find time for it. We recommend starting with the Navigator's "7 Minutes with God" program. Read the Bible for 3 ½ minutes and pray for 3 ½ minutes. Start small. Start with what

[294] For background help in catechizing, especially in connection with the *Shorter Catechism,* see *Catechizing our Children: The Whys and Hows of Teaching the Shorter Catechism Today* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013).
[295] Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 21.

is achievable. Anyone can squeeze seven minutes out of the morning. Do it every day without fail. Do it as consistently as brushing teeth.

One may find, as I did, that over time, more time is desirable. If so expand to 15 minutes. Gradually keep extending the time as increasingly the time alone is cherished, time in quiet, in prayer, and with an open Bible, hearing from God through His word and speaking to God in prayer.

Second, *pray systematically.* There are times when all we can do is cry out to God We see this not infrequently in the Psalms. Yet ordinarily we should pray in an orderly and comprehensive manner. Prayer is more than going to God with our shopping lists. When we pray we take time to address God as God: to praise Him, confess our sins, and thank Him. The following easy-to-remember acrostic is recommended as a guide to prayer.

A-C-T-S:
A=Adoration – We praise God for who He is, i.e. His attributes (e.g. His holiness, justice, goodness, truth, etc.). See 1 Chronicles 29:10ff for a good example of this. This is a time to meditate on and enjoy the beauty of God's character. Sit quietly and don't rush!

C=Confession – Our sin renders us unworthy to come into God's presence (Isa 59:2), and so we confess our sins both of *omission* (when I fail to do what I ought to do) and *commission* (when I have thought, said, or done what is wrong). See Psalm 51 and I John 1:9.

T=Thanksgiving – We are to give thanks for all our blessings, both spiritual and otherwise. Everything that we have is a gift from God (I Cor 4:7). So then, we count our blessings, and in everything give thanks (Eph 5:20, I Thess 5:18). Periodically write a list of those things for which we are especially thankful to God.

S=Supplication – Finally we make our requests, beginning with basic provisions such as "our daily bread," and then moving on into the areas listed on the following pages.[296]

Third, *utilize a prayer list*. A list of our petitions helps us both to *remember* those persons and things for which we mean to pray and *record* the answers that we receive. Consider the following a guide to creating a prayer list.

[296] For Scripture language on each of these categories, see *The Family Worship Book,* pp 25-43.

Model prayer list

I. Personal

1. Character**:** areas in which I need to become more like Jesus Christ (e.g. love for God and others: holiness, humility, contentment, etc.; help with problems like lust, pride, anger, selfishness, etc.)

2. Ministry: what are my gifts and where do I see God using me? How may I serve Jesus Christ at home, at school, in the community, in the church?

3. Calling: what is my full-time job (e.g. student, employee, employer)? Where do I need help (e.g. relationships with students, teachers, employer, fellow employees; attitude toward studies, work, schedule, work environment)?

II. Family

Pray for each member of your family by name, and for your family as a whole. Pray for all their needs and for healthy, loving relationships within the family.

III. Friends & Enemies

With which individuals and groups am I close? Whom has God providentially given to me as friends and associates, and therefore as people for whom I have a responsibility to pray? List both Christians and non-Christians, both friends and enemies and pray for their needs.

IV. Church

1. Leaders: Pray for your ministers and their needs; your elders and deacons. Pray for strong, wise leadership for our church.

2. Ministries: Pray for each church service, various Bible study meetings, and special events. Pray that our worship will be God-centered, gospel-driven and word-filled, and that sinners will be saved and the saints sanctified

V. Nation

1. Leaders: Local, state, and national civil authorities in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government (e.g. city officials, the governor, President, Congress, the courts). Pray that God will give them wisdom as they rule.

2. Issues and Events: significant current events and issues of a moral and/or legal nature should be brought to the Lord in prayer (e.g. church/state relations, abortion, the decline of public morality, war and peace).

4. Revival: our only hope as a nation is that God will pour out His Holy Spirit in a mighty way, bringing it (us!) to repentance and to submission to God and His Christ.

VI. World

Our God is a global God. Most of us need to broaden our horizons. Begin to pray for peoples and countries all around the world.

1. Spiritual needs: pray for the hundreds of millions who have never heard the name of Christ; for the struggling yet growing churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; the dying churches of Europe; for the persecuted churches of China, Cuba, India and throughout the Muslim world. Pray for worldwide revival, that the "knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

2. Physical needs: remember the multiple millions who are hungry, who lack clothing and shelter, who are victims of violence, oppression and injustice.

Pray, then, believing that if we ask, we will receive, that if we seek, we will find, and that if we knock, it will be opened to us (Mt 7:7, 8).

Bible reading and study

Jesus teaches us that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). The word of God nourishes our souls. It provides the sound spiritual diet that ensures the health and well-being of our souls. This is why the psalmist meditates on it constantly, even "day and night" (Ps 1:2; 119:97). He hides it in his heart (he memorizes it) that he might not sin against God (Ps 119:11). It is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path, guiding him through life (Ps 119:105). Consequently, God's word should be read, studied and memorized.

Reading

There are a number of helpful annual reading programs that one may use according to personal preference. For those getting started, we recommend a selective reading, an overview of the Old and New Testaments. Our hope is to prevent one's inaugural launch into Scripture from getting bogged down in the detail of the genealogies and ceremonial laws in Leviticus and Numbers. Skipping certain sections of the Bible does not imply that these sections are not the word of God. Rather, we merely are recognizing that some sections of Scripture are more accessible than others, especially for those who relatively are Bible novices.

A Suggested Old Testament Overview

I was in seminary before I realized that the large front section of the bible is essentially consecutive history, from creation to the return of Israel from exile in Babylon: Creation – Flood – Fall – Covenant with Abraham – Isaac – Jacob – 12 sons/tribes – Joseph and Egypt – Moses and Exodus – Joshua and conquest – Judges (e.g. Gideon and Samson) – Samuel – Saul – David

– Solomon – kings of Israel and Judah – exile – Ezra/Nehemiah and return. This historical block is about one third of the entire Bible.

1. Genesis – Creation and Flood; *covenant* with Abraham established and traced through Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons, concluding with the children of Israel joining Joseph in Egypt.
2. Exodus 1-24, 40 – The children of Israel are still in Egypt, though now the slaves of their Egyptian hosts. Exodus records the *deliverance* of Israel from Egypt through Moses and the mighty acts of God, and their *departure* for Canaan. In Exodus 19, they arrive at Mt. Sinai where they remain to the end of the book. The preparations for the tabernacle, the priests, and the sacrifices described in 25-39 culminate in the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle, God dwelling with His people.
3. Numbers 10-17 – Records the departure of Israel from Mt. Sinai (where they have been since Exodus 19, through Leviticus to Numbers 10:10); their journey to the Jordan River where the people rebel and receive the judgement of 40 years of *wandering* in the wilderness.
4. Joshua 1-11; 22-24 – Following the 40 years of wandering and a second issuing of the Law of God (Deuteronomy), Joshua records the *conquest* of Canaan.
5. Judges – Traces the *occupation* of Canaan, and life before the monarchy, when Israel was led by the Judges (e.g. Samson, Gideon), and "everyone did what wat right in his own eyes."
6. 1 & 2 Samuel – The last of the Judges and first of the prophets (Samuel) gives way to the *monarchy,* as we read of the reigns of Saul and David.
7. 1 & 2 Kings – Solomon follows David as King in Israel (1 Kings 1-11); thereafter, the *kingdom is divided* (931 BC) into North (Israel or Samaria) and South (Judah). Sin grows in both nations until 722 when the North is destroyed by Assyria, and 587 when the South is deported by Babylon. 1 & 2 Chronicles essentially repeats the events of the books of Samuel and Kings, but from a different, more positive perspective.
8. Ezra & Nehemiah – Record the first waves of those returning from the Babylonian captivity in 538 (Ezra 1-6), 458 (Ezra 7-10), and 444 (Nehemiah 1-13).
9. 10 Psalms – To acquaint the reader with the *poetic* literature in Scripture.
10. 10 Proverbs (10 chapters, that is) – To acquaint the reader with wisdom literature in Scripture.
11. Amos – Prophet of woe
12. Hosea – Prophet of hope

A Suggested New Testament Overview

1. Luke – Longest and most comprehensive of the Synoptic Gospels (along with Matthew and Mark).
2. John – the "fourth gospel" omits much of what the Synoptics record, records much of what the synoptics omit. Sometimes referred to as the "spiritual gospel."
3. Acts – History of the Early Church from the ascension of Christ through the early ministries of the Apostles, focusing on the Apostles Peter and Paul.
4. Romans – the most systematic and theologically comprehensive presentation of the whole gospel.

5. 1 Corinthians – A very practical letter to a very needful church. Deals with pride, Christian freedom, love, marriage, worship, and more.
6. Ephesians – Provides an overview of basic Christian teaching concerning the work of Christ.
7. 1 & 2 Timothy – Deals with the ongoing structure and operation of the church.
8. 1 Peter – Exposes the beginner to an apostolic writer other than the Apostle Paul. Deals with suffering and persecution, providing comfort in times of trial.

This gives one a basic introduction to the Old Testament and the history of Israel, and the New Testament's presentation of the person and work of Christ and the early years of the church that He founded. Once this has been completed, go back and read the whole Bible, including the portions skipped.

If one reads three chapters a day, one reads through the whole Bible in a year. If one reads four chapters, one may read through the whole Bible once, the New Testament and Psalms twice. This relatively rapid reading helps one to see the "forest," the big picture of Scripture, and not get lost in the trees.

Study
Deeper appreciation of the Bible comes by adding to the light reading of Scripture the deep study of Scripture. Grasping the "trees" amidst the "forest" is as important as grasping the forest amidst the trees.

We suggest selecting a book of the Bible (e.g. 1 John) to work through a paragraph at a time. Use the simple method outlined below:

1. *Paraphrase* (put into one's own words) the paragraph pretending perhaps that one is explaining its meaning to a friend, using modern language and illustrations.

2. Then *apply* the passage, recording what has been learned about God, truth, the Christian life, etc., and how one ought to *respond* to what one has learned

For example, we might reword John's statement, "Love not the world nor the things of the world," as "Don't be all caught up in the things the world has to offer." (1 John 2:15)

Then one might *apply* the text to oneself by saying, "God does not want me to be wrapped up in the world's things. I need to be far less concerned with clothes, houses, cars, and the opinions of others" — or whatever one's thing happens to be.

My early years of spiritual growth accelerated when I began to use this approach in the study of Philippians. For the first time in my life the Bible came alive. For the first time I understood that the Apostle Paul was a real person with real feelings of both joy and frustration. The Bible opened up for me in ways it had never done before.

This sort of study is a method of encouraging meditation on Scripture. “Hearing begets knowledge,” says Watson, “but meditation begets devotion.”[297] Again, “reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our hearts.” He warns, “The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.”[298] As one wrestles with understanding a passage, the process itself forces one to ponder its meaning at length, to the edification of one’s soul. Memorization, of course, is always to be encouraged as a means of truly treasuring God’s word in one’s heart (Ps 119:11).

* * *

The Christian life is maintained and nourished through these three spiritual disciplines: public, family, and private worship. These are the commitments, the routines, centered as they are on the word of God, that the Holy Spirit uses to grow His people into Christ-like maturity.

[297] Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm,* 23.
[298] Ibid., 118.