



# *Leadership* TRAINING GUIDE

*A Resource for Pastors, Elders, and Church Leaders  
of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*

# *Leadership* TRAINING GUIDE

*A Resource for Pastors, Elders, and Church Leaders  
of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*



Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 510  
Orlando, FL 32822  
info@epc.org  
www.epc.org

Third Edition, 2021  
Second Printing, 2022

The First Edition of the EPC Leadership Training Guide  
was received by the 26th General Assembly (June 2006) as a resource  
and commended for use in EPC congregations.  
Additional editions have been edited and produced by the Ministerial Vocation Committee.

© 2007-2022, Evangelical Presbyterian Church. All rights reserved. This work is licensed under  
the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivs 3.0 Unported License.  
To view a copy of this license, visit [www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)  
or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco CA 94105.

# Contents

---

Introduction.....	iv
Using This Guide with the Ordination Questions .....	v
Chapter 1: Early Church History .....	I
Chapter 2: Reformed Church History.....	19
Chapter 3: Reading the Bible.....	45
Chapter 4: Theology .....	57
Chapter 5: Anthropology.....	75
Chapter 6: Christology.....	91
Chapter 7: Soteriology.....	107
Chapter 8: The Holy Spirit .....	125
Chapter 9: Ecclesiology and the Sacraments .....	137
Chapter 10: Eschatology .....	151
Chapter 11: The Purpose for Which God Created the World .....	165
Chapter 12: Church Government.....	183
Chapter 13: The Officers of the Church.....	193
Chapter 14: The Life and Character of the Officer .....	203
Chapter 15: Leading Healthy Churches .....	209
Emotional and Spiritual Health Inventory .....	218
Ordination Vows.....	223

# Introduction

---

*A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.  
(Jesus in Luke 6:40, NIV)*

Since the earliest times, the process of training leaders of biblical faith has been a key concern in the pages of Scripture. Leaders must be trained. Just a few examples include Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and Peter. For example, the Apostle Paul writes about this in the training of his protégé, Timothy:

*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,  
entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.  
(2 Timothy 2:2, NASB)*

Our hope is that this Leadership Training Guide might aid every church in training godly leaders who will then teach others the truths of our faith. This is undoubtedly a large task. Like all such curricula, this guide has its strengths and weaknesses. Certainly, some will find this guide incomplete, while others might declare it too in-depth. Our goal in producing this guide has not been to find flawless precision for every situation (as if anyone could), but to offer a significant resource tool to the congregations of the EPC. We have simply tried to build a resource for the training of church leadership.

We encourage pastors and trainers to exercise their own wisdom, and to feel free to adapt the use of this guide to fit their own church's needs. The guide includes chapters arranged by theological topics. Boxes in each chapter add depth, quotes, or discussion items. At the end of each chapter you will find two additional resources: a "Practical Leadership Applications" section with practical applications for church leaders, and some questions on the chapter material for discussion or review.

This guide has been birthed by significant work and prayer from many members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Tom Werner, Moderator of the 38th General Assembly and Ruling Elder for Greentree Community Church in Kirkwood, Missouri, wrote and pioneered much of the manual at his own congregation. Teaching Elder Brad Strait edited and wrote many sections. A special thanks to Caroline Tromble, Scott Sealy, and other members of the Ministerial Vocation Committee and the Theology Committee. Most importantly, many churches have added to the process through use, experimentation, and feedback. Additionally, this Leadership Training Guide would not exist without the ideas, energy, and expertise of key EPC leadership: Stated Clerk Jeff Jeremiah, Assistant Stated Clerk Jerry Iamurri, former Stated Clerk Mike Glodo, former Assistant Stated Clerk Ed McCallum, Director of Communications Brian Smith, Executive Assistant Zenaida Bermudez, and the staff of the Office of the General Assembly who have touched and tended these pages.

For all who prayed over this Guide; for all who participated in its preparation, design, and review; and for all those churches who will participate in using it, we say simply, *Soli Deo Gloria*.

The EPC Ministerial Vocation Committee, December 2020

# Using this Guide

---

## *with the Ordination Questions*

The ability to faithfully take ordination vows requires that leaders understand what they are promising to do. Anything less than this is contrary to the Bible, which reminds us, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). Self-study, reading, and review should be completed prior to ordination. To that end, we have included a guide of readings which apply specifically to the ordination questions. In the EPC Book of Government, we find common questions for the ordination vows of Ministers, Ruling Elders, and Deacons.<sup>1</sup> The ordered list is included on page 223. Use these pages to study them:

### **On Jesus Christ:**

1. Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?
  - Read and discuss pages 78-84, on "The Effects of the Fall."
  - Read and discuss pages 84-85, on "The Answer to Adam's Fall."
  - Read and discuss Chapter 6 on "Christology," pages 91-106.

### **On the Bible:**

2. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
  - Read and discuss the "Five Solas" on page 20.
  - Read and discuss Chapter 3, "Reading the Bible," on pages 45-56.
  - Read and discuss the "Practical Leadership Applications" section on pages 53-55.

### **On a System of Doctrine and Theology:**

3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith<sup>2</sup> and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
  - Read and discuss Chapter 2, pages 19-43, on "Reformed Church History" for an understanding of the who, what, why, and when of the Westminster Confession.
4. Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with the system of doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, you will on your own initiative make known to your church Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
  - Look at and discuss the theological ideas and quotes from the Westminster Confession found on the following pages of this Leadership Training Guide:

Scripture.....	45-47	Sanctification.....	117-118
Providence and Free Will .....	64-65	The Visible and Invisible Church .....	138
The Trinity.....	66-68	Sacraments.....	141-145
Creation and the Fall.....	75-81	Death and Immortality.....	152-154
Sin.....	86-88	God's Purposes.....	166-171
Theology of T-U-L-I-P.....	108-116	Troubling Questions .....	172-173

5. Do you affirm and adopt the "Essentials of Our Faith" without exception?
- Read and discuss "Subscription and the Adopting Act (1729) on page 26.
  - Read and discuss "The Essentials of Our Faith" and the "Explanatory Statement" on pages 34-35.

### **On Being Under Proper Authority:**

6. Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?
- Read and discuss Chapter 12 on "Church Government," pages 183-191.
7. Do you promise subjection to your fellow officers in the Lord?
- Read and discuss "The Authority of the Church" on pages 187-189.

### **On the Office and High Call of the Gospel:**

8. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to accept the office of (Minister, Ruling Elder, or Deacon) from love of God and sincere desire to promote His glory in the gospel of His Son?
- Review the "Five Solas" on page 20 and discuss *Sola Deo Gloria*.
  - Read and discuss "The Work and Decrees of God" on pages 63-66.
  - Read and discuss Chapter 11, pages 165-182.
9. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise to you on that account?
- Read and discuss "Sanctification" on pages 117-119.
10. Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as (Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon), whether personal or relative, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before this congregation of which God will make you an officer?
- Read and discuss "The Work of the Holy Spirit" on pages 125-126.
  - Read and discuss the Chapter 15, "Leading Healthy Churches," pages 209-225.
11. Are you now willing to take responsibility in the life of this congregation as a (Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon), and will you seek to discharge your duties, relying upon the Grace of God, in such a way that the entire Church of Jesus Christ will be blessed?
- Read and discuss Chapter 14, "The Life and Character of the Officer," on pages 203-208.

---

<sup>1</sup>For complete ordination instructions and questions for Ministers, Ruling Elders, and Deacons, see EPC Book Of Government, chapter 14, pages 43-48.

<sup>2</sup>A traditional language copy of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms is available at [www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org). A modern language version may be ordered from [www.epcresources.org](http://www.epcresources.org)

## CHAPTER I

# Early Church History

The church of Jesus Christ is rooted in historical events—the coming of Jesus Christ, His death, and His resurrection to provide God's grace to humankind. The Bible makes clear that the work of Christ took place in a definite place at a particular time. Luke tells us that the birth of Christ took place during the reign of Augustus Caesar, when Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). Matthew sets the work of Christ in a genealogy of Israel and in the days of Herod the king (Matthew 2:1). Paul says that the birth of Jesus was at just the right time (Galatians 4:4), and that a well-informed person would be familiar with the events of the gospel, because they "did not take place in a corner" (Acts 26:26). In Acts 27, Luke even records minor sailing details. Why? Because the Bible, in most cases, is written by eyewitnesses. Luke is writing down what he saw, documenting history.

The gospel is rooted in history, and God is the ruler of that history. As the gospel spread, the history of the early church was recorded in the book of Acts, which many Christians have read and know well. However, many of us find our knowledge of the history of the church after the book of Acts to be scanty at best. Yet church history is a rich resource that shows us ways Christians have brought glory to Christ, as well as mistakes Christians have made that have discredited God's name. Knowledge of the history of God's church can help steer us in the right direction in our own times.

In this chapter, we will look at the history of the early church, based on the events associated with ten key events. In the next chapter we will look more specifically at the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. If we look with care at these events, we can see the best and the worst—not just of Christians during other periods—but of ourselves as well. We will start with the year AD 70.

### *Titus Destroys Jerusalem (AD 70)*

As the Gospels closed, almost all the believers were Jewish. Yet within one or two generations, the church was predominantly Gentile. How did this transition take place? In Acts, we see the persecution of the infant church by the Jewish leaders. Peter and John were arrested and released by the Sanhedrin, the same council that had arrested Jesus (Acts 5).

*"In those days  
a decree went out  
from Caesar Augustus  
that all the world  
should be enrolled ..."*

*~Luke 2:1*

*"Now when the  
south wind blew gently,  
supposing that they had  
obtained their purpose,  
they weighed anchor  
and sailed along Crete,  
close to the shore.*

*But soon  
a tempestuous wind,  
called the northeaster,  
struck down  
from the land.  
And when the ship  
was caught and  
could not face the wind,  
we gave way to it  
and were driven along.  
Running under the lee  
of a small island  
called Cauda, we managed  
with difficulty to  
secure the ship's boat."*

*~Acts 27:13-16*



*A detail from the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing Titus' victorious forces carrying to Rome the sacred Menorah and other treasures from the Jewish Temple (AD 80).*

Stephen was arrested next and condemned to death (Acts 7). Herod arrested James, the brother of John, and had him put to death with the sword. When Herod saw that the people were pleased by this, he arrested Peter as well, but Peter miraculously escaped (Acts 12). As early as Acts 9, we read that Jewish Christians were scattered to Damascus, well away from Jerusalem. From here, Acts tracks the development of a mission to the Gentiles through Paul.

In AD 66, the Jews revolted against the rule of Rome. The Roman procurator seized money from the temple, and when the Jews object-

ed, he sent troops who besieged the city. Eventually the Romans broke through the city walls, massacred the inhabitants, and destroyed the Jewish temple, which ended the temple sacrifices. The Jewish revolt ended at Masada, a bleak slab of rock above the Dead Sea. The Jews there withstood a siege for nine months before committing mass suicide in AD 73 rather than surrender to the Romans. The Roman army carried back to Rome the temple treasures, which were melted down or sold to finance the Colosseum.

So, where were the Christians during these events? Sometime before, the Christians left Jerusalem to escape the persecution and moved to the city of Pella, some distance from Jerusalem. By the time Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple with it (as Jesus had prophesied, recorded in Matthew 24:1-2), the Christians were out of town.

The destruction of Jerusalem was not the cause of division between Christians and Jews, but instead made clear what had already taken place—the fledgling church had become more Gentile than Jewish. The church would no longer look to Jerusalem and Jewish Christians for leadership, but to Gentile centers such as Rome and Constantinople. Although there were still many Jewish Christians, the church became predominantly Gentile.

### ***The Edict of Milan (313)***

The Edict of Milan was the product of a meeting between Constantine, ruler of the Western part of the Roman Empire, and Licinius, ruler of the Eastern part of the empire. Just months earlier, Constantine became the first emperor to throw in with the Christian sect. Constantine was a usurper of the empire. His army was to fight a battle against the forces of Maxentius, the incumbent emperor, and in a vision Constantine received a command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine was victorious at the battle of Milvian Bridge and became

emperor. Within months after the battle, Constantine met with Licinius and concluded an alliance. They agreed in part that the persecution of Christians should stop, and that their churches, cemeteries, and properties should be returned to them.

The Edict of Milan did not make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. It was a document of religious toleration, although it is true that Constantine was sympathetic to Christianity (Constantine's mother, Helena, was a strong Christian, and, just before his death, Constantine was baptized.) For more than two hundred years, the Roman Empire had persecuted Christians, denied them positions of authority, seized their property, subjected them to terrible tortures, and took their lives. The persecutions were sporadic, depending on the emperor and where the Christians lived. The edict marked the first time that the empire acknowledged Christians to be entitled to the protections of Rome. Some periods of persecution followed, but this was a new direction.

Some would call the end of persecution a mixed blessing. The empire later became closely associated with the Christian faith. This transition brought new problems. Under persecution, Christians were common people—fishermen and slaves and criminals condemned to death for following a carpenter. During the latter stages of the Roman Empire, Christians rose to positions of great prominence and wealth. People joined the church for political reasons. How would the young church respond? Would believers remain firm in the faith? Or would Christians give way to the temptation of an easy life? Over the centuries, Christians have experienced the transition from persecution, to acceptance, to dominance in society, and then back in many countries.

A moment of self-examination is appropriate here. Where do we fit along the spectrum—persecution to acceptance to dominance in society—and how does our faithfulness measure up against those who have fought the good fight? Why are we Christians? To what end will we stand?

### *The Councils Of Nicaea & Chalcedon (325/451)*

July 4, 325, was an important day. Three hundred bishops—church leaders from across the Roman Empire—gathered in the city of Nicaea, in present-day Turkey. Many bore the scars of persecution, but now they met with the blessing and at the urging of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, to discuss family matters. And the most important matter to discuss was, "Who is Jesus?"

Arius was the pastor of a church in Alexandria, Egypt, who taught that Jesus was more than human, but something less than God. He taught that God originally lived alone and had no Son. Then God created the Son, who in turn created everything else. Arius popularized his ideas through

*The Edict of Milan shifted Christianity from being an illicit, persecuted sect to being a welcome—and even dominant—religion in the west:*

*"Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each person has desired, whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us and to all who are placed under our authority. Therefore, we thought it salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no person whatever should be refused complete toleration, who has given up his mind either to the cult of the Christians or the religion which he personally feels best suited to himself ..."*



An icon of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

witty rhymes. "There was a time when the Son was not," could be set to a catchy tune whistled by the man on the street. To some, the Arian position may have been attractive because it mirrored the Roman hierarchy of gods. Others were concerned about maintaining the distinction between God the Father and God the Son. Others recognized that if Christ were not pre-existent, eternally one with the Father, there would be an infinite gap between God and Jesus; Jesus would be a creature, and the Savior less than divine. Can a finite Savior's sacrifice be sufficient for the remission of the sins of all of humankind?

The assembly was comprised of 318 bishops from all branches of the faith, including church fathers Eusebius, Nicholas of Myra (the seed of the Santa Nicholas legends), and Aristaces of Armenia (son of Saint Gregory the Illuminator). The leaders included two men from Alexandria:

Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and his secretary Athanasius, a deacon. In the course of debate at Nicaea, the assembly agreed on a formula that clearly rejected Arianism. The statement affirms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then says about Jesus that He is:

"The Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father; God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father ...

"Those who say that there was [a time] when He was not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance or essence, or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathemizes."

The Nicene Creed rejects any idea that Jesus is a creature, or less divine than the Father. This is seen in the affirmations such as "God of God, light of light, true God of true God." It is also why the creed declares that the Son is "begotten, not made." But the key word is the Greek *homoousias*, usually translated as "of the same substance." This was intended to convey that the Son is just as divine as the Father. They are the same.

In spite of the hopes of the bishops, the Council of Nicaea did not end the controversy. Followers of Arius won important positions within the Roman Empire's hierarchy. Athanasius, the secretary and deacon who helped formulate the creed, succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria, but he spent much of his life in ministry evading his Arian enemies in

the most harrowing of escapades. He was exiled by his Arian enemies five times, escaped to live with monks in the Egyptian desert, and was put on trial falsely for murder.

Councils followed at Constantinople in 381 and Chalcedon in 451. At Chalcedon a second set of affirmations further defined the nature of Christ. Eventually the views expressed by the Nicene Creed and the Council of Chalcedon won out. We will return to the ideas debated at Nicaea and Chalcedon when we discuss the person and work of Christ.

### *Augustine Converts to Christianity (386)*

"Take up and read. Take up and read. Take up and read." The words from a child drifted over the fence of the garden in Milan where a dejected rhetoric teacher named Augustine sat under a fig tree and cried at his inability to live the chaste life he wanted. He later said that he had prayed, "Lord, make me chaste—but not yet." Now, in response to the child's singsong words, he picked up a manuscript and read the words of Paul, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:13-14). The man who would become one of the most influential theologians of the entire Western church gave way, and he found what he had been searching for. In Christ, Augustine found his intellectual longings satisfied and found the strength to live a moral life.

After his conversion, Augustine became a bishop in Hippo, North Africa. As a leader of the church, he addressed some of the difficult (and timeless) questions Christians face. When some in North Africa turned to violence to resist the Romans, Augustine formulated a theory of a just war. Augustine wrote on the problem of evil. He discussed the nature and extent of the freedom of the will, the nature of sin, and the radical work of God in salvation. When Rome fell to the barbarians in 410, Augustine wrote *The City of God* on the relationship between the church and the state.

These and other writings by Augustine served as guidance for the Catholic Church through the Middle Ages. Augustine also became the favorite theologian of the great Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century. We will examine the questions considered by Augustine in our discussion of theology, especially the nature of human freedom and the work of God in salvation.

*Jesus Christ is  
"made known in two  
natures [which exist]  
without confusion,  
without change,  
without division,  
without separation."  
~Council of Chalcedon*



*"St. Augustine of Hippo"  
by Philippe de Champaigne  
(c.1645)*

### *The East-West Schism (1054)*

On June 16, 1054, as the priests of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople were preparing for communion, Cardinal Humbert, the representative of Pope Leo IX, strode into the cathedral, walked up to the altar, and placed there the sentence of the pope declaring the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Celarius, and any who followed him to be excommunicated. Humbert walked out of the cathedral, shook the dust off his feet, and set off for Rome. What led to this breach between Eastern and Western Christianity? There were a number of factors.

First, language and culture each played parts. Eastern Christianity was expressed in Greek language and culture, Western Christianity in Latin. The political situation was also different. After the Roman Empire fell,



*Mary and Jesus on the ancient dome of the Hagia Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Istanbul, Turkey, (Constantinople) built in 537 and now a mosque and museum.*

the pope came to wield political power to fill the vacuum. But in the East, the empire continued for another thousand years and the Eastern emperors kept a tight rein on the ecclesiastical leaders. The pope claimed authority over the Eastern patriarchs, but Eastern Christians view the Bishop of Rome equal to the other patriarchs. There were also theological differences about the Trinity and the procession of the Holy Spirit—from the Father only, or from both Father and Son.

There were differences in worship and liturgy. In the Eastern church there was a greater emphasis on the mystery of God. In the most important Orthodox systematic theology, John of Damascus (675- 754) wrote in *The Orthodox Faith* that God

is, He exists, but "what He is in His essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable... All that is comprehensible about Him is His incomprehensibility." Orthodox worship is heavily liturgical and emphasizes the "otherness" and mystery of God. But Western faith and practice emphasize a more systematic theology.

A week after Humbert delivered the excommunication, the patriarch of Constantinople retaliated by condemning Humbert. The actions of 1054 served to formalize what had been building for many years—the gradual drifting apart of the two segments of Christianity.

### *The First Crusade (1095)*

In 1095, when Pope Urban II announced a great expedition to take back Jerusalem and the Holy Land with a stirring sermon at the Council of Clermont, the crowds cried out, "God wills it! God wills it!" Urban made "God wills it!" the battle cry of the endeavor, and two hundred years of Crusades followed.

Why did the people of Europe respond to the call? Reasons included the recovery of the Holy Land for Christianity; the defense of the Christian East; destruction of the Muslims; the spirit of adventure; and a misdirected desire for assurance of salvation.

Of all the Crusades, only the first might be considered a military success. After a siege, the city of Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders; this was followed by the slaughter of the defenders, women, and children. The Crusaders held Jerusalem until 1187, when the Muslims retook the city.

The Crusades contributed to a larger view of the world for Europe, increased trade with other parts of the world, and the rise of cities and a middle class. The Crusades also engendered significant bitterness toward Western Christians by Eastern Christians, Jews, and Muslims. In 1996, a Palestinian Christian named Elias Chacour said, "We have to show our Muslim neighbors that we are not descendants of the Crusaders but the descendants of Jesus Christ, eager to help them know who Jesus Christ is" (interview in "Christianity Today" March 4, 1996).

### ***Luther Recaptures Justification by Faith (1517)***

Martin Luther, the young Augustinian monk, was tortured by doubts about his standing before God. As a beginning theology student, he was taught that God demanded absolute righteousness, as in the passage, "Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." People needed to love God absolutely, and their neighbors as themselves. They should have the unshakable faith of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son.

Luther knew he could never meet the standard and was tortured by his sin. In human terms, his sins were not grievous. His superior once commanded him to go out and commit a real sin. "You don't have any real sins anyway. You must not inflate your halting, artificial sins out of proportion." But Luther knew his own nature and would not be satisfied. He said later that he had hated the righteous God who punished sinners.

Salvation was mediated by the church, in part, through confession. Knowing his own selfishness too well, Luther found he was repeatedly confessing his sins and performing his penance out of the intensely human instinct to save his own skin. During Luther's years of turmoil, he would wear out confessors. "My conscience would never give me assurance, but



*"Entry of the Crusades  
into Constantinople"*

*by Gustave Dore  
(c.1880)*

I was always doubting and said, 'You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.'"

In his hunt for holiness, Luther studied and restudied the Scriptures, finally becoming a professor of Bible. His preparation, his reading of the Scriptures with his own discomfort in mind, led him to a new view of the Scriptures.

"At last," he said, "meditating day and night and by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith ... I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open."

In Luther's time, the church had largely turned to a justification by of both faith and works. The power to forgive sins was understood to reside in the pope based on the "power of the keys" given to the apostles, according to Matthew 16:18, and was used to discipline sinners. Penitent sinners were asked to show regret for their sins (contrition), confess them to a priest (confession), and do penitential work to pay for punishment (satisfaction). Abuses of the idea of penitential work abounded.

By the time of the Crusades, the pope pronounced that volunteers who took part in the Crusades would be forgiven of all their sins. When the pope needed money to fight the Turks and build the new basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, he instituted the sale of "indulgences," the forgiveness of sin in the form of "time off" in Purgatory in return for contributions

to the church. In Northern Europe, the Dominican Johann Tetzel sold forgiveness by indulgences, giving rise to the famous jingle, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs."

Indulgences scandalized many Christians opposed to papal power, but Luther saw that the sale of indulgences represented more than papal power

gone awry—the sale of indulgences represented justification based on works. In 1517, Luther posted 95 Theses, statements posted on the equivalent of a university bulletin board for academic debate over the means of justification.

The events of Luther's time made his personal rediscovery of justification by faith the spark for the Protestant Reformation. To Luther's surprise, his 95 Theses captured the attention of Europe, catalyzing the Reformation and the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.



*"Luther Posting  
His 95 Thesis"  
on the Wittenberg church  
door in 1517.*

*by Ferdinand Pauwels  
(1904)*

## *Luther and the Diet of Worms (1521)*

Luther was not the first to call the church to account. In various ways and in different places, John Wycliffe of England, Jan Hus of Czechoslovakia, and Girolama Savonarola of Italy challenged the church. Wycliffe was declared a heretic, and after his death his remains were disinterred and burned, and his ashes were thrown into the River Swift; Hus was burned at the stake; Savonarola was hanged and burned. Luther knew the danger he was in.

In January of 1521, Luther was excommunicated. Under pressure from supporters of Luther—such as Luther's patron, Elector Frederick—the Emperor Charles V agreed to hear Luther at a meeting (a "diet") that met in Worms, Germany, in the spring of 1521.

Luther appeared before the Diet on April 17 at 4:00 p.m. His writings were brought to the meeting, and a representative of the emperor asked Luther to respond to two questions: Did he acknowledge the authorship of books that had been brought to the Diet and bore his name? And, would he stand by them or retract anything in them?

Luther asked for time to reflect before answering, and he was granted twenty-four hours. On April 18, at 6:00 p.m., he answered:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason (for I trust neither pope nor council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me."

The next day, Charles V declared Luther a "notorious heretic" who would have to be silenced. However, before sentence could be pronounced, Luther left Worms to go home. Elector Frederick arranged a friendly "kidnapping" of Luther on his way, and safely hid Luther at the castle of Wartburg. Luther was able to continue the work we know as the Protestant Reformation. Luther thus was called upon to answer publicly two of the most important questions of life—the posting of the 95 Theses addressed the question, "How am I justified before God?" Luther's view was that we are made right before God based on the work of Christ, not our works or accomplishments.

When Rome disputed Luther's conclusions, Luther faced a second great question, "What is my authority?" In this case, Luther faced the choice of acknowledging the church hierarchy as his authority, or the Scriptures as pre-eminent. Luther acknowledged the authority of Scripture. Are

*"Here I stand,  
may God help me."  
~Martin Luther*

*Religious Influence  
in Europe  
at the End of  
the 16th Century .*

*(Wikipedia commons)*

these questions settled for you? If asked, do you know how you are justified, made right with God? And do you know on what authority you make your decisions, on what do you base your actions? We will look at Luther's questions again as we discuss the authority of Scripture and the means of salvation.



*The First Great Awakening (1734-42)*

Nathan Cole, a farmer in Hartford, Connecticut, described his desire to see and hear revivalist George Whitefield. Cole and his wife hastened to Middletown. He wrote that he left,

"... as if we were fleeing for our lives. As I came nearer the road, I heard a noise something like a low rumbling thunder and presently found it was the noise of horses' feet coming down the road ... Every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear the news from heaven for the saving of souls. It made me tremble ... When I saw Mr. Whitefield come upon the scaffold, he looked

almost angelical—a young, slim, slender youth before some thousands of people with a bold undaunted countenance ... And my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound. By God's blessing my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me. I ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might."

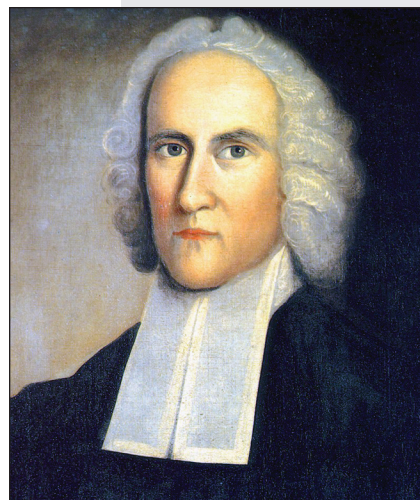
Between 1734 and 1742, there was a wonderful work of the Spirit in the Colonies and Britain. In the Colonies, the early fervor of faith of the Pilgrims and others had long faded as life had become comfortable, although the form of religion remained.

The work of the Spirit in awakening showed itself first in the church of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was a tall, thin man of stern appearance and a great joy in God. Edwards was blessed with a fine intellect, which some believe the greatest mind in America before or since. In 1734 Edwards began to stress the need for personal conversion from his pulpit with a series of sermons on justification by faith. There was no immediate effect, but in December of that year "the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work among us." Many came to a new and deeper knowledge of God. Edwards recorded what happened in his *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. We will hear of Edwards again as we read of the purpose of God in the world.

Other pastors began to promote the awakening, and revival spread across Massachusetts and the rest of New England. Meanwhile in England, George Whitefield (pronounced Whit-field) was preaching with great effectiveness. Whitefield came to the Colonies for preaching tours in 1739 and 1740. To some, even in the churches, Whitefield was a threat, and many churches would not allow him to preach from the pulpit. Whitefield preached nevertheless in the open air, in city squares and in fields, and thousands like Nathan Cole heard him and were changed, convicted that the form of religion was not enough, that a faith with real power was needed.

While Edwards and Whitefield represented the best of American evangelical preaching and teaching in their time, they also represent a significant failing, in that they each compromised their Christian principles by holding enslaved persons. They did this while also advocating for the rights of enslaved people to learn Christianity and to worship. Christian leaders in the early American church were more likely to acknowledge individual enslaved people as brothers and sisters than they were to specifically address the evils of the institution of slavery.

In his book *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and*



*"An increase in speculative knowledge in divinity is not what is so much needed by our people as something else. Men may abound in this sort of light and have no heart ... Our people do not so much need to have their heads turned as to have their hearts touched, and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching which has the greatest tendency to do this."  
~ Jonathan Edwards*

*the Wesleys*, Church historian Mark Noll explains, "As a revival movement ... evangelicalism transformed people within their inherited social setting, but worked only partial and selective transformation on the social settings themselves." For more thoughts on the subject, see "Thoughts on Race, Justice, and Diversity" on page 13.

From time to time since the First Great Awakening, the Spirit of God has visited our nation with great power. The Second Great Awakening in 1801-1834 changed the western frontier of Kentucky and Tennessee. There was another awakening in the years just before the Civil War and in the camps of the armies of that war. In addition, there were a number of awakenings that were more regional, or which were effective mostly in a particular denomination.

Could we be ripe for the work of the Spirit in an extraordinary way once again? Let us pray it may be so.

In the next chapter we will continue to look at church history, this time more specifically the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition within Christianity as a whole.

## *Thoughts on Race, Justice, and Diversity*

From its inception, the Church's record on race and justice is mixed. Historically, the early Patriarchal Church tended to approach slavery primarily on the basis of an individual's spiritual renewal and membership, and less as a widespread injustice issue. In many cases, people of all races—including enslaved persons—were offered membership and leadership in the church. However, throughout the centuries the Church has had long seasons where it allowed, ignored, or even justified slavery. Even today, Sunday services often remain a time of racial separation. Yet it was Christians like John Chrysostom, Saint Patrick, William Wilberforce, B.B. Warfield, Billy Graham, and Martin Luther King Jr. who mobilized many toward fighting slavery and racism, and moved western society toward justice. As the Church has encouraged minority individuals to hear the gospel and believe, the Church has simultaneously failed to consistently confront racial injustice. Many Christians throughout history have held enslaved persons. Race, economic interests, majority power, politics, and the Church have made a bitter justice brew.

Justice is one aspect of our holy God's nature. He treats humanity with complete justice (thankfully, also with grace, goodness, and mercy). His actions are unmarred with any prejudice or favoritism. In our reflecting of his nature, Christians should do our best to act as He does. "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). When we practice justice—whether individually or as a church body—we reflect the character of God before anyone watching us, and we glorify God. As Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed, people should be measured by the character of their hearts, not the color of their skin.

As well, our triune God is both unified and diverse. Intentionally, creation reflects the unity and diversity of the Trinity. We see animals and life of every shape and size, and the colors of the rainbow blend in plants and flowers. Life is filled with a wide range of foods that come together to blend flavors: sweet and sour chicken or lemon meringue pie. Harmonies and dissonance enrich music. Our unlimited God has designed a world of both glorious accord and wide differentiation.

Perhaps the highest demonstration of God's great delight in unity and diversity is in the Church, particularly as expressed in Revelation 7:9, where we read that when the Kingdom of God is fully ushered in, we will see people of every nation, tribe, people, and language praising before the throne of Christ. What a time that will be! If we honestly pray, "Thy Kingdom come, on earth as in heaven," should we not reflect the coming diversity in this present life?

As Christians, we are to display a picture of a triune God through the growing unity and diversity of the church, now and in the age to come. We must ask ourselves where future generations will critique us and our churches for falling short of biblical justice and mercy. James 2:1-2 enjoins us: "My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism." Ligon Duncan writes, "Anti-racism is not the gospel, but the gospel is anti-racism, and racism is anti-gospel, hence heresy of the deepest dye."

In the EPC, we believe we can improve our anti-racism actions. Where do we as Christians need to stop accommodation of current "favoritism" culture to advocate for biblical values? To what degree do we and our churches need to practice such justice ministries in an unfair world? How do we best embody anti-racism in our churches?

# Practical Leadership Applications

## Why is church history important today?

Irish philosopher Edmund Burke wisely said that "those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." Indeed, without a basic knowledge of church history, individual Christians and churches are prone to repeat the same doctrinal errors and foolish mistakes of former days. Adapted from Matthew J. Hall (The Gospel Coalition) and Jon Payne (Ligonier Ministries), here are ten principles for why studying church history is not only valuable but crucial for church leaders:



### **1. Remembering is critical to faithfulness.**

Throughout Scripture, God calls His people to recall and retell His gracious saving acts. Yet Israel repeatedly forgets, fails, and strays. Historical events are at the heart of the good news, and we are to tell and retell the story of our Savior.

### **2. History shows the faithful, divine plan of the Sovereign Creator and King.**

History reflects divine providence and is a giant canvas on which we see God paint His sovereign plan. Like the psalmist, we must "recount all of God's wonderful deeds" to remind ourselves that He will never leave us or forsake us (Psalm. 9:1, Hebrews 13:5).

### **3. History fits into the divine drama of creation, fall, and redemption.**

From the beginning, God has been demonstrating His grand story of redemption in real places populated by real people as a reflection of the gospel of Jesus. As visible outposts of the Kingdom of Christ, churches are where this one great story continually confronts and collides with the stories of this present evil age.

### **4. God's meticulous providence shouldn't make us presume on His mysterious providence.**

Historians must be careful not to casually ascribe divine motive where God has not plainly revealed it. From Scripture we understand His ultimate purposes of redemption and His pledge to build His church. We are often without human explanation, however, for why His plans take a particular course. We must be willing to acknowledge the mysterious nature of providence and remain silent where God is silent.

### **5. God has unique purposes for His church.**

The church is historically unique. God enters into a particular covenant with this new people, through the saving work of His Son, and makes promises to them as revealed in Scripture. Church history is the story of how God has guarded, purified, chastised, and strengthened His undeserving people.

### **6. Seeing the long view helps us persevere in difficult times.**

Considering that "great cloud of witnesses," the godly lives of believers from the past, can motivate and inspire us to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and to run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Are you feeling spiritually weary? Are you ready to give up? Throw yourself into the arms of Christ and also into the pages of church history. Spend time reflecting upon the faithful lives and godly voices of the past, on those whose faith motivates you to keep running. Read a biography of Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, or Elisabeth Elliot. Explore an overview of the Reformation or a survey of the modern missionary movement.

### **7. History reminds us that doctrinal truth matters.**

Understanding the historical circumstances surrounding doctrinal formulation should make us better theologians. Sometimes, church history reminds us of the questions, arguments, and progression that theologies took when forming. It also shows us the failures and shortcomings of many of our forebears—even our heroes—and calls us to higher and holier ideals. Facing down such warts with historical honesty is not just a scholarly duty, but also brings glory to God. And it reminds us that the perseverance of the church has never been dependent on any human being. Yes, truth is objective, real, and knowable. This conviction is grounded in the character and nature of a self-revealing, truth-telling God. But we understand that our knowledge is never full and always clouded. We're all too frail and imperfect. The church of Jesus Christ is established, furthered, and guarded by the King Himself.

### **8. History gives us a healthy view of the biblical doctrine of depravity.**

Along these lines, George Marsden points out that "the most convincing histories will be those that portray their protagonists with faults as well as virtues." Not only does a biblical doctrine of depravity give us an appropriate skepticism, it also provides needed humility to acknowledge we lack authoritative certainty about what happened in the past. This doctrine should warn us against the temptation of hagiography, calling us instead to critical truth-telling about those who have come before us.

*"When I was still  
lying in darkness  
and gloomy night,  
I used to regard it  
as extremely difficult  
and demanding to do  
what God's mercy  
was suggesting to me ...  
I myself was held in bonds  
by the innumerable errors  
of my previous life,  
from which I did not  
believe I could possibly  
be delivered, so I was  
disposed to acquiesce  
in my clinging vices  
and to indulge my sins ...  
But after that, by the help  
of the water of new birth,  
the stain of my former life  
was washed away,  
and a light from above,  
serene and pure,  
was infused into  
my reconciled heart...  
a second birth  
restored me to a new man.  
Then, in a wondrous  
manner every doubt  
began to fade ..."*  
~Cyprian, *Ad Donatum*,  
3rd Century  
Bishop of Carthage,  
martyred in 270 AD.

**9. History teaches us to treat others—our own brothers and sisters—with grace and truth.**

Humility and empathy are required. Before we too easily judge motives, prejudices, or intentions, we must ask how we would fare in others' shoes. Honesty compels us to speak plainly when previous generations of Christians have erred (for example, anti-Semitism, persecution of religious minorities, slavery, white supremacy, and so on). But it should also cause us to speak with charity and empathy, recognizing we are not much different from them.

**10. Church history is our corporate history.**

No matter your nationality, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status, if you're in Christ, church history is the story of your true community and family. This belief runs contrary to how we often understand ourselves. My brothers and sisters from the 16th century, for example, compose my spiritual family. The bond we share in Christ is more real and enduring than the connection we have with our families in the flesh. Mark Noll writes, "If the people of God come from every tribe and nation, so then should a history of the people of God try to take in every tribe and nation." Church history can't be limited to Western or English-speaking peoples. As we read church history, we see a bigger view of the Church.

**11. History helps us find our place in His Story.**

We keep living our lives for Christ. We don't do it to make the history books of the next generation, for we know that not every actor or group will have the same historical significance. But we know that church history is part of God's grand plan—that labor of both remembering and anticipating—of living in our times. We tell the truth about the past, give thanks for God's grace today, and live so as to please our Father in Heaven. Then we move on and live for a home we have coming soon. We do it all through the eyes of faith which see the Story unfolding around us. We are a part of God's history.

## *Early Church History Questions*

These questions are for review and discussion, and to test your comprehension of the chapter material.

*1-1.* What was the significance to the Christian church of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans?

*1-2.* What is the Edict of Milan? What was its effect on the church? What is its parallel in today's world?

*1-3.* What issue was at stake at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon?

*1-4.* Who was Augustine? Why was he significant?

*1-5.* What are some factors leading to the Great Schism?

*1-6.* What was the significance of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses? What issue was at stake?

*1-7.* What was the significance of the Diet of Worms? What issue was at stake?

*1-8.* Who were some of the principals in the First Great Awakening?

## CHAPTER 2

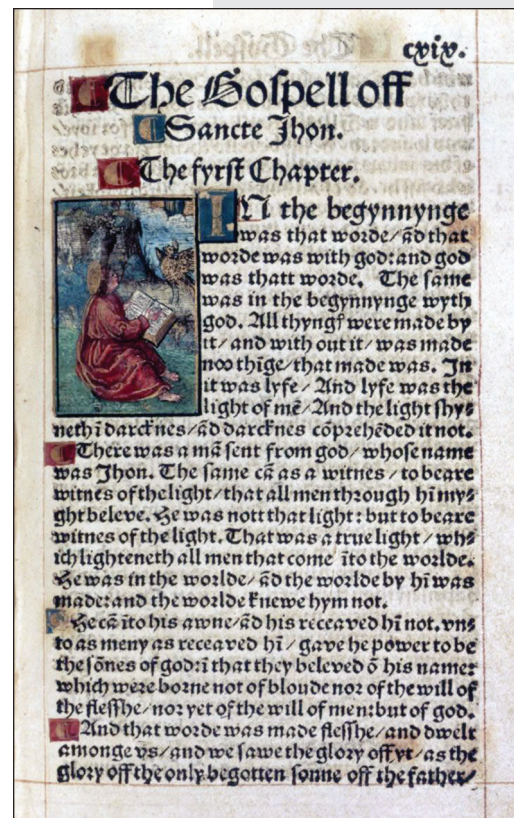
# Reformed Church History

### *The Reformed, Presbyterian, and Evangelical Tradition*

The Reformation was the 16th century religious revolution in the Christian church that ended the supremacy of the Roman pope in many parts of Europe. It contributed to the making of a new era of history and resulted in the establishment of a new branch of the Christian church—the Protestants. In abstract, the Reformation was a convergence of movements (personal holiness movements, monastic movements, renewal movements, etc.) that attempted to reform the practices of the Roman church from within.

After the Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the Renaissance, the Catholic church of Rome had become highly centralized and political. Popes, cardinals, and bishops had far-reaching power over their parishioners, falsely claiming to control not only church membership but also each person's eternal salvation. Misuses and corruption in the church were common. Since Bibles were available only to those who could read Latin, Hebrew, or Greek, there was little accountability. Leaders often created church laws that were outside any Scriptural boundaries. For example, permission and prior forgiveness for a sin could be bought in the form of an "indulgence" from church leaders.

In this environment, a group of men began to stand publicly against the excesses of the church. We often forget that the movement was "an inside job," for most of the Reformers were Catholic priests or religious scholars in universities. These men were offended at the state of their church, and desired to return it to a more holy way of operation. The movement's earliest roots can be traced to voices such as Thomas à Kempis (Holland), the Waldensians (Switzerland), John Wycliffe (England), and the Hussites (Bohemia). By the 1500s, this call for reform had become a wide movement across Europe. It included many church leaders, thinkers, and "protesters"—called Protestants—including Erasmus in Holland, Martin Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland, John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, and John Knox in Scotland.



*The Gospel of John  
from William Tyndale's  
1525 Bible.*

*The rapid growth of the Reformation was made possible by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1450.*

*This allowed mass circulation of Bibles and Reformation documents in common languages. Previously all Bibles were written in Latin, Hebrew, or Greek.*

*The Reformation began on "All Saints Eve," October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his "95 Theses" (a theological discussion of "The Gross Error of Indulgences") to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany.*

*According to the Library of Congress, more books have been written about Luther than any other human figure in Christian history.*

*Many church reform movements across Europe were brought together under one heading: the Protestant Reformation.*

*Many leaders of the Reformation lost their livelihood or their lives for their stand against a corrupt church.*

The Reformed church grew from a desire for a church that would return to biblical roots. The Reformed church drew on classical Christian theology expressed by theologians such as Augustine in his understanding of the radical grace of God, and Anselm in his understanding of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The Reformed church was in the tradition of the Catholic Pre-Reformers John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and Girolamo Savonarola, who called for the use of Scripture in the church and the repentance of the church.

While the Reformation was a widespread movement, it was not unified in every country or in all areas of theology. However, the following theological truths—often called "the Five Solas" (*sola* in Latin means "only")—were consistent across the movement. Any reformed scholar or leader should memorize these simple questions and answers:

- **How are we saved?** "*Sola fide.*"  
By faith alone, not by church membership or sacrament.
- **How are we forgiven?** "*Sola gratia.*"  
By grace alone, instead of through church membership, penance, and absolution from a priest.
- **What is the ultimate basis of authority for spiritual life?** "*Sola scriptura.*"  
By Scripture alone, above the traditions and teachings of any church or any person.
- **Who is the mediator of the Church?** "*Solus Christus.*"  
By Christ alone. Instead of two classes, priests (mediators) and lay members, Protestants believe in One Mediator—Jesus—and a single class, "the priesthood of all believers."
- **What is the purpose of life and the Church?** "*Soli Deo Gloria*"  
Glory to God alone, not to any organization, leader, or ruler.

### ***Calvin and the Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536)***

Calvin was the leading figure of the Reformed movement. It has been said that John Calvin "was one of those strong and consistent men of history who people either liked or disliked, adored or abhorred" (Lewis W. Spitz, Lutheran historian). Consider the following comments:

- Calvin "is the man who, next to St. Paul, has done the most good to mankind" (William Cunningham, Scottish theologian).
- Calvin "belongs to the ranks of the greatest haters in history" (Erich Fromm, author).

- "Taking into account all his failings, he must be reckoned as one of the greatest and best men whom God raised in the history of Christianity" (Philip Schaff, historian).
- "Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned ..." (Jimmy Swaggart, Evangelist).
- "The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection" (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, English Baptist preacher).
- "The strength of that heretic [Calvin] consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants, my dominion would extend from sea to sea" (Pope Pius IV, pope at the time of Calvin's death).

Despite chronic poor health, John Calvin's output was prodigious. He preached or lectured an average of five times a week for twenty years, he wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, his correspondence fills eleven volumes and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* grew from about 100 pages to almost 1,300 pages. He was greatly involved in the lives of the elders of the city of Geneva, and in establishing schools, opportunities for employment, and other social welfare sponsored by the church. Even on Calvin's deathbed, he continued to work. When his friends suggested he refrain from his labors, he replied, "What! Would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes?"

Calvin was a Catholic (as were all Western Christians of his time) who studied law and took up serious study of the Bible. As he studied, he added his voice to the cry for reformation of the church. He was forced to flee France to avoid persecution and ended up in Geneva. By then he had published the first version of *Institutes* and was on his way to Basel. When the roads were blocked, he detoured to Geneva until he could get to Basel. However, the leaders of Geneva begged him to stay and teach the people Reformation theology. Calvin reluctantly agreed. However, within eighteen months, he was run out of town by the city council for his insistence that the church, not the civil government, had authority to determine who could receive the Lord's Supper. After three years in Strasbourg, the city leaders again begged him to come to Geneva. Calvin did so and worked there until his death more than twenty years later, in 1564.

Calvin is the father of that branch of Protestantism called the Reformed Church, from which came Presbyterians. There were several branches to the Reformation—the first was Lutheranism; a second was Anglicanism;



*John Calvin*

***Reform (v.):***

*(1) To change or transform for the better; to improve by removing faults or abuses.*

*(2) Relating to the theology of specific leaders of the Protestant Reformers like John Calvin and John Knox.*

another was a radical element represented by the Anabaptists; and there was the Reformed Church, of which we Presbyterians are a part.

A characterization of Presbyterians requires a description of both (1) our form of government, and (2) our doctrinal stance. If you describe us by the way we govern ourselves, we are called Presbyterians. The word "Presbyterian" is derived from a Greek word meaning "elder," since we are ruled or governed by elders. But if you describe us by what we believe, we are called Reformed. We are Presbyterian in government, and we are Reformed in faith. Therefore, as Presbyterians our spiritual forefather is John Calvin. Both Calvin and Luther took the Bible seriously when it came to reshaping the church. The Roman church said that there were two sources of what we believe and practice as Christians. First, there was the Bible. It is a source of faith and practice.

But second, there is the tradition of the church. Rome claimed that the church hierarchy had also inherited an unwritten tradition from the Apostles that has an authority equal to that of Scripture. Thus, the pope may take the tradition of the church and declare it as an article of faith. For example, Roman Catholics believe that Mary was conceived sinless in order that she be a fitting vessel for the conception of Christ. That is not in Scripture, but it is in the tradition of the church. So in 1854, the Pope declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and it became a matter of faith. But Luther and Calvin took a different position. Both said Scripture alone was the final authority.

Being "Reformed" has two connotations for us. First, the name is derived from the idea that we are people who are "reformed" by the Bible, by the Word of God. We stand under the Word of God to be reformed—changed, transformed—by it in our faith and practice. But that is not a one-time thing. We keep on standing under God's Word to keep on being reformed by it. Not only were we reformed in the past, but we continue to be reformed today. And we will keep on being reformed in the future by what we learn from God's Word.

However, there are other groups—Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, and others—who would consider the Bible to be their authority but who are not generally referred to as "Reformed." Being Reformed also has the connotation that an individual or church adopts the theological views of Calvin, Knox, the Westminster divines, and others. We will discuss their views over the next weeks.

***John Knox Returns to Scotland (1559)***

"John Knox remains one of the most controversial figures in history," states biographer and historian Iain Murray. From his own countrymen, views range from "the greatest of Scotsmen" to "of Christian virtues he

had but few." (Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage*, p. 5). Whatever the perspective, this "Thundering Scot," was the man most responsible for bringing the Reformation perspective through Scotland to the English-speaking world.

To understand why he is so controversial, it is necessary to have some knowledge of Knox's times. Like Calvin, Knox studied law and was a Catholic, becoming a priest. However, he converted to Protestantism—and acceptance of Protestantism was a dangerous decision. At this time in sixteenth century Scotland, corruption existed within the Roman Catholic clergy: indulgences were sold; celibacy was claimed but concubines and illegitimate children existed; nepotism flourished; biblical preaching had all but disappeared. Against this corruption the Protestants were preaching the gospel as proclaimed in the Bible. These differences between the Church of Rome and the Protestants were the church's understanding of Scripture and the way of salvation, which resulted in severe persecution of the Protestants—to the point of some being burned alive at the stake.

Playing a part in the subsequent struggles, John Knox spent nineteen months as a prisoner aboard a French galley ship. Through English intervention, he was freed and for the next five years was a leader to Protestants in England. However, when Mary Tudor became queen, she renewed persecution of Protestants. Knox fled to Geneva where John Calvin mentored him. Knox later described Geneva under Calvin as "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the apostles."

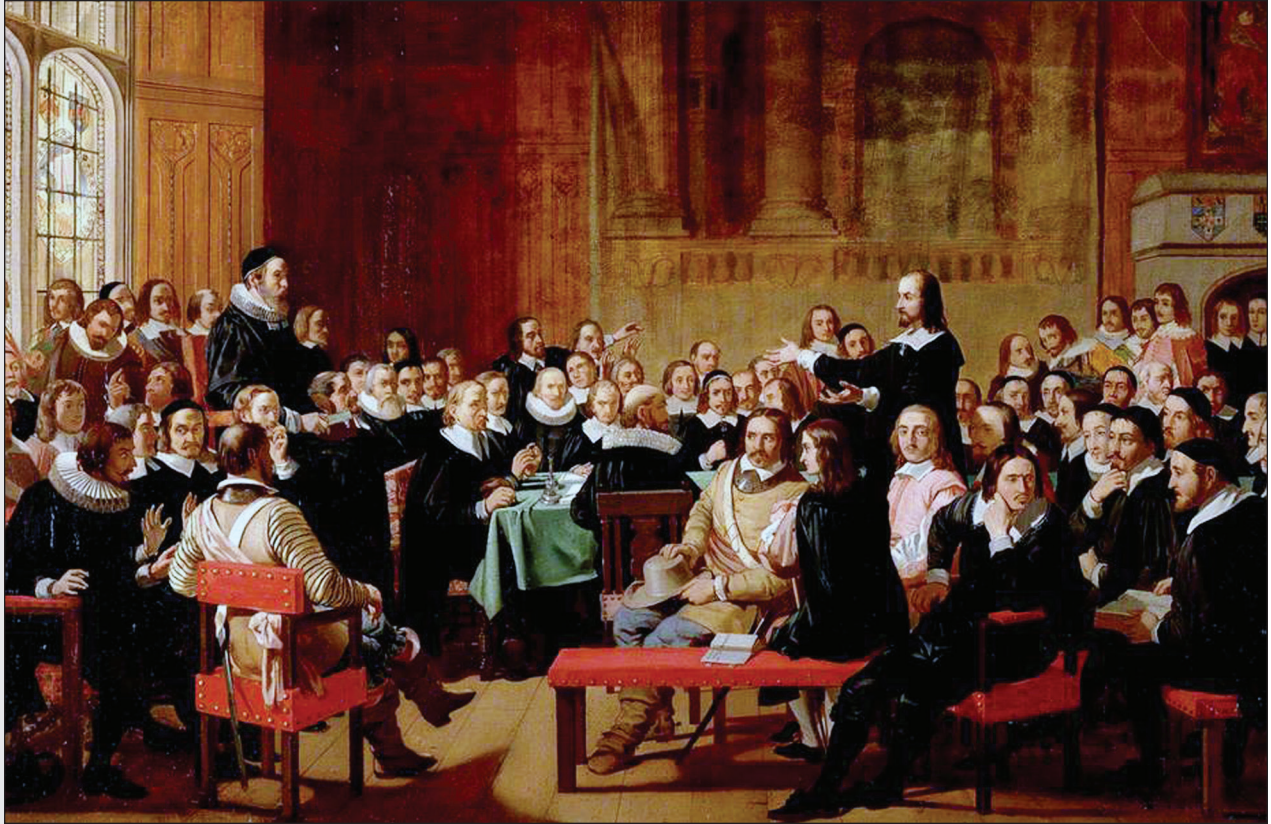
When Protestant Elizabeth I ascended to the throne, Knox returned to Scotland and England where he worked tirelessly for Protestant causes. He was sometimes intemperate, offending rulers of his day with his strong positions. However, he established the Reformed faith in the English-speaking world through his preaching, his *Scots Confession* and his general writings. It is evidence of God's grace that he could use two difficult and sickly men such as Calvin and Knox to accomplish his purposes.

### ***Westminster Confession of Faith is Completed (1647)***

One hundred years after Knox's conversion to Protestantism, religious and governmental affairs in England were still entwined. Parliament asked the Westminster Assembly to draft a statement of faith. Over five years a group of "divines," 120 English ministers and 12 Scots (who were more influential than their number would indicate), drafted *The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. These documents, and perhaps especially the Confession, have had a profound impact on Presbyterians. Two points about the Confession:



*Statue of John Knox  
at New College,  
Edinburgh, Scotland.*



*"The Assertion  
of Liberty of Conscience  
by the Independents  
at the Westminster  
Assembly of Divines"*  
by John Rogers Herbert  
c. 1844

(1) it is a truly wonderful document. It is a guide that can almost always be relied on when you have doctrinal questions or need Scripture references for your study; however, (2) like all statements of faith, it was written by fallible men. It always is to be subservient to Scripture.

The Westminster Confession of Faith represents a high point in the development of covenantal theology, and it covers the full range of Christian doctrine. It begins with Scripture as the source of knowledge of divine things and continues with an exposition of God and His decrees, creation, providence, the fall, the church, and the future. It discusses the

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"The catholic or universal church is invisible and consists of all the elect who have been, are, or ever will be gathered into one under Christ, the head. The church is His body and spouse, the fullness of God, who fills all in all."

"The visible church is also catholic or universal under the gospel, i.e., it is not confined to one nation as previously under the Mosaic Law. It consists of everyone in the world who professes the true religion together with their children. The visible church is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and the house and family of God, outside of which people cannot ordinarily be saved." (Chapter 20, 1-2).

covenant of grace, the work of Christ and His redemption of the elect. While the Confession was written by disciplined theologians, it reveals the practical influence of men with deep pastoral and preaching experience. It is an outstanding expression of classical Reformed theology framed for the needs of the people of God. Although imperfect, as any work of human minds, the Westminster Confession gives us a baseline of theology for clergy and leadership and holds us to an orthodox standard in our continuing discussions, our interactions with a changing world, and our growth as a denomination.

According to the EPC Book of Government, "The Westminster Confession of Faith is a confessional statement of orthodox Presbyterianism. The Westminster Confession of Faith is our standard of doctrine as found in Scripture. It is a positive statement of the Reformed Faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith constitutes a system of biblical truth that an officer of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is required to believe, acknowledging that each individual court has the freedom to allow exceptions which do not infringe upon the system of the doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith" (Book of Government, iv.).

### *The First Presbytery in the New World is Formed— The Philadelphia Presbytery (1706)*

The Reformed faith came to America through several different groups, including the Pilgrims and Puritan Congregationalists to New England, French Huguenots in various pockets, Dutch Reformed in New Jersey and New York's Hudson River Valley, and German Reformed in Pennsylvania.

The Rev. Francis Makemie, a Scot immigrant to the American wilderness, often has been called the "Father of American Presbyterians." He planted churches in Maryland and Virginia, and preached in New York, where he was fined a year's salary for preaching without a license. Makemie was also instrumental in forming the first presbytery.

As discussed above, Presbyterians can be described as (1) Reformed in doctrine and (2) Presbyterian in government. A "presbytery" is a group of churches that work together. The formation of a presbytery of churches is one of the distinctive marks of a Presbyterian church.

In 1706, nine pastors and four laymen from England, Scotland, and Ireland met in Philadelphia "to consult the most proper measure for advancing religion and propagating Christianity" in the American wilderness. They formed the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the first presbytery of the New World.

#### ***What is a Presbytery?***

*Presbyterian church government is often called a "mixed" system of democratic and hierarchical elements, because the power is balanced between clergy and members, and between congregations and larger governing bodies of the church.*

*Presbyterian government consists of ascending church bodies, or courts. Each congregation is governed by a ruling body called a Session, composed of the pastor and the elders, who are elected representatives of the congregation. Congregations within a particular geographic area belong to a Presbytery, which coordinates and governs the activities of congregations. Presbytery members include all the pastors and elected representative elders from each of the congregations. When all the presbyteries gather together (usually each year), the court is called the General Assembly.*

### *Subscription and the Adopting Act (1729)*

One of the first issues that the Presbyterians in America faced was this: Should a minister be required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith before being accepted for ministry? Most Presbyterians desired that their churches be Reformed in doctrine. How could this be maintained without a meaningful confession? Others, however, argued on principle that the place of the Bible as our guide to faith and practice would be threatened by a mandatory confession. The Roman Catholic

Church had elevated its doctrine over the Bible, and this position was the major cause for the Reformation itself. Still others argued the practical position that a man might have scruples about particular parts of the Confession but agree with all the rest. Could he not minister?

In 1729, under the leadership of Jonathan Dickinson, the church passed the Adopting Act. The Adopting Act provided for the Westminster Confession to be the church's doctrinal standard. However, if a man had scruples about any particular article, he should report this to the presbytery and the presbytery would determine whether the issue was an essential of the Calvinistic

system of doctrine in the Confession and Catechisms. With this compromise, the need for a standard was affirmed, but there was some flexibility for differences, so long as Reformed essentials were maintained.

The EPC has adopted the "Essentials of Our Faith" and an "Explanatory Statement to 'Essentials of Our Faith.'" All officers in the EPC must agree to the "Essentials of Our Faith" without exception and take a vow to "sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures" (see inset at right). Make sure to read the Essentials and the Explanatory Statement. Also, read questions 3 and 4 in the ordination vows. If you disagree with any of the material presented, now is a good time to talk to your pastor.

### *Agreement with the Congregationalists (1801)*

In 1801, Presbyterians and Congregationalists entered into a Plan of Union. The purpose for the plan was good, but the plan had unintended adverse consequences for Presbyterians.

The plan was developed to curb competition for members between two similar churches. Both churches purported to be Reformed in faith, but

#### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any way contrary to or different from his word in matters of faith or worship.

And so, believing any such teachings or obeying any such commandments of men for conscience's sake actually betrays true freedom of conscience. Requiring implicit or absolute, blind obedience also destroys freedom of conscience as well as the free use of reason."

(Chapter 20, 2).

## *What it means to "receive and adopt" the Westminster Standards*

The Adopting Act stipulated that ministers may state their "scruples" with the Confession, i.e., describing places where they had disagreements with particular articles. After hearing the candidates' scruples, a presbytery would determine whether or not these reservations were about articles "essential and necessary" in doctrine, worship, or government. If scruples were judged to be over "extra-essentials," the minister was admitted as a member. This established the principle of liberty of conscience.

When the first General Assembly met in 1789, it endorsed the Adopting Act and established a formula for subscribing to the Confession that was included in the Form of Government. The subscription formula asked this question of the ministerial candidate: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?" The phrase "system of doctrine" was understood to include not only fundamental catholic Christianity and the evangelical doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, but also the unique Reformed or Calvinistic system of doctrine embodied in the Westminster Standards. It was the Reformed system of the Confession that distinguished the Presbyterian theological heritage from Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Arminian systems of doctrine.

The 1789 formula of subscription has served American Presbyterians well for over 200 years. Amid significant doctrinal diversity, schism, and reunion, the historic subscription vow has stood the test of time as a median position between the extremes of strict subscription (every word) and a minimal subscription requiring "essentials of Christianity only." The historic moderate doctrinal position of Presbyterianism has allowed diversity in expressing the Reformed faith while at the same time affirming our distinctives as Reformed people committed to the doctrines of grace.

When a church officer takes the traditional ordination vow in the EPC, he or she is affirming a personal commitment to the doctrines displayed in the Westminster Standards. The subscription vow is understood to be an acknowledgment of the Reformed or Calvinistic "system of doctrine" as expressing one's own belief of what the Holy Scriptures teach. This vow allows one freedom to express reservations about parts of the Confession provided these "scruples" are not about "essential" components of the Reformed system. It is the duty of sessions and presbyteries when examining candidates for church office to determine what constitutes an essential of the "system of doctrine" found in the Confession and Catechisms. The balance of individual liberty and commitment to Reformed theology is a hallmark of Presbyterianism and a value we hold dear.

-Adopted by the 22nd General Assembly of the EPC (2002)

## *How has Christian thought and theology changed over the last two hundred years?*

From our perspective, the growth of more "liberal" or less-canonical (less biblically orthodox) thinking in western churches in the last two hundred years has many factors:

1. **The rise of Enlightenment thought.** Where God had once been man's measure, enlightenment thought by Rousseau and others in the 1700s encouraged men to measure themselves by themselves.
2. **Increased prosperity.** When the Pilgrims and Puritans first eked out an existence in a tough wilderness, it was essential in their view that they rely on God for His provision. By the First Great Awakening in the 1740s, Jonathan Edwards commented that this reliance on God had been replaced by self-reliance in a time of prosperity.
3. **Changes in education.** German influence changed the purpose of education from development of character to development of specialized, science-based knowledge.
4. **Scientific and naturalistic worldview.** Man's knowledge of science grew explosively. As natural laws were understood, people viewed miracles with increasing skepticism, and the expectation that science will one day explain everything grew.
5. **Historical criticism of the Bible.** Academic critiques of the Bible increasingly doubted its historicity and reliability. By the early 1900s, Albert Schweitzer expressed doubt in his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, that we could know anything about Jesus as a historical figure.
6. **Darwinism.** In 1859, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Increasingly, Christians felt the need to accommodate evolutionary thought, but could not draw any lines between accommodation and surrender.
7. **Freudian Psychology.** Freud's school held that most human belief could be explained in terms of human upbringing and psycho-social development.
8. **Subjective Truth.** For most of history, truth could be known because it corresponded to observable life—it was tied to facts, evidence, and reason. Today, truth has become subjective. It is "personal and internal" and so measured by each person's feelings and attitudes. This "postmodernism" erodes both dialogue and faith in truth standards like the Bible.

different in government. Congregationalists had no higher courts, no presbytery, synod, or general assembly to govern the local church. All decisions were locally made. Nevertheless, the two churches were similar, and so the plan allowed local congregations to call either a Presbyterian or a Congregational minister. There also were provisions for a mixed form of government.

However, in practice, there were also doctrinal issues. By this time, liberalism had begun to make its impact on the church, making more inroads in the Congregationalist than in Presbyterian churches. In the view of many conservatives, the Presbyterians were therefore adversely affected by the plan and the liberal preaching it brought. The church continues to struggle with the influence of liberalism to this day.

### ***The Way West (1800s)***

As the frontier moved westward, it may have seemed that Presbyterians were in a perfect position to have moved with it, converting the people of the frontier. Presbyterians generally were well-organized, prosperous, and well-educated. However, there are two related reasons why Presbyterians did not fare as well as the Baptists or the Methodists on the frontier. First, Presbyterians have historically required more education. Ministers were thus grown slowly and were more limited in number. Second, the local Presbyterian church calls its pastors—each church is responsible to find a minister who will come and serve them. This approach requires believers who wish to be Presbyterians to gather first, before any pastoral leadership can be in place.

In contrast, the Methodist church was hierarchical in nature, and regional leaders instituted circuit riders—men who were assigned to go out to the people. The Baptists were Congregationalists—they called men from among their own number who would serve as leaders and teachers. In effect, the Presbyterian minister was called, the Methodist minister was sent, and the Baptist minister came with the people. Each of these systems had then, and has now, both strengths and weaknesses. The contrasts remain relevant today, and still impact our ministerial values, how we measure candidates, and how we evaluate our prospects for church planting and mission work. We will discuss this more in chapter 12.

### ***Presbyterian Church Divisions (1741, 1837 and 1861)***

Along the way there were several splits in the Presbyterian Church. The first was in 1741 between the "Old Side" and the "New Side." Led by Gilbert Tennent, the New Side strongly supported revivalism with its itinerant preaching. The New Siders opened the Log College, a school for the training of pastors. The Old Siders were suspicious of itinerant preaching. Why should itinerant preaching be needed in towns where

there was a church? The Old Siders supported traditional theological education with an emphasis on doctrinal grounding. There were fiery words between the two groups, and the split ensued. By 1758, with words of apology from both sides, the split was mended.

The church split again in 1837, this time between groups that went by the names "Old School" and "New School." The Old School concerned about a lack of theological grounding and lax discipline. The Old Schoolers opposed the 1801 union with the Congregationalists and the resulting lack of doctrinal clarity. They also opposed the creation of independent mission boards by the New School proponents, stating that the church itself is a missionary society and should itself direct mission work.

These splits point out the need for the church to serve both head and heart. The church is to worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23). There is no conflict between doctrinal purity and a heart-felt zeal for God and the lost. The church can maintain both.

In 1861, the immediate issue was slavery and the Union. Slavery also had played a part in the Old School-New School split. A resolution (the Gardiner Spring Resolution) was proposed to the General Assembly declaring it the obligation of Presbyterians to proclaim loyalty to the United States, to "uphold and encourage the Federal government." When the resolution was passed, the Southern churches left to form a separate Presbyterian church. Many Southern Presbyterians felt that slavery for African Americans was God's will. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, a strong Christian and a Presbyterian, is a poignant example. Despite opposition, he had started a Sunday school for slaves. However, he also knew that God was sovereign and therefore believed slavery was ordained by God. Remember his position when we discuss God's sovereignty and His use of secondary causes to accomplish His will.

Many felt that the church should not take a position on a political issue. This is also an issue with current applications. When is the church obligated to call government and society to account for their actions?

### ***J. Gresham Machen Suspended (1935)***

Liberals and Traditionalists continued to struggle in the church. Andrew Jumper, former pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri, and one of the EPC's founding pastors, observed that by the turn of the twentieth century, liberals had won the day among scholars and that a number of them had departed from historical Christianity. In response, conservatives established a group of five basic doctrines or five "fundamentals" of the faith— (1) inerrancy of the Scriptures, (2) virgin birth, (3) substitutionary atonement, (4) bodily resurrection, and (5) the reality of the miracles of Christ. Conservatives who believed

in these five doctrines became known as "Fundamentalists." We all recognize that words can change in meaning over time. While today the term "fundamentalist" has come to mean extremists of any religion, originally it simply referred to Christians who held to these five essential doctrines. The movement later became known as "evangelicals". (Note that today, even the term "evangelical" is shifting for some people toward a political meaning and away from this original one where it stood for people who believed in the orthodox, historic truths of the faith.)

A Baptist minister named Harry Emerson Fosdick became a primary representative of liberal thought. He was named to a Presbyterian pulpit, where he preached the sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" He listed three doctrines—the virgin birth, biblical inerrancy, and the physical return of Christ—as examples of fundamentals that man could refuse to believe and still be a Christian, since they were not basic to the faith.

A sample of Fosdick's writing follows this chapter. As you will see, liberals believe strongly that "creating goodness" is to be the principal focus of Christianity. Understanding the doctrine, while helpful, is not fully necessary. In contrast, J. Gresham Machen became a prominent proponent of orthodoxy. He was a pastor, author, and head of a conservative mission board that was independent of the denomination. In 1934, the General Assembly voted to force ministers to resign their membership from the independent board. Machen refused and was brought to trial for his action. Whereas in times past, liberals were brought to trial for theological errors, now conservatives were being brought to trial under the pretense of ecclesiastical errors. In 1935, Machen was suspended as a minister in the Presbyterian Church. Machen helped to form a new denomination (the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and was elected the first moderator. However, he died within a year of assuming the duties.

An example of Machen's writings follows Fosdick's at the end of this chapter. Note Machen's focus on the problem of sin and man's separation from God as a basic issue that liberals do not wish to address.

This struggle brings into focus the key issues, which we will address in chapter 3:

- What is essential to faith?
- How do we view the Bible?
- Where do we find Truth for the times we live in?
- How do we maintain a faithful orthodoxy while loving "the world" that Jesus died for?

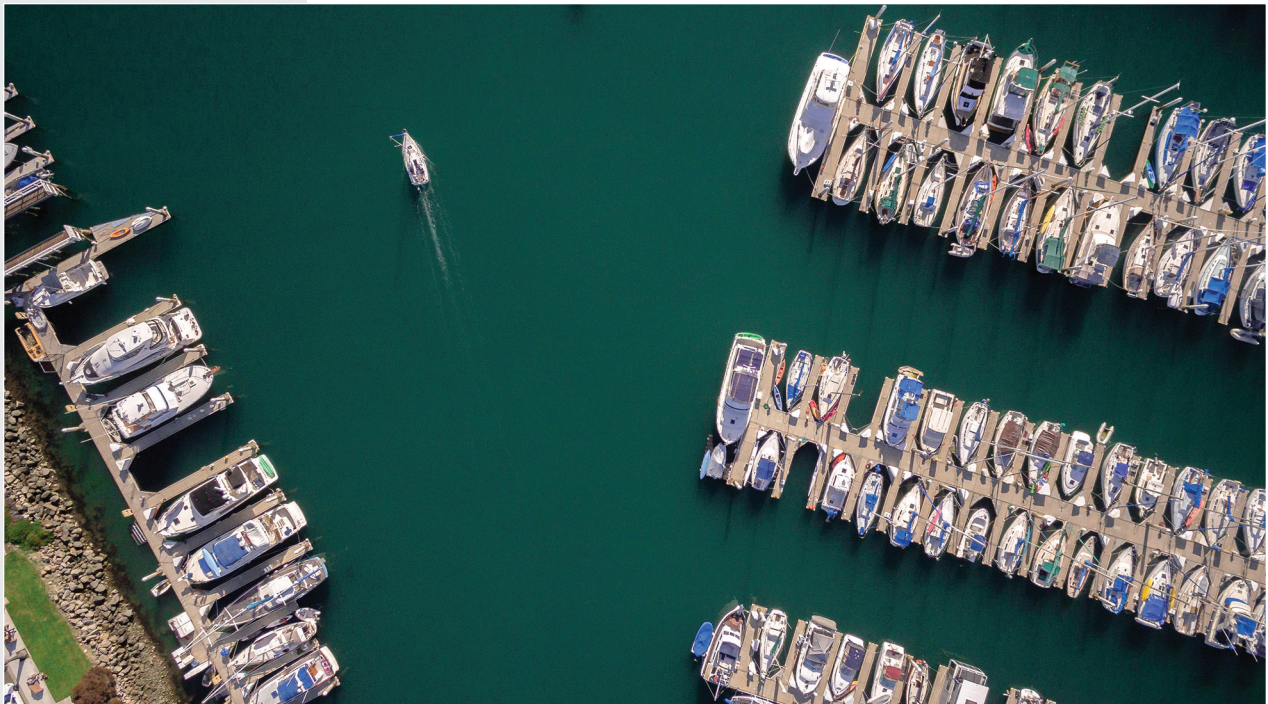


### *Birth of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (1980)*

The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, Missouri, for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations such as the United Presbyterian (Northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern churches). These leaders had become increasingly distressed by liberalism within their denominations. They wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders. They envisioned a denomination that was truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian; hence the name.

Six months later, the first General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church met at Ward Presbyterian Church in suburban Detroit, Michigan. To ensure that the ideals of faith would remain foundational to the new denomination, the Assembly drafted an intentionally brief list of essential beliefs. The "Essentials of Our Faith" define the core beliefs of the Christian Faith. "The Westminster Confession of Faith preserves our commitment to the historic orthodoxy of the Reformed Faith, while the "Essentials of Our Faith" preserves our commitment to historic evangelicalism."

Even though the founders of the EPC valued purity of faith, they saw the danger of division over non-essential issues. To protect the new denomination from needless strife, the founders promoted an understanding of freedom in which fewer essential matters were left to the conscience



of individual churches and believers. This understanding included such matters as the freedom of a local church to elect its own officers, to exercise spiritual gifts, and to own and keep property. EPC churches study the Scripture and make their own decisions about issues such as worship style and the ordination of women. At regional and national meetings, church leaders take for granted that they will work and worship with other leaders who differ with them on these and other non-essential matters. This idea is encapsulated in the EPC's motto: "In Essentials, Unity. In Non-Essentials, Liberty. In All Things, Charity. Truth in Love."

That final statement of our motto speaks of love. We are fellow pilgrims, walking together with our Lord. We have, individually, received His charity toward us so we extend that charity to each other. We speak the truth to define our faith and to extend it to others. But we speak it out of love for our brothers and sisters, and for our Savior.

The 1st General Assembly convened in 1981 with 75 delegates representing 12 churches. When the Second General Assembly met nine months later, more than 120 elders and ministers registered as commissioners. Before the decade ended, an impressive growth in member congregations had taken place. Churches in Argentina, formerly part of the Church of Scotland, joined the EPC as the Presbytery of St. Andrews in 1987. By the mid-90s, 56 missionaries represented the EPC throughout the world. Because we believe that God uses a variety of ways to draw people to himself, we allow missionaries to serve with EPC support through mission agencies other than our own. Our global mission plan focuses on planting, developing, and nurturing the church.

### ***The EPC Statement of "Essentials Of Our Faith"***

The Reformation desire to find both theological orthodoxy and personal freedom is modeled in the EPC motto. In the EPC, a baseline standard has been set for church membership. It defines the core beliefs of the Christian faith, which are held in common by all Christians of all times and places. Christians of most traditions would agree on these truths.

This statement of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "Essentials of Our Faith," as well as the supporting "Explanatory Statement to Essentials of Our Faith" are on the following pages.

# *The Essentials of Our Faith*

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, become flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.
6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).
7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

## *Explanatory Statement to The Essentials of Our Faith*

The Westminster Confession of Faith is a confessional statement of orthodox Presbyterianism. The Westminster Confession of Faith is our standard of doctrine as found in Scripture. It is a positive statement of the Reformed Faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith constitutes a system of biblical truth that an officer of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is required to believe, acknowledging that each individual court has the freedom to allow exceptions which do not infringe on the system of doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

"The Essentials of Our Faith" is an irenic statement of historic evangelicalism. The purpose of "The Essentials of Our Faith" is to define core beliefs of the Christian faith. It expresses historic Christian beliefs common to all true believers and churches throughout the world. "The Essentials of Our Faith" is not intended to be the exclusive test of orthodoxy for ordination. It is not intended to be used as an explicit standard for minimal core beliefs for candidates, ordination, or ministerial examinations. It is not to be construed as a substitute for the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and "The Essentials of Our Faith" are important documents in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith and "The Essentials of Our Faith" are not alternative statements of truth, nor are they competitive statements of truth. They each serve important and harmonious purposes within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith preserves our commitment to the historic orthodoxy of the Reformed Faith. "The Essentials of Our Faith" preserves our commitment to historic evangelicalism.

# Practical Leadership Applications

## What principles can we learn from history?

The God of Christianity is a God of history. For thousands of years, millions of people of faith, in billions of differing daily situations, have found reasons to trust God. Trust is often defined as "consistent behavior practiced over time." The nature and character of God throughout the generations allow us to exercise trust in Him. The God "with me now" is also the God of forever.



### 1. God is in charge.

As one NBA coach said, "God is a gamer." God operates with sovereignty. He has the power and knowledge and ability to act without any limits.

He does whatever He chooses to do, contingent only on Himself. Therefore, He is never caught off guard or in need of an adaptive, "second-best" plan. When things seem to change or come unraveled, we need to remind each other that this is only true from our perspective. The universe operates and unfolds at God's will. God rules over the details of life. He sees the smallest sparrow fall and counts the diminishing number of hairs on every head. He can be trusted. (Proverbs 16:33, Matthew 10:29-30; Luke 12:6, Ephesians 1:11, Deuteronomy 32:39, Psalm 135:6, Isaiah 46:9-10, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11, Romans 11:34).

### 2. We have a purpose.

One way God has chosen to reveal Himself is through personal relationships with men and women. He has done this in countless generations, in various places and times. God reveals Himself to us for two reasons, it seems: first, because He desires to reveal His nature to us that we might glorify Him, and second, because He desires for us to participate with Him in His rule and reign (the Kingdom). We are here for a reason. As the Westminster Catechisms note: Our ultimate purpose (chief end) in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

### 3. We have important choices to make.

Throughout history, this divine interaction has allowed people to make real choices about how we live and glorify Him. The choices are not preprogrammed, but actual: will we operate with God or against Him? In the pages of Scripture and in numerous life stories, we see clearly the results of these choices—building a Tower of Babel or an Ark, living as Judas or Peter, or loving as Barnabas or Demos. One lesson from God's relationships with men and women in history is clear: God can be glorified and followed in any situation!

## *Q.* Although we participate, it is never about us.

God often overrules human will. While we may seek to convince ourselves that we have power and control, God directs the affairs of humanity as He chooses. We can work with Him or against Him, but He remains in charge. Ultimately, His ends will prevail—every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Romans 9:15-18, Proverbs 21:1, Acts 16:14, Revelation 17:17, Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Samuel 15:31-17:14, Psalm 33:10-11, Proverbs 19:21).

### For Group Discussion or Reflection

- A.* How does our history as a church show God's trustworthiness? How about in each of our life stories? How is God proving He is a gamer?
- B.* How is God revealing His nature in us now? How are we revealing God's nature to our church?
- C.* Are we giving opportunities for people here to share about God's faithfulness to them?

### Additional Resources

*Christian History & Biography* magazine, any issue but especially:

Issue 12, Volume V, No. 4, "Meet John Calvin."

Issue 28, Vol. IX, No. 4, "The 100 Most Important Events in Church History."

Issue 33, Vol. XI, No. 1, "The Untold Story of Christianity and the Civil War."

Issue 46, Vol. XIV, No. 2, "John Knox."

Donald S. Fortson III, *Liberty in Non-Essentials: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*. (Orlando, FL: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2015). Available at [www.epcresources.org](http://www.epcresources.org)

Donald S. Fortson III, *The Presbyterian Story: Origins & Progress of a Reformed Tradition*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017).

Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992).

#### **Theologian Thomas Oden writes:**

*Some [evangelicals] have fixated upon "me and the Bible, and especially me," so that what Bible reading becomes is primarily an assertion of inward feelings. This has sadly prevented readers from ... learning that the Spirit has a history, and that the body of Christ being called forth in that history has unity ... Beware of the "evangelical" who wants to read the Bible without the historic voices of the church, who is only willing to listen to his own voice or the voices of contemporaries in the dialogue. Evangelicals have usually been the losers when they have systematically neglected the saints and martyrs and consensual writers of the earliest Christian centuries.*  
~*Christianity Today*  
Volume 37, No. 12.

## *Relevant Morality*

*Though in the 1930s Pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick questioned many liberal premises, in the 1920s he was an ardent champion of modernist liberal thought. In a 1926 essay, "What Christian Liberals Are Driving At," he outlined two major aims of liberalism; the following is a condensed excerpt.*

Certainly I cannot claim the right to speak for all Christian liberals. There are too many different sorts of them, from swashbuckling radicals, believing not much of anything, to men of well-stabilized convictions who are tolerant of differences and open-minded to new truth. But there is a large and growing group in our churches for whom I shall try to speak.

The uproar of the last few years associated with Fundamentalism has been caused in part by the clear and true perception of the reactionaries that the liberals are gaining and that, if not stopped now, they will soon be in control. What the liberals are driving at, therefore, is an important matter, not only to the churches, but also to the public in general. Let me try to group their major aims and motives under two headings.

For one thing, liberals undoubtedly wish to modernize Christianity's expression of its faith. The Protestant Reformation was a valiant stroke for liberty, but it occurred before the most characteristic ideas of our modern age had arrived. The Augsburg Confession is a memorable document, but the Lutherans who framed it did not even know that they were living on a moving planet. Martin Luther himself called Copernicus a new astrologer. The Westminster Confession is a notable achievement in the development of Christian thought, but it was written 40 years before Newton published his work on the law of gravitation.

Protestantism, therefore, was formulated in pre-scientific days. Not one of its historic statements of faith considers any of the masterful ideas that constitute the framework of modern thinking—the inductive method, the new astronomy, natural law, evolution. All these have come since Protestantism arrived.

Protestantism stiffened into its classic forms under intellectual influences long antedating our modern world, and the chaos and turmoil in Christian thought today are the consequences. They spring directly from the impossible endeavor of large sections of the church to continue the presentation of the gospel in forms of thought that are no longer real and cogent to well-instructed minds.

As one deals with young men and women religiously upset, one must often blame their unsettlement not so much upon the colleges as upon Christian churches and Sunday schools—upon religious agencies that taught these young people in the beginning that the Christian gospel is indissolubly associated with the pre-scientific view of the world in the Scriptures or the creeds; that the gospel of the Lord Jesus is dependent upon fiat creation or the historic reliability of old miracle narratives; that the God of the gospel, like the God of the early Hebrew documents, is a magnified man who could walk in the garden in the cool of the day or come down from the sky to confound men's speech lest they should build a tower high enough to reach his home.

It is a tragic error thus to set up in the minds of young children an artificial adhesion between the gospel



and a literal interpretation of Scripture and creed so that, when education inevitably opens a child's mind, the whole unnatural combination of liberalism and spiritual faith collapses, and Christ is banished from a soul because he has been associated with opinions that are bound in the end to prove untenable.

Liberalism is not primarily a set of opinions; it is a spirit of free inquiry which wishes to face the new facts, accept whatever is true, and state the abiding principles of Christian faith in cogent and contemporary terms. At the very center of liberalism, as I understand it, is the conviction that nothing fundamentally matters in religion except those things that create private and public goodness.

In historic and contemporary Christianity, three elements have been continually used as competitors of character in the interest of Christians. They have repeatedly usurped the place that private and public righteousness ought to occupy as the one supreme matter with which Christianity is concerned and for which it works. These three elements are ritual, doctrine, and church.

This does not mean that ritual is unnecessary or unimportant in religion. Religion always has had its ceremonies and always will. Nevertheless, a peril lurks in all ritualism—the supposition, namely, that the Lord God of this infinite universe cares anything about our meticulous performance of a ceremony—if it does not issue in private and public righteousness.

Nor does the liberal Christian belittle doctrine. The ordered and intelligible statement of the convictions that undergird Christian living is important. A man's creed, if real and vital, is his conviction about the nature and meaning of his life, of the world in which it is lived, and of the God who rules it. That certainly is basic and controlling.

However, there is an omnipresent danger in emphasis on doctrine. Doctrine in time is petrified into dogma. It is officially formulated. Then there is an ecclesiastical type of mind ready to use it, no longer as an inspiring elucidation of the convictions by which men really live but as a mold into which men's thinking must be exactly run. Doctrine is then authoritative, a definition laid down in times past of the way in which men must always think. And men often pride themselves on this repetition of their fathers' thoughts, as though the God and Father of Jesus cared anything for that, except as it represents real convictions vitally issuing in private and public righteousness.

Furthermore, the liberal certainly does not undervalue the church. Nevertheless, the pathos of Christian history lies in the way the church has so often misrepresented and obstructed vital Christianity. Our multiplied and meaningless denominations are doing that today. In one of our American communities, a congregation called itself The Church of God. They could not agree among themselves and, having split asunder, the split called itself, The True Church of God. They in turn divided, and the new division called itself The Only True Church of God. The tragedy of that picturesque situation, too typical of our modern Protestantism to be pleasant, is that none of these divisions has any imaginable relationship with the one supreme business of religion: the creation of private and public righteousness.

A liberal, therefore, in his emphasis is utterly careless of sectarian distinctions. He sees that our denominational peculiarities for the most part are caused by historic reasons only, have no contemporary excuse for existence, and have no contribution to make to righteousness. He is convinced that nothing matters in any church except those few vital and transforming faiths and principles of the gospel, common to all churches, which do create personal character and social progress.

*Originally published in "Christian History Magazine," Issue 55. © 1997. Used by permission.*

# *A Return to Bondage*

*Even H.L. Mencken, the agnostic and cynical columnist of the The Baltimore Sun, admired Presbyterian J. Gresham Machen as an "adept theologian" whose scholarship was "wide and deep." Machen made the most adept "fundamentalist" critique of liberalism in his 1923 book, Christianity and Liberalism. The following are excerpts.*

The great redemptive religion that has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism."

The liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only the same indefinite type of religious aspiration that was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene. In trying to remove from Christianity everything that could possibly be objected to in the name of science, in trying to bribe the enemy by those concessions that the enemy most desires, the apologist has really abandoned what he started out to defend.

In view of the lamentable defects of modern life, a type of religion certainly should not be commended simply because it is modern or condemned simply because it is old. In the midst of all the material achievements of modern life, one may well ask the question whether in gaining the whole world we have not lost our own soul. Are we forever condemned to live the sordid life of utilitarianism? Or is there some lost secret which if rediscovered will restore to mankind something of the glories of the past?

Such a secret the writer of this little book would discover in the Christian religion. But the Christian religion that is meant is certainly not the religion of the modern liberal church, but a message of divine grace.

## **Whatever happened to sin?**

At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of consciousness of sin. The consciousness of sin was formerly the starting point of all preaching, but today it is gone.

Characteristic of the modern age, above all else, is a supreme confidence in human goodness; the religious literature of the day is redolent of that confidence. Get beneath the rough exterior of men, we are told, and we shall discover enough self-sacrifice to found upon it the hope of society; the world's evil, it is said, can be overcome with the world's good; no help is needed from outside the world.

Despite all superficial continuity, a remarkable change has come about within the last 75 years. The change is nothing less than the substitution of paganism for Christianity as the dominant view of life.

In speaking of "paganism," we are not using a term of reproach. Ancient Greece was pagan, but it was



glorious, and the modern world has not even begun to equal its achievements. What, then, is paganism? Paganism is that view of life that finds the highest goal of human existence in the healthy and harmonious and joyous development of existing human faculties.

Very different is the Christian ideal. Paganism is optimistic with regard to unaided human nature, whereas Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.

We do not mean that the characteristic Christian attitude is a continual beating on the breast or a continual crying of "Woe is me." Nothing could be farther from the fact. On the contrary, Christianity means that sin is faced once for all and then is cast, by the grace of God, forever into the depths of the sea.

The trouble with the paganism of ancient Greece, as with the paganism of modern times, was not in the superstructure, which was glorious, but in the foundation, which was rotten. There was always something to be covered up; the enthusiasm of the architect was maintained only by ignoring the disturbing fact of sin.

In Christianity, on the other hand, nothing needs to be covered up. The fact of sin is faced squarely, once for all, and is dealt with by the grace of God. But then, after sin has been removed by the grace of God, the Christian can proceed to develop joyously every faculty that God has given him.

### **Middle Ages redux**

Faith, according to the Christian view, means simply receiving a gift. To have faith in Christ means to cease trying to win God's favor by one's own character; the man who believes in Christ simply accepts the sacrifice that Christ offered on Calvary. The result of such faith is a new life and all good works, but the salvation itself is an absolutely free gift of God.

According to modern liberalism, faith is essentially the same as "making Christ master" in one's life; at least, it is by making Christ master in the life that the welfare of men is sought. But that simply means salvation is thought to be obtained by our own obedience to the commands of Christ. Such teaching is just a sublimated form of legalism. The ground of hope, on this view, is not the sacrifice of Christ but our own obedience to God's law.

In this way, the whole achievement of the Reformation has been given up, and there has been a return to the religion of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, God raised up a man who began to read the Epistle to the Galatians with his own eyes. The result was the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. Upon that rediscovery has been based the whole of our evangelical freedom.

The grace of God is rejected by modern liberalism. And the result is slavery—the slavery of the law, the wretched bondage by which man undertakes the impossible task of establishing his own righteousness as a ground of acceptance with God. It may seem strange at first sight that "liberalism," of which the very name means freedom, should in reality be wretched slavery. But the phenomenon is not really so strange. Emancipation from the blessed will of God always involves bondage to some worse taskmaster.

*Originally published in "Christian History Magazine," Issue 55. © 1997. Used by permission.*

# *Reformed Church History Questions*

*Q-1.* Who was John Calvin and what did he do?

*Q-2.* How can we describe Presbyterians?

*Q-3.* What does it mean to be Reformed?

*Q-4.* Who was John Knox?

*Q-5.* What is the Westminster Confession?

*Q-6.* Who was the Father of American Presbyterianism?

*Q-7.* What happened in 1706 that was of significance to American Presbyterians?

*Q-8.* What was the Adopting Act? What issue spawned it? How does the EPC address the issue?

*Q-9.* What was the effect on Presbyterians of the Agreement with the Congregationalists?

*Q-10.* Give two reasons why Presbyterians did not thrive on the frontier like Methodists and Baptists.

*Q-11.* What was the Gardiner Spring Resolution, and what was its result?

*Q-12.* Who were Harry Emerson Fosdick and J. Gresham Machen?

*Q-13.* What did liberals believe to be the primary focus of Christianity? What did Fundamentalists think that liberals were missing?

*Q-14.* When was the EPC formed? Who formed it and why?

CHAPTER  
3

# *Reading the Bible*

## *A Controversial Word*

As we have seen, the issue of the reliability of the Bible not only divides the church and the world; it also divides the church itself.

Jesus said that man would not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Historically, the church has echoed the teaching of Jesus and the Bible itself that the Bible is the voice of God, the "Word of God."

We assume that the reader agrees the Bible is God's authoritative Word. Good defenses for this position are available for reading, as described in the notes to this chapter. But what does this authority mean? And how do we read and interpret the Bible?



## *The Inspiration of Scripture*

The university experience of one church officer may be illustrative. During college years, belief in the Bible's authority and reliability are quickly challenged in academic studies, including religious course studies. In a New Testament course, one evangelical sought to defend the trustworthiness of Scripture to the liberal professor (who also was a minister). The professor dismissed the idea of God's inspiration of the Bible, saying, "And I suppose that your Bible came straight from heaven to the university bookstore with a price tag on it!"

What does it mean that God inspired the Scriptures? Did He dictate them? Translate them into English? Oversee the choice of books to be included? Paul says, "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The word "inspiration" is a translation of a Greek word meaning "God-breathed." We believe that the Holy Spirit used human authors with their individual backgrounds, vocations, languages, and experiences to write His words. This is why the prophets could say, "Thus saith the Lord." The Holy Spirit superintended this process. He did not dictate the words. Rather, He communicated through human writers the very Word of God.

## *From the Westminster Confession:*

"Our natural understanding and the works of creation and providence so clearly show God's goodness, wisdom, and power that human beings have no excuse for not believing in Him. However, these means alone cannot provide that knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary for salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at different times and in various ways to reveal Himself and to declare that this revelation contains His will for His church. Afterwards it pleased God to put this entire revelation into writing so that the truth might be better preserved and transmitted and that the church, confronted with the corruption of the flesh and the evil purposes of Satan and the world, might be more securely established and comforted. Since God no longer reveals Himself to His people in those earlier ways, Holy Scripture is absolutely essential." (Chapter 1, 1).

The Christian church has historically affirmed the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. "Inerrancy" means that the Bible is without error. If the Bible is superintended and inspired by God, it cannot err. "Authority" means that the Bible is our rule for faith and practice in every area as to which it speaks.

That the Bible is inerrant and authoritative does not necessarily mean that every part of the Bible is to be taken "literally." The Bible uses poetic language, such as describing Christians as "the salt of the earth." This does not mean we are thrown out on the sidewalk to melt ice. Christians should use rules of interpretation to understand the Bible, so it is not necessary or always helpful to read the Bible literally.

Inspiration does not mean that the Bible translations we have today are without error, but that the original manuscripts were without error. Nor does inspiration mean that every statement made in the Bible is true. Job, for instance, receives some bad advice from his well-meaning friends. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes that all is vanity; there is no purpose in life. However, we know from the context and other parts of the Bible that he was speaking from the perspective of human despair.

### *The Canon of Scripture*

The Canon of Scripture is the list of books that comprise the Bible. The word "canon" is from a Greek word meaning "rule or standard." How were the books of the Bible chosen? What books were chosen? Were wrong books chosen and valuable books omitted? This is a complex subject and perhaps we will not be able to spend enough time on it. But it is important to feel a good level of comfort with the authority of the books which are a part of our Bible.

The New Testament books were "received" (the term used by the early

church) based on several criteria: (1) they need apostolic authorship or endorsement; (2) they must have been received as authoritative by the early church; and (3) they must be in harmony with books about which there was no doubt.

Although the vast majority of the books of the New Testament were clearly considered authoritative, several were initially questioned. Two or three were considered and then omitted, as they were not written by apostles and the writers themselves acknowledged that their authority was subordinate to the apostles.

There is disagreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the authority of seven books, called the Apocrypha. These books were written in the period between Malachi and the events of the New Testament. These books were never considered by the Jews to be authoritative, but are considered to be historical on the level of other secular history books. There are problems with these books: (1) all but two are anonymous; (2) they do not claim to be authoritative; (3) they are not quoted by Jesus in the Gospels or by other New Testament writers. They became part of the Roman Catholic Bible only in 1546 at the Council of Trent.

### *Interpreting the Bible*

How is the Bible to be read? A longer treatment is needed; some good resources are cited at the end of the chapter. But in his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge cited three primary rules of interpretation. He writes:

If every man has the right and is bound to read the Scriptures and to judge for himself what they teach, he must have certain rules to guide him in the exercise of this privilege and duty. These rules are not arbitrary. They are not imposed by human authority. They have no binding force, which does not flow from their own intrinsic truth and propriety. They are few and simple:

- (1) The words of Scripture are to be taken in their plain historical sense. That is, they must be taken in the sense attached to them in the age and by the people to whom they were addressed. This assumes that the sacred writers were honest and meant to be understood.
- (2) If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the Word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything that is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. Hence Scripture must explain Scripture. If a passage admits of different interpretations, the true one will agree with what the Bible teaches elsewhere on the same subject.

#### ***Canon (n.):***

*from the Greek word  
"kanon"*

*(1) A ruler, rule,  
standard, or model;*

*(2) A criterion of judgment.*



Charles Hodge

(3) The Scriptures are to be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which guidance is to be humbly and earnestly sought. The Spirit is promised as a guide and teacher. He was to come to lead the people of God into the knowledge of the truth."

Hodge offers good and helpful rules that can help the reader understand particular literary forms used in Scripture, such as understanding the parallelisms used in poetry, interpreting Jesus' parables, and so forth. It is why Presbyterians believe so strongly in an educated clergy. If you feel uncertain about how to read the Bible, see the section on Practical Leadership Applications at the end of this chapter, or read a good book on biblical interpretation.

### *Dispensationalism*

Within conservative Protestantism there is a basic question of approach to biblical interpretation. Reformed readers see the Scriptures as a unity, while another group—Dispensationalists—see Scripture as divided into separate periods, or dispensations. Dispensationalism is relatively new, traceable to Irish Anglican clergyman John Nelson Darby in the 1830s, then to the 1909 publication of C.I. Scofield's Reference Bible. Noted Dispensationalist expositors include Scofield, Charles Ryrie, and faculty members from Dallas Theological Seminary.

A text frequently cited by Dispensationalists is 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing [the NIV says 'handling'] the word of truth." Dispensationalists have interpreted this verse to mean that the Bible presents sharply divided parts called dispensations. Scofield defined a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Correctly interpreting the Bible thus means correctly dividing these dispensations from one another. Scofield defined seven epochs in the Bible (*Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Genesis 1:28). Other Dispensationalists have found more than seven, some as few as two dispensations.

Dispensationalist and non-Dispensationalist theologians alike would agree that God has revealed His plan progressively. People in later ages knew more of God than those of earlier periods. Paul says that he came to make known a new administration of God not known to men of other ages (Ephesians 3:2-9). The writer of Hebrews says that God spoke to the people in former times by prophets but had now spoken through the Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). God has worked with different means in different ages.

However, unlike non-Dispensationalists, Dispensationalists divide sections into areas that sharply contrast or even conflict with one another. John Gerstner observed, "Genuine biblical revelation is developmental; one

stage unfolds naturally from another as the unfolding of the blossom of a flower." But for Dispensationalists, these periods are sharply divided rather than integrated, and they conflict rather than harmonize. "Divide" is a sharper term than Paul's original requires, and Dispensationalists have made it sharper still, "a veritable scissors separation of one part from another" (John H. Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism*, P&R Publishing, 1982).

Calvin's *Institutes* contains a chapter dedicated to the differences between Old and New Testaments, and another dedicated to their similarities. However, there is no sharp break in God's interaction with man in any time period. Reformed thinkers believe that the patterns of God's work are generally consistent throughout time.

In its extreme forms, Dispensationalism causes confusion because the divisions mean that not all Scripture is applicable to us today. In particular, Dispensationalists do not consider the continuity of the Old and New Testaments. For example, are Christians today free of all obligations to obey the Law, since the Law was a part of the Old Testament dispensation? Do Christians have any obligation to tithe if tithing is not discussed in the New Testament? There are other questions raised. Some Dispensationalists seem to portray God as trying different approaches to humanity in different ages, hoping to find something that will work, and God is surprised and disappointed when the latest dispensation does not stick. Of course, not all Dispensationalist interpreters take these positions.

While we agree with Dispensationalists on the authority of Scripture and our dependence on free grace in Jesus Christ, Dispensationalists may disagree with certain positions historically taken by the Reformed church, based on different approaches to Scripture. For instance, Dispensationalists may disagree with some or all of the following positions frequently adopted by Reformed believers:

1. The Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ, and Christ is now reigning as King.
2. The church is the manifestation of Christ's Kingdom in the present age.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"We may be influenced by the testimony of the church to value the Bible highly and reverently, and Scripture itself shows in so many ways that it is God's Word; for example, in its spiritual subject matter, in the effectiveness of its teaching, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, its unified aim from beginning to end (to give all glory to God), the full revelation it makes of the only way of man's salvation, its many other incomparably outstanding features, and its complete perfection. However, we are completely persuaded and assured of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Bible only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit, who testifies by and with the word in our hearts."  
(Chapter 1, 5).

3. The people of God under the old covenant and the new are one people.
4. God's purpose and plan are consistent from the creation until the consummation.
5. Even though we are justified by grace alone through faith alone, God's moral law is still incumbent on Christians.
6. The church will be present in the world at the consummation (1 Corinthians 15:52 and Revelation 11:15).

Dispensationalists remain fellow Christians. They have done wonderful things for God's Kingdom. However, their method of interpreting Scripture differs from the interpretation of the Reformed tradition because they do not give, in our opinion, adequate consideration to the continuity of Scripture—particularly the Old and New Testaments.

### ***Why So Many Bible Versions?***

We live in an age of Bible translations. According to the American Bible Society, there are about 900 printed English translations and paraphrases of the Bible (whether complete or not). Bible "versions" are simply translations of the original Greek or Hebrew text into English. Because English can be expressed in many ways, the differences between versions are due to differences in translation styles. Often denominations, seminaries, and pastors have their favorites. Most scholars use several versions in study, as most key theology is reflected in all. So, how do we evaluate a version? A first question might be, "How and when did the translator(s) do their work?" There are at least six distinct issues related to the translation process. Different translations might score higher than others in one category below, but lower than others in another. No one Bible gets five stars in every category. In overview, what issues should we consider?

#### **Translation Philosophy**

There is a continuum among philosophies with a literal, word-for-word translation on one end, a phrase-for-phrase translation in the middle, and a paraphrase of thought-for thought on the other end. Depending on the purpose of the translation, all have strengths and weaknesses. The use of the version impacts what philosophy one chooses.

#### **Use and Audience**

How is the Bible going to be used? A Bible that is paraphrased may be much easier to read and understand, but one which is translated word-for-word may reflect the original intent of the passage better. Does it have notes and aids for study? For example, is this Bible a daily devotional Bible? Is it designed for clarity to a younger audience? Is it to understand exact original word choice for preaching? Is it to expand understanding to a non-Christian audience?

### **Translators and Purpose**

Who translated this? What level of scholars were used? What was their purpose or desire in printing the translation? Is there a particular "bent" in this translation's theological interpretation? For example, does it or its notes reflect an Evangelical, Liberal, Catholic, or Dispensational view?

### **Source Manuscripts Used**

There are two competing sets of ancient manuscript families, an older set, and a larger set, used for translation. As you might guess, those who prefer the older set argue that it must be truer to the original because it is older (closer to those written originally) whereas the other group argues that the larger set must be more faithful because it is larger (in likelihood more widely used accepted).

### **Reading and Beauty**

Which translation in its form best befits its content? Which flows well, is easily read, or helps in memorizing? As R.C. Sproul said, "The most faithful translation often will clank, artistically speaking."

### **History and Context**

Which Bible translation fits best into the life of the church over the centuries? What is its longevity? How well does it translate truth to our modern culture? How well does it strengthen the daily lives of our church people?

## *Major English Bible Versions*

TYN	Tyndale Bible (1525).....	Earliest, with commentary. Tyndale martyred for it
GEN	Geneva Bible (1560).....	A hallmark of the Reformation, but a bit wooden
KJV	King James Version (1611).....	Most poetic and historic, literal
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952).....	Literal, scholarly, father of ESV and NRSV
AMP	Amplified Bible (1965, 2015).....	Merges word-for-word and context in expanded texts
NASB	New American Standard (1971).....	Evangelical, most literal word-for-word version
NEB	New English Bible (1971).....	U.K. scholarship, paraphrase version
NIV	New International Version (1978).....	Evangelical, popular, word/phrase compromise
NKJV	New King James (1982).....	Modernized, scholarly, literal, popular
CEV	Contemporary English (1983).....	Modern-language Catholic version
NRSV	New Revised Standard (1989).....	Scholarly, gender-neutral, non-evangelical
TM	The Message (1993).....	Evangelical paraphrase by Eugene Peterson
NLT	New Living Translation (1996).....	Revision of the paraphrased 1971 Living Bible
ESV	English Standard Version (2001).....	Evangelical, scholarly revision of RSV
CEB	Common English Bible (2011).....	Mainline denominational paraphrase

### *Some Examples of Romans 3:28*

TYN	"For we suppose that a man is iustified by fayth without the dedes of the lawe."
KJV	"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."
AMP	"For we hold that a man is justified and made upright by faith independent of and distinctly apart from good deeds (works of the Law)."
NASB	"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."
NIV	"For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."
CEV	"We see that people are acceptable to God because they have faith, and not because they obey the Law."
ESV	"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."
TM	"Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace by faith, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade."
NRSV	"For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law."
NLT	"So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law."
CEB	"No, not at all, but through the law of faith. We consider that a person is treated as righteous by faith, apart from what is accomplished under the Law."

# Practical Leadership Applications

Why should we, as leaders, find time for personal study of the Bible?

As Evangelical Presbyterians, we are deeply committed to the Bible (see Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1). But sometimes we can love the concept of Scripture more than the actual, ingested words of God. How is our level of faith impacted by time reading God's Word? Our maturity? Our prayers? Our humility? Our wisdom?

1. When we wonder how we can hear from a mysterious God we cannot see, the Bible gives us *concrete revelation and wisdom*. In it, God speaks to real individuals about real issues.
2. When you and I are searching for truth that can make a difference in our lives, the Bible is *near and available to all men and women*. Anyone can read it. Anyone with the Spirit can find answers.
3. When we need answers that apply today, the Bible is *active and alive*. Because it is a spiritual document, it speaks across times and cultures. Martin Luther wrote, "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me."
4. When we are hoping for something bigger than ourselves, the Bible is both *transcendent* and *relevant*. Authors, wisdom, and true stories from the ages connect to today's situations and struggles. When we are caught in the net of human limitations, and are surrounded by our boundaries of "cannot," the Bible is *limitless*. The character of an unstoppable God blossoms in each page.
5. When we are insufficient and empty, the Bible is *sufficient and filling*. When we read and meditate on Scripture, new insights stretch and grow us. When we have questions upon questions, without answers, the Bible is our *teacher*. Again and again, we are instructed with patience and truth.
6. When we see only signs of erosion and decay, and we are unsure as to where to look for real security, the Bible is *enduring and eternal*. When we need a standard that does not change with every morning's headlines, the Bible remains *steadfast and perfect*. When we hunger for real goodness in a world of dishonesty, selfishness, and fear, the Bible is *good*. It reflects the goodness of God's nature.
7. When we are searching for something on which we can count, in

"Let no day pass by without the reading of some portion of the sacred Scriptures and giving some space to meditation; for nothing feeds the souls so well as those sacred studies do."

~Theonas of Alexandria  
(c. 300)

"Nearly 9 out of 10 churched teenagers said their church experience exposed them to Bible stories (95%), taught them about the lives of great people in the Bible (92%), and gave them fun experiences related to religion (89%). Only half (53%) said their church experience helped them understand the Bible enough to help them make decisions based on biblical principles."

~Christian Parenting Today  
Winter, 2003.

"If we thus read God's Word as a test of our spiritual condition, we shall have good reason to stop many a time and say, 'Lord, I feel I have never yet been here, O bring me here! Give me true penitence, such as this I read of ... make me more like Jesus.'"

~Charles Spurgeon,  
"Morning and Evening,"  
June 12, 1880

good times and in bad, the Bible demonstrates its *reliability*. When we are about to tumble—or perhaps be pushed—for a great fall, the Bible is our *safeguard*. When we are at risk, God has an appropriate answer just waiting in the pages of Scripture.

### *Reading the Bible in a Fresh Way*

**1. Read passages aloud.**

This may seem ridiculous (especially if you are alone), but the human mind has an amazing ability to wander. While we read, too often we are planning what we're going to do next or trying to solve other issues. Reading aloud doesn't solve the problem, but it significantly helps the mind to focus by changing patterns and involving other senses.

**2. Be patient and don't read too much at once.**

Give yourself room to reflect and think about what God is saying. For example, study and think about only one verse for a week or two. Biblical meditation is simply the process of letting a verse or small section of Scripture stay in your mind for a significant period of time.

**3. Emphasize different words as you read.**

For broader insights, try reading a verse several times out loud, each with new verbal emphasis. For example: "The Lord is my *shepherd*." "The *Lord* is my shepherd." "The Lord is *my* shepherd."

**4. Read several translations for freshness.**

It can help to understand a passage if you look at another translation.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"The meanings of all the passages in the Bible are not equally obvious, nor is any individual passage equally clear to everyone. However, everything which we have to know, believe, and observe in order to be saved is so clearly presented and revealed somewhere in the Bible that the uneducated as well as the educated can sufficiently understand it by the proper use of the ordinary means of grace... The infallible standard for the interpretation of the Bible is the Bible itself. And so any question about the true and complete sense of a passage in the Bible (which is a unified whole) can be answered by referring to other passages which speak more plainly." (Chapter 1, 7, 9).

Bear in mind which translations follow the original text most closely, and which add flavor and breath.

**5. Ask the Lord (and yourself) prayerful questions:**

- Lord, why is this passage here for me today?
- Lord, what is the main point (subject, issue, or action) here?
- Lord, who were you speaking to first here, and why?
- Lord, what does this teach me about You, Father-Son-Spirit?
- Lord, what example is there for us to follow?
- Lord, are there words I should look up to clarify the meaning?
- Jesus, what do I need most from this passage to apply to my life today?

***Additional Resources***

James M. Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (Chicago, IL: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1979). Contains "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." Also available at [www.defendinginerrancy.com](http://www.defendinginerrancy.com)

Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2016).

Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message—A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996).

John H. Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1982).

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992); pages 75-98.

Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993).

R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith.* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), Part I, pages 3-28.

Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957).

## *Reading the Bible Questions*

- 3-1.* Who do we mean when we say that the Scriptures are inspired by God?
- 3-2.* What do we mean when we say that Scripture is inerrant? Is this the same as saying that we take the Bible literally?
- 3-3.* What is the "canon" of Scripture?
- 3-4.* What is the method of interpreting Scripture used by Dispensationalists?
- 3-5.* Name several reasons the Bible is special and valuable.
- 3-6.* Can a non-seminary or non-educated person read the Bible?
- 3-7.* What are the things that interfere with your regular reading of Scripture?

## CHAPTER 4

# Theology

### *The Framework for Christian Thought*

What do Christians believe? Christian thought has been systematized—put into a coherent whole—by theologians who have studied the Bible in a logical way. Traditionally, systematic theology has been broken down into seven major areas, which progress logically through the basic truths of the faith. These form the framework, or scaffolding, of what Christians believe. Each of these areas will be a topic for study over the next six sections. These topics of doctrinal study are:

1. The doctrine of God, or theology, sometimes called "theology proper" to distinguish this area from the study of all six doctrines generally.
2. The doctrine of the human condition, or anthropology.
3. The doctrine of the person and work of Christ, or Christology.
4. The doctrine of the means of salvation, called soteriology.
5. The doctrine of the church and the sacraments, or ecclesiology.
6. The doctrine of the last things, called eschatology.

#### **Theology Proper: Knowing God**

We cannot think seriously about ourselves without thinking about the One who made us and continues to care for us. The powers we have are such that we could not have made them ourselves, and we most certainly could not have given ourselves life. We have been given so many things in this life that we must think of the Giver. More than this, the evil of our natures makes us turn to God seeking for better things. We want Him to replace our ignorance, poverty, weakness, and corruption with His true wisdom, wealth, power, and righteousness.

#### **Knowing ourselves**

In order to have a right knowledge of ourselves, we must know God and know what we are like in God's sight. Our human pride makes us think

#### **Theological Terms:**

*"Theology Proper"*  
The study of the existence of God and of His nature and attributes.

*"Anthropology"*  
The study of humanity and the human condition.

*"Christology"*  
The study of Jesus Christ.

*"Soteriology"*  
The study of how people are saved, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

*"Pneumatology"*  
The study of the Holy Spirit

*"Ecclesiology"*  
The doctrine and study of the Church and Sacraments

*"Eschatology"*  
Last things, the afterlife, Jesus' second coming.

"If we wish to have real wisdom we must know two things: we must know God and we must know ourselves. In order to know one of these properly, we must also know the other."  
~John Calvin

we are wise and holy, until we look to the Lord, whose perfection is the only standard against which we must be measured. Then we find that we are hypocrites. We are content to appear to be righteous without having God's true righteousness. Our judgment is tainted by evil around us. Because of this, we think certain things are good when, in fact, it's only that they are not so corrupt as other things. In the same way, we may look from black to cream color and, because our eyes are adjusted to the black, we think the cream is white. We need to learn that in God's sight our righteousness is sin, our strength is weakness, and our wisdom is folly." (John Calvin, from an abridged version of *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Introduction to Biblical Christianity*).

### *The Idea of Revelation*

How do we know of God? We know God because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us, although only in part, and never fully. Generally, theologians have put the sources of our knowledge of God in two categories: general revelation and special revelation.

*General revelation* is God's revelation of Himself in what we observe of the world. We see the creation and preservation of the universe, order and harmony in the world and God's work in history. We see the prick of conscience among non-believers and feel that there is a source of ethical restraint for all men. All of these are means of God's general revelation.

General revelation is sufficient light for us to know that there is a God and that we are guilty and without excuse before Him.

Paul makes this very clear in the first chapter of Romans: "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Gentiles

"show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them" (Romans 2:15). However, general revelation is not sufficient to bring men to a saving faith. It does not convey an absolutely reliable knowledge of God or acquaint us with the only way of salvation.

Saving faith comes only through *special revelation*. Special revelation is given to us through the incarnation of the living Word and the recording



of the written Word. We know nothing about God's revelations among Israel and finally in Christ except from the Bible. The Bible and what it teaches us of God is therefore absolutely necessary for salvation, for it is the means by which God reveals Himself and his plan of salvation to us.

### *Proofs of the Existence of God*

Throughout the centuries, Christians and non-Christians have posited arguments for a Supreme Being (although not necessarily the God of Scripture) from reasons outside the Bible. For instance, the classic *cosmological argument* is that there is a cause for every effect; therefore, we can reason our way to a First Cause, or an Uncaused Cause, which is infinitely great.

The *teleological argument* extends the cosmological argument by looking at the order and beauty of creation. What are the chances that a wind blowing through a junkyard will assemble a jumbo jet? Or consider a watch. Does it not imply that there is a watchmaker, as well as something about the character of the watchmaker? Since there is order and harmony to the universe, we can know that the Supreme Being is one with intelligence and purposeful being.

The *moral argument* notes that men have consciences and have adopted moral codes. Things "seem right" and things "seem wrong" to almost all normal people. Does this not imply a lawgiver and judge who has commanded men absolutely? Who has written some code upon our hearts?

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) is credited with another argument. Saint Anselm was the outstanding Christian philosopher and theologian of the eleventh century. He is best known for the celebrated *ontological argument* for the existence of God, but his contributions to philosophical theology (and indeed to philosophy more generally) go well beyond the ontological argument.

In his book, *Proslogion*, Anselm wanted to formulate a direct argument that does not need the world in order to find God. He wanted to find God in thought itself. He would argue that before thought goes outside itself to the world, it should be certain of God. His argument is difficult to follow because it is extremely scholastic and far from our normal ways of reasoning. (For more from Anselm, see the inset on page 60).

Each of these arguments for God—cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological—as well as several others like them, start from general revelation (what can be observed about God from creation). Arguments for God like these are made by other deistic religions.

# *Does God Exist?*

*The Ontology from Saint Anselm (1033-1109):*

In his philosophical approach, Saint Anselm followed Augustine, but he advanced with surprising originality to new fields of inquiry. He adopted from Augustine the motto *Credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order that I may understand"). Anselm assumed that faith supplies the propositions with which one must start, propositions relating to the existence of God, the Trinity, the atonement, and so forth; reason is able to elaborate rational proofs of these doctrines. In his masterpiece of theology, *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why the God-Man"), Anselm is the first in church history to have articulated the precise significance of Christ's death in terms of the vicarious substitutionary atonement.

In *Proslogion*, Anselm writes,

Even the fool is convinced that there is something in the intellect than which nothing greater can be thought, because as soon as he (the fool) hears this, he understands it; and whatever is understood is in the understanding. And certainly, that than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be only in the intellect. If, namely, it were in the intellect alone, it could be thought to be in reality also, which is more.

If, therefore, that than which nothing greater can be thought is in the intellect alone, that than which nothing greater can be thought is something than which something greater can be thought. But this is certainly impossible. Therefore, beyond doubt, something than which nothing greater can be thought exists in intellect as well as in reality. And this Being Thou art, O Lord, our God.

The last sentence is remarkable. After going through the most sophisticated logical argumentation, it ends in a prayer which makes the ontological connection between the mind and reality. Philosophers and theologians have been divided on the validity of this leap ever since Anselm made his argument. It is very interesting that this is an argument that has continued from Plato to the present. And its most classical formulation is that of Anselm.

Whether or not we agree with the ontological argument, we can say that Anselm's intention has never been defeated, namely, to make the certainty of God independent of any encounter with the world, and to link it entirely to our self-consciousness. We owe the curious name "ontological argument" for this argument to Immanuel Kant. The medievals simply called it "that argument of Anselm's" (*argumentum Anselmi*).

## *Definition and Attributes of God*

Can we define God? No, and yes. It is impossible for us to define Him in the sense of putting bounds around Him. God is, by nature, incomprehensible to us. The creation cannot understand the Creator fully.

This is not, of course, to say that we cannot understand anything of God. However, we will only understand that of God which He chooses to reveal to us, and then only to the limit of our comprehension. We can say that God is a spirit, for Jesus tells the Samaritan woman so (John 4:24). He is spirit; therefore immaterial, invisible and without parts. Yet even this definition is "fuzzy"—for God reveals His invisible self to Moses, and poetically has "eyes" that watch over us and "hands" that shelter us. We must admit that God is too complex for us. Finite minds will never understand an infinite God.

Yet God has revealed to us much of His nature and ways. Theologians call these "attributes," and have categorized God's attributes as *communicable* and *incommunicable*. Communicable attributes are those qualities of God's character in that we see reflected in the world and other people, although present to a lesser degree than that to which they are present in God's character. For instance, we see power, goodness, mercy, and righteousness displayed in the actions and spirit of others. Incommunicable attributes are those qualities of God to which there is no human or earthly analogy. Have you ever been on a camping trip and looked up at the stars and wondered what lay beyond them? A feeling of metaphysical vertigo



*God is infinite ... without bounds and boundaries, everywhere and eternally in His being. His very essence is everywhere.*

*That may raise the question of pantheism: "If God's being is infinite, is everything God?"*

*The Bible makes a clear distinction between*

*God the Creator and His creatures.*

*The creatures live and move and have their being in God.*

*Our being is limited, finite, contingent, derived, and dependent on the infinite being of God, who is perfect in His infinity.*

*We should never consider the character of God to be too deep to think about.*

*The more we reflect on His greatness, the more our souls are moved to adore Him and worship Him for His magnificence.*

*The universe has no room for more than one infinite being. If there were a second infinite being, then the first one would have a boundary to His essence, in which case His essence would not be infinite.*

*The confession says that there can be only one God because philosophically there can be only one infinite being. God is that being.*

*~R.C. Sproul*

*"Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith"*

follows as you begin to contemplate the idea of infinity, and one of God's incommunicable attributes.

One of God's incommunicable attributes is His *self-existence*. Every effect must have a cause. That is true by definition. But God is not an effect. He has no beginning, and therefore, no antecedent cause. He is eternal. He always was and is and always will be. He has within Himself the power of being. We know of nothing like it.

Another of God's attributes is His *omnipotence*. In simple terms, God has the power to do anything. However, this is not entirely true. Can God make a rock so big he can't lift it? The question as presented is absurd. The Bible indicates there are some things God cannot do. He cannot die. He cannot lie. He cannot fail to act in accordance with His own character. Omnipotence means that *God has power over the whole of creation*.

The companions of omnipotence are God's *omnipresence* and *omniscience*. Omnipresence means that *God is present fully everywhere*. David spoke of this attribute in Psalm 139: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." Even the wicked in Hell are not separated from God's presence, only from his benevolence. His wrath is constantly with them.

Omniscience means that God, being infinite, *knows and understands everything*. God knows the future as well as the past and the present. Nothing ever surprises Him.

The *holiness* of God refers to two related qualities. First, he is *completely pure*, without moral imperfection. Human beings, tainted with evil, cannot comprehend this quality. Second, God is not of this world, but outside it, *set apart* and in a classification of His own. Human beings who have observed God have invariably been overwhelmed by the experience of God's holiness. God told Moses that no one could see His face and live. God showed Moses only a small portion of His glory, but Moses' face afterward was so radiant that the Israelites were afraid to come near Moses (Exodus 33-34). Samson's father, Manoah, said, "We shall surely die; for we have seen God!" (Judges 13:22). Isaiah felt his uncleanness, crying out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

God's *justice* is another aspect of his character related to other attributes. As the One who is totally pure and without fault, God is the only just judge. Fortunately, God's goodness—His grace—causes Him to temper His righteous judgment with mercy.

Two other attributes can be closely linked—God's *immutability* and God's

*goodness.* God's immutability means that He does not change. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. James declares, "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

However, this does not mean that God is not active. For instance, God is unfailing in His goodness. He cannot be otherwise. His goodness may be used to encompass His benevolence, mercy, and grace. Because God is good, He is more than just in His judgments—He is gracious.

Theologians have divided or commented on the attributes of God differently. A longer list of God's attributes is provided at the end of this chapter. But the above group is a good starting point.

### *The Work and Decrees of God*

We should now consider God's relationship to the world. His attributes show themselves in actions, in how He has acted in creating the universe and sustaining it.

#### **The Creation**

The Bible says that God created the world. The existence of a world is an argument for the existence of a God. Can you imagine the existence of nothing? Probably not. However, if there were ever a time when nothing existed, what would be here now?

Exactly! There would be nothing! Why? Because you cannot get something from nothing. An absolute law of logic and science is that out of nothing, nothing comes (*ex nihilo, nihil fit*). Therefore, either the cosmos has existed forever, or an eternal God created it. The idea of a cosmos spontaneously generated out of nothing is intellectually bankrupt.

#### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"God, who created everything, also upholds everything. He directs, regulates, and governs every creature, action, and thing from the greatest to the least by His completely wise and holy providence. He does so in accordance with His infallible foreknowledge and the voluntary, unchangeable purpose of His own will, all to the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy." (Chapter 5, paragraph 1).

There are several competing worldviews besides the Christian view of a Creator-God. One view of the world is *naturalism*, the idea that the observable cosmos is the sum total of the universe, there was no creator behind it, and the world has existed forever. Another view is *pantheism*, in which there is an impersonal spirit or force alive in the universe that is its moving force. Still another view is that of *deism*, the view that there is a god who created the universe, winding it up like a huge clock, but not participating in its present operation. The universe is now running on "automatic pilot" by natural laws God originally established, and God watches from the sideline without involvement.

*If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled. Perhaps that one maverick molecule will lay waste all the grand and glorious plans that God has made and promised to us. If a grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the course of English history, so one maverick molecule could change the course of all redemption history. Maybe that one molecule will be what prevents Christ from returning. Of course not! God is in charge of all things. I remember my distress when I heard that Bill Vukovich, the greatest race car driver of his era, was killed in a crash in the Indianapolis 500. The cause was later isolated in the failure of a cotter pin that cost ten cents. Bill Vukovich had amazing control of race cars. He was a magnificent driver. However, he was not sovereign. A part worth only a dime cost him his life. God doesn't worry about ten-cent cotter pins wrecking His plans. There are no maverick molecules running around loose. God is sovereign. God is God.*

*~R.C. Sproul  
"Chosen by God"*

The Bible makes its position clear in the first sentence, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The author of Hebrews lists the creation as the first item of faith in chapter 11, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command" (Hebrews 11:3). According to the Bible, God created the world, but stands apart from it, not a part of it. He is *transcendent*, not of the same substance as that which He made. However, He is still involved in the world, or *immanent*. This view of the world is referred to as *theism*, and is shared by Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

### Providence

The capital city of Rhode Island is named Providence. The name of the city points out the gap in thinking between the twentieth century and that of our forebears. We are now so secular that few could tell us what "providence" is, let alone consider naming a city for it. *Providence* is the idea that not only has God created the world; *God continues to sustain it for our good*. God upholds all things by His power. It is in Him that we live and move and have our being. Think about the import of that idea for a moment. Why does your breath continue and your heartbeat as you read this sentence? Why do you not collapse without thought or breathe this instant? You live because "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

The idea of providence is distinguishable from fortune or fate or luck or chance in that providence is the act of a personal God with the attributes discussed above. When people talk of fate or luck—insofar as they have any conscious concept in mind at all—they usually are thinking of impersonal forces at work in their lives. However, the Bible does not recognize any such forces, since God is in control of everything. For most of us, discarding the idea and language of luck or chance would take some work.

### Sovereignty

God's providence is possible because of his sovereignty. *God's sovereignty is the key doctrine of the Reformed faith*. Sovereignty is the idea that *God is in control of everything*, that He rules over all. There is nothing beyond His control. If anything were to come to pass that is outside His control, it would frustrate His sovereignty, and whatever caused that to happen would be greater than God. If God is not sovereign, God is not God.

### Secondary Causes and Free Will

While Reformed believers (and all thoughtful Christians, for that matter) affirm the sovereignty of God, some will object that this view makes us robots without any control or the ability to make meaningful decisions. We will discuss this more in the next chapter in connection with the doctrine of the human condition. But for now, we will note that the Westminster Confession affirms the idea of *secondary causes*. This means

that God carries out His sovereignty by use of ordinary means, including the laws of nature and the acts of men.

"God is the first cause, and in relationship to Him, everything happens unchangeably and infallibly. However, by this same providence, He orders things to happen from secondary causes. As a result of these secondary causes, some things must inevitably happen; others may or may not happen depending on the voluntary intentions of the agents involved; and some things do not have to happen but may, depending on other conditions. God uses ordinary means to work out His providence day by day. But as He pleases, He may work without, beyond or contrary to these means." (Chapter 5, paragraphs 2 and 3).

Read the passage from the Westminster Confession in the box at right. This means that God uses the *acts of men as secondary causes* to accomplish His purposes—even the sinful acts of men. Do you remember the discussion of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson in the last chapter? Jackson believed that slavery was foreordained for African Americans. Jackson may have needed to know that God can use secondary causes, such as Jackson, to change the course of history. Contrast Jackson with William Wilberforce, a British Christian largely responsible for ending the English slave trade. Which man had the correct understanding of his position as God's secondary cause for accomplishing His will?

In the alternative, God can work through the acts of men to accomplish His purposes. God has a *permissive will*. By this permissive will, God allows the consequences of the Fall. Normal cells become cancerous; a child dies; jobs are lost—these are all part of God's permissive will. However, since God is sovereign, He can use those things for good.

God also uses **natural laws as secondary causes**. God is the One who has initiated the workings of the solar system, time, death, and other natural forces. However, God also is free to suspend these laws at any time to accomplish His will. Where useful to accomplish His purposes, God stopped the course of the sun (Joshua 10), created wine without time for fermentation (John 2), and raised a man from the dead (John 11).

In very recent years, a view of God's sovereignty called "free will theism" or "the openness of God" has arisen among those who describe themselves as Evangelicals. At its best, this view of God attempts to see God as

*From the Westminster Confession:*

"His providence extends even to the Fall, and to all other sins of angels and men. These sins are not simply allowed by God, but are bound, ordered, and governed by Him in the fullness of His wisdom and power so that they fulfill His own holy purposes. However, the sinfulness does not proceed from God, whose holy righteousness does not and cannot cause or approve sin." (Chapter 5, paragraph 4).

highly empathetic with human suffering and not responsible for evil. However, it does so at the expense of Scripture's clear teaching on God's sovereignty. The classic Augustinian view of God in relation to the future holds God's omnipotence, goodness, and omniscience in proper relationship, not sacrificing an all-powerful God in order to have one who is compassionate. (Note: the 23rd General Assembly found open theism to be a defective view of God containing some serious pastoral implications. For more on this, see the EPC's "Pastoral Letter on Open Theism" at <https://epconnect.org/downloads/>)

It is God's sovereignty that allows Him to keep the promises of Romans 8, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose ... If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:28, 31, 35, 38-39).

### **God and History**

There are several views of history. One is the *cyclical view* that history repeats itself in familiar patterns. Another, the *progressive view* adopted by Pollyanna and extreme political liberals, is that the world is getting better every day ("in every way"), and that we can eventually perfect our world and ourselves. Another view, the *regressive view* used in doomsday novels, is that the world is going downhill toward inevitable destruction.

If God is sovereign, He also is in charge of history. Time is His creation, and He sees all of it at once, forward and backward. The cross is the central point of history. History is essentially the story of God's redemption of His people.

### **Covenant**

God has consistently initiated a special relationship with a people he has chosen. This special relationship is the covenant, and it will be described in detail in the next chapter.

## ***T e Trinity***

We will consider the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with theology. The word "Trinity" does not appear in the Scriptures. Yet the concept of the Trinity is taught throughout the Bible. In the early centuries of the church, false teaching on the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was common. The doctrine of the Trinity was the church's attempt to explain what the Bible said about this relationship.

The Old Testament had always maintained God to be a unity. "Hear,

O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples claimed that Jesus was God. And after Pentecost, they affirmed that the Holy Spirit was God also.

Some tried to reconcile the oneness and the three persons in ways that were unsatisfactory. Some held that the second and third persons of the Trinity were not equal in essence to the Father, and thus not fully God. Some held the different persons to be merely "modes" of expression of God, with the real God sometimes being a different person altogether.

The historic formulation of the Trinity is that *God is one in essence and three in person*. The unity of the Godhead is affirmed in terms of essence and being, while the diversity of the Godhead is expressed in terms of person. All three persons of the Trinity have all the attributes of deity. However, there are some acts that are referred primarily to one of the three persons of the Trinity.

A longer, more complete formulation of the Trinity from Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* is provided on page 69. In addition, a historic diagram depiction is included on page 72.

Though the formula of the Trinity is mysterious and even paradoxical, it is not contradictory. The doctrine of the Trinity sets the boundaries outside which we should not step. The doctrine of the Trinity is rather like the lines that run alongside the highway—it is safe to travel within those bounds. Venturing outside those limits puts the traveler at risk.



The Trinity Window  
Église Saint-Samson  
de Quistreham, France.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons,  
of one substance, power, and eternity:  
God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost:  
the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding;  
the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;  
the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."  
(Chapter 2, 3).

## *Charles Hodge on the Trinity*

The form in which this doctrine lies in the Bible and in which it enters into the faith of the church universal includes substantially the following particulars:

1. There is only one living and true God or divine Being. The religion of the Bible stands opposed not only to atheism, but also to all forms of polytheism. The Scriptures everywhere assert that Jehovah alone is God. "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well" (James 2:19). The decalogue, which is the foundation of the moral and religious code of Christianity, as well as of Judaism, has as its first and greatest commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." No doctrine, therefore, can possibly be true which contradicts this primary truth of natural as well as of revealed religion.
2. In the Bible all divine titles and attributes are ascribed equally to the Father, Son, and Spirit. The same divine worship is rendered to them. The one is as much the object of adoration, love, confidence, and devotion as are the others. It is not more evident that the Father is God than that the Son is God, nor is the deity of the Father and Son more clearly revealed than that of the Spirit.
3. The terms Father, Son, and Spirit do not express different revelations of God to His creatures. They are not analogous to the terms creator, preserver, and benefactor, which do express such relations. The Scriptural facts are: (a) the Father says I, the Son says I, the Spirit says I; (b) the Father says Thou to the Son, and the Son says Thou to the Father; and in like manner the Father and the Son use the pronouns he and him in reference to the Spirit; (c) the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, the Spirit testifies of the Son. The Father, Son, and Spirit are severally subject and object. They act and are acted upon or are the objects of action. Nothing is added to these facts when it is said that the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons; for a person is an intelligent subject who can say I, who can be addressed as Thou, and who can act and can be the object of action. The above facts are summed up in the proposition; the one divine Being subsists in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. This proposition adds nothing to the facts themselves, for the facts are: (a) there is one divine Being; (b) the Father, Son, and Spirit are divine; (c) the Father, Son, and Spirit are, in the sense just stated, distinct persons; and (d) attributes being inseparable from substance, the Scriptures, in saying that the Father, Son, and Spirit possess the same attributes, say they are the same in substance; and if the same in substance, they are equal in power and glory.
4. Notwithstanding that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same in substance and equal in power and glory, it is no less true, according to the Scriptures, that (a) the Father is first, the Son second, and the Spirit third; (b) the Son is of the Father, and the Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; (c) the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit; and (d) the Father operates through the Son, and the Father and Son operate through the Spirit. The converse of these statements is never found. The Son is never said to send the Father nor to operate through Him; nor is the Spirit ever said to send the Father or the Son, or to operate through them. The facts contained in the paragraph are summed up in the proposition; In the Holy Trinity there is a subordination of the persons as to the mode of subsistence and operation.
5. According to the Scriptures, the Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world. The Father preserves all things, the Son upholds all things, and the Spirit is the source of all life. These facts are expressed by saying that the persons of the Trinity concur in all external acts. Nevertheless, there are some acts that are predominantly referred to the Father, others to the Son, and others to the Spirit. The Father creates, elects, and calls; the Son redeems; and the Spirit sanctifies. And, on the other hand, certain acts or conditions predicated of one person of the Trinity are never predicated of either of the others. Thus, generation belongs exclusively to the Father, filiation to the Son, and procession to the Spirit. This is the form in which the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the Bible.

*-Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition, pp. 166-168. (P&R Publishing, 1992)*

# Practical Leadership Applications

How does theology affect our daily work as leaders?

We live in a world of both truth and perception. For example, we watch an airplane take off and fly away to the north. In our view from the ground, the plane grows smaller until it disappears. Did its size and mass change? Is it gone? No, our view—our perspective—of it has changed. If we were at the northern horizon with a different perspective, we might see the plane appear to grow until we shook as it passed. The plane does not change; our perceptions do. Our view of reality also impacts our lives.

Our system of beliefs about God—our theology—also touches our reality and perceptions. Our theological suppositions give meaning and perspective to our life events. How we live and what meaning we give to what we see are rooted in our theology. *In academic terms, this set of personal perspectives based on theological truths is often called "practical theology."*

## An Example of Practical Theology

### Theology Proper

God knows all things actual or possible at once (omniscience) and can do what He chooses (omnipotence). He is in tomorrow already (omnipresence, eternality) and remains in charge of all things (sovereignty). (Psalm 147:5, Isaiah 40:28, Genesis 14:19, Genesis 18:14, Acts 17:24-28, 2 Timothy 2:13).

### Practical Theology

Every choice we make is *not* the critical choice or turning point of all humanity (or even our church). Perhaps we can relax some as leaders, for the world or the church does not depend on our competence. God knows that we will not always get it right and is already at work covering for us.

### Application

How does this practical theological truth apply to our perspective of workaholicism and clergy/leadership burnout?

## For Group Discussion or Reflection

### Theology Proper: The "If"

God's nature of love and grace means that He *always* treats His creation with unconditional love and an attitude of mercy (Hosea, 1 John 4:16, John 3:16). If God is unchanging and consistent (immutable), this is true even in times of judgment. Do we believe this? How is it possible?

### Practical Theology: The "Then"

How should this impact the way we live our lives? The way we minister to each other. Our evangelism?

### Why do we need theology?

*Theology is necessary because truth and experience are related. While some would deny or at least question this connection, in the long run the truth will affect our experience.*

*A person who falls from the tenth story of a building may shout while passing each window on the way down, "I'm still doing fine," and may mean it, but eventually the facts of the matter will catch up with the person's experience.*

*We may continue to live on happily for hours and even days after a close loved one has, unknown to us, passed away, but again the truth will come with crushing effect on our experience.*

*Since the meaning and truth of the Christian faith will eventually have ultimate bearing on our experience, we must come to grips with them.*

*~Millard J. Erickson  
"Christian Theology"  
Second Edition (1998)*

# *Definitions of the Attributes of God*

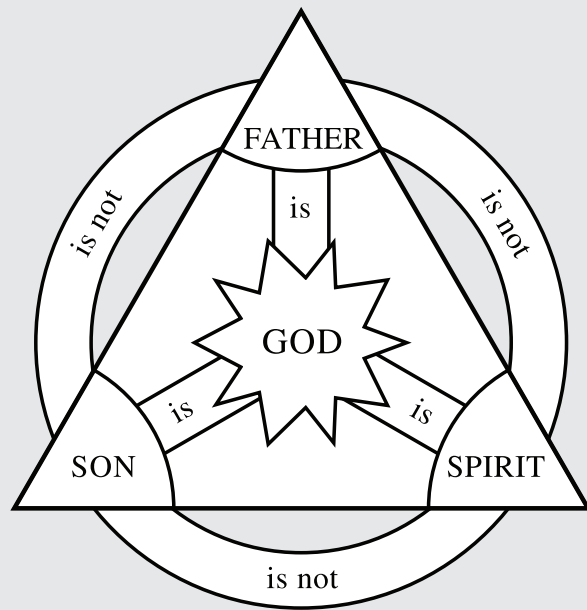
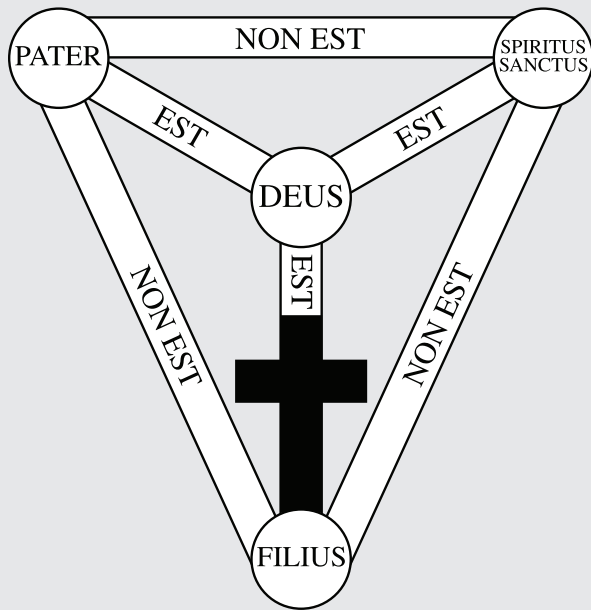
Adapted from H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*,  
(Zondervan Publishing, 1992). Used by permission.

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Scripture Reference</i>
Eternity	God is free from succession of time.	Genesis 21:33, Psalm 90:2
Freedom	God is independent from His creatures.	Psalm 115:3
Benevolence	God has unselfish concern for the welfare of those He loves.	Deuteronomy 7:7-8, John 3:16
Faithfulness	God proves true; He keeps His promises.	Numbers 23:19, Psalm 89:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:24
Grace	God acts freely in mercy on His chosen ones, supplying favor and salvation.	Exodus 34:6, Ephesians 1:5-8, Titus 2:11
Holiness	God is righteous, perfect, set apart, or separate from all sin or evil.	1 Peter 1:16
Immutability / Constancy	God is unchanging and unchangeable in His being.	Psalm 102:27, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17
Infinity	God is without termination and finitude.	1 Kings 8:27, Psalm 145:3, Acts 17:24
Justice	God has moral equity; He does not show favoritism.	Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:11
Life	God is life and the ultimate source of all of life.	Exodus 3:14, Jeremiah 10:10, John 5:26
Goodness	That which constitutes the character of God and is shown by benevolence, mercy, and grace.	Exodus 33:19, Psalm 145:9
Simplicity / Spirituality	God is uncompounded, uncomplex, indivisible, unique, and spirit in essential being.	John 1:18, John 4:24, 1 Timothy 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:15-16

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Scripture Reference</i>
Genuineness	God is real/true.	Jeremiah 10:5-10, John 17:3
Omnipresence	God is present everywhere.	Psalms 139:7-12, Jeremiah 22:23-24
Love	God seeks the highest good of humans at His own infinite cost.	Psalms 103:17, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:10
Omnipotence	God is all-powerful.	Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:11, Matthew 19:26, Revelation 19:6
Omniscience	God knows all actual and possible things.	Psalms 139:1-4, Psalm 147:4-5, Matthew 11:21
Persistence	God is long-suffering and patient toward His people.	Psalms 86:15, Romans 2:4, Romans 9:22
Personality	God is personal. He has self-cognizance, will, intellect, and self-determination.	Exodus 3:14, Genesis 3
Sovereignty	God is the supreme ruler, independent of any authority outside of Himself.	Ephesians 1 (especially v. 21)
Unity	God is one.	Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:6
Veracity	God speaks the truth and is trustworthy.	1 Samuel 15:29, John 17:17-19, Hebrews 6:16, Titus 1-2
Righteousness	God's holiness is applied to relationships; God's law and His actions are exactly right.	Psalms 19:7-9, Jeremiah 9:24a
Truth	There is agreement and consistency with all that is represented by God Himself.	John 14:6, John 17:3
Mercy	God is tenderhearted, showing compassion toward the miserable, needy people He loves and not bringing on fallen people what they deserve.	Exodus 3:7, Exodus 3:17, Psalm 103:13, Matthew 9:36

# The Shield of the Trinity

The Shield of the Trinity, or *Scutum Fidei* (Latin for "shield of faith"), is a traditional Christian symbol that concisely expresses the doctrine of the Trinity. In late medieval Europe, the Shield was considered the heraldic arms of God and of the Trinity. Not generally intended as a schematic diagram of the structure of the three Persons of the Godhead, the Shield is designed as simply a compact visual device. Below are the earliest (c. 1208–1260) and most recent (1989–1992) major variations.



## *Theology Questions*

*4-1.* What are the six traditional areas of theology?

*4-2.* What is general revelation? What is its effect on men?

*4-3.* What is special revelation? What is its effect on men?

*4-4.* What are some of the proofs of God's existence from sources outside the Bible?

*4-5.* What are communicable attributes of God? Incommunicable attributes of God?

*4-6.* What is God's omnipotence? Omnipresence? Omniscience?

*4-7.* What is God's immutability?

*4-8.* How is God related to the universe in naturalism? Pantheism?

*4-9.* What is deism?

*4-10.* What is the name of the view of God's relationship to the world held by Christians, Jews, and Muslims? Describe this view.

*4-11.* What is providence?

*4-12.* What is sovereignty? Why is it necessary that God be sovereign? (Luke 22:22, Acts 2:23)

*4-13.* What are secondary causes?

*4-14.* In what sense is the doctrine of the Trinity not in the Bible? In what sense is it in the Bible?

*4-15.* Summarize the doctrine of the Trinity.

*4-16.* In what sense is the doctrine of the Trinity a guide in what not to believe?

# Anthropology

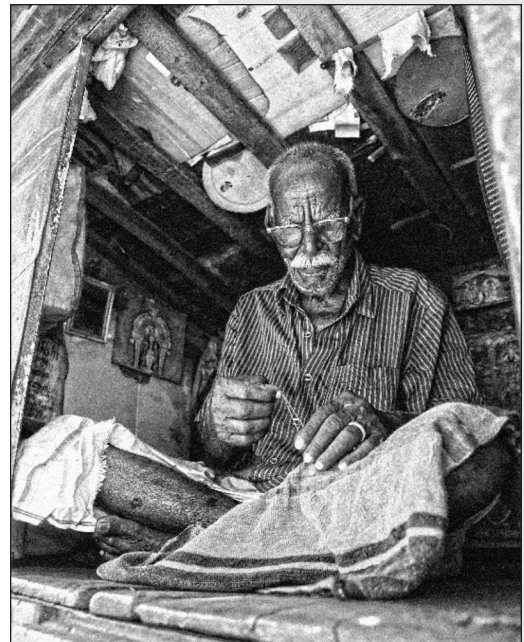
## *The Creation of Humankind*

Who are we, in essence, as men and women? What makes us human? What makes us good or bad? The study of the human person and our position before God is given the theological name *anthropology*. It starts with human creation, and the Scriptural account of the origin of humanity is contained in the book of Genesis. This account tells us several things about human beings.

"And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them ... And the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:8).

### **Created as Body and Soul**

As God created us, He made us in a way different from the way He made the rest of creation. God spoke the rest of the universe into creation. God created man from the dust of the earth, and so we are tied to the physical realm of creation. But God added more: a personal touch of His breath, adding a new dimension of intimacy and life. To humankind's earthiness God added something absolutely different and new—a soul. Therefore, now man has *a body and a soul/spirit*. One is material, the other non-material; one is physical, the other spiritual. In Old Testament Hebrew, two terms are used. *Nephesh* is used to speak of "corporal life, breathing, a living being" for both humans and animals. *Ruah* is used to speak of spirit, that which is immaterial and placed in humans alone—our minds, wills, hearts, and spirits (as in Job 7:11). Both parts are formed by and bear the image of God—the *imago dei*. These two natures form a unity and cannot be separated during life. This unity is important because, as we will see, when God acts to redeem us, He *redeems the whole person*, both body and soul.



*"God created man good,  
after His image—  
that is, in righteousness  
and true holiness;  
that he might rightly know  
God his Creator,  
heartily love Him,  
and live with Him  
in eternal blessedness,  
to praise and glorify Him."  
~The Heidelberg Confession*

Some would divide the non-physical parts into three. They define the three as the body (which is physical), the soul (which thinks, feels, and wills), and the spirit (which is filled by and which communes with God). This view that we are body, soul, and spirit is called trichotomy, but it is not clearly taught in Scripture and is not favored by many theologians (R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 134; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p. 250-251; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 193).

### **Created in the Image of God**

Humanity also was created in (literally, "as the image") of God's likeness. What exactly does this mean? In Genesis 1:26-27 (and in other places in Scripture) God declares some important things about humanity:

1. It asserts that we hold a bit of the nature of divine dominion, ruling over the rest of creation.
2. It affirms that we reflect some of the multiplicity and oneness of the Trinity as male and female.
3. It means that humans share, though imperfectly and finitely, in God's communicable attributes—life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice, discernment.
4. It states that we are spiritual beings, for God is a spirit and the human soul is a spirit.
5. It declares that our likeness to God includes both a moral nature and an intellectual nature.

We were created with *immortality, intellectual power, and moral freedom*. These attributes of a spirit distinguish us from the rest of creation and make us capable of communion with our Maker. In the Bible, other animals and life are "made." Humanity is "created"—using a different Hebrew word, *bara*. This word is used at only three points in the creation narrative: first, when God created matter from nothing (v. 1); second, when God created conscious life (v. 21); and third, when God created

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"After God made all the other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasoning, immortal souls. He endowed them with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness in His own image and wrote His law in their hearts. God also gave them the ability to obey His law and the potential to disobey it; i.e., He gave them the freedom of their own will, which could change. In addition to this law written on their hearts, they were commanded not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As long as they obeyed God's law and kept His commandment, they were happy in fellowship with God and had dominion over the other creatures." (Chapter 4, 2).

man (v. 27). Like God, humans could make choices not born just of instincts. If we were not like God in these respects, we could not really know God. As Francis Schaeffer writes, "It is as though God put exclamation points here to indicate that there is something special about the creation of man."

The creation of our first parents as moral free agents meant that they originally *had the power to obey God or the power to disobey*. The decision to obey or to disobey was constantly before our first parents, as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stood in the center of the garden. The decision to obey or disobey God stood in the center of the lives of Adam and Eve, where they passed by it every day. That same decision to obey or disobey stands at the center of our lives.

### **God's Purpose in Creation**

Why did God create human beings? What is our purpose in life? The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1, says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Note that this is a relational statement.

### *The Fall*

Eventually, of course, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and eat of the forbidden fruit. The immediate consequences of the disobedience of Adam and Eve were: (a) a sense of guilt and shame; (b) a desire to hide themselves from God; (c) brokenness in the relationship between the man and the woman; (d) God's righteous judgment on the serpent, the man, and the woman, tempered by grace; (e) expulsion from the garden; and (g) eventual death.

Why did Adam and Eve choose to disobey God? We do not know. We know that the first step of Satan was to cause Eve to question God's word ("You will not surely die"), and then to suggest that if they ate of the fruit, they would be like God. It is a tempting offer. Nevertheless, it is hard for us to understand why they made the choice they did. We do know that God had already planned for this eventuality, looking ahead to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. However, God is never the author of sin. Man's sin was not God's fault.

Many who read the Scriptures would like to spiritualize the story of the Fall, to treat it as an allegory. There are other stories in the Bible, such as the parables, clearly intended to be taken as spiritual truth, not historical truth. Can the Fall not be an allegory? Did we really have ancestors who disobeyed? Did their actions really affect us? As we will see, the effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience on humanity has been debated for centuries.



We will note that there is substantial scientific evidence for the premise that all of humankind has a common female ancestor. So far, scientists are unable to either confirm or deny a common male ancestor (John Tierney, Linda Wright, and Karen Springen, "The Search for Adam and Eve," *Newsweek* magazine, January 11, 1988; Nancy Shute, "Where We Come From," *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, January 29, 2001). We also can observe that the world around us is plagued by the universality of sin, and therefore conforms to the description of a world suffering from the effects of the Fall. Most importantly, we should observe that the rest of Scripture assumes the account of Genesis to be historical fact, and that the Fall underlies the whole doctrinal system revealed in the Bible.

### *The Effects of the Fall—Total Depravity*

What were the effects of the Fall? This has been a subject of debate going back at least to the fifth century. At that time, an English monk named Pelagius taught that, although Adam and Eve were affected by their sin, the human race thereafter was not affected. Augustine—about whom we read in the church history chapters—opposed Pelagius, and Pelagius' view has since been treated as heretical. Later, however, the same debate raged in a modified form between the supporters of Calvin and the supporters of a Dutch teacher named Arminius. Reformed theology followed Calvin, and Arminius passed his viewpoint to his followers, the "Arminians." We will discuss this debate over the next few lessons, especially in the lesson on soteriology. The debate focuses on the spiritual health of the human race after Adam and has some very practical implications for the church and society as a whole, particularly touching the church's approach to evangelism and social welfare.

Both Reformed and Arminian thinkers agree that the results of the Fall reached beyond Adam and Eve to us today, and that their actions led to the sinful nature of all succeeding generations. However, Reformed theology says that we are born with a radically fallen nature, which we inherited from Adam, and we are totally unable to please God on our own. God must intervene to save us. Arminians believe that although the Fall was serious, we still have sufficient good left to seek after God. Let us first understand the Reformed position.

You will remember that Adam was morally free, with the ability to obey or the ability to disobey God. However, after Adam's fall, he no longer

had the ability not to sin. Something in humanity had changed physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually.

The Bible also says that when Adam fell, he fell as our representative (remember that in the image-bearing, God shared "lordship" with Adam). Adam is referred to as our *federal head*. Just as a federal government has a chief spokesman who speaks and acts for the entire nation, so Adam spoke and acted on our behalf. Adam acted as the earthly king, and as a representative of the entire human race—and all his future descendants.

His sin becomes ours by *imputation*. What does imputation mean? In brief, imputation is the idea that we are attributed with credit or responsibility for the acts of another. In Reformed theology, imputation refers to the legal crediting of a king's choices to his subjects (we see this when Jesus' perfect righteousness is credited to believers by faith for justification). Imputation communicates with precision some important aspects of the gospel. The imputation of Adam's sin to us works to our terrible detriment: this means that we also have lost the ability to be righteous and "not to sin." However, the imputation of Jesus' blood works to our wonderful benefit as the sin-bearing substitute.

When the Fall took place, not only was Adam forced to earn his living by the sweat of his brow—we were, too. Not only was Eve forced to experience pain in childbirth, but all women after her experienced that same pain. In fact, the whole universe suffered, "for we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:22). We see the universality of a sinful nature in human beings through the actions of people around us.

The New Testament explicitly teaches that we suffer as a result of Adam's sin. In Romans 5, for instance, Paul says, "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin ... By the one man's offense, many died ... Through one man's offense, judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation ... Through one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:12, 15, 18-19).

Most importantly, through Adam our basic natures changed. We became corrupt and polluted in all aspects of our lives. The theological term for this is *total depravity*. There is no part of us left untouched by sin. Our minds, our wills, our senses and our bodies are affected by the Fall. We



Michelangelo's  
"The Captive"  
c. 1540 AD

have impure thoughts, speak sinful words, and do sinful deeds. Because we are sinners, we sin.

We must be careful to note the difference between total depravity and utter depravity. After all, we could be worse. We are not "all bad." We are not as wicked as we could possibly be. We look good compared to Hitler, and even someone like Hitler probably loved his mother. However, God does not grade on a curve. While we may look good compared with someone else, we do not measure up to God's standard, which is absolute perfection. After all, God measures our actions and our motivations for them. Rarely, if ever, do I do anything purely to please God. Almost always I have my own interests at least partly in view. Some people favor the term "radical depravity" to express this idea, because "radical" comes from the word "radix," or "root." We are not corrupted as badly as we could be. However, we are corrupted at the root, and every part growing from that root is deeply broken.

The person who does not know Christ cannot please God. Because of this radical corruption, the verdict of Scripture falls: "There is no one righteous, not one" (Romans 3:10); "They are altogether unprofitable" (Romans 3:12); we are "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1); we are "sold under slavery to sin" (Romans 7:23) and we are "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

1. Our first parents were led astray by the cunning temptation of Satan and sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. It pleased God to allow them to sin, because in His wisdom and holiness He planned to order their sin to His own glory.
2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and fellowship with God, and so became dead in sin and completely polluted in all their faculties and parts of body and soul.
3. Since Adam and Eve are the root of all mankind, the guilt for this sin has been imputed to all human beings, who are their natural descendants and have inherited the same death in sin and the same corrupt nature.
4. This original corruption completely disinclines, incapacitates, and turns us away from every good, while it completely inclines us to every evil. From it proceed all actualized sins." (Chapter 6, 1-4).

The Reformed position takes seriously the idea that we are spiritually dead. We are unable to help ourselves until God awakens us from death. This radical corruption leaves us enemies of God, dead in our sins, totally unable to please Him. It is no longer in our natures to seek to please God. We are as dead spiritually as Lazarus was dead physically before Christ called him from the grave.

Fortunately, God has not left us in this wretched condition. For we will see that for those whom He has called, there is another imputation, one of righteousness that is received by grace through faith. For God imputed our sins to Jesus Christ and has imputed to us His righteousness.

### **The Question of Free Will**

Some will object that if our will has been corrupted by sin, we no longer have free

will. However, Reformed thinkers consistently affirm free will, even while also affirming that unregenerate men will never choose to please God.

What is free will? Essentially, exercising free will is doing that which we want to do. Free will is the exercise of our strongest desires. Free will is acting on what we want most, and everyone has a reason for the choices made. It is not a violation of free will to have a motive for a choice. In *Alice In Wonderland*, Alice came to a fork in the road. She did not know whether to turn to the left or the right. She saw the grinning Cheshire cat in the tree. She asked the cat, "Which way shall I turn?" The cat replied, "Where are you going?" Alice answered, "I don't know." "Then," replied the Cheshire cat, "it doesn't matter" (application to the issue of free will from R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, p. 52).

No one would object if Alice had a reason for choosing one direction over the other. Without a reason for her actions, she never would have moved. *Free will is not violated when we have a reason for that which we want to do.* In fact, that is the very essence of free will—doing what we want to do. We always choose according to our strongest instinct at the moment. Following this instinct, from wherever derived, is the heart and soul of free will. After the Fall, we continue to have the ability to follow our strongest instinct. It is no denial of free will to say that, after the Fall, I have a reason for choosing to follow my own way rather than God's.

Free will also must be exercised within certain limits. We are not free to fly as birds fly. Birds are free to fly, but (to our knowledge) not free to do advanced mathematical calculations. No matter how I might wish to do so, I am not free to change my skin pigmentation. Freedom is always exercised within limits. *Free will is not violated when my freedom is exercised within limits.* The Bible asserts my freedom, but within limits. We are free, but our nature is not inclined to pursue God. Indeed, our nature is hostile to God. We need the initiative of God to free us from that nature.

### *The Effects of the Fall—*

#### *The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace*

There was another change in our relationship to God, which took place with the Fall. Man's relationship to God has been governed by the covenants God initiated. Before the Fall, Adam stood under the Covenant of Works. After the Fall, God introduced a Covenant of Grace, which still is in effect today.

#### **Covenants**

God's relationship to His people has been governed by covenants. "Covenant" is a seldom-used concept today. To most people, the word has the connotation of a serious agreement, but most people could not distinguish



a covenant from a contract. A *covenant* is a *bond in blood*. When two people enter into a covenant, they pledge their lives, their families, their property, and all else they have to each other, to defend each other to the death. Covenants for mutual defense were commonplace. The Hebrew word used to describe entering into a covenant is the word *berit*, which literally means to "cut" a covenant. A covenant was often solemnized by cutting an animal, symbolizing that if one party were to fail in the covenant, may he be cut and his blood flow like the blood of the animal.

Other ways of solemnizing a covenant might include the exchange of family members or possessions, or the eating of a covenant meal together.

We have written record of some covenants between political parties in the Middle East. The usual elements of these political covenants included (1) a statement of the parties to the covenant, (2) the historical background to the agreement, (3) the agreements to be kept by each side, (4) a list of witnesses to the agreement, and (5) blessings and curses for keeping or breaching the agreement. That God would enter into a covenant relationship with us shows His love and concern for us.

### **The Covenant of Works**

To establish His relationship with man, God entered into the *Covenant of Works* with Adam. God did not overtly state that this was a covenant, as He did later with some of Adam's descendants. The word "covenant" is not used in connection with God's dealings with Adam. Nevertheless, the elements of a covenant are present in God's dealings with Adam.

God established the covenant, requiring that Adam and Eve live in perfect and total obedience to Him. He promised eternal life as the blessing of obedience, but also established death as the penalty for disobeying. We have discussed the event of the Fall above. When Adam disobeyed, he subjected not only himself, but also all his offspring, to the penalty of death for disobeying the Covenant of Works.

### **The Covenant of Grace**

However, God did not stop with the Covenant of Works. God established a *Covenant of Grace*, beginning with Adam and continuing today. The story of redemptive history is the story of God calling His redeemed to Himself by the Covenant of Grace.

We see the first steps taken by God to establish a Covenant of Grace in

Genesis 3, immediately after Adam and Eve had fallen. Although they deserved to die under the Covenant of Works, God graciously spared them. Further, God promised them a redeemer who would crush the head of the serpent.

God established the Covenant of Grace and continued to clarify it throughout the Old Testament. The Covenant of Grace is summarized by God's pledge, "I will be your God and you will be My people." By the Covenant of Grace, God delights in redeeming His people without condition. In Genesis 15 and 17, God entered into the covenant with Abraham, by which God told Abraham that he would have a son, he would be a blessing to many nations, and that he would have a land. This covenant was between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendants. This covenant was initiated by God by His grace, certainly not because Abraham deserved such promises.

The covenant was reaffirmed when God led the people out of Egypt, and when Moses gave the people the Law. You will remember that after the Law was given, Moses sprinkled blood on the people, solemnizing the covenant. (Exodus 24:1-8). The book of Deuteronomy contains the blessings for obeying and the curses for disobeying the Law (Deuteronomy 28). With the Law, God also graciously gave Israel the sacrifice to permit their cleansing and forgiveness when they disobeyed.

God's covenant revelation continued to David. Even though David was guilty of sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, God graciously made an "everlasting covenant" with David (2 Samuel 23:5) by which God promised that a descendant of David would always be the ruler of the kingdom (2 Samuel 7). In all, there are 290 references to the covenant in the Old Testament. The people of Israel clearly understood themselves to stand in unique relationship to God because of the covenant He had initiated with them.

The Covenant of Grace continued into the New Testament. Second Corinthians and Hebrews speak about the covenant's fulfillment. Paul writes in Romans 11 that the Gentiles, as wild branches, have been grafted into the olive tree that was Israel. By this ingrafting, the Gentile believers enjoy the benefits of the covenant previously offered only to the Jews. The covenant is even more gracious in the New Testament, and available to even more people. But it is essentially the same covenant as the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament.



But what about the original Covenant of Works? Was it ever fulfilled? What about the punishment of death that Adam deserved? Did God just forget about the penalty that went with Adam's disobedience?

### *The Answer to Adam's Fall*

God answered our needs at the cross. We will discuss the work of Christ at the cross in greater detail later. But the cross answers our need for a nature renewed from our total depravity, by a double switch. And the cross was the place where Adam's sin was punished, the Covenant of Works was fulfilled, and we could be promised the benefits of the fulfilled covenant.

#### **Imputation and the Wondrous Double Switch**

We discussed the imputation of Adam's sin to us, and the change in our natures that resulted. If the only imputation were that of Adam's sin to

us, we would be left in our state of radical corruption, separated from God and without hope. However, God has not stopped there.

#### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"By his fall, man made himself incapable of life under that covenant, and so the Lord made a second, the covenant of grace. In it He freely offers sinners life and salvation through Jesus Christ. In order to be saved He requires faith in Jesus and promises to give His Holy Spirit to all who are ordained to life so that they may be willing and able to believe."  
(Chapter 7, 3).

God went on to make available to us two further imputations, discussed in Romans 5. First, on the cross, God imputed the sins of believers to His son, Jesus Christ, and Christ paid all of the debt for those sins. By the cross we are free from the debt we owe God. We are then restored from our great debt to God for our sins to a position of moral neutrality. However, we still would not have any

merit—any righteousness of our own—if this were the only imputation made by God. But God also imputes to us the obedience, the righteousness of Christ. This is the double switch that takes place at the cross, and our acceptance of God's grace. Our sin has been imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us. This is what gives us merit before God. It is totally by the merit of Christ that we are righteous before God. It is by this double switch that God declares us righteous in His sight.

We read about J. Gresham Machen earlier. On New Year's Eve 1936 in a Roman Catholic hospital in Bismarck, North Dakota, Machen was one day away from death at the age of 55. It was Christmas break at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia where he taught New Testament. His colleagues said he looked "deadly tired," but instead of resting he took the train from Philadelphia to the 20-below-zero winds of North Dakota to preach in a few Presbyterian churches at the request of Pastor Samuel Allen. He had pneumonia and could hardly breathe.

The following day, New Year's Day, 1937, he mustered the strength to send a telegram to John Murray, his friend and colleague at Westminster. It was his last recorded word: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." He died that evening.

Machen was right to place his hope in the active obedience, the righteousness of Christ. Christ has been perfectly obedient, even to death on a cross. Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to the account of J. Gresham Machen, to my account, and to the account of every believer. I have no hope without the active obedience of Christ, reckoned to me as righteousness in my account.

### **The Fulfillment of the Covenant of Works**

It is also by the cross that the Covenant of Works is fulfilled. Christ has been perfectly obedient, thus fulfilling all that God commanded in the Covenant of Works. Christ is the one whose blood is spilled, instead of the blood of Adam and instead of the blood of you and me, as punishment for our failure to be perfectly obedient to God. Jesus has taken in our place the punishment that Adam deserved, and that we deserve for breaking the Covenant of Works. This is what Jesus meant when He said at the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 24:20).

When Christ's righteousness is imputed to us at the cross, in God's view we have also fulfilled the obligations of the Covenant of Works. We are therefore given the eternal life promised for perfect obedience to God. God's beloved people have a new nature and eternal life, won for us by Jesus on the cross.

Praise God for His wonderful work on our behalf!



*Mirror, Mirror  
On The Wall...*

*I have found little  
that is "good"  
about human beings  
on the whole.*

*In my experience  
most of them are trash,  
no matter whether they  
publicly subscribe to this  
or that ethical doctrine  
or to none at all.*

*~Sigmund Freud  
atheist philosopher  
(1856-1939)*

*There is an eagle in me  
that wants to soar,  
and there is a  
hippopotamus in me  
that wants to wallow  
in the mud.*

*~Carl Sandburg  
author and poet  
(1878-1967)*

*Gradually it was  
disclosed to me  
that the line dividing  
good and evil passes  
not through states,  
nor between classes,  
nor between political  
parties either—  
but right through  
every human heart.*

*~Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
writer and dissident  
(b. 1918)*

## *Practical Leadership Application*

How does learning about our own humanity  
impact our church leadership today?

Since the first moment of history, men and women have been in rebellion against God. At one level or another, humanity—like Adam and Eve—has tried to substitute its will for God's will. In so doing, people of every age and century have lived with the results of that rebellion: shame, fear, and a compulsion to hide from others and from God. In response, human hearts and souls feel exposed, naked, and covet "cover" and distance.

As well, the results of sin touch people's relationships with each other, creating an imperfect world where wounding is normal. All human lives are touched with relational struggle, failure, and ache. Each day, people barter their hopes for a perfect, satisfying love. What they receive in return is often pain, disappointment, and broken expectations. A relational back spasm of sorts grows, and humanity becomes immobilized and afraid to move for fear of the pain that will follow. Joseph Stowell notes that this creates a world "that cares less and less about one another, creating a culture where the increasing silence of isolation, loneliness, and despair is almost deafening."

Confused about the nature and security of any love, people include God and His love in the equation, "Intimacy Equals Pain." A series of questions come to the foreground: What is the real problem? Is there something wrong with me? The biblical answer is simple: Yes, there is something wrong with us (Isaiah 64:5-6, Romans 3:10-11.) The problem is sin. Ecclesiastes 7:20 is clear, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins."

What is this stain of sin? What does "fallenness" really mean in human experience? Theologian Stan Grenz has said that we must remember that sin is, essentially, a disruption of intimacy, communion, and community with God. The covenant relationship was deeply damaged when human choices rebelled against God. Intimacy at every level has been pounded down. Sadly, more was lost than a single couple's relationship with God. The *imago dei* of perfect intimacy has been hammered, and it is passed down with its scars and dents.

Barriers have grown between our hearts and God. These barriers become our ways of staying safe and keeping God at arm's length. They limit what we can accomplish and become in this life. As leaders, we model an honest acceptance of our own fallen humanity. As men and women of faith, we set aside our own fears of intimacy and become authentic and open. As shepherds, we call those under us to face their brokenness and

sin. And as church officers, we seek to structure the church so that these barriers to growth and intimacy can, with God's help, be overcome. Take a look at the lists below. Which of these barriers do we see in our church? Which do we see in ourselves?

### ***Some Sin Barriers to Intimacy***

- Old habits, defense strategies, and coping mechanisms.
- Worthlessness and low self-esteem.
- Martyrdom complexes.
- Spiritual rigidity or Pharisaical "I'm right" beliefs.
- Confrontationalism: we vs. them mentality.
- A consumer mindset—"Switchers and searchers."
- Emotional shut-down, locked in the cognitive world.
- The performance trap and overzealous work ethics.
- Weariness and burn-out.
- Self-centered worldview.
- Always questioning.
- Immobilized by self-assessment.
- Afraid of any "works for God."
- Impractical and out of touch.
- Careless about important things.
- Poor priorities.

### ***For Group Discussion***

There are many ways to grow and overcome these sin natures. As leaders, we become the models, the gatekeepers, and the spiritual health encouragers. Look at the list below of ways to overcome sin barriers. Which of these do we do well as a church? Which could we be better at? Are there any listed to which we feel a particular call to at this time?

- Belong to and encourage strong, accepting small groups.
- Provide multiple entry points and opportunities for heart connections.
- Provide systematic teaching on our need to love and connect with each other.
- Allow grace-filled examples and testimonies of healthy or redeemed relationships.
- Teach regularly on the uniqueness of each individual and unity of the Body.
- Have classes that develop relationships and provide spiritual gifts evaluations.
- Give people multiple places to work and serve alongside each other.
- Plan short-term missions that both force and allow dependence and bonding.

### ***Mirror, Mirror On The Wall...***

*I've given my life  
to God, and I try  
to do the right thing,  
but inevitably,  
and unfortunately,  
I do the wrong thing....  
I suffer from being human.*

*~Mickey Rooney  
actor and Christian  
(b. 1920)*

*Christ undertook  
to help the descendants  
of Abraham,  
fashioning a body  
for Himself from a woman  
and sharing our flesh and  
blood, to enable us  
to see in Him not only God,  
but also, by reason  
of this union,  
a man like ourselves.*

*~Cyril of Alexandria  
Elder (5th century)*

- Train and provide spiritual directors and mentors.
- Share stories of leaders experiencing faith, trust, and dependence.
- Make clear to all the permission to be real and honest.
- Help people share each other's crises (Stephen Ministers, Grief Recovery, hospital visits).
- Declare and model the church's willingness to try and fail, and then try again.
- Spend enough time in reflection and prayer so that God draws close.
- Seek and offer Christian counseling as a means of health and wholeness.
- Make the commitment of a new surrender to God's will for your life.
- Model faith, risk, and obedience.
- Look for "God moments" and celebrate them together.
- Simplify calendars and give up material things.
- Learn from those who came before us by reading Christian biographies.
- Work to see God in all of life, not just inside the walls of a church.
- Become your brother's keeper.
- Develop a relationship with a Third World family.
- Die more to self, and live a life of sacrifice and more sacrifice.

### *Additional Resources*

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 6-7.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 181-301.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992); pp. 239-319, 337-350.

O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants: God's Way with His People*. (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1987).

O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980).

R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986).

R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992).

## *Anthropology Questions*

*5-1.* What does the Bible say was the origin of man? What does this say about the nature of humanity?

*5-2.* What does the Bible teach about the relationship of the two parts of man?  
What is the implication for redemption?

*5-3.* What does it mean that man was created in the image of God?

*5-4.* What is God's purpose for men?

*5-5.* What were some of the immediate effects of the Fall?

*5-6.* What is total depravity?

*5-7.* What does it mean that Adam acted as "federal head" for humanity?

*5-8.* What are the effects of the imputation of Adam's sin to us?

*5-9.* What is a covenant?

*5-10.* What was the Covenant of Works? What was its condition? What was its promise? What was its penalty?

*5-11.* Summarize the Covenant of Grace.

*5-12.* What is the relationship of the covenant in the Old Testament to the covenant in the New Testament?

*5-13.* How do we become righteous in God's view?

*5-14.* What is "imputed righteousness"?

*5-15.* Does our salvation depend on obedience to the Law?

## CHAPTER 6

# Christology

In the last chapter we looked at the condition of humanity, anthropology. There we learned that we were created to be in right relationship with God, and with the ability to obey or disobey God. However, with the Fall, our relationship with God was broken, and we lost the ability to lead an obedient life. In this chapter, we will look at Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, and His work to restore us.

### *The Nature of Christ*

Who was this Savior? In brief, we can say three things about Jesus:

1. He was fully human (with all that entails).
2. He was fully divine (with all that entails).
3. These natures are a unity in one personality.

### **The Humanity of Jesus**

Jesus was fully human. He was born of a woman, from the womb of Mary. He grew in wisdom and stature, in the same way other people grow up. He displayed normal bodily responses to physical and mental stimulation. Jesus had all the regular human emotions and normal human temptations, but He handled them without sinning.

Theologian B.B. Warfield surveyed the gospels for the emotional make-up of Jesus in his essay "The Emotional Life of Our Lord." He notes that Jesus felt compassion and love for the people of Jerusalem and Lazarus and his family; moral indignation at the money changers; the affliction of the Man of Sorrows, distress at the thought of the cross, sorrow unto death; amazement at the faith of the centurion; joy in God's work; anticipation of the Last Supper with the disciples. His emotions displayed themselves in physical reactions. He hungered (Matthew 4:2), thirsted (John 19:20), and was weary (John 4:6). Jesus wept (John 11:35), wailed (Luke 19:41) and sighed (Mark 7:34). A loud cry was wrung from Him at the moment of death. Nothing was lacking to make the impression that Jesus was a human being, fully like ourselves.



The display of strong emotions by Jesus is an encouragement to us that there is a place for godly emotions. And yet, throughout the expression of these emotions, Jesus is always in control. Jesus is always master of Himself. In all ways, He was like us, except that He did not sin.

The sinlessness of Jesus, His fulfillment of the Law, had both negative and positive aspects to it. Negatively, Jesus restrained Himself from transgression. He challenged His accusers to find any fault in Him. However, Jesus not only restrained Himself from sin, He also affirmatively fulfilled the Law by zealously fulfilling the Law's spirit as well as its letter. His core purpose was to do the will of His Father (John 4:34), and zeal for His Father's house consumed him (John 2:17). Hebrews says that Jesus is able to sympathize with us in our weakness, for He was tempted in every way like we are but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). The sinlessness of Christ is more than just an example to us. Since every sin carries with it the penalty of death, this perfect obedience was required in order for Jesus to offer a sacrifice of infinite value.

### **The Divine Nature of Jesus**

At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the church declared that Jesus is of the same divine nature as the Father. The New Testament demands this conclusion. Jesus claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Jesus was called "Lord" by the early church (Acts 2:36), implying authority and mastery over the lives of His people. No Jew would have acknowledged anyone in this position except God Himself. Jesus claimed to have the authority to forgive sins, transgressions against God (Mark 2:1-12). Who can forgive except the one offended? Jesus received worship when Thomas confessed, "My Lord and My God!" (John 20:28). With each of the "I am" statements, Jesus identified Himself with the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as "I Am." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was unafraid to claim that He was greater than Moses, since His words were to be accorded obedience over the Law. Hebrews says that Jesus is higher than the angels (Hebrews 1:4), Moses (Hebrews 3:3) and Melchizedek, the high priest (Hebrews 7). Paul says that the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus (Colossians 1:19). He is described as the creator, upholder, and ruler of the universe (Colossians 1:16-18). There are other passages even more direct, which we will discuss under "The Pre-existent Christ" below.

### **The Unity of Jesus**

Although perfect man and perfect God, Christ was nevertheless one person, a *unipersonality*. Jesus was not God underneath, covered by human flesh. The two natures are joined "without being altered, disunited, or jumbled" (WCF, chapter 8, paragraph 2). Scripture reveals the Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct persons in the Godhead. There is nothing like this in the two natures of Jesus Christ. Jesus is consistently referred to as

one person—as "I" or "He," not in plural. He showed no sense of confusion from having a split or disjointed personality. Jesus is one person, both God and human.

### *The Pre-Existent Christ*

The clearest statements of the nature of Christ are set out in John 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, and 1 John 1:1-3. From these passages we see that Christ was with God in the beginning (1 John and John), that Christ was the equal of the Father (Philippians), that He was in intimate relationship with God the Father (John), and that He was God Himself (John).

The Bible refers to Jesus as "the only-begotten of the Father" (John 1:14) and "the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15). Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons deny the deity of Christ based on these concepts. It is primarily because of their denial of the deity of Christ that these groups are considered to be cults or sects rather than Christian denominations. Both of these groups are echoing arguments heard at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. These arguments were made by Arius, who was condemned as a heretic. Arius argued that the use of the word "begotten" implies that Jesus has not always been, that He had a beginning in time and is not eternal.

The Nicene Creed reflects the church's response. The church determined that the Bible's references to Jesus as the "firstborn" or "begotten" son must be understood from the background of Jewish culture. From that perspective, the term "firstborn" is a statement of Christ's exalted status as the heir of the Father. Just as the firstborn son in Jewish culture received the patriarchal inheritance, so Jesus, as the divine Son, receives the Father's Kingdom as His inheritance.

The New Testament passages that refer to Jesus as begotten (John 1:14, John 1:18, and Hebrews 1:5) are also in the books with the clearest and highest Christology—that is, these same books proclaim the exalted position of Jesus, eternal and all-powerful. The Nicene Creed declares that Jesus was "begotten, not made." Jesus was, therefore, not a created being. The council decided that Jesus is "very God of very God," and "of one substance with the Father." He is not less than or different in essence from the Father.

When Jehovah's Witnesses knock on your door, you would probably discuss the same verses of the Bible that were the subject of discussions at the Council of Nicaea almost 1,700 years ago. The outcome will be the same. The Orthodox Church has determined that the pre-existent Christ was God, of the same substance of the Father. There are others outside orthodox Christianity who believe Jesus to be something less.

## *The Righteousness of Christ*

Jesus lived a life that was righteous in every respect, a morally perfect life. Most people think of sin in negative terms: I will be all right if I "do not

smoke or chew or go with girls who do." Jesus fulfilled all the prohibitions of Scripture, but also went to all lengths to live a life of active righteousness. For example, He loved and cared and interceded and prayed when it was called for.

When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, John protested. But Jesus said, "Let us do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). It was said of Jesus, "Zeal for My Father's house will consume Me" (John 2:17). Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). These are examples of Jesus' work to fulfill not only the prohibitions of the Law, but also the positive requirements of righteousness.

When Jesus was put on trial, Pilate was right to say that he could find no fault in Jesus, for He was the lamb without fault or blemish. As we have seen, the righteousness of

Christ is our hope of a right standing before God.



## *The Humiliation Of Jesus*

The passage in Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus did not think His equality with God a thing to be grasped, but Jesus emptied Himself, taking on human likeness, and humbled Himself, even to death on the cross. This passage is referred to as the "kenosis" passage, from the Greek word for "emptying." This humbling was entirely voluntary on the part of Jesus, and it is the ground for Jesus' exaltation above every name on earth and under the earth.

## *The Cross and the Theories of the Atonement*

By His atoning death on the cross, Jesus won redemption for multitudes. Jesus won for us a restored nature and a right relationship with God. But how was this redemption the result of the cross? There have been a number of explanations given for the cross.

For example, one view is called the "*ransom to Satan*" theory. According to this view, we were captive to Satan because of sin. Christ on the cross was offered to Satan as a ransom for the souls of those who believed in Jesus. Satan accepted the transaction but could not hold Jesus when He turned out to be the Son of God. This theory involves God in a rather shady transaction. Yet, there is a certain element of truth in the theory in that Satan and evil were indeed dealt a decisive blow on the cross.

Another theory of atonement is called *recapitulation*. This view suggests that even as the Adam introduced sin into the world, Christ introduced obedience to undo what Adam had done. Again, there is an element of truth in this, in that Jesus did indeed introduce perfect obedience to God into the world—yet a good example is inadequate to change our hearts. We need more than another good example—we have more good examples than we can follow.

Another view is called the *satisfaction theory*. In a modified form, this is the view of the Roman church today. According to this view, God's honor had been violated and offended because we had withheld from God what was due Him. Thus, the violation of God's honor must be satisfied. Christ, who gave perfect obedience to God, thereby gave God honor and did not deserve to die. However, He permitted Himself to be crucified upon the cross, bringing infinite glory to God. If dishonor to God brings punishment, then honor and glory to God brings reward. But Christ, being the second person of the Trinity, needed no reward and so He passed His reward on to us as forgiveness of our sin. The shortcoming of this view of the cross is that it puts the emphasis on the honor of God rather than the justice and holiness of God.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Savior of His church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified."

"The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man."

"The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father, who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same."

(Chapter 8:1-8:3).



Another view of the meaning of the cross is the *moral influence theory*. There is nothing in the character of God, according to this view, that requires justice or satisfaction. The cross is simply God's identifying with and suffering with sinful humankind. This demonstration of God's love for and identification with us moves upon the heart of the rebellious sinner to turn from sin and to respond to God's love with obedience. This accurately makes the cross of Jesus an act of identification with humanity but fails to provide for our need for forgiveness and does not bring about salvation.

The historic view of the Reformed church is the *vicarious substitutionary view*. From Chapter 3, you will recall that Anselm was a very influential

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"The Lord Jesus undertook this office completely voluntarily. In order to discharge it, He was made under and perfectly fulfilled the law. He endured extremely severe torment in His soul and extremely painful suffering in His body. He was crucified and died. He was buried and remained under the power of death, but His body did not decay. On the third day He arose from the dead with the same body in which He suffered and with which He also ascended into heaven. There He sits at the right hand of His Father, interceding for believers. He will return to judge men and angels at the end of the world."

"Christ insures with absolute certainty that everyone for whom He purchased redemption actually accepts and receives it. He makes intercession for them, reveals the mysteries of salvation to them in and by the Word, and effectively persuades them to believe and obey by His Spirit. He governs their hearts by His Word and Spirit and overcomes all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom in such ways as are most in agreement with His wonderful and unknowable administration of things." (Chapter 8, 4, 8).

thinker, and was the first to articulate the idea of vicarious substitutionary atonement. According to this theory, vicarious substitution occurs when the offended party makes payment on behalf of the offending party. Suppose you are brought to court for negligent collision because of a traffic accident and you are fined. But suppose further, the person whose car you hit steps forward and pays the fine for you. This is an example of substitutionary payment. The example would be improved if you had hit the judge's car. The judge must uphold the law and is compelled to exact the penalty for violation because if he does not support the legal structures of society, those structures will collapse. However, having fined you, the judge now pays your fine.

That is what we mean when we say that Jesus was substituted for us. He took our place and died our death. He bore the punishment for our sins on the cross. As Isaiah puts it, "... the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Or, as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Other passages supporting the vicarious substitutionary view include Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us ..." and Hebrews 9:28, "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people ..." That is what we mean by the substitutionary understanding of the atonement: the offended party makes payment for the offender by taking his place.

Most of the theories of the atonement have an element of truth to them, yet no one theory can adequately encompass all that the cross means. God cannot ignore sin as though it were non-existent or unimportant. The love of God, our sin, and the sins of all humanity meet at the cross. The crucifixion of Christ is the central point of redemptive history, for at the cross our sins are borne in the reconciling love of God.

On page 96 is Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of Christ the Redeemer and Judge. Notice how all of humanity symbolically stands before him, uncovered. We can say this about the cross: *reconciliation* occurs there. There was something objectively real to God at Calvary. As God enables us to respond to what He has done there, as we in faith turn to this Jesus of the cross, we are reconciled to God. As we turn in faith and commitment, we come into the living, dynamic, personal relationship with God for which we were intended. Uncovered, we are accepted and loved.

### *Salvation in the Old Testament*

Salvation is available to us through the cross. But what about the people before Christ? After all, God told the Jews that they were His people, set aside for Him alone. How were they saved?

### God's View of Time

We have discussed God's view of time. God created time. He is not limited by it. He sees all of it at once from an outside vantage point. From that vantage point, God sees past, present, and future as a sort of eternal "now." From God's viewpoint, the cross's effect moves both backward and forward through time. The writer of Revelation says, "Jesus is the Lamb that was slain from the beginning of the world" (Revelation 13:8). From the time of the Fall, God tells Adam and Eve of the One who would crush the head of the serpent. Surely these verses tell us that it has always been the plan of God to use the cross to restore our relationship to Him, and that the restoration was effective from the beginning. Jesus' death on the cross is the means of salvation for all people and for all time, even in the Old Testament.

But if it was God's plan to restore us by the cross, how could the Jews of the Old Testament know of the plan? If Jesus were the only way, how could people who did not know Him become part of that plan? We believe the Old Testament provided men with a *progressive revelation* of God's plan. Jesus said that Abraham saw Jesus' day and rejoiced (John 8:56-58). The writer of Hebrews said people of the Old Testament lived by faith (Hebrews 11). And what was the object of that faith? Jesus Christ, to the extent He had been revealed to those people.

### Prefiguring, Foreshadowing, Types and Signs

Jesus consistently taught that He was the centerpiece, the main topic of the Old Testament. He said that the Scriptures (to the Jews whom He was addressing, the Old Testament) bear witness to Him (John 5:39). He said that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46). When He began His ministry, He read from Isaiah 61 about the Messiah's mission and message, and added, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). In other words, Jesus claimed to be the subject of Isaiah's writing. After the resurrection, when the disciples were discouraged, Jesus joined two of them on the road to Emmaus and "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The plan Jesus showed them was a powerful encouragement. "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

How was Jesus revealed in the Old Testament? *God revealed Jesus to the Old Testament Jews by prefigurings and foreshadowing, by types and signs.* What does that mean? Jesus was not fully revealed, but many things that the Jews heard or were commanded to do showed Jesus to them. For instance, the covenant we have described foreshadowed a relationship between God and His people based on the shed blood of Jesus. Isaac escaped death because of the sacrifice of the ram in Isaac's place. Jacob saw a ladder built from heaven to earth, by which God descended to us,



and that ladder was Christ (John 1:51). In the Passover, death moved over the homes of the Israelites based on the blood of the lamb. The people of Israel followed God's mediator Moses from slavery to freedom, prefiguring the freedom from bondage to sin to freedom in Christ (Romans 6). They were accompanied by a rock, which was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus was the bread and the water of life for the Israelites in the desert, as He is for us. The temple worship—especially the sacrifice of the lamb for the sins of Israel—pointed to Jesus.

The prophecies caused the people to look forward to a Messiah who would come specifically from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1), and from the lineage of David (Isaiah 9:7). He would minister primarily in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1), would be a shepherd stricken, causing the sheep to scatter (Zechariah 13:7), would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12), and would suffer and be insulted and have lots cast for his clothing (Psalm 69). But this Messiah would emerge victorious to sit at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110).

All of these are examples of the prefiguring and foreshadowing, types and signs by which Jesus was known to the people of the Old Testament. *The people of the Old Testament looked forward to the cross as we look back to it, but with a lesser knowledge based on God's progressive revelation.*

There is one specific area of prefigurings and foreshadowing, types and signs that we will look at in greater detail, because it reveals an example of Old Testament knowledge of Jesus and because it bears on the work of Jesus. Jesus was a mediator of the relationship between God and His people as prophet, priest, and king.

### **Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King**

Christianity centers on Jesus. In the Old Testament, there were three offices through which God communicated the covenant relationship. God worked through *prophets, priests, and kings* who were mediators of the covenant. Each of these offices is perfectly performed by Jesus.

The responsibility of the *prophet* was to *speak to the people for God*. The prophet *foretold* the future and at least as importantly, he *forthtold*, calling the people of Israel into right relationship with God. Jesus performed this same responsibility. He called the people, whether the religious leaders or the lost sheep, to right relationship with God. Even a Samaritan woman of questionable moral character could see that Jesus was a prophet (John 4:19). Jesus took the place of the prophets. "In many and various ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days, He has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The responsibility of the *priest* was to *speak to God for the people*. The priest offered sacrifice for the sins of God's people, and interceded in prayer for the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. The unique thing in Christ's action for us is that, instead of sacrificing a sheep or a bull for the forgiveness of sins, He sacrificed Himself. This was the only way of offering a sacrifice that would serve once and forever. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, the place of honor, where He intercedes on behalf of the chosen people. (Hebrews 8:1; Romans 8:34).

The responsibility of the *king* was to *rule over all*. Jesus is now the sovereign over His people. Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Before Pilate, Jesus said that His kingdom was spiritual and not physical, saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

These were the three mediators through whom God worked in the Old Testament. The people of Israel anointed their leaders with oil as a sign they had a special task. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed to show they were set aside with special responsibilities. The people of Israel looked forward to a promised and expected mediator, who was referred to as the "Messiah," the Hebrew word for "anointed." This promised Messiah was Jesus. The word "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of "Messiah" or "anointed." "Jesus Christ" is then a title or description, meaning "Jesus the anointed," or "Jesus the mediator." *Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king*. He speaks to us for God; He speaks to God on our behalf; and He rules over

all. Each prophet, priest, and king in the Old Testament prefigured and foreshadowed Jesus. The people of the Old Testament looked forward to the promised Messiah, who would perfectly mediate the covenant between God and His people. As they looked forward to this Messiah, they looked forward to and placed their hope in Jesus.

### *The Resurrection*

Jesus did not stay on the cross—or in the grave. After His death and entombment, after three days, Jesus rose again. *The resurrection of Christ is declared by Paul to be the fundamental truth of the gospel.* "If Christ is not risen," he wrote, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also in vain. you are still dead in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17). The apostles were in despair and fear after Christ's death and before His resurrection. Then, remember the change in them on Easter morning. There was a reason they were so transformed. Consider what hinges on the fact of the resurrection:

1. All of Christ's claims and the success of His work rest on the fact that He rose from the dead.
2. If He rose, the gospel is true and the identity of Jesus is certain. He is the Son of God, equal to the Father, God manifest in the flesh.
3. If He rose, His words are true and dependable as words of life.
4. If He rose, His sacrifice has been accepted as a satisfaction of divine justice, and His blood is a ransom for many.
5. If He rose, He has acted as federal head for His people, and His resurrection secures and illustrates the new life we will enjoy. His life imparts eternal life to us.

But if Christ is not risen, none of these glorious possibilities are true and Paul is right—we are without hope. "But," Paul assures us, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The fact of the resurrection may be the best-authenticated fact in history.

1. It was foretold in the Old Testament.
2. Christ Himself foretold it.



*The most casual reader of the New Testament can scarcely fail to see the commanding position the resurrection of Christ holds in Christianity. It is the creator of its new and brighter hopes, of its richer and stronger faith, of its deeper and more exalted experience.*  
~Edward McKendree Bounds

*“As a pastor in a Protestant church, my whole ministry centers on the conviction that by grace we are saved through faith. And it's not our faith that delivers us, as if believing something, anything at all, were pleasing to God. It's the object of our faith—Christ's life, death, and resurrection—that saves us.”*  
~Kevin DeYoung

3. The empty tomb was never explained, although the authorities would have loved to.
4. The witnesses to the fact that Christ was alive after his death were numerous (more than 500 at once), competent, and worthy of confidence.
5. The sincerity of conviction of the believers cannot be questioned, as their entire view of life changed. They made otherwise unimaginable sacrifices for their convictions.
6. The testimony of witnesses was confirmed by signs and wonders that could not be explained.
7. The resurrection has been commemorated from its occurrence to the present by a change in the day of the week for God's worship.
8. The testimony of the Holy Spirit to the truth of the resurrection continues in the hearts of believers even to the present day.

*The resurrection of Christ is a promise that as Jesus has been raised from the dead, we also will be raised. It is the defining event of our faith as Christians, the engine to our energies, and the hope of our tomorrow.*



# Practical Leadership Applications

As Christians—"ones of the Christ"—  
how does understanding Jesus' nature inform our leadership?

The dictionary defines "incarnation" as: (1) The embodiment of a deity or spirit in some earthly form, (2) capitalized: the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ, (3) a concrete or actual form of a quality or concept; especially: a person showing a trait or typical character to a marked degree [she is the incarnation of goodness], (4) the process of being with, present, or in contact with someone or something.

"Incarnational living" for Christians could be defined, then, as embodying the spiritual life of Christ on earth and with those around us. This is our primary job as church leaders.

Richard Foster, author and founder of *Renovaré*, offers this charge: "To live the incarnational life, by God's grace, I will joyfully seek to show forth the presence of God in all that I say, in all that I do, and in all that I am." What does this have to do with Christian leadership? Everything! For Jesus is not only our Lord and leader, but also our example to follow. Laurie Beth Jones offers several examples of how Jesus led both His life and His disciples. Some of these "Leadership Style of Jesus" from her book *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* are listed below in modern business vernacular for emphasis. As you read, ask yourself: "How are we doing following this example?"

## Jesus Modeled an Ability to Know and Master Self

1. He knew who He was.
2. He kept in constant contact with His Boss.
3. He stuck to His mission.
4. He had internal anchors.
5. He was transparent.
6. He did difficult things.
7. He took a stand and was willing to look foolish.
8. He asked people to join His plan.
9. He worked through His fears.
10. He had a passionate commitment to the cause.

## Jesus Modeled Strength of Action

1. He saw the big picture.
2. He acted.
3. He had a plan.

4. He was visible.
5. He took the long view and asked for a commitment.
6. He troubled himself on behalf of others.
7. He trained His replacements.
8. He said, "Why not me?"
9. He rose above the distractions.
10. He came to be a blessing to those around Him.
11. He knew He was never alone.

### **Jesus Modeled a Strength of Relationships**

1. He gave them a vision of something larger than themselves.
2. He was willing to interrupt His own plans for others.
3. He believed in them and treated them as friends.
4. He set an example for them.
5. He was willing to teach them.
6. He held them accountable.
7. He prayed for their best.
8. He acknowledged them in public and in private.
9. He looked out for the little guy.
10. He had high expectations for them and kept urging them on.
11. He had compassion for the crowds.
12. He served them. He defended them. He forgave them.
13. He delegated authority to them.
14. He saw them as God's gift to Him.
15. He saw them as His greatest accomplishment.
16. He loved them until the end.

### ***Additional Resources***

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 8; Westminster Shorter Catechism, Questions 23-26 on Jesus as prophet, priest, and king; Question 27 on the active obedience of Christ.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 305-414.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), pp. 337.

R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992).

## *Christology Questions*

- 6-1.* What three statements can be made about the nature of Christ?
- 6-2.* What do we mean by the "unipersonality" of Christ?
- 6-3.* What was the issue decided at the Council of Nicaea? What groups are separated from orthodox Christianity today by that decision?
- 6-4.* What is the "kenosis" passage? What does "kenosis" mean?
- 6-5.* Explain the major theories of the atonement.
- 6-6.* What is the Reformed view of the cross?
- 6-7.* How is God related to time?

*6-8.* How were people in the Old Testament period saved?

*6-9.* How was Jesus revealed to the Old Testament Jews?

*6-10.* What were the three offices of the Old Testament?

*6-11.* What was the responsibility of the prophet? How was Jesus a prophet?

*6-12.* What was the responsibility of the priest? How was Jesus a priest?

*6-13.* What was the responsibility of the king? How was Jesus a king?

*6-14.* In what way is the resurrection of Jesus a promise?

# Soteriology

We will now turn our attention to the doctrine of soteriology. Of all the areas of theology, the doctrine of soteriology has been the subject of greatest debate within the faith.

*Soteriology* deals with the application of Christ's death to our lives, through grace, to bring us to a saving knowledge of God. What makes Christ's sacrifice effective for us? Some people, called *universalists*, believe that all people are saved by Christ's death on the cross, that His death is effective for all humanity without need for any action or response, or even any knowledge, on the part of any individual. However, almost all believers agree that Christ's death does not bring us to right relationship with God without some action or response on our part. What action or response is needed, and how do we come to that response? Soteriology answers the Philippian jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?"

## *What Happens in Salvation?*

What is salvation? Most people have heard of the graffiti proclamations back-to-back on a building wall: "Jesus saves!" followed by "But Hull gets the rebound, shoots, and SCORES!" These two theologians did not have the same idea of "saved." So, what does it mean to be saved?

This issue was at the center of the Protestant Reformation. Roman Catholics believed that approved membership in the church granted salvation. As we will see, Martin Luther and John Calvin both searched the Scriptures to develop a biblically grounded soteriology. This struggle formed the thrust of the Reformation.

Many Protestants will agree that the following are at the heart of salvation. First, a part of salvation is *calling*. By this we mean two calls. First, there must be an *external* call, the proclamation of the Word so that there can be a response. However, there must also be the work of God, the *internal call*, in the person so that he or she responds. The plan and work of God in the person hearing the message also is referred to as *effectual calling*.



Secondly, salvation involves *regeneration*, spiritual rebirth. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. He said, "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Paul echoed this thought. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Third, salvation brings *conversion, repentance, and faith*. In Scripture, the word repentance (*metanoia*) means "to undergo a change of one's mind." This change of mind does not mean a mere changing of opinions or bad habits, but changing the entire direction of one's life. It implies going down a highway in one direction and doing a U-turn. These steps mean a radical turning from sin, self, the world, and Satan, and a turning to Christ.

With salvation there is also *justification*, the legal act of God by which He declares unjust sinners to be just. There is a declaration of "not guilty." Salvation means that, by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, we are saved from the guilt and eternal punishment that should be the consequence of our sin.

Finally, as the believer grows in the knowledge of Christ, the believer is *sanctified*, conformed to the image of Christ and growing in holiness. The believer *perseveres* in the faith, even when tried, and finally enters into *glorification* when earthly life is over.

Each of these is a part of salvation, orchestrated by the Spirit and involving an individual's faith.

### ***How Are We Saved? Justification by Faith***

Martin Luther, the young Augustinian monk, was tortured by doubts about his standing before God. As a beginning theology student, he was taught that God demanded absolute righteousness. He read the passage, "Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." It is a high bar. People needed to love God absolutely and love their neighbors as themselves. They should have the unshakable faith of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son. They should live a victorious life and be above reproach. Their minds and bodies must be pure.

Luther knew he could never meet the standard, and was tortured by his sin. In human terms, his sins did not amount to much. His superior once commanded him to go out and commit a real sin. "You don't have any real sins anyway. You must not inflate your halting, artificial sins out of proportion." But Luther knew his own nature and would not be satisfied. Luther said later that he hated the righteous God who punished sinners.

By the time of the Reformation, the Roman church commonly taught

that salvation was mediated by the church, through confession and sacraments. During Luther's years of turmoil, he would wear out confessors. During confession, Luther knew himself to be most selfish. He was confessing his sins and performing his penance out of the intensely human instinct to save his own skin. "My conscience would never give me assurance, but I was always doubting and said, 'You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.'"

Luther became a professor of Bible. His preparation, his reading of the Scriptures with his own discomfort in mind, led him to a new view of the Scriptures. "At last," he said, "meditating day and night and by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteous live by a gift of God, namely *by faith* ... I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open."

Justification is the act by which unjust sinners are made right in the sight of a just and holy God. Justification by faith means that the works we do are not good enough to merit justification. Instead, we are declared to be righteous when God imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account. The necessary condition to this is faith.

Romans 3:20-22 says just this. "No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Protestant theology affirms that faith is the instrumental cause of justification, in that faith is the means by which the merits of Christ are granted to us. Protestants believe that Christ's death on the cross will, by faith, give us all the merit we need or can receive. No works of our own, by themselves or added to Christ's death, can justify us before God. *Justification is by faith alone.*



*All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door in 1517.*

## The Reformed Doctrine of Salvation

If Martin Luther's contribution to our understanding of salvation was the rediscovery of justification by faith, then John Calvin's contribution was the articulation of predestination—although Calvin set out a broader

theology of salvation than predestination alone.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"At the right time, appointed by Him, God effectually calls all those and only those whom He has predestined to life. He calls them by His Word and Spirit out of their natural state of sin and death into grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually with a saving understanding of the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills and by His almighty power leads them to what is good. And so He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ. But they come to Jesus voluntarily, having been made willing by God's grace." (Chapter 10, 1).

Actually, Augustine had set out both of these doctrines in the fifth century, but the church had lost sight of them. Luther largely understood predestination in the same way as Calvin, but the doctrine is associated with Calvin because he systematized the idea and expressed it so clearly in the *Institutes*.

It must be stated at the outset that no doctrine of the faith sets more teeth on edge, both within and outside the church, than predestination. Not all Protestant denominations adhere to the

view of predestination articulated by Calvin. However, every Christian needs to come to some understanding of predestination, because the Bible is so full of references to the idea. The words "predestination," "chosen," and "elect" are so commonplace in Scripture they cannot be ignored. Every Christian who reads Ephesians 1:1-10 must believe in predestination. No one reading the Scriptures seriously can simply say, "I don't believe in predestination," and be done with it.

Calvin came to his understanding of predestination after seeing a very practical pastoral issue. When he preached the word of God, why did different people respond so differently? Several parishioners would hear the same sermon. One would be enraptured by a message that had communicated good news to his troubled heart. A second might be outraged. A third would consistently slumber through the service. What accounted for the difference? Should Calvin change his approach to appeal to all three? Like Luther in his rediscovery of justification by faith, Calvin read the Scripture with a very practical eye to a pastoral issue and saw the answer there.

Later students reviewed the doctrine of salvation and made up a useful mnemonic device to describe it: *T-U-L-I-P*. In the chapter on the human condition we discussed the "Arminian" view of humanity. In Dortrecht (or "Dort"), Holland, in 1618-1619, a synod of Reformed churches met to consider the theology of Jacobus Arminius. Those holding the views of Arminius—known as Arminians—took five positions on issues such as

the position of humanity before God, the work of God in salvation, the reasons for God's work in salvation, and the certainty of salvation. The Arminian views were examined by the Synod of Dort and found wanting. In response, the synod drafted the Canons of Dort (recall that "canon" means "rule"). Students later summarized the position with five positions captured by TULIP. We will examine the Reformed doctrine of salvation by reviewing this mnemonic.

We said above that faith is the means, the instrument by which we are justified. TULIP explains how we get such faith. What is the source behind the instrument? We do not ourselves conjure up faith. God provides us with faith as his gift. The letters of TULIP stand for *Total Depravity*; *Unconditional Election*; *Limited Atonement*; *Irresistible Grace*; and *Perseverance of the Saints*. We will examine each of these ideas in turn.

### **Total Depravity**

We have discussed the idea of total depravity in our study of the human condition, but some review will be helpful—this is the foundation for all else that follows. Total depravity is the idea that humanity was radically corrupted by the Fall. Our whole humanity is fallen. There is no part of us that was not affected by the Fall—our intellect, our will, our bodies, and our senses were all impacted. Total depravity does not mean that we are as bad as we could be. It is not "utter depravity." We could still be worse. For this reason, some would prefer the term "radical depravity."

Total depravity means that we will never choose Christ by ourselves. The Reformed view of salvation takes seriously the Bible's declaration that we are dead in our sins. Unless our nature is changed, we will never follow God. The concept of total depravity is set out in the Westminster Confession, chapter 6, paragraphs 2-4. Scriptural grounding is found in Psalm 51:5, Isaiah 53:6, Jeremiah 17:9, John 8:34, Romans 5:12-17, Romans 8:7-8, Ephesians 2:1, and Ephesians 2:4-5.

### **Unconditional Election**

Unconditional election is the idea that God has chosen His own from the beginning without regard to any of their acts or their faith. The Westminster Confession says it this way:

"Before the creation of the world, according to His eternal,

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"Before the creation of the world, according to His eternal, unchangeable plan and the hidden purpose and good pleasure of His will, God has chosen in Christ those who are predestined to life and to everlasting glory. He has done this out of His own mercy and love and completely to the praise of His wonderful grace. This choice was completely independent of His foreknowledge of how His created beings would be or act. Neither their faith nor good works had any part in influencing His selection."  
(Chapter 3, paragraph 5).

unchangeable plan and the hidden purpose and good pleasure of His will, God has chosen in Christ those who are predestined to life and to everlasting glory. He has done this out of His own mercy and love and completely to the praise of His wonderful grace. This choice was completely independent of His foreknowledge of how His created beings would be or act. Neither their faith nor good works had any part in influencing His selection" (Chapter 3, paragraph 5).

These last two sentences are key. How does God choose? The Reformed view is that God makes His election based on His own good pleasure, not on anything in me. The view of the Arminians is that God makes His choice based on His foreknowledge of my decision.

You will recall that Reformed thinkers and Arminians disagree about the effect of the Fall. Arminians believe humanity is adversely affected by the Fall, but that we are still capable of choosing God. Arminians believe that God has foreknowledge of our decision, and so God chooses for eternal life those whom he knows will choose him. But then who really predestines? In the Arminian scheme, we predestine, not God. The Reformed view takes God's sovereignty seriously. God predestines. God chooses His elect without condition.

The Reformed view holds that, left to himself, no fallen person will ever choose God. Fallen people still have a free will and are able to choose what they desire. But the problem is that we have no desire for God and will not choose God unless first regenerated. Only those who are elect will ever respond to the gospel in faith. The elect do choose Christ, but only because they were first chosen by God.

Some people object to this idea because God does not elect or choose everyone. He reserves the right to have mercy upon whom He has mercy. Some of fallen humankind will receive grace and the mercy of election. The rest God passes over, leaving them in their sinful condition. The elect receive mercy. The non-elect receive justice. No one receives injustice.

It is God's prerogative to grant mercy on whom He pleases. He is never obligated to be merciful. Scriptural grounding for this concept is found in Exodus 33:19, Romans 9:15, Matthew 22:14, John 15:16, Romans 9:11-23, Ephesians 1:4-5, and Ephesians 1:11-12.

### **Limited Atonement**

The logical corollary to total depravity and unconditional election is a limited atonement. A limited atonement means that Christ's death on the cross was sufficient for all, but efficient only for the elect. Exercising free will, unregenerate men will never choose Christ. This is true because the nature of fallen men is such that they cannot please God, but only

# *Proclaiming the Gospel: a Devotion from Charles H. Spurgeon*

*"I have many in this city who are my people." (Acts 18:10)*

This should be a great encouragement in proclaiming the Gospel, since among the people in our communities—the disinterested, the rebellious, the careless—God has an elect people who must be saved. When you take the Word to them, you do so because God has ordained you to be the messenger of life to their souls, and they must receive it, for so the decree of predestination runs.

They are as much redeemed by blood as the saints before the eternal throne. They are Christ's property, and yet perhaps they are lovers of selfish pleasures and haters of holiness; but if Jesus Christ purchased them, He will have them.



God is not unfaithful to forget the price that His Son has paid. He will not suffer His substitution to be in any case an ineffectual, dead thing. Tens of thousands of redeemed ones are not regenerated yet, but regenerated they must be; and this is our comfort when we go to them with the quickening Word of God.

More than this, the ungodly are prayed for by Christ before the throne. "I do not ask for these only," says the great Intercessor, "but also for those who will believe in me through their word." Poor, ignorant souls, they know nothing about prayer for themselves, but Jesus prays for them. Their names are on His breastplate, and before long they must bow their stubborn knee, breathing the penitential sigh before the throne of grace.

The predestinated moment has not struck; but when it comes, they will obey, for God will have His own. They must, for the Spirit is not to be resisted when He comes with the fullness of power—they must become the willing servants of the living God. "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power." He will "make many to be accounted righteous." "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied." "I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

-Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Edited by A. Begg, Crossway Books, 2003)

themselves. However, once one is able to see God's grace, he or she will choose God. The Westminster Confession says:

"Those who are chosen, having fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ ... Only the elect, and no others, are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved. According to the hidden purpose of His own will, by which He offers or withholds mercy at His pleasure, and for the glory of His sovereign power over creatures, it pleased God not to call the rest of mankind, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice" (Chapter 3, paragraphs 6-7).

There are two sides to this idea. For the elect, it means that Christ died not just to make salvation *possible*, but also to make it *certain*. No one pays a ransom without being certain that those for whom it is paid will be delivered. It is not a ransom unless it actually frees us. We will discuss how this works below. However, by implication the other class—those not among the elect—will not choose Christ.

It is difficult to think that God would not choose to grant salvation to all. This is particularly troubling when we read, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 7:1-5, Romans 9). Does God actively harden the hearts of men and women? Or does He simply withdraw His hand, leave men and women on their own, and allow them to do what they want without intervening? Our hearts are "deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Left to our own devices, our hearts are very hard. Did God harden Pharaoh's heart actively, or did He harden Pharaoh's heart by withdrawing His influence in Pharaoh's life and letting Pharaoh's own hard heart rule? There is disagreement as to how God worked here. But we know Pharaoh is responsible for his own actions.

Scriptural grounding for this is found in Matthew 1:21, John 10:26-28, John 6:44, and John 6:65.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"This effectual call is freely made by God and is entirely an act of His special grace. It does not depend on anything God foreknew or foresaw about the person called, who is completely passive. God Himself gives life and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He thereby enables each person to answer His call and to accept the grace He offers and actually gives.

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, where, and how He pleases. The same is true of all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word." (Chapter 10, 2-3).

## Irresistible Grace

Irresistible grace means that God's grace will always accomplish its purpose. Of course, as sinful people, we can resist God's grace and do so all the time. But God's grace is irresistible in the sense that it always achieves its purpose. It brings about God's intended effect.

Some theologians prefer the term "Effectual Grace" over "Irresistible Grace." Note that the confession says that the person effectually called by God comes voluntarily. God's grace makes that person willing to come. But we still function according to the strongest desires of our hearts. We are as free as before. But it is as if scales have fallen from the eyes of one healed of blindness, and God's beauty is newly revealed. Of course, one will be drawn to that beauty, and now will sacrifice all to have it.

The whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens the individual to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in His irresistible sweetness. Jesus is irresistible to those who have been made alive to the things of God. Scriptural grounding for this is found in John 6:37, Acts 13:48, Romans 9:15-16, 1 Corinthians 2:14, and Philippians 2:13.

## Perseverance of the Saints

The "P" in TULIP stands for "perseverance." Many of us know people who have made professions of faith—sometimes participating in and even leading ministries—but years later they show no signs of a living faith. Such a case always raises the question, "Can a person once saved lose his salvation?"

The Roman Catholic Church—and many Protestants—believe that it is possible to lose salvation. They look at Hebrews 6, Paul's concern about being "disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27), and some examples such as King Saul, and conclude that we can fall fully and finally from grace. However, none of these passages directly say that we, or any of the people discussed, have had saving faith and then lost it.

The Reformed position is that God will not allow those whom He has called to fall away. Our salvation depends on God initially, and so He will continue to protect us. In essence, those people who have saving faith cannot lose it, and those who seem to lose it, never had it. John says of those falling away, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19).



Further scriptural grounding for this eternal security is found in Jesus' assurance that no believer can be snatched from the Father's hand as described in John 10:27-30. The priestly work of Christ praying on our behalf assures us that he intercedes for us. The "golden chain" of Romans 8:30 tells us that all whom He predestines, He brings to glory. Jesus prayed for the disciples and restored Peter. Jesus says, "None of them is lost except the son of perdition [Judas], that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12). The only one lost was one who was never saved. We believe that God grants perseverance to those whom He calls.

### *The Implications of TULIP*

We may ask whether this is entirely an intellectual exercise, or whether the means of our salvation has practical import. We surely can be saved without knowing all of the instruments God has used. However, there are applications of this doctrine, some of them requiring changes in attitude and some requiring action.

First, Calvin said that the doctrine of predestination is both a "horrible decree" and "very sweet fruit," depending on the side of the doctrine on which we fall. We may never take credit for our own salvation. When I first became a Christian, I knew that I had not done anything that merited God's favor. However, I also "knew" that I had made the right decision in accepting Christ, and that my unbelieving fraternity brothers had made a serious error by failing to accept Christ. Spiritual pride was the inevitable result. I had turned my decision to accept Christ into just another act for which I took credit. But according to the Reformed view, I could not take credit for my decision to receive Christ since it was by God's grace I did so. *The Reformed view of salvation properly leaves no room for my spiritual pride.* We should feel Calvin's *compassion for all who do not know Christ.*

Second, *God—His sovereignty and grace—are all magnified.* God is God, and properly on the throne.

Third, *we do not delude ourselves about the perfectibility of human beings.* We keep the achievements of humankind in perspective.

Fourth, *we can take part in evangelism as privileged partners of God.* We are not responsible for the results, which are up to God. We are only responsible for our faithfulness in proclaiming the message. This approach frees us to share the good news without the burden of having to get it just right.

Fifth, we will see that *we can take comfort that once justified, we cannot lose our salvation.*

## Sanctification

Salvation results in a new relationship with God that lasts for all time. We continue to struggle with sin. However, during life we grow in holiness, becoming more Christlike as the Holy Spirit works in us. We are able to perform good works pleasing to God. How does this transformation take place?

### The New Nature

As we have discussed, when we are regenerated, one of the products is a new nature. As we come to faith, our nature does that U-turn that comes with conversion and repentance. Just as our nature was changed with Adam's Fall, so we are changed again. Until Adam fell, he had the ability to obey or disobey God. However, with the Fall, the nature of Adam (and our nature) was corrupted so that neither he nor we had the ability to obey. We were unable to refrain from sin. But with our regeneration, we once more have the ability to obey God.

In his book *Chosen by God*, R.C. Sproul has portrayed our moral abilities and inabilities by this chart:

Pre-Fall Man	Post-Fall Man	Reborn Man	Glorified Man
Able to sin	Able to sin	Able to sin	
Able to not sin		Able to not sin	Able to not sin
	Unable to not sin		
			Unable to sin

The significance of this truth is that God has freed us from our bondage to sin—not only has he paid the penalty, but he has freed us to resist temptation and to affirmatively fulfill the spirit of the Law. The power of sin is broken, not only in our legal standing before God, but also in our daily lives.

### The Struggle with Sin

If we are new creations, why do we seem to struggle so with the old habits? The world, the flesh, and the devil seem to have part of us because even while we have new natures, the old nature remains.

There is a branch of Christians that believes that we should be without sin after conversion. This belief seems out of line with the very real struggle Paul says he continued to have as a believer, "When I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who

will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:21-25).

The struggle to become sanctified is difficult. We have a part to play in the sanctification process. Sanctification is a joint effort; it requires both the work of the Holy Spirit within us and the work of our wills and our action. Paul calls on the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you ..." (Philippians 2:12-13). Fear and trembling does not suggest terror, but rather reverence coupled with effort. And we can be assured that while we are at work, God is at work in us.

### ***Good Works***

Is there a place for good works? If we are justified by faith alone, does God care about our works? There are several common views on the relationship between religion and works. Many people assume that if they live a good life, they have done all that is necessary to get to heaven. We have already discussed the fact that our sinful nature will never permit us to be good enough or do good enough to satisfy a holy God. God demands perfection in both our actions and our thoughts. This might be expressed as follows:

**Works = Justification.....FALSE**

Some people have accepted a modified form of works-righteousness that takes Christ's death into account, but still leaves us responsible for a considerable piece of the work necessary to achieve God's favor. This requires us to continue to do good deeds and make penance before we will be truly accepted by God. We fail to understand that Christ has truly taken all of our sins, and that we receive faith and salvation completely as a gift of God. There also is an element of spiritual pride here, as we would like to have a hand in our salvation. But we can add nothing to the cross of Christ, which was sufficient for all time. This erroneous view would be expressed:

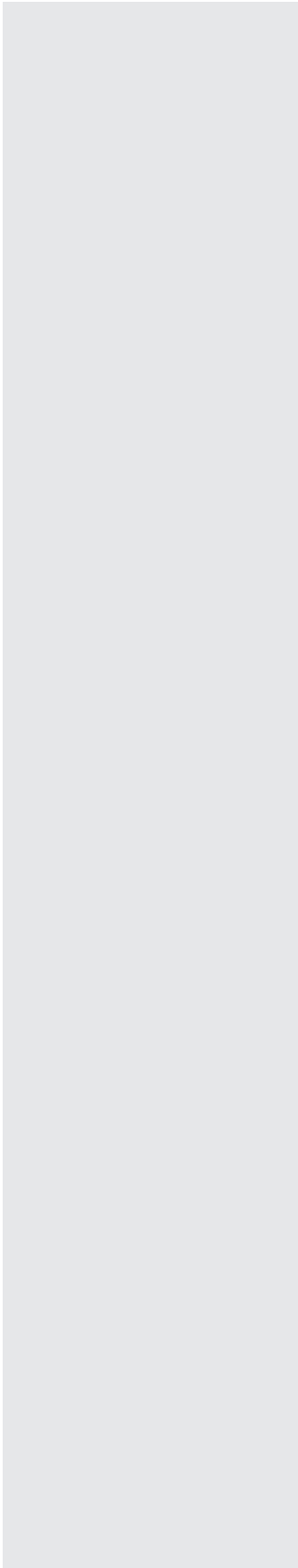
**Faith + Works = Justification.....FALSE**

In another view, there is no relationship between faith and works. We simply receive faith as a gift of God, are assured of our eternal relationship with God, and go on with our lives without regard to Him. The theological term for this view is "anti-nomianism" (*anti* = against, *nomy* = law). Some people thought that Paul's message of God's grace amounted to this easy way of belief. "Shall we sin then because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). This view may be expressed as:

**Faith = Justification - Works.....FALSE**

However, faith and good deeds can never be separated. James says faith without works is dead (James 2:18-24). In other words, if you have no works, you do not have faith. *We live by faith alone, but never by a faith that is alone.* A true understanding of God's grace to us makes us grateful to Him, and the work of the Holy Spirit changes our nature. These together result in good works. Justification depends on true faith, which will always show itself in acts of obedience. If there is no change in the life of someone who professes Christ, there is reason to doubt whether the profession is genuine. This view is expressed:

**Faith = Justification + Works.....TRUE!**



# Practical Leadership Applications



How should leadership encourage the salvation process?

Salvation is a uniquely mysterious process. As we have seen, it is internal and external. It is both an event and a continual process. It is dependent on the drawing by the Holy Spirit and the submission of the human will. It happens only once, but may feel as though it occurs again and again.

One way to look at salvation and growth is through the following five-step model or paradigm.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Stability

*Here the current system or place in life seems to work fine.*

- The non-Christian seems "content" to live without God.
- Dorothy (The Wizard of Oz) is happy in Kansas, where life is in black and white.
- During their early life in Egypt, the Israelites did not experience famine.
- Galileo is content to do his writing and scientific experiments in the medieval world.
- Martin Luther lives faithfully in the church as a monk.
- We have satisfaction with our Christian "place" in life.

## 2. Discontinuity

*The current system seems to work less well, and questions arise.*

- Spiritual hunger for Christ emerges in the human heart—the wooing of the Holy Spirit.
- Dorothy looks "somewhere over the rainbow" as the tornado winds of Kansas gather.
- The good life becomes slavery in Egypt
- Galileo finds "observable inconsistencies" in the theory that all things revolve around the earth.
- Luther becomes discontent with the church.
- Dissatisfaction rises with our own level of faith, commitment, holiness, or spiritual power.

---

<sup>6</sup> As modified and adapted by Brad Strait from Alan Roxburgh's stages in *The Terranova Project*.

### 3. Disembedding

*We begin to disconnect from the current system or process of thinking in many ways, stepping outward.*

- A dissatisfied, pre-Christian begins searching for answers that will bring fulfillment.
- Dorothy is caught and lifted into in the tornado.
- Moses confronts Pharaoh with the plagues.
- Galileo approaches the queen with his belief that the earth is round, and not at the center of all things.
- Martin Luther nails the 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg church.
- We move away from the old way of church or abandon what we are doing in the church.

### 4. Transition

*We are between the old and new, still not fully engaged in either world or way of thinking.*

- The pre-Christian asks for answers, makes some changes.
- Dorothy is greeted in Oz but does not understand "why," "where," or what the ruby slippers mean.
- The Israelites cross the Red Sea into the wilderness.
- Rejection and conflict come from Galileo's ideas. He must back down for a season and study more.
- Dialogues lead to "the new church" in Geneva.
- We begin a new search for God, believing that He will not leave us or forsake us.

### 4. Transformation

*We decide to commit to the new world or new paradigm. The spiritual birth begins the journey of faith.*

- Dorothy, on the journey in Oz, seeks the Wizard.
- The Mount Sinai covenant leads to the journey to the Promised Land.
- Galileo initiates the modern world through writings on "new" philosophy, science, and theology.
- Martin Luther is convinced that the Reformation of the church is occurring and that he must be a part of it.
- We commit to being renewed, transformed Christians, and begin acting accordingly.

#### **Salvation Proverbs from Around the Globe:**

*Even though the bees  
bite me,  
the honey is worth it.  
~Mozambique*

*Salvation translation:  
If one person can be saved,  
the struggle is worth it.*

*One generation  
plants trees;  
another gets shade.  
~China*

*Salvation translation:  
Salvation is often  
the result of  
long-term dedication.*

*If each one sweeps  
in front of his own door,  
the whole street is clean.  
~Germany*

*Salvation translation:  
Evangelism is  
everyone's job.*

*Pull thy brother's boat  
across, and lo, thine own  
hath reached the shore.  
~India*

*Salvation translation:  
God amazingly allows us  
to participate in the  
salvation process  
of others, and we  
get blessed, too.*

### *For Group Discussion or Reflection*

1. How have we, as individuals, experienced this process?
2. How is faith required at each step?
3. How are conversion and continuing transformation significantly different?
4. How would we reach out to a person at each step?
5. What barriers would we find in our church if we were at each stage?
6. Is there something specific we can do now to reach out to people at each stage?

### *Additional Resources*

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 11-18.

Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1932).

J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986).

# *Soteriology Questions*

*7-1.* What is soteriology?

*7-2.* What is regeneration?

*7-3.* What is effectual calling?

*7-4.* What is justification?

*7-5.* How are we justified before God?

*7-6.* Why must we have a doctrine of predestination?

*7-7.* What does each letter of TULIP stand for? What is the meaning of each term?

T =

U =

L =

I =

P =

*7-8.* What happens in salvation that enables us to live differently?

*7-9.* What are two differences between justification and sanctification?

A. Justification is \_\_\_\_\_

but sanctification is \_\_\_\_\_.

B. Justification is \_\_\_\_\_

but sanctification is \_\_\_\_\_.

*7-10.* What is the proper relationship of faith, works, and justification?

## CHAPTER 8

# *The Holy Spirit*

We have already discussed the Trinity and much of the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we should discuss the Third Person of the Trinity, the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, *pneumatology*.

### *The Deity of the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. While the deity of Christ is often questioned, this is rarely so with the Holy Spirit, probably because the Holy Spirit has never taken on human form. In the Old Testament the expressions "God said" and "the Spirit said" are used interchangeably. This pattern continues in the New Testament, as in Acts 5:3-4 where Peter says, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ... You have not lied to men but to God." Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God.

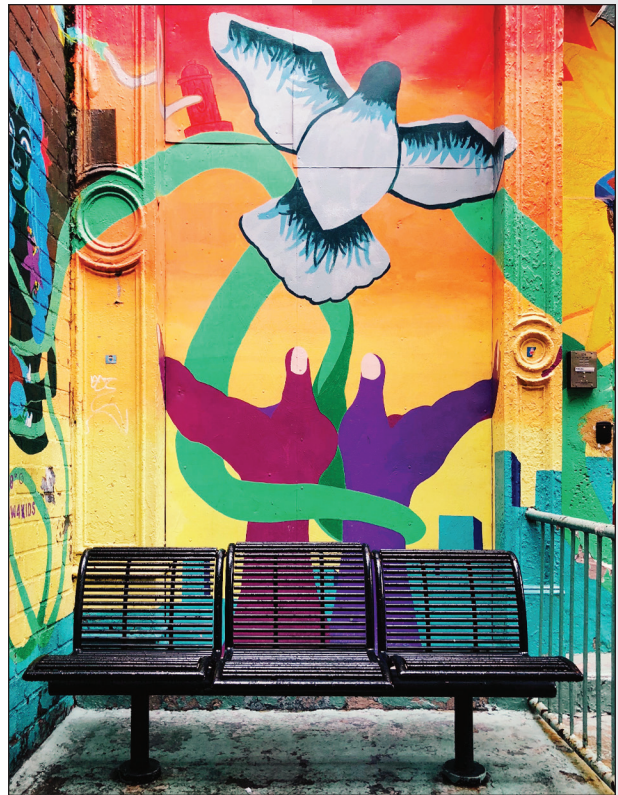
The Bible also attributes divine qualities to the Holy Spirit. Paul ascribes omniscience to the Holy Spirit, writing to the Corinthian church, "The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God ... No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). In Psalm 139, the Spirit is described as omnipresent: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" The Holy Spirit also works in creation, hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2), consistent with omnipotence.

### *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

In his book, *The Holy Spirit*, Arthur Pink ascribed 22 roles to the Holy Spirit. We will discuss only a few here.

#### **Revelation of Truth**

It is the Holy Spirit who reveals truth to us. The Holy Spirit brings us to salvation and reveals spiritual truth for our sanctification.



### **The Fruit of the Spirit**

*Galatians 5:22  
shows us the fruit of  
living a Spirit-filled life:*

*"The fruit of the Spirit  
is love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness,  
goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, and  
self-control."*

*These are habits  
of mind, of lifestyle  
and of conduct, which find  
their source in God.*

*Notice that the word  
"fruit" is singular,  
pointing to the fact that  
a believer should exhibit  
all of these characteristics  
as a unity.*

*It is important to know  
that these "fruit"  
are not produced  
by a believer, but by  
the Holy Spirit working  
inside a person who is  
in vital union with Christ  
(John 15:1-8).*

*A yielded believer  
should begin  
to show these qualities  
as he or she matures  
into the image of Jesus  
and as the Spirit  
works within him or her.*

Jesus told the disciples that "when the Spirit comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Jesus tells Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit ... the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:3,5). Paul tells the Corinthians, "No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The prophets were moved to speak by the Holy Spirit, and it was by the Holy Spirit that the Scriptures were inspired (1 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16). We may ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom because Jesus promised us, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things" (John 14:26). In all these ways, God reveals truth to us.

### **Power**

What is it that enables us as believers to do things that make us afraid? It is the power of the Holy Spirit: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power" (2 Timothy 1:7). "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," Jesus promised (Acts 1:8). The word translated "power" is *dunamis*, from which we derive "dynamite." This power strengthens us as believers and is associated with the miracles of Jesus and the ability of the disciples to witness.

### **Comfort**

Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper, "I will ask the Father, and He will send you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16). This Counselor is a *paraclete*, one who comes alongside us. It is the Spirit who gives us a sense of Sonship (Galatians 4:6), so that we know that we are God's, in His tender care.

### **Prayer**

The Holy Spirit enables us to pray, for He "helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words ... He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

### **Enabling for Service**

The Holy Spirit also calls men and women to service and enables them to serve well. In some cases, this service is formally ordained office within the church—prophet, priest, and king were anointed to show they were set aside for service and empowered by the Spirit. Individuals who serve in the ordained offices of elder and deacon are to be filled with the Spirit. In other cases, the Spirit has strengthened for service outside ordained positions—for instance, God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with the Spirit for the building of the tabernacle and all its furnishings (Exodus 31).

## *Filling and Baptism of the Holy Spirit*

The passage that best discusses the filling of the Spirit is Ephesians 5:17-21, as follows:

Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

All this is connected. In the Greek, two verbs are in the imperative ("Do not get drunk with wine ... Instead be filled with the Spirit"). On these depend four present participles ("speaking," "singing and making music," "giving thanks," and "submitting"). That is, the single command to be filled with the Spirit is followed by four descriptive consequences of the Holy Spirit's fullness. The first and fourth consequences of this command to be filled are that we are in right relationship with each other, because our speech is right, and we submit to one another. The second and third consequences are that we are in right relationship to God because we are worshipful and thankful.

We can make four points about the statement that we are to be filled.

1. The statement is in the *imperative mood*. "Be filled" is not a tentative suggestion, a mild recommendation, or a polite piece of advice. It is a command.
2. The verb is in the *plural form*. Being filled is not optional, but rather it is a command for all Christians.

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"The Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son, of the same substance and equal in power and glory, is, together with the Father and the Son, to be believed in, loved, obeyed, and worshiped throughout all ages.

He is the Lord and giver of life, everywhere present, and is the source of all good thoughts, pure desires, and holy counsels in men. By Him the prophets were moved to speak the word of God, and all the writers of the Holy Scriptures inspired to record infallibly the mind and will of God. The dispensation of the gospel is especially committed to Him. He prepares the way for it, accompanies it with his persuasive power, and urges its message upon the reason and conscience of men, so that they who reject its merciful offer are not only without excuse, but are also guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit." (Chapter 34, 1-2).

3. The verb is in the *passive voice*: be filled. That is, "Let the Holy Spirit fill you." We must yield to the Spirit without reservation. But we are not purely passive in receiving the Spirit's fullness, any more than we are passive in getting drunk. A man gets drunk by drinking; we become filled with the Spirit by drinking, too. As Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). We must come to be filled.
4. The verb is in the *present tense*. In the Greek language, the verb form can show that the action is either a single action or that it is continuous. Thus, when at the wedding in Cana Jesus said, "Fill the jars with water" (John 2:7), the verb form shows that he meant to do it only once. The present imperative, "be filled with the Holy Spirit," on the other hand, indicates that this filling is to be continuous. This is not some dramatic or decisive experience that will settle the issue for good, but a continuous appropriation.

In summary, God intends us to be filled with the Holy Spirit as part of the normal Christian life. The filling puts us in right relationship with each other and God. All Christians are exhorted and commanded to be filled by the Holy Spirit by being yielded to Him on an ongoing basis.

### **The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

The Old Testament prophet Joel, John the Baptist, and Jesus all said that God would provide an outpouring of His Spirit on His people. This experience, sometimes referred to as the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit, began at Pentecost.

From time to time in the book of Acts, there are believers who have a second experience with the Holy Spirit, sometimes at some interval after they have initially believed (Acts 8:14-17, 10:44-48, 19:6-7). From these experiences, some Christians derive a belief that a "second baptism" is commonplace, or even necessary, for a Christian to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Reformed tradition believes that such a second experience is not necessary or normative. The doctrinal passages of Scripture indicate the Spirit is received at conversion, and indeed must be at work before our hearts are softened to conversion. "No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). "He saved us by the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). The instances in Acts may have served as confirmation to the disciples that Samaritans and Gentiles—the subjects of the "second baptisms"—could serve God as acceptably, as could the Jews who received the spectacular signs of Pentecost. The second baptism may have been appropriate for a

particular situation. It may happen from time to time now as God wills. Certainly, we want never to "quench" the Spirit. We should want all that the Holy Spirit has for us, and we should be encouraged ourselves and the body of Christ to receive the fullness of the Spirit. But there is no doctrinal teaching that requires any particular experience with the Holy Spirit.

### *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

Four passages in the New Testament discuss the gifts of the Holy Spirit—1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-12, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul says, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."

Paul emphasizes that although there are diverse gifts, *the giver is God*. He says this three times, each time relating the gifts to a different person of the Trinity ("the same Spirit," "the same Lord," and "the same God").

Second, the Scriptures emphasize that *each believer has at least one gift*. Gifts are not just widespread—they are universal. No one can say that they have no gift to share. This is emphasized in each of the passages on the gifts. "For I say to *every one* of you ..." (Romans 12:3); "one and the same Spirit, and He gives them *to each one*, just as He determines ..." (1 Corinthians 12:11); "But *to each one of us* grace has been given ..." (Ephesians 4:7); "*Each of you* should use whatever gift he has received ..." (1 Peter 4:10).

Next, Paul makes several points using a body metaphor. The gifts are given, not for our private enjoyment, but for the purpose of building up the body.

In early 2001, two sports stories played out on opposite ends of the U.S. New Englanders went into wild celebration when Adam Vinatieri kicked a last-second field goal to win Super Bowl XXXVI for the Patriots, 20-17 over the Rams. Meanwhile on the West Coast, the Lakers were seeking to defend their NBA title but without the best big man in basketball. Shaquille O'Neal (all 7'1" and 340 pounds of him) was out of action, felled by an injury to his toe. The humble and lowly toe! Who can love a toe, except perhaps a podiatrist? However, a toe brought glory and pride and celebration to one coast; and a toe brought anxiety and fear to the other



coast (O'Neal recovered and led the Lakers to a successful title defense).

So it is with the body of Christ. All the members must exercise their gifts for the body to function as God has designed it. Any member, no matter how humble, can bring glory to the whole body. And if any member, no matter how humble, fails to do its part, the whole body suffers.

Because *the gifts are for the use of the body*, no one member should feel pride in his part or disappointment in his gift. All the gifts are valuable for the functioning of the body.

The passages together suggest a great number of gifts. There are nine gifts listed at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12, and nine at the end—and four of the latter ones are new. There also is a list of seven in Romans 12, five of which are not in 1 Corinthians; a list of five in Ephesians, two of which are new; and two gifts in 1 Peter, one of which is new. In some cases, it is difficult to determine if the gifts named coincide because the names are similar but not the same; however, there are about twenty gifts in total. But there is no indication that the lists are exhaustive—there may be additional gifts. No single gift is in all the lists, and thirteen appear in only one list, as if to emphasize the variety of the gifts.

In some cases, our spiritual gifts may be talents given by the Holy Spirit applied to building the body of Christ. In other cases, the spiritual gifts named are closely related to ordinary work and are almost mundane. For instance, in Paul names serving, teaching, and encouraging as spiritual gifts (Romans 12:7), and says that he who contributes should do so generously; he who shows mercy should do so cheerfully (Romans 12:8). In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul names administration as one of the gifts. These gifts—serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, mercy, and administration—are probably all closely related to natural talents. These gifts are not what most people would classify as "miraculous," but God has transformed the heart of a person who was hostile to God so that person now wishes to use his or her giftedness to build the body of Christ.

In other cases, the gifts are miraculous in that they involve works beyond ordinary human capacity. These gifts include healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, and speaking in and interpreting other tongues (1 Corinthians 12:9-10). However, all the gifts—whether appearing mundane or miraculous—are given by the same Spirit for the good of the body.

What is the place of the gifts of the Holy Spirit today? Some churches believe that these gifts were only for the apostolic age and are not available for us today. Other churches believe all of the gifts are available today. A few would say that one who has not received the gift of tongues has not

received the Holy Spirit. Those who doubt the validity of some or all of these gifts for today argue along several lines. First, they argue that some or all of these gifts were valid for a period prior to the completion of the New Testament only, and that such signs were needed then to show God's authority. That foundation has been laid and does not need to be laid again. For instance, we do not need more apostles, which is among the offices listed in 1 Corinthians 12:27. Some of these people will argue that certain gifts were temporary, limited to the apostolic age, and others were permanent.<sup>8</sup>

Second, they argue the issue of "gift" versus "office." During the apostolic age, Peter, Paul, and others may have been commissioned by God and given the ability to heal consistently wherever they were. Those who question the gifts for today would argue that while God may heal or allow Christians to prophesy or work miracles from time to time, God does not have people who occupy the position or "office" of healer, prophet, or miracle worker today and consistently exercise those gifts.

Third, those who question the gifts may do so based on the idea that prophecy, tongues, and interpretation are new revelation. The argument is that the Scripture is our authority, and that the canon is closed. Therefore, the exercise of the gifts must always be subject to Scripture.

Those endorsing the validity of the gifts for today point out that there is plenty of evidence to show that the gifts are in use today, and that the exercise of the gifts is a faith-building experience. They would also point out that most of the above arguments are not made from Scripture, which is our authority. Scripture advocates the freedom of the believer in Christ. If there is no clear and direct statement in Scripture to require that any gift be ended, we should expect that the gifts continue.

There are many nuances of positions along the lines outlined above. This

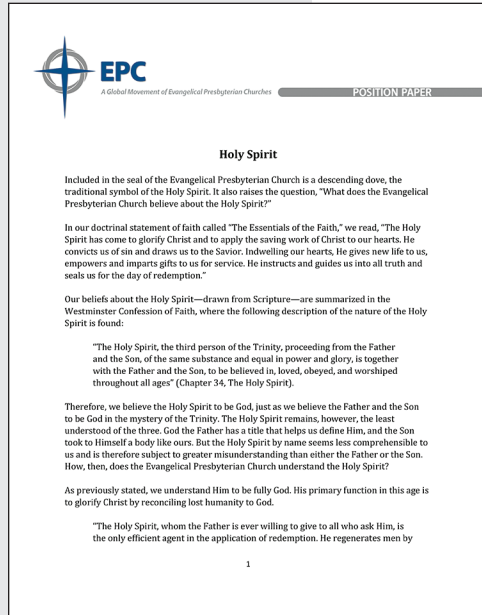
### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask Him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by His grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to repentance, and persuades and enables them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in them as their comforter and sanctifier, gives to them the spirit of adoption and prayer, and performs all these gracious offices by which they are sanctified and sealed unto the day of redemption." (Chapter 34, 3).

---

<sup>8</sup>In *God the Holy Spirit*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that the temporary gifts were apostleship, prophecy, healing, miracles, discerning spirits, and tongues. Permanent gifts are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, the ability to teach, the gift of ministering and helps, the gift of administration and governments, the ability that elders and deacons have, the gift of evangelism, the gift of the pastorate, the gift of exhortation, and the gift of faith. He observes that some of the temporary gifts are experienced today, but are not exercised by persons "commissioned" with an office as in the New Testament.

is a good place to note that in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church there is freedom. The EPC's motto is "In Essentials, Unity; In Non-Essentials, Liberty; In All Things, Charity." This is an area where we must exercise charity. Finally, as discussed above, the fruit of the Spirit is the primary means of considering growth or maturity in a Christian's life. As such, the fruit is more significant than the operation of the gifts in our lives.



The EPC has adopted a "Position Paper on the Holy Spirit" which states in part:

Some would require that Christians manifest a particular gift, such as speaking in tongues, as evidence of a deeper work of the Spirit within. Others would have us believe such a gift is no longer available or acceptable. As a Reformed denomination, we adhere strongly to our belief in the sovereignty of God, a belief that does not allow us either to require a certain gift or to restrict the Spirit in how He will work. Rather, we call upon all Christians to open their lives unto God's Spirit to fill, empower, and "gift" as He sees fit.

The Position Paper also states that the gifts should be exercised under the guidelines of Scripture and the local Session. Officers in the local church should therefore take the initiative to study in this area so as to be able to exercise their authority judiciously. The Position Paper is a good place to start, available on the EPC website at [www.epc.org/beliefs](http://www.epc.org/beliefs).

### *Additional Resources*

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 34 (note: this is one of the "American Chapters" added to the Confession in 1903).

"Position Paper on the Holy Spirit." (Orlando, FL: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 1986).

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), pp. 185-192.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997).

John R.W. Stott, *Baptism And Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964).

# Practical Leadership Applications

How should our church reflect the leadership of the Holy Spirit?

Even after salvation, we all need to be changed. Old attitudes and habits die hard. Growth takes time. God knows we need help in changing. That's why He not only forgives our sins, but also puts a piece of Himself inside us. *He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit to guarantee what is to come (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).*

God is building a new kind of community. If God's Spirit is to live in this community, it needs a different kind of place to call home. This community—the church—is to be the sign of His Kingdom, hung on the street for all who pass by to see. It is to be His lamppost, His beacon. It is to proclaim: "Look! Things are different here! My very Spirit is inside these people!"

How is it to be different? Look at the passage from Acts 4. In it, we can find some marks of the Spirit-filled church. They are:

- A shared vision (4:31, 4:33)
- A shared attitude (4:32)
- A shared sacrifice (4:32b, 4:34-35).

Do we, as shepherds of this flock, see clear signs that the Holy Spirit is in residence here in our church? Are we different from the world, in more than words but in deeds as well?

## *For Group Discussion or Reflection*

**In the spirit-filled church there is a shared vision**

"... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."

The first signal that something new was in residence inside them was what came out of them. In a fearless manner, a bold word bubbled forth, most likely in Bible passages or prophecies for the infant church or for those who did not believe. Notice that in a Spirit-filled church, the Spirit is allowed to talk through people. But notice what these Spirit-filled people were interested in talking about—not work or life events, not church growth principles, not the lack of clean-up in the junior high room, and not their personal needs. Instead, led by the Spirit inside them, they were talking about God and His Son. "And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." The shared "vision" of the Spirit-led church is not about a statement printed on our bulletins or etched on our signs. It is not a joint reciting of the pithy goals and objectives of the leadership. This passage is clear: the "one heart

### **Marks of the Spirit-Filled Church**

*Acts 4:31-35*

*And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed was of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

*~New American Standard (Updated)*

and mind" shared picture (vision) in their Spirit-filled minds was of Jesus, his resurrection, and his powerful work among them. In a sense, it was a spontaneous praise service, with every eye and tongue focused on the person of Christ. "Let me tell you about what Jesus did ..." "We have seen Him, alive and at work!" "What a great God we serve!" "As it says in Isaiah, Jesus is our Anointed One!"

Here are some questions for discussion and reflection about the church having a shared vision:

- Do we as leaders communicate this type of praise when we speak?
- Are we unified on a vision of Christ Jesus crucified, resurrected, and at work in our world? Or are we just dealing with finances and staffing problems?
- Is the Word of God continually in our mouths when we eat, sit, work, and rest?
- Do we encourage each other with the great work Jesus is doing?
- Are we allowing enough places for the Body to encourage each other?
- How do we see the Body of Christ exercising a shared, Spirit-led vision of Jesus?
- Are there things we can pray for or do to increase our shared vision?

### **In the spirit-filled church there is a shared attitude**

"And the congregation ... was of one heart and soul ..."

Luke uses the Greek word *cardia* in the Hebrew sense of reason, emotion, and will. It stood for the person's entire mental and emotional activity. These believers *shared one heart*. To this, Luke adds the word *psuche*. While *psuche* can mean mind, it most often means "spirit" or "soul." The *psuche* is the life-spirit in a person, the part that can be quickened and filled by the Holy Spirit. They share not only one heart, but also *one spirit*. In essence, what Luke is saying is that the early Christians shared an attitude of oneness. Their minds, emotions, and wills were open to each other, and the Spirit enabled a special unity.

Here are some questions for discussion and reflection about the church having a shared attitude:

- How are we doing as a leadership team in this area? Are we unified?
- How do we see the Body of Christ doing in this shared, spirit-led attitude?
- Are there things we can pray for or do to increase our attitude of oneness?

### **In the spirit-filled church there is a shared sacrifice**

"No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own."

We can make two major mistakes when we examine this passage. First, we can think that it is not about money. Or second, we can think it is only about money. Look at what we can learn about the Spirit-filled church here. In the Spirit-filled church there is recognition that God owns all things. And there is recognition that we are our brother's keepers. In this passage, no one held on too tightly to things, but shared. It was different from the world. It was a Holy Spirit community, willing to sacrifice for the good of others. And notice: "*... abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them ...*" We need reminding: the most important things in life are not things.

Here are some questions for discussion and reflection about the church having a shared sacrifice:

- Are we led by the Spirit in our finances and generosity?
- How are we doing as a leadership team in this area?
- Do we model a commitment to shared sacrifice for the Body?
- How do we see the Body of Christ doing in Spirit-led generosity and sacrifice?
- Are we gently reaching out to those who are in need?
- Are there things we can pray for or do to increase our shared sacrifice?

## *The Holy Spirit Questions*

*8-1.* What are some of the works of the Holy Spirit?

*8-2.* What is the filling of the Holy Spirit?

*8-3.* When does one receive the Holy Spirit?

*8-4.* Where do we read about the fruit of the Spirit? What are the fruits of the Spirit?

*8-5.* What is the position of the EPC on the gifts of the Spirit?

# *Ecclesiology and the Sacraments*

## *The Church*

The doctrine of the application of the merits of Christ leads us logically to the doctrine of the church, for the church consists of those who are in Christ and have received the blessings of salvation, together with their children.

The word most commonly used for the church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which roughly means "*the called ones.*" The Old Testament word *kahal* also is rooted in the word meaning called by God. In the Old Testament, this term is used with reference to Israel (Joshua 8:35, Ezra 2:65, Joel 2:16).

If this is the right understanding of the church—those called by God—then the church did not start in the New Testament. Since Abraham is the patriarch of Israel—the one called by God to begin His special people—we may understand the calling of Abraham as the beginning of an unbroken line of persons called to covenant with God. Some contend that the church started even earlier, with Adam and the covenant of grace. In any case, it is clear the church originated in the Old Testament and goes back farther than the calling of Christ's disciples or Pentecost.

The Reformation thinkers changed the emphasis in the concept of the church. The change is reflected in a sign at Old Des Peres Presbyterian Church near St. Louis, Missouri—one of the oldest churches west of the Mississippi River and now a national historic site. The sign says, "1833 Meeting House/Des Peres Presbyterian Church." This sign is an acknowledgment that the building is only the meetinghouse, not the church itself. The church is the people who are the community of saints. The Catholic Church tended to emphasize the external aspect of the church and saw the church first as the mother of believers. Protestants have tended to emphasize the spiritual aspect of the church as the community



of believers, and the result of God's work, not the source of it.

### ***The Character of the Church***

Several aspects of the character of the church warrant discussion.

#### **The Visible and the Invisible Church**

There is a visible and an invisible church, both aspects of the one church of Jesus Christ. The visible church is comprised of all who profess faith in Christ, along with their children (Westminster Confession, chapter 25, paragraph 2). The visible church is that church acknowledged by the world. However, no church is wholly pure. There are pious and impious, wheat and tares, sheep and goats in every body of believers. We do not see which individuals among those who claim Christ are truly in right relationship to God and which are not. The invisible church is comprised of all those who entered into union with Christ through the Holy Spirit, and therefore enjoy the spiritual blessings of regeneration, conversion, faith, and communion with Christ. The invisible church is known to God but will become visible to us only in our glorified state, when true believers will become known to one another.

#### **The Church as Organism and Organization**

The church also is both organism and organization. Paul compares the church to a body made up of different cells and organs (1 Corinthians 12). In this respect, the church is a living and breathing organism made up of different members. However, there is organization to the church, just as there is organization to a living being. It is this organization that makes the church an institution, which is a means to God's end, the growth of the community of faith.

#### **The Militant and Triumphant Church**

The church and all its members in the present age are engaged in a struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. However, the church is assured that Christ has already secured the victory in the end, and the church militant will therefore also be the church triumphant.

#### **The "Catholic" Church**

The word "catholic" simply means "universal." Members of the catholic church are all members of the church universal, the church comprised of all its members. While others may be Roman Catholic, we are Presbyterian catholic.

#### **The Marks of the Church**

What makes a true church? When the church began to split in the Reformation period, the Reformers felt it appropriate to point out some marks by which a true church could be distinguished from a false church. Generally, three marks of a *true church* were recognized:

1. The true preaching of the Word.
2. The right administration of the sacraments.
3. The faithful exercise of discipline.

Note the adjectives used. How does our church measure up?

### *The Means of Grace*

Fallen men receive blessings from God. Some of these blessings are available to all men, saved and unsaved. God's blessings include the benefits of nature, employment, the harvest, arts and sciences, charitable causes, and good government. God causes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust. God has operated to provide material blessings and restrain sin. *The blessings of God available to all men are referred to as common grace.*

All of us know people who are not believers but who have high moral standards. All men have some sense of right and wrong, of the need for truth. This is the operation of common grace. Christians frequently degrade the value of charitable work outside the church, such as works promoting medical care, research, and the arts, since they do not provide salvation. What a misunderstanding of God's common grace!

However, there also are blessings available that result in salvation and strengthen those who have received salvation—means by which God works in our hearts and lives. *These blessings connected to salvation are referred to as special means of grace.* They include the Word and the sacraments.

A small digression is in order here. The terms "common grace" and "special grace" are not used in Scripture. Not all theologians agree on the means of special grace. Some include prayer and the church among the means of special grace. But even if there is not universal agreement on particulars, common grace and special grace are helpful terms in that they help us to remember and give thanks for God's blessings to us and help us to be vigilant to take advantage of the means God has provided to strengthen our relationship with Him.

### **The Word and the Sacraments as Means of Grace**

What do we mean by saying that the Word and the sacraments are a means of grace? First of all, let us make it clear that of themselves, they are ineffective. *They become efficacious—or productive—or they work—only through the operation of the Holy Spirit.* Baptism does not work just because water is poured on someone—it takes the Holy Spirit working through the act. The Lord's Supper will not work just because you eat bread and drink wine, but it works because the Holy Spirit works through the act. People are not converted and do not grow in faith just because the Word is preached, but because the Holy Spirit works through the preaching.

But the Word and sacraments are means of grace because God has chosen and ordained them as special ways through which the Spirit will work. Christ has officially instituted these in the church by which the Holy Spirit works and confirms faith in the hearts of men.

What is the relationship between the Word and the sacraments? Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has given more prominence to the sacraments than to the Word. The Roman Catholic Church has considered the sacraments to be the real means of grace, with little relationship



between the Word and sacraments. Luther shifted the emphasis from the sacraments to the Word and gave prominence to the Word as God's primary means of grace. He pointed out that the sacraments required explanation from the Word and in fact, the sacraments served to make the Word visible.

In the Reformed faith, we believe that God's grace is most usually communicated to us through Word and sacraments. Therefore, the willful neglect of hearing the preached Word

or participating in the sacraments can mean only our spiritual loss. You can verify this for yourself. If a person persistently misses sitting under the preached Word and consistently fails to partake of the Lord's Supper, you will observe the spiritual life of that person diminishing. It is difficult to live a fruitful Christian life by yourself or apart from the church. We also believe that Word and sacrament go together. The sacraments need the Word because they are visible demonstrations of what the Word says, and the Word needs the sacraments, because the Sacraments are visual illustrations of the Word.

### *The Preached Word*

What do we mean when we say the Word is a special means of grace? When we speak of the Word as a means of grace, we are not talking about the Bible. It is true that the Bible is used by the Holy Spirit for the growth and extension of the church and the Spirit uses Scripture to edify and nourish the believer; it is also true that the written Word is often used by the Holy Spirit to convict sinners. However, when we talk about the Word as a means of grace, technically and strictly speaking we are talking about the Word as it is preached—the *preached Word*. Preaching the Word is a divine commission given by Christ. This does not mean in a general sense that the Bible is not a means of grace. As it is read and studied and taught and communicated, the Spirit works through it. But

in a very special way, ordained by Christ, the preaching of the Word is more powerful than a two-edged sword. This is what Paul means in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians when he talks about the foolishness of preaching being the wisdom of God.

### *Law and Gospel*

The preached Word is a means of special grace. But we have to go on to say that there are two parts to this preached Word—the Law and the gospel. Some might think of the Old Testament as being the Law and the New Testament as being the gospel, but that is not true. God is gracious in all His dealings with Israel in the Old Testament, and Jesus is tougher than the Mosaic Law in the Sermon on the Mount. Both Law and gospel are found throughout Scripture.

#### **What is the Law?**

*The Law is anything in Scripture that reveals God's will in the form of a prohibition or a command.* The Law reveals to us the bad news that we are sinners and cannot be justified on the basis of our own works according to the Law.

#### **What is the gospel?**

The gospel proclaims the redeeming love of God in Jesus reconciling us to God. It is the good news. Each of these two—Law and gospel—is present in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Each has its proper function. The Law seeks to awaken sorrow for sin in our hearts. The gospel seeks to awaken faith in Jesus in our hearts. We need both. The good news isn't good without the bad news. And the bad news without good news is just depressing. Perhaps you have heard people say we don't need the Law of God, or that we are under grace and not law. In a sense, that is true, but that does not mean the law is no longer useful. We need it to awaken our awareness of our sin when we fall short of it. But it also is a guide to the believer—a rule of life—that reminds us of our duty to God and it leads us in the way of salvation. We are not saved by our obedience to the Law, but we are convicted of sin and drawn to salvation based on the Law—and the Law guides our sanctification. The Law is our teacher.

### *The Sacraments*

#### **The Nature and Number of the Sacraments**

What is a sacrament? As with several other terms we have used, the word is not found in the Bible. The Westminster Confession says, "*Sacraments*



*are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace.* They were instituted by God along with the covenant to represent Christ and His benefits, to confirm our position with and in Him, to demonstrate a visible difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to engage believers in the service of God in Christ according to His Word ..." (Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 27, paragraph 1).

What is meant by "signs and seals?" A sign points to something, describes something, and is a shorthand reminder of something. In this case, the sacraments point us to and remind us of God's work. What about a seal? A seal guarantees the authority, authenticity, and validity of whatever document it is affixed to. The sacrament reminds us of God's authority exercised through the church.

How does a sacrament provide grace? As noted previously, *the power and effectiveness of the sacrament are derived from the work of the Holy Spirit.* There is no power in the outward ritual. In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote that if we partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily, without recognizing the body of the Lord, we are guilty of sin and bring judgment on ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). The outward or visible part of the sacrament signs and seals an inner work. Therefore, the effectiveness of the sacrament is not dependent on the devoutness or the intention of the one who administers the sacrament. However, the Westminster Confession says that the

### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They were instituted by God along with that covenant to represent Christ and His benefits, to confirm our position with and in Him, to demonstrate a visible difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to engage believers in the service of God in Christ according to His Word.

In every sacrament there is a spiritual relationship or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. And so the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

The grace revealed in or by sacraments in their right use does not come from any power in them. Neither does the effectiveness of a sacrament depend on the devoutness or the intention of whoever administers it. Rather the power and effectiveness of the sacraments are the result of the work of the Spirit and rest on God's Word instituting them, since His Word authorizes their use and promises benefits to worthy receivers of them.

There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism and the Lord's supper. Ordinarily, neither of these may be administered by anyone but a lawfully ordained minister of the Word." (Chapter 27, 1-4).

sacraments should be administered by a lawfully ordained minister of the Word. Presbyterians recognize two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each of these is derived from an Old Testament sacrament—baptism from circumcision, and the Lord's Supper from Passover.

### **Baptism**

Baptism of infants can be a significant hurdle for a full adoption of the Reformed tradition. What is the meaning of baptism? And why do we baptize infants? To us, baptism represents entry into the body of believers, admission into God's covenant people. This is the significance of infant baptism. Baptism is also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of the believer's ingrafting into Christ, of rebirth and new life, of remission of sins, and of the believer's yielding to God. Adult baptism is a sign, not only of admission to God's covenant people, but of these works as well.

We have previously discussed the Covenant of Grace at some length. You will recall that from the Fall through Noah, Abraham, David, the prophets, and Jesus, God instituted His Covenant of Grace, revealing more of His plan and His grace in each setting. God called out a special people in an unbroken line beginning with Abraham—the called-out ones of Israel through whom God would work. The church is now the people through whom God works. Paul portrays the gentile church as grafted into the tree that was Israel (Romans 11).

In the Old Testament period, formal admission into the covenant people was recognized by circumcision. When God entered into the covenant with Abraham, he declared:

This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between you and Me. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised" (Genesis 17:10-12).

Note that the mark of the covenant people was to be given to entire households, and that male children were to receive this mark.

As the church grew, and especially as Gentiles joined the church, it had to grapple with whether circumcision would continue to be required. At a council in Jerusalem, the church fathers determined that circumcision would not be required (Acts 15). However, Jesus had commanded baptism for His followers (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16). The early church baptized those God called out to be His covenant people. In the New Testament,



we see whole households being baptized, presumably including children (Acts 10:48, Acts 16:33). It is appropriate that children be baptized as part of the covenant community. First, God works through covenant families.

God has called out a visible people in whom He works and through whom He makes Himself known to the world. This is God's message to Abraham and to us. Peter reminded the crowd at Pentecost that "the promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39). If you are a parent, you have a responsibility to convey the blessings of the covenant to your children.

Second, the New Testament is greater in grace than the Old. In the Old Testament, women were surely part of the covenant community; however, they did not partake of the sign and seal that showed they were members. Male children were offered the mark of the covenant in the Old Testament. It is logical that they would also be included in the mark of the covenant community under the New Testament. And it is characteristic of God to extend that grace as it becomes available to the

Gentiles by offering the sign and seal of membership in the covenant community to female children as well.

### **Baptism and Regeneration**

Other traditions claim a direct link between baptism and regeneration. The Roman Catholic Church says that baptism results in regeneration. In some Protestant denominations, baptism is reserved for those believed to have been regenerated, or who have professed their faith in Christ. For Presbyterians, baptism can mean that we are regenerated, but it need not. *Baptism of a child does not show that we believe the child has a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.* Infants are baptized to show that they are members of the covenant community. Professing believers are baptized to show that they have new life and are members of the covenant.

### **The Mode of Baptism**

In churches that understand baptism to show regeneration, new life is symbolized by a good dunking. Going under the water represents death and a rising to new life. It also signifies an identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. However, our understanding of the meaning of baptism does not require immersion. Immersion is certainly acceptable, but it is no more effective than sprinkling or pouring.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Let us turn now to the second sacrament, the Lord's Supper. It properly may be called by a number of names. It may be called Holy Communion or the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving, the Table of the Lord, or the Breaking of the Bread.

As we have seen, the Lord's Supper came to replace the Passover. As the Hebrews were delivered from the death of the firstborn in Egypt by the sacrifice of a lamb—which then became a meal celebrating their deliverance from bondage—so also the sacrifice of Jesus frees us from spiritual bondage to sin, and the meal becomes a communion with God. You can see that the transition from the Passover to the Lord's Supper was a natural one. The lamb of Passover was a type of the Christ who was to come. That's why Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. Roman Catholics take the position that when Jesus said, "This is my body," the "is" must be taken literally. This view of the Lord's Supper is called *transubstantiation*; that is, the substance of bread and wine are transferred to something else, the literal body and blood of Jesus. Luther, on the other hand, departed from that view somewhat. He did not believe in the literal transformation of the elements, but he did believe that the literal body and blood of Jesus were present with the elements. This view is called *consubstantiation*.

John Calvin rejected both of these views. As do we Presbyterians, Calvin believed that the Lord's Supper is first a memorial, a remembering of the death of Christ. But more importantly, he believed that Christ—while not bodily present as Catholics and Lutherans believed—*is spiritually present*. The influence and presence of Christ are real, but it is a spiritual presence and not a physical presence. Thus, Christ is mediated to us spiritually by the Holy Spirit when we take the elements in faith.



### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"This universal church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible.

Particular churches, which are members of it, are also more or less pure, depending on how the gospel is accepted and taught, how the ordinances of God are administered, and how public worship is performed.

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to impurity and error.

Some churches have so degenerated that they are not churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there will always be a church on earth to worship God according to His will.

There is no other head of the church than the Lord Jesus Christ." (Chapter 25, 4-6).

# Practical Leadership Applications

How does our theology of the church affect the way we lead?

The EPC is founded and established on clear Reformed principles. Yet our structures and *Book of Government* allow a great range of freedoms. Worship styles vary widely. Some churches reflect a traditional spirit, others are more contemporary, others are even considered "emerging." All draw from the Reformed stream, but some have a Bible Church feel, some may be pretty charismatic, and some may use a high liturgy.

The chart on page 147 compares different denominations (though the comparisons are general). Note the wide variety of theology and worship. Some are highly structured, centralized, and controlled. Others are independent and autonomous, shaped only by local congregational leadership. In the middle, groups like the EPC allow a combination of local and denominational influence. Many churches are influenced by other streams. For example, some churches are affected by the Bible Church stream, the broader Evangelical stream, or even the Puritan stream. Many churches reflect several streams. Notice also how leadership styles vary from one to another. Leading such a varied congregation can be a large, intricate task. Looking at the chart, evaluate your own church. Then think about or discuss the following:

*Churches must decide whether they want to structure themselves for control or growth. Old forms of structure are designed for control. Rethinking will demand structuring for growth, which means high morale, effectiveness, and unity. For this to happen, both the pastor and the people will have to give up control: The people must give up control of leadership and the pastor must give up control of the ministry.*

*~James Emery White  
"Rethinking the Church"*

- Where does our church best fit on the chart?
- How does our place on the chart impact how we lead the church?
- What other streams of influence affect our own church?
- In our leadership team, what are our own backgrounds?
- How does this impact our leadership?
- How many different backgrounds are in our congregation?
- What conflicts arise from the presence of these backgrounds?
- How does this impact the leadership expectations of those in our church?
- How do our people approach the sacraments?
- Are there leadership, sacramental, or theological issues we need to clarify for our congregation?

## Additional Resources

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 19, 25-29.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 555-660.

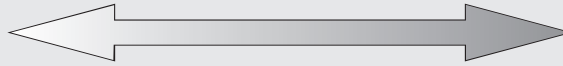
Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), pp. 477-508.

# A Continuum of Christian Worship

With some generalizations, developed by Brad Strait with Bruce Shelley and Marshall Shelley.

## Experiential Worship

- Subjective
- Inwardness
- The Individual
- Nondenominational

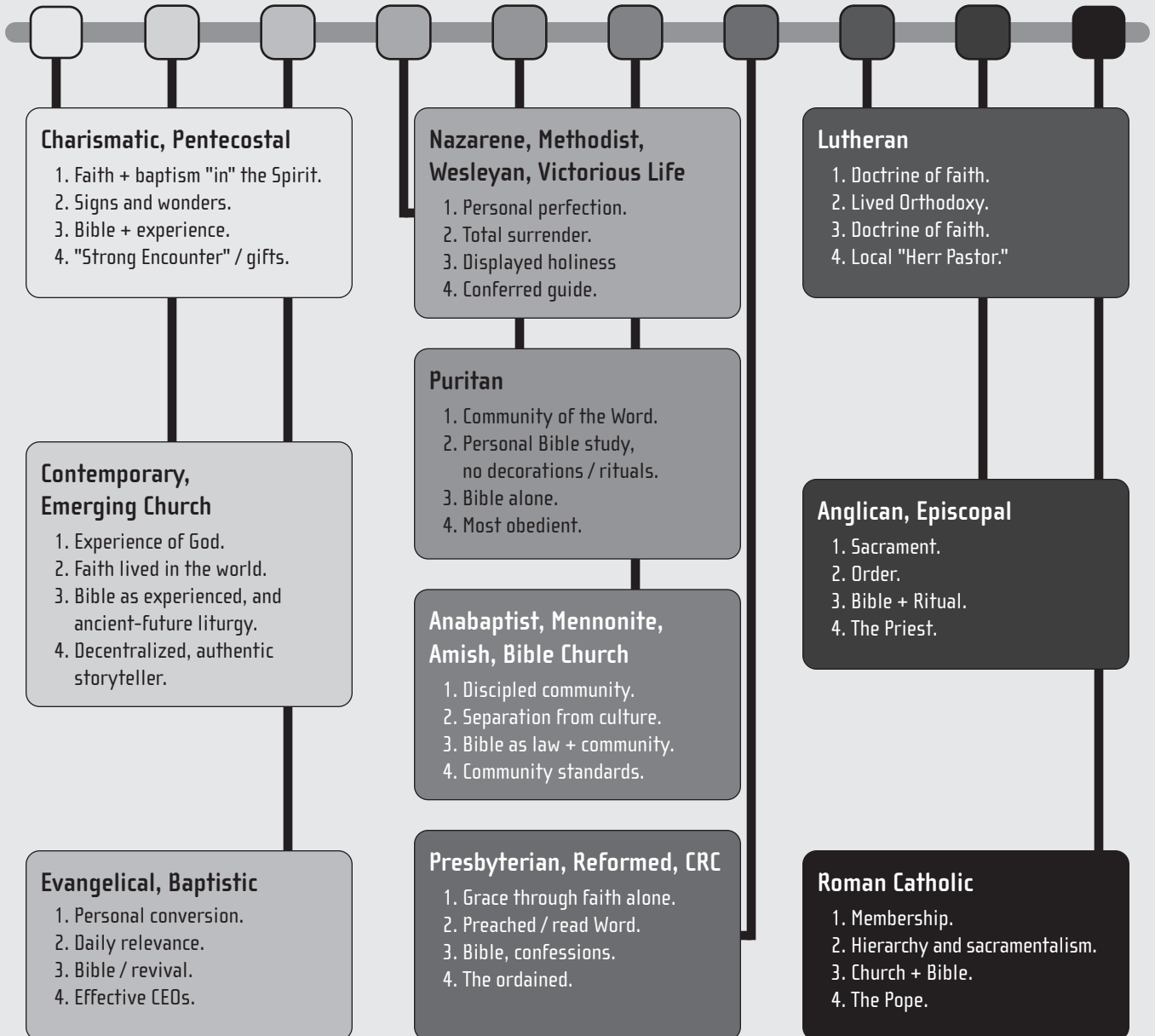


## Sacramental Worship

- Objective/Concrete
- Outwardness
- The Church
- Institutional

### KEY

1. Salvation comes through...
2. Sanctification proven by...
3. Main truth source...
4. Authority resides in...



## *Ecclesiology and the Sacraments Questions*

*Q-1.* When did the church begin?

*Q-2.* What is the visible church? The invisible church?

*Q-3.* What is the militant church? Why is the church also the triumphant church?

*Q-4.* What is the catholic church?

*Q-5.* What are the marks of a true church?

*Q-6.* What is common grace? What does it have to do with our salvation?

*Q-7.* To whom is special grace limited, and what does it do?

*Q-8.* When we say the Word is a special means of grace, what "Word" are we talking about?

*Q-9.* What are the two parts of the preached Word?

*Q-10.* What role does the Law play?

*Q-11.* What role does the gospel play?

*Q-12.* Is the Law limited to the Old Dispensation? Is the gospel limited to the New Dispensation?

*Q-13.* What are the sacraments of the Old Dispensation?

*Q-14.* Who may administer the sacraments? Who may preach the Word?

*Q-15.* What one thing did circumcision and baptism represent?

*9-16.* How do we believe baptism is related to regeneration?

*9-17.* What is the real difference between Presbyterians and immersionists as regards baptism, and who is a proper candidate for baptism for Presbyterians and immersionists?

*9-18.* Were infants a part of the Old Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace?

*9-19.* What is transubstantiation? Who holds this view?

*9-20.* What is consubstantiation? Who holds this view?

*9-21.* How do Presbyterians believe Christ is present in the bread and wine?

*9-22.* How does leadership style and control impact worship?

## CHAPTER IO

# Eschatology

In his book *Citizen Soldiers*, Steven Ambrose writes of the end of World War II in Europe. Christmas Day 1944 was bright, clear, and cold, and Pvt. Wesley Peyton was enjoying hot food at the front lines when a single German fighter plane came over at treetop level. American machine gunners set the plane's engine on fire. The German pilot turned straight up, then rolled the plane over and bailed out. The watching Americans broke out with roars of approval and admiration for the German's skill. But as the pilot came down in his parachute, Peyton said, "the damned fool unholstered his pistol and began shooting at us. By the time he hit the ground there was hardly enough of him to bury. He shot first; we shot last."

For Peyton, the scene brought "the certainty that we would win the war and I would survive it." He reasoned that the German pilot knew that the war was lost, and that the German pilot did not want to live. But on that Christmas Day, Peyton knew that the Allies would win the war, and that he would go home.

So it is with us. We live in a furious battle. But with Christmas, the first advent of Christ, the invasion has begun, and the outcome is now assured. The enemy knows the war is lost. We also know the outcome of the war, and that we are on the victorious side, and that we will go home. We are not home now, but one day we will be.

Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is at hand. We are in the last days. The word "eschatology" comes from the passages of Scripture that talk of the last things—the "last days" (*eschatai hemerai*—Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1), the "last time" (*eschatos ton chronon*—1 Peter 1:20), and "the last hour" (*eschate hora*—1 John 2:18).

There are two levels to eschatology. First, there is *individual eschatology*. For the individual, the end of this existence comes with death, which



*Utah Beach Memorial  
Normandie, France*

transfers us from this life into another existence. Physical death, the immortality of the soul, and the intermediate stage bear discussion here. Second, there is a *general eschatology*. The world as we know it—and the human race—will come to an end. History is not an indefinite and endless process, but there will be a great crisis and Christ will return to usher in a new age. We will examine in this section the crisis of the end times, the return of Christ, the general resurrection, the last judgment, the consummation of the Kingdom, and the final condition of those saved and unsaved.

## *Individual Eschatology*

### **Physical Death**

Life as we know it comes to an end with death. The Bible speaks of the death of the body, as opposed to the soul. Physical death can be described as termination of life by the separation of body and soul. The body dies but the spirit lives on. The soul is not annihilated by death. Ecclesiastes 12:7 tells us that "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." James 2:26 echoes this idea, saying, "The body without the spirit is dead." When Jesus died, the Bible says He gave up His spirit (John 19:30). When Stephen died, he asked God to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59).

In 1998, the Vietnam War soldier interred in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, D.C., was identified. Using DNA technology previously unavailable, authorities identified him as Michael Blassie. His remains were transferred to Jefferson Barracks cemetery in St. Louis. The news reports properly used the word "remains" to describe the transfer. Blassie's soul had separated from his body at death, and what was left to be interred is only what remains—the body.

Physical death is punishment, "the wages of sin." However, since believers are justified and no longer under penalty, why do we have to die? After all, Christ became a curse for us and so removed the curse of death. Is death necessary? It seems not. Elijah and Enoch did not experience death. But most Christians do experience death. Death produces sanctification. Sickness, bereavement, and the thought of death serve to humble the proud, check our worldly concerns, and produce in us a mind of humility. And in death we experience the suffering of Christ often producing great victories where victory hardly seems possible. 1 Peter 4:12-13 reminds us of the benefits of participating in the sufferings of Christ: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."

## The Immortality of the Soul

Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) is a question of perennial interest. The biblical answer is a resounding "Yes!" The soul lives on after the death of the body. But what is the nature of that life? What happens after we die?

## The Intermediate Stage

As we will discuss below, there will be a final resurrection at the end of the world. But what is the situation of the soul after death and before the resurrection? The Reformed position is that the souls of believers proceed to heaven immediately after death. The Westminster Confession says that at death,

"The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of unbelievers also continue at death. The souls of the wicked are thrown into hell, where they remain in torment and complete darkness, set apart for the great day of judgment" (Chapter 32, paragraph 1).

There is strong scriptural support for this position; however, it is not without difficulties.

In the Old Testament there is discussion of a place called Sheol, described as a shadowy region to which the dead descend. For instance, Psalm 89:48 says, "What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of Sheol?" Sheol does not always correspond readily with heaven or hell. Sheol is variously translated as "grave" (as in some translations of Psalm 89) or "pit" or "hell."

But Paul says that he is "willing to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord," and that he has a "desire to depart and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23), implying that the transition to God's presence will be immediate. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "*Today* you will be with me in Paradise." In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus went to a place of consciousness in the presence of Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). The writer of Hebrews cheers believers by reminding them that others of the church "are [present tense] enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). There are Old Testament references also, such as in Job and Daniel, that support a life in the immediate presence of God after death. All of these passages indicate that after death there is no waiting in line, no state without consciousness, and no intermediate stage where spiritual exercises must be conducted before entering God's presence.

In the Catholic tradition there is a place of purgatory where the believer

works off "venal sins," those committed after baptism and not resulting in damnation but requiring purging. According to Catholic teaching, the period of purgatory can be shortened by the prayers and Masses of the living. Purgatory is supported by 2 Maccabees 12:42-45. However, this book is part of the Apocrypha and not considered authoritative by the Jews, the early church, or the Reformation church. Catholics also believe in *Limbus Patrum* and *Limbus Infantum*. The first is a place where the Old Testament saints waited for Christ; the second a place for unbaptized infants. Biblical support for these concepts is weak.

## *General Eschatology*

### **The Crisis of the End Times**

The Bible says that certain events, some cataclysmic, must take place before Christ's return. These include:

#### *The Calling of the Gentiles*

All nations will have the opportunity to hear the gospel before the return of Christ (Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:10, Romans 11:25). These passages refer to the evangelization of the world as the goal of history. If this is true, then missions work is more than just a casual part of the church's overall program.

#### *The Turning of the Jews*

Many Jews will come to Christ, and Romans 11:25-29 connects this to the return of Christ.

#### *The Great Apostasy and Great Tribulation*

Many will fall away in the end times, and many will suffer persecution (Matthew 24:9-12, Matthew 24:21-24, Mark 13:9-22, Luke 21:22-24, 2 Timothy 3:1-4).

#### *The Coming of the Antichrist*

There will be one who virulently opposes Christ and His people (1 John 2:18, 1 John 2:22, 1 John 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Daniel 11:36).

#### *Signs and Portents*

At the end of the age there will be signs, including wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, the coming of false prophets, the working of false miracles; and strange signs in the skies involving the sun, moon, and stars (Matthew 24:29-30, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:25-26).

### **The Return of Christ**

After these signs, Christ will return. The exact time of Christ's return is not known to anyone, "not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36). The return of Christ will be personal and physical, not just spiritual, as the angels told the disciples: "This same

## *From the Westminster Confession:*

"God the Father has ordained a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom He has given all power and judgment. In that day not only will the apostate angels be judged, but all the people who have lived on earth will appear before the court of Christ to give an account of their thoughts, words, and actions, and be judged according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

God's purpose in arranging for this day is to show forth the glory of His mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect and the glory of His justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. At that time the righteous will go into everlasting life and receive that fullness of joy and refreshment which will come from the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, will be thrown into eternal torment and punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

Christ wants us to be completely convinced that there is going to be a day of judgment, as a deterrent to sin for everyone and as an added consolation for the godly in their suffering. He has also made sure that no one knows when that day will be, so that we may never rest secure in our worldly surroundings, but, not knowing what hour the Lord will come, we must always be alert and may always be ready to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." (Chapter 33, 1-3).

Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). His return will be visible to the whole world, and will be sudden (Matthew 24:30, 36-44). And His return will in one sense be very different from His first advent. He will come, not in humility but in glory and triumph, in royal apparel (Hebrews 9:28). The clouds of heaven will be His chariot (Matthew 24:30), the angels of heaven His bodyguard (2 Thessalonians 1:7), and the saints His escort (1 Thessalonians 3:13). He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord (1 Corinthians 15:25, Revelation 19:11-16, Philippians 2:10-11).

### **The General Resurrection**

With Christ's return, the dead will rise. The resurrection body will be like our present bodies, and yet changed. We will be physical, not just spirits. Jesus was raised physically, as Thomas learned, and Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, implying we will be like him. We are told clearly in Romans 8:11 that our new bodies will have connection to our old bodies, for "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who lives in you." At the same time, we will be different from our bodily selves. Jesus was different in the resurrection body. Paul refers to the change that takes place as one of sowing a seed and reaping something different, for "the body that is sown is perishable;

it is raised imperishable: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). The righteous and the wicked will be resurrected (Acts 24:15, John 5:28), although the emphasis in Scripture is on those who will rise to blessing.

### **The Last Judgment**

Following the resurrection there will be a final judgment. This judgment will be the work of a triune God, but Scripture ascribes it especially to Christ (Matthew 25:31, John 5:27, Acts 10:42, Philippians 2:10). We all will be judged based on our response to Christ, and be given entrance to heaven or consigned to hell. There will be different levels of reward in heaven, and there will be different levels of punishment in hell. For example, Jesus says that certain unrepentant cities in Israel—which did not respond to Him—will be worse off than Sodom, apparently in part because they knew more. While our assignment to heaven or hell is based on our response to Christ, our level of reward in heaven or our degree of punishment in hell will be based on the degree of revelation we received and on what we have done in the flesh (Matthew 11:22, Matthew 11:24, Luke 12:47-48, Daniel 12:3).

### **Consummation of the Kingdom: Final Condition of Saved and Unsaved**

*Hell* is variously described as a place from which God is entirely absent, or a place in which God is present, but only in justice and wrath—not love and mercy.

*Heaven* will be a new creation for the believers. Described in Revelation 21 as a Holy City of incomparable beauty and light, heaven is a place where God will be fully present with His people, where there will be no tears or death or pain. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

### ***Millennial Views***

Within the church, the order and timing of the events surrounding the end of the world are hotly debated. Many connect the advent of Christ with the idea of a millennium, a thousand years during which Christ will reign on earth, either before or after the return of Christ.

The idea is based on Revelation 20:1-6, describing a thousand years during which Satan is bound and the martyrs who have not worshipped the beast reign with Christ. Among those who believe in the millennium, there is division on whether the period is literal (one thousand years) or figurative (a substantial period of time). Those favoring a figurative meaning point to Psalm 50:10 (the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God), and Job 9:3 (a man cannot answer God once in a thousand times).

Two groups believing in a reign of Christ on earth are categorized by the time at which they believe Christ will return relative to the millennium.

Those who believe Christ will return before the millennium are *premillennialists*. Those who hold that Christ will return after the millennium are *postmillennialists*.

But large numbers of believers do not believe that an expectation of a thousand-year reign is warranted at all. These people are referred to as *amillennialists*. Those who are classified as amillennialists believe that the millennium describes the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven.

### **Premillennialism**

The early church premillennialists believed in a sequence of events along these lines: The present world would last six thousand years, each of the six days of creation corresponding to one thousand years. Toward the end of this period, there would be persecution and turmoil, and the Antichrist would appear. Christ would appear and defeat the Antichrist, ushering in a period of one thousand years of Christ's reign on earth, corresponding to the day of rest. Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and peace and righteousness would prevail. At the end of the thousand years, there would be the last judgment and a new creation would follow for eternity.

Contemporary premillennialist thought is vastly more complicated. Modern proponents of Premillennialism are often Dispensationalists (we discussed Dispensationalism on pages 48-50). In Dispensationalist thought, God deals with humanity on the basis of several covenants and according to several periods of time, or dispensations. Premillennialism tends to be very literal in charting out events of the end times. This Premillennialism believes in the following sequence of events:

1. Christ may return at any time, nothing further being required for His return. He will return first to take the saints with Him in the rapture.
2. For seven years the gospel will be preached, primarily by believing Jews, and there will be conversions and great tribulation. The Antichrist will be revealed.
3. Christ will return again with the saints, the nations will be judged, and the Antichrist defeated.
4. For a thousand years the millennial kingdom will be established. Satan will be bound, and there will be a visible kingdom on earth centered in Jerusalem and ruled by Christ and the saints. Worship will be re-established at the temple in Jerusalem. Although there will still be sin and death, this will be a wonderful time.



5. After the millennium, Satan will be loosed for a short season. He and his allies will make war against the Holy City but will be defeated. Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit, the wicked will be judged, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

This is a simplified sequence and assumes all premillennialist thought is uniform. It is not.

### **Postmillennialism**

Growing from Holland in the 1500s and 1600s, Postmillennialism does not believe that Christ will return to reign with the saints on earth during the millennial period. Instead, Postmillennialists see the spread of the gospel throughout the world and believe that during the end of the present age, the gospel will become much more effective, and there will be a period of rich blessing, a golden age during which good will be ascendant over evil. At the end of the period of one thousand years there will be a brief period of apostasy, a terrible conflict between good and evil, the return of Christ, and the resurrection and judgment.

In modern times this view has become popular among theologians to whom the idea of a gradual perfectionism is appealing. The advent of the millennium is hardly perceptible and can be evolutionary. To these persons the millennium can be characterized as a utopian period of social order, freedom, and dignity, with an increasing emphasis on spiritual good and a decreasing emphasis on materialism.

### **Amillennialism**

Amillennialists emphasize the passage in Revelation 20 as the only section in Scripture that explicitly discusses the millennium. Amillennialists say that the Kingdom of God is eternal, not temporal, and that we should not expect Christ to reign physically on earth with His saints. Instead, they believe that we are currently in the millennium age, that the souls of deceased believers who are in God's presence also are reigning with God, satisfying Revelation 20. The present form of God's Kingdom will be followed by Christ's return, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and Christ's eternal reign over the final kingdom on the new earth.

On page 161 is a chart that compares four positions on the sequence of the end times. No one of these positions is clearly predominant in Reformed circles. The Westminster Confession does not speak to a millennial view. In his *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof takes the amillennial position, while Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield are postmillennial. Few Reformed thinkers would agree with the detailed and literal approach of Dispensational Premillennialism.

By whatever sequence of events, we can look forward to the new creation.

# Practical Leadership Applications

How does the coming of the "End Times" impact our leadership today?

As Christians, there are some things about which we can be sure:

- God remains in charge of history.
- We have a purpose here.
- The Lord will return.
- This age of struggle will end in a time of righteous judgment by Jesus.
- For every one of us, our time on earth is limited and will certainly end.
- One day, we will rule and reign with Christ forever.

So, how do we lead our churches in the meantime? We must do more than wait patiently, right? We are to do more than argue about when the end is coming, or about how it will unfold. We are to make a difference here and now. We have a purpose in the midst of struggle: to glorify God by following Christ with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. The price of following Christ is clear: it is everything we have. It is all of our money. It is all of our time. It is every member of our families. It is every right we so often feel we deserve. It is every skill and talent we have, dedicated to him. The end is coming. And God promises to use us to fulfill a worthwhile purpose while we are here.

In 2 Peter 3:10-14, the Spirit warns us about the end of the age:

<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup>Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup>as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup>But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. (NIV)

The calling is to a life of holiness and unconditional obedience where the exact price is unknown. The upper limit required may be higher than you imagined. "I wouldn't go into anything where the exact price is unknown." Well, then, you cannot fully follow Jesus. You cannot live a purposeful life. One of our most significant jobs as leaders is to point our church people toward real significance and purpose in life. We are

## Why Are We Here?

*American Christianity is more like busy Martha than pensive Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet. It expands more in breadth than in depth. It is often carried on like a secular business, and in a mechanical or utilitarian spirit. It lacks the beautiful enamel of deep fervor and heartiness, true mysticism, an appreciation of history and the church; it wants a profound and spiritual theology; but under the mask of orthodoxy it often conceals, without intending or knowing it, the tendency to be superficial. This is especially evident in the doctrine of the church, of the Sacraments, and in the meagerness of the worship ... a rush of minutes wherein nothing is left but dry preaching, a little prayer, and some singing.*  
~Philip Schaff, Swiss theologian, 1854

to teach them and model for them a life of unconditional obedience. As leaders, we must prepare ourselves and then prepare others.

### ***For Group Discussion or Reflection***

Yes, the end is coming, and no person knows exactly when. A popular country song contains these words, "I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying." In some ways, this is the truth of the coming end of the age—we are to live as if our time here is limited. Some questions to discuss honestly:

- What if Christ returns this month? Are we willing to live as if Christ were at the door, a minute away?
- What if God gives us another 10 years? Another 20? How will we use them?
- What if following Christ in these "last days" costs far more than we think?
- How prepared is our congregation for the difficulties somewhere ahead?
- Are we looking forward to the "Day of God?"
- Are we teaching people to live with an air of expectancy?
- What spiritual skills can we learn and teach others that will be useful preparation for the future, no matter what happens or when it happens?
- How can we help our members go deeper in their faith so that they are ready for anything?
- How do we help them "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him?"

### ***Additional Resources***

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 32-33.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 661-736.

Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Abridged Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), pp. 509-542.

R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992).

# Views Concerning Last Things

from H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Zondervan Publishing, 1992).

Used by permission.

Categories	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism	Historic Premillennialism	Dispensational Premillennialism
<i>Second Coming of Christ</i>	Single event; no distinction between rapture and second coming; introduces eternal state.	Single event; no distinction between rapture and second coming; Christ returns after millennium.	Rapture and second coming simultaneous; Christ returns to reign on earth.	Second coming in two phases; rapture of church; second coming to earth 7 years later.
<i>Resurrection</i>	General resurrection of believers and unbelievers at second coming of Christ.	General resurrection of believers and unbelievers at second coming of Christ.	Resurrection of believers at beginning of millennium. Resurrection of unbelievers at end of millennium.	Distinction in two resurrections: 1. Church at rapture; 2. Old Testament/tribulation saints at second coming; 3. Unbelievers at end of millennium.
<i>Judgments</i>	General judgment of all people.	General judgment of all people.	Judgment at second coming. Judgment at end of tribulation.	Distinction in judgment: 1. Believers' works at Rapture; 2. Jews/Gentiles at end of tribulation; 3. Unbelievers at end of millennium.
<i>Tribulation</i>	Tribulation is experienced in this present age.	Tribulation is experienced in this present age.	Post-tribulation view: church goes through the future tribulation.	Pretribulation view: church is raptured prior to tribulation.
<i>Millennium</i>	No literal millennium on earth after second coming.	Present age blends into millennium because of progress of the gospel.	Millennium is both present and future; Christ is reigning in heaven; Millennium not necessarily 1,000 years.	At second coming Christ inaugurates literal 1,000-year millennium on earth.
<i>Israel and the Church</i>	Church is the new Israel; No distinction between Israel and church.	Church is the new Israel; No distinction between Israel and church.	Some distinction between Israel and church. Future for Israel, but church is spiritual Israel.	Complete distinction between Israel and church; Distinct program for each.
<i>Adherent Theologians</i>	Louis Berkhof Oswald T. Allis G.C. Berkhouwer	Charles Hodge B.B. Warfield W.G.T. Shedd A.H. Strong	George Eldon Ladd Alexander Reese Millard J. Erickson	Lewis Sperry Chafer J. Dwight Pentecost Charles C. Ryrie John F. Walvoord

## *Eschatology Questions*

*10-1.* In what way does general eschatology differ from individual eschatology?

*10-2.* What happens to the soul when we die?

*10-3.* What events will occur before the return of Christ? (There are six—be able to name most.)

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

*10-4.* When will Jesus come?

*10-5.* Describe five characteristics of Jesus' return.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

*10-6.* What do we know about the resurrected believer?

*10-7.* Who will be the principal judge at the last judgment?

*10-8.* Will there be levels of reward in heaven? Levels of punishment in hell?

*10-9.* What is the primary difference among premillennialists, postmillennialists, and amillennialists? Briefly describe the different positions.

## CHAPTER II

# *The Purpose for which God Created the World*

It is a basic human need to have purpose in life. A bumper sticker reads: "He Who Dies with the Most Toys Wins." For this person, acquisition is purpose. Other less materially oriented people seek purpose in work, in family, or in noble causes such as the preservation of the environment or relief of hunger or disease. However, very few people on the street can readily articulate their purpose in life. Every Christian should be able to state succinctly the purpose of his or her life.

The Westminster drafters had it exactly right. The purpose for which God created the world is His glory and our good. And our purpose is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

The Reformers had five Latin phrases by which they set out the distinctives of what they believed. Each used the Latin word *solus*, meaning "alone." The Reformers affirmed "Christ alone" (*Solus Christus*); "Scripture alone" (*Sola Scriptura*); "Faith alone" (*Sola Fide*); "Grace alone" (*Sola Gratia*); and "To God alone the Glory" (*Soli Deo Gloria*). This last phrase, "To God alone the glory" was widely understood by Protestants to be the purpose of life. Johann Sebastian Bach, for instance, wrote the letters "SDG" on his manuscripts, short for *Soli Deo Gloria*, or "To God alone the glory." Bach wanted no credit for his compositions; he wanted God to receive all the credit for the music he composed.

In our unsaved, unregenerate state, we believe everything revolves around ourselves. We are the measure of everything. The universe exists for us and for our satisfaction. *When we become Christians, we see that the world and all that is in it is from God, is governed by Him, and exists for His glory.*

In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards wrote *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. Edwards' work was republished in its entirety as the second half of John Piper's 1998 book, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*. References to Edwards' work here are from Piper's book.

*From the Westminster Confession:*

"What is the chief end of man?"  
and the answer is "Man's chief end  
is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."  
(Chapter 1).

## God's Glory

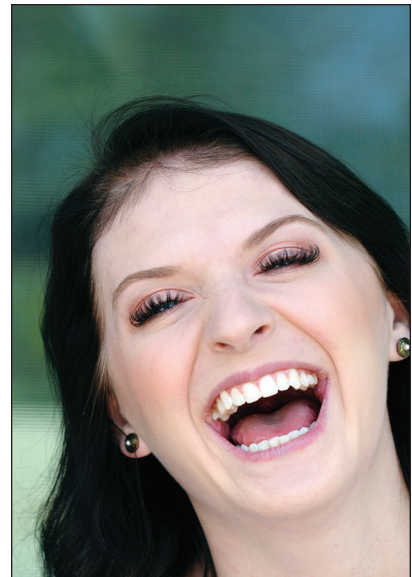
What do we mean when we speak of "God's glory?" The Bible speaks of God's glory in several respects. The most common words used are in the Hebrew *kabod* and in the Greek *doxa* (from which we get "doxology"). These words imply weight, heaviness, greatness, gravity, or abundance (*God's Passion for His Glory*, p. 231). The words fit God's character as having gravity or great weight. We say that a deep concept or thinker is "heavy," (as in the Beatles' song "He's so Heavy"), or that a person of repute is a "heavyweight."

### God's glory is His internal excellence

As we discussed in the chapter on Theology, there is no one like God. God is holy. He is self-sufficient. He is eternal. His purity of character, His power, His omnipotence—indeed all His attributes—give Him a weight—a gravity—which is the source of His glory.

As God is described in the Bible, His character overflows with goodness. This overflow, *the external display of God's internal character, also is referred to as His glory*. Paul would "pray that out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you ..." (Ephesians 3:16) and promise "that my God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory ..." (Philippians 4:19). God's provision of strength and supply of needs is the external manifestation of His internal goodness, and therefore displays His glory.

Sometimes God's glory can be *physically displayed*. For instance, when the shepherds in Bethlehem were told of the newborn Jesus, "the glory of the Lord shone about them" (Luke 2:9). When Moses saw just the rear of God, the "Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was" (2 Corinthians 2:7).



### *From the Westminster Confession:*

"By their profession of faith saints are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion with each other in the worship of God and in the performance of other spiritual services for their mutual improvement. They are also bound to help each other in material things according to their different abilities and needs. This fellowship is to be offered, as God gives the opportunity, to everyone in every place who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus."  
(Chapter 26, 2).

God's glory may also be equated with its expression of honor and the *praises of His people*. The Psalms commend His people to glorify God by rejoicing in Him. And God's glory also may be equated with *His name*, which is to be kept holy and spread to all the nations. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" (Psalm 8:1). "Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake." (Psalm 79:9). *God's fame*, that He is known to the nations, is also His glory.

*In summary, God's glory is His supreme value—arising from His character—and the outward expression of that character among men.*

### *All that Is, Gives Glory to God*

We tend to put ourselves at the center of all God has done. For instance, on a trip to the mountains we can see a place of beauty where God's work is displayed in breathtaking views of the stars at night, in alpine lakes, swift streams, cloudbursts in the peaks, and delicate wildflowers. On a trip to the ocean we may see a glimpse of God's mighty power. And why



## *From the Westminster Confession:*

"God guarantees the adoption of all those who are justified in and for the sake of His only son, Jesus Christ. Those adopted enjoy the liberties and privileges of God's children, have His name put on them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry, Abba, Father. They are pitied, protected, provided for, and disciplined by Him as a father. They are never cast off, however, and are sealed until the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation."  
(Chapter 12, 1).

did God create this world? I tend to put myself at the center of God's creation. I tend to think that God created the world so that I would have a beautiful place to work and live and to enjoy. The same holds true for the plan of salvation—I tend to think that God created the plan of salvation for my benefit.

These statements are true, of course. The world is a beautiful place for me to work and live, and I have benefited by the plan of salvation. But the Bible also makes clear that all God has created, and all that God does is for His glory, as well as my benefit. God is concerned for His own glory.

### **The entire creation gives glory to God**

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is excellent, His glory is above the earth and the heavens" (Psalm 148:13).

### **The natural world gives glory to God**

In Psalm 19, the works of God are said to declare the glory of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands." The Eighth Psalm proclaims, "You have set your glory above the heavens, from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise."

### **The plan of election gives glory to God**

"In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace ..." (Ephesians 1:5-6).

### **All redemptive history gives glory to God**

God has worked throughout redemptive history for His own glory. God created man for His own glory (Isaiah 43:7). He frustrated the building of the Tower of Babel as men tried to make a name for themselves instead of God (Genesis 11:4). He called Abram to make Israel a nation in which God could display his glory (Isaiah 49:3). When He gave the Law, God declared that no other gods would be glorified before Him (Exodus 20:3-5).

God's support of the rebellious wanderers in the desert (Ezekiel 20:21-22), the conquest of Canaan (2 Samuel 7:23), the establishment of the monarchy (1 Samuel 12:19-23), the building of the temple (1 Kings 8:41-45), Israel's return from exile (Isaiah 48:9-11) and the other steps in redemptive history are taken by God "for His own sake" or "for His name's sake."

### **The work of Christ on the cross was for God's glory**

In John 12, Jesus was troubled at the prospect of His own death. But He was strengthened by the purpose of the cross, which is the glory of God. Jesus says that His purpose, like a fallen kernel of wheat, is to spread many seeds which will glorify God. The Father assured Him by a voice from heaven that God will be glorified. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:23-29). Jesus' death on the cross was to glorify God.

### **The good works of the redeemed give glory to God**

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8). "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise [glorify] your father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14).

### **The work of God in missions and outreach give glory to God**

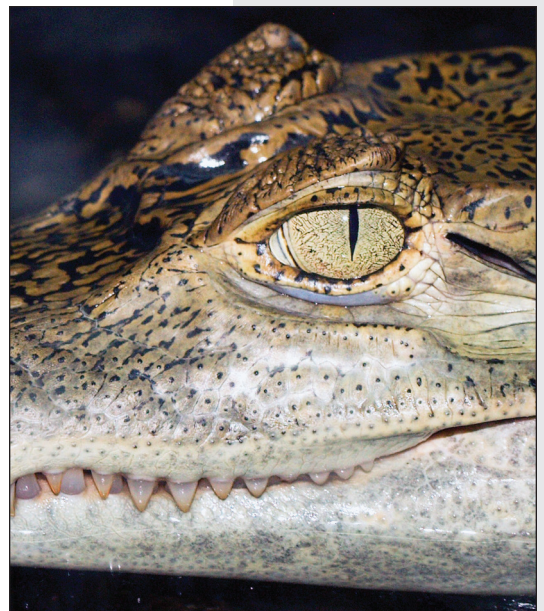
In Isaiah 60:6, God proclaims the coming conversion of the Gentiles, and says that He would send missionaries "to the faraway islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations."

### ***Reprobation Glorifies God***

All of the above seem to be a part of God's plan, working within that plan—not in rebellion against God—so it may not be surprising that they glorify God. But could God be glorified by the worst kind of person, by rebels, by murderers, liars, genocidal maniacs? The Westminster Confession 3.3 affirms what the Bible says that *even reprobates, the wicked and the unrighteous—those most in rebellion—are for God's glory.*

How can this be? Proverbs 6:4 says, "The Lord works out everything for His own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster." This proverb says that even the wicked exist for God's purposes.

Of course, we know the outcome at the end of the world. Philippians 2 assures us that at the end "every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord



# *Leadership in Weakness, Suffering, and Pain: Soul-Making*

Could God create a world that had only the possibility of good and pleasure but not for evil and pain? Perhaps so, but C.S. Lewis believed such a world would have been "a lesser place" which would limit the growth of our character and souls. Think about what we learn from our struggles in a broken, evil world: a dependence on God, a desperate need for repentance, a mutual dependence on each other, a clarity between fear and faith, an understanding of depths of human evil, and the deep "Good news!" of the Gospel. Create a world that is all sweetness and pleasure—and we lose the best teacher for humility, sacrificial love, heroism, endurance, perseverance, patience, cooperation, dependence, kindness, comfort, long-suffering, or hope?

Mother Teresa of Calcutta writes, "Suffering—pain, humiliation, sickness, and failure—is but a kiss of Jesus. Suffering is a gift of God, a gift that makes us most Christlike. People must not accept suffering as punishment." Martin Luther King Jr., would often say, "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." Warriors like Navy SEALs repeat this, too. We don't completely understand it, but suffering and pain in an evil-tainted world are God's sovereign choice for humanity, and His design for our ultimate strengthening and His ultimate Glory. Paul understands this glorious "gift" of painful soul-making:

"He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."  
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Art Lindsley, Senior Fellow with the C.S. Lewis Institute, adds considerable clarity to this discussion of theodicy (the study of God in suffering). In the Winter 2003 issue of *Knowing & Doing*, the quarterly journal of the C.S. Lewis Institute, Lindsley wrote:

In his book *Creative Suffering*, Paul Tournier [Swiss doctor, counselor, and theologian] argues that all great human leaders have had to overcome painful experiences in order to rise to their prominent leadership positions. To be without pain tends to keep your life on the surface of things. With pain you have the choice of how to face it—be overcome by it or rise above it. Pain presents an opportunity for victory or defeat. Above all, it wakes us up and makes us ask very basic questions that we might not ask otherwise. Lewis says in *The Problem of Pain*:

*... pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world ... It plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.*

Pain not only gets our attention, but it shatters the illusion that whatever things we have are enough to satisfy us. It is so very easy for us to divert or distract ourselves from looking at what is most important in life.

When we experience even relatively minor pain, say of a toothache, we cannot do much else until we get it relieved. And, many types of pain are far greater than a toothache. However, when we are in over our heads, in the depths of despair we cry out to God in a way that we seldom, perhaps never, do otherwise. Lewis quotes Augustine to the effect that: "God wants to give us something but cannot because our hands are full—there's nowhere for Him to put it."

Pain and suffering provide opportunities for heroism and for great good, as we saw in the events surrounding September 11, 2001. Not only policemen and firemen, but also many ordinary people gave their lives or worked to alleviate the pain of those involved. But pain can also crush someone to the point of despair. There is in suffering the possibility of real gain or real loss. Lewis maintains that in this world we live in the "vale of soul-making" where we have serious choices and consequences over how we respond to evil.

to the glory of God the Father." Note that all people—even those "under the earth," the dead and those in rebellion, whether or not they were voluntarily willing to honor God in life—will acknowledge Christ. And note that our knees will be bent to Jesus to the glory of God.

As an example, the Bible says that Pharaoh was raised up for God's glory. "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 4:14). "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'" (Romans 9:17, Exodus 9:16). Of course, this happened when Pharaoh's army drowned. God's glory also is displayed to God's people when God bears with us patiently but shows His wrath to Pharaoh and others whom God will destroy for their sin (Romans 9:22-23).

Although this is hard for us to take in, God is glorified in His love when He shows mercy, and God is glorified in His justice when He judges the rebellious. *God is glorified in everything, from His creation of the world, to the plan of salvation; He is even glorified in the most rebellious sinner.*

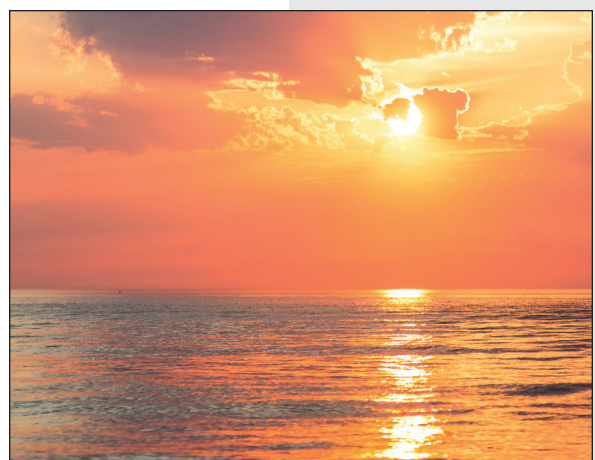
### ***God's Glory is the "Ultimate End" of the World***

Edwards says that God's glory is the "ultimate end" of the world, or what we would call the ultimate purpose. The ultimate purpose is that which lies behind everything else, the one most valued.

Think about getting in the car to pick up a prescription at the pharmacy. In going into the garage, I might have several purposes—but only one ultimate purpose. Getting the car was a purpose; driving to the pharmacy was a purpose; obtaining the medicine was a purpose. But my ultimate purpose was for my son to be well. My ultimate purpose was the one that lay behind all others.

In Revelation 1:8, God is described as "the Alpha and the Omega." In Isaiah 48:12, He is "the beginning and the end." Of course, this is true in regard to time. If God created everything, He existed before anything else. And if everything else will decay and deteriorate, He will be there after everything else. But God is also the beginning and end *in purpose* for everything. Romans 11:35-36 says, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever!" Everything that exists was created by Him. Everything that exists is sustained through Him. Everything is *to* God, meaning that it is *for His glory*.

*God's ultimate purpose in the world is His own glory.*



## *Addressing Troubling Questions*

Yet several troubling questions arise. Edwards addressed these well.

### **Is God inappropriately concerned with His glory?**

In giving the Ten Commandments, God ordains first that the people shall have no other gods before Him, and He says that He is a jealous God. In other words, His first aim in giving the Law is that we give Him the honor He alone is due. In Isaiah 48, God says that He will do what He wills for His own sake, and that, "I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11) As discussed above, God has ordered everything for His own glory. This may make us squirm in discomfort.

In World War II, General Douglas MacArthur was Commander of the U.S. Army forces in the Pacific theater. MacArthur had a considerable ego, and when another general of lesser rank became too popular, MacArthur made sure that the general was "buried"—given an obscure post with no access to the press. The objective, of course, was to make sure that MacArthur alone received the adulation to which he thought he was entitled. Not a pretty picture. Is God like that? Is God inappropriately concerned with His glory? Is God small-minded and selfish in seeking praise and the fame of His name? Should we be troubled by God's interest in his own glory?

We must first recognize that God is truth, and that He will never lie—He cannot do so. And we must secondly recognize that His nature and character are infinitely superior to His creatures' ways. Jonathan Edwards says, "But if God be indeed so great and so excellent that all other beings are as nothing to Him, and all other excellency be as less than nothing, and vanity in comparison with His, and if God be omniscient and infallible, and perfectly knows that He is infinitely the most valuable being, then it is fit that His heart should be agreeable to this—and that He should value Himself infinitely more than His creatures." *In infinitely valuing His own glory, God is not inappropriate. He merely sees things as they are and acts accordingly.*

### **But does God really love us?**

Another question logically arises here. If God's glory is infinitely valuable to Him, does He really care about us? One might get the impression that God has ordered everything selfishly for His own good, that He does not care about us and even that we are simply puppets in God's play to display His glory. But *there is no conflict between God's valuing His own glory, and His seeking our happiness, our joy, in Him. In fact, they are the same thing.* God's character overflows with happiness. God is compared in the Bible to an infinite source of water and an overflowing spring. God's delight within Himself spills over to His creation and His people. God is love.

Edwards says, "Many have wrong notions of God's happiness, as resulting from His absolute self-sufficiency, independence, and immutability. Though it is true that God's glory and happiness are in and of Himself, are infinite and cannot be added to ... yet it does not hence follow, nor is it true, that God has no real delight, pleasure or happiness in any of His acts or communications relative to the creature or effects He produces in them, or in anything He sees in the creature's qualifications, dispositions, actions, or state. God may have a real and proper pleasure or happiness in seeing the happy state of the creature; yet this may not be different from delight in His own infinite goodness ... (*God's Passion for His Glory*, p. 163). God's respect to the creature's good and His respect to Himself is not a divided respect; both are united in one, as *the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with Himself*" (*God's Passion for His Glory*, p. 249).



God's happiness overflows to a joy in us as His creation. We are assured of God's love in several respects. First, although we were deserving of death for our sins and trespasses, both Adam's and our own, God preserved us and provides all mankind with His common grace.

Second and most importantly, the three persons of the Trinity ordered the plan of salvation from the very beginning. God predestined us to election even before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Jesus is the lamb slain from the beginning of the world (Revelation 13:8). He ordered good for us from the outset. The cross is the most powerful evidence that God is not far off, acting as a puppet-master. The physical and spiritual pain and suffering of the cross was real and would be borne only by a God who loves us.

At the right time, the Holy Spirit calls us to declare that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). We are assured that all things presently work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). And we know that God has only good for us in the future as we enter into the joy of our Master (Matthew 25:21) and live with Him in a place in which there is no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

God has loved us from the beginning by preserving and choosing us, has loved us on the cross, loves us now by His providence, and will show His love for us in the future by bringing us to Himself completely. *God's goodness to us is the outworking of God's internal goodness.*

## *Glorifying God*

If the ultimate purpose of the world, and all in it, is to glorify God, then you and I are created for the purpose of glorifying God. Our family and our church are also to glorify God.

*How* do Christians glorify God? What does it mean to glorify God? Most of us would think first about worship—Sunday worship service, prayer, and praise of God, study of the Bible. Of course, we glorify God in the act of worship. But glorifying God is both simpler and more difficult than that.

*We glorify God when we make Him supreme in everything we do.*

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul gives us the key to glorifying God in everything. The Corinthians struggled with whether they could eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols—not on its face an issue we would

commonly confront today. Paul says they were free to do so, "for the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." But Paul also recognized that the eating of meat sacrificed to idols would bother some people. He goes on to say that the Corinthians should not eat the meat if it would cause temptation to anyone else. The more general application of the passage is that a Christian should rein in his freedom for the conscience, or even the weakness, of another. But Paul then concludes the passage with an even broader application to all of life, saying "*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

There it is. *When we eat or drink or whatever we do, we can glorify God.*

The Corinthians could glorify God by making decisions about eating and drinking with supreme regard for God. When we put aside what we perceive to be our rights and make God pre-eminent—when we are satisfied in Him—we glorify God, whether in eating or drinking or anything else. When God is first in our actions and thinking, we glorify Him. When we put Him in His rightful place as the center of our decision, we glorify God. To paraphrase the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the chief purpose of man is to "glorify God by enjoying Him forever." By making God the source of our pleasure, our greatest source of enjoyment and satisfaction, we glorify Him. To glorify God is to have supreme regard for Him in everything.

In one sense, glorifying God is simple. God is glorified when He has His rightful place as the ultimate purpose in our lives. God is glorified every



time we put Him first in our family decisions, our relationships, our dating, our ethics, our money decisions, and all else.

But in another sense, glorifying God is so very difficult to actually do. Unbelievers unabashedly focus on the creation instead of the Creator as the source of satisfaction in life—pursuing satisfaction in pleasure, money, status, education, or any other created thing instead of in God. As believers, we also continue to seek satisfaction in places other than our God. This makes the created thing an idol.

### ***We are Most Satisfied when God is Most Glorified***

It is true that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. The converse is also true. We are most satisfied when God is most glorified. God has made us to be satisfied in Him. Over and over, Scripture tells us that we will be satisfied in God. We are exhorted in the Psalms to be joyful in God. "*Delight* yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). "*Rejoice* in the Lord and *be glad* you righteous" (Psalm 32:11). "*Shout for joy* to the Lord, all the earth" (Psalm 100:1).

Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a treasure hidden in a field. "When a man found it, he hid it again, and then *in his joy* went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:44). The field and its treasure—the Kingdom of Heaven—bring the man more joy than all else the man has. The Beatitudes reflect this same idea. The Greek word we translate "blessed," *makarios*, also means "happy." *Happy* are those who have Kingdom values, who are poor in spirit, who mourn for their sinfulness, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Imprisoned in Rome, Paul writes to the Philippians, "*Rejoice* in the Lord always. I will say it again: *Rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:4). He also writes of his achievements, then says, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to *the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him ..." (Philippians 3:7-9). To Paul, nothing fulfills in comparison with knowing Christ.

The writer of Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). What are we to believe about God? First that He exists, and second that *He rewards those who seek Him*.

The Bible also spells out this truth negatively—there is no fulfillment apart

*If we consider  
the unblushing promises  
of reward and the  
staggering nature  
of the rewards  
promised in the gospels,  
it would seem that  
our Lord finds our desires  
not too strong,  
but too weak.  
We are half-hearted  
creatures, fooling about  
with drink and sex  
and ambition when  
infinite joy is offered us,  
like an ignorant child  
who wants to go on  
making mud pies in a slum  
because he cannot imagine  
what is meant  
by the offer of  
a holiday at the sea.  
We are far too  
easily pleased.  
~C.S. Lewis  
"The Weight of Glory"*



from God. Consider Jeremiah 2:12-13. "Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the Lord. "My people have committed two great sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they have dug their own cisterns that cannot hold water."

Or Jeremiah 50:10-11: "Let him who has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment." God says that self-reliance and seeking fulfillment apart from God as the source of that satisfaction will never work.

Paul says in Romans 1 that to exchange the glory of the Creator for the created world is the ultimate foolishness. "For although they knew God they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, *they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal god for images* made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Romans 1:21-22). Although modern idols may be different—no longer carved images—they still are products of exchanging the glory of the Creator for the created world. Pursuing our gratification in the created world will never truly satisfy.

Even after we believe, because we are fallen we still pursue our satisfaction in the created world. We believe we will be satisfied when we find the perfect life partner, a career change, children, or a larger home. We will actually be most satisfied in knowing God's perfect character and acting out of love for God. Our passion for gratification is not too strong; instead, it is too weak, for we seek gratification in the wrong things.

Nothing else will satisfy us like God. Blaise Pascal said that in every heart there is a God-shaped vacuum. Nothing else can fill that space except God. We may try all other means to satisfaction, but nothing else will substitute for God's presence in our lives, for God has so made us. After all, God says he will not share His glory with another.

We should be clear about this: we owe God our worship, His glory—even if to do so were not to our benefit—because of His character, His perfection and His position as our creator.

But in God we also find our greatest good. He is the one who ultimately satisfies our deepest needs.

*We are most satisfied when God is most glorified.*

### ***God's Glory as the Ultimate Purpose for All***

Consider this question: "What if God's glory is the ultimate purpose for the world?"

**God's purposes are His glory and our good.**  
We should seek His glory first, and our good will follow.

**God is committed to my good as His glory.**  
God is our good. Knowing him will be our greatest source of joy and pleasure.

**The focus of the proclamation of the gospel is on God's character first, and our felt needs second.**

If God's first concern is His glory, that should be our first concern; if our good follows from God's glory, and not from following our own inclinations, we should say so.

**God's glory is most manifest in the joy of the saints in Him.**

The magnifying of God and the joy of all people in God is one end, not two.

**Sin is both sacrilege and suicide.**

If it is true that we are most satisfied when He is most glorified, then rebellion against God both dishonors Him and is eventually hurtful to our happiness.

**There is no place for "religion in its place."**

God is ultimate, not just one stall in the marketplace. Reserving God a Sunday morning worship time is not enough. Family, sports, politics, business, media, ethics, architecture, the progress of history—all are subject to God. We cannot segment God out of any interest.

**God can be glorified in our churches in any number of ways.**

One church may focus its ministry primarily on evangelism; a second focuses on Christian education; a third on missions. Each of these glorifies God by the work to which it is called. No one of these is the ultimate end; each is a "penultimate" end to the ultimate end, which is glorifying God.



*The only weapon that will triumph is a deeper hunger for God ... What is at stake here is not just the good of our souls, but also the glory of God. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. The fight of faith is a fight to feast on all that God is for us in Christ. What we hunger for most, we worship.  
~John Piper,  
"A Hunger for God"*

## *God's Glory and Our Good in Suffering*

We need to be realistic about this idea of God's glory, especially as it relates to our good. God's glory may not always lead to what looks like our good when that good is viewed through the eyes of the world. Both the Bible and modern life provide examples.

Many of the prophets were killed by the people of Israel to whom they proclaimed God's glory in His righteousness and from whom they demanded obedience. Paul, as a Jew of high repute, was converted on the road to Damascus, and later told the Corinthians of the troubles he endured for the proclamation of the message of God's glory revealed in Christ—he was flogged, exposed to death again and again, five times receiving forty lashes, three times beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked three times, in danger from rivers, lowered over Damascus walls to escape

enemies, in danger from bandits, hungry, sleepless, cold, and naked. As we have seen, Jesus strengthened Himself in contemplation of God's glory as His purpose before the crucifixion.



There are many stories of the redeemed who gave up all for God's glory—comfort, education, family, liberty, life itself. Joni Erickson was paralyzed but has said that she would not go back to health if it would mean losing God's purpose for her life. Chuck Colson went from the White House to prison but said that the glory of the White House was no

loss compared with knowing Christ. Missionary Jim Elliot willingly gave up his life for the name of Christ, saying that a man is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Brothers and sisters have been persecuted in much of the world but have given up family and education and good jobs and liberty for the sake of Christ. God's glory may not look like our good as we would understand our good superficially. Yet these men and women set aside what appeared to be their good for the promise that God's glory is their good.

*God's purpose in creating the world, the church, and His people is the display of His glory, and we are most satisfied when He is most glorified.*

# Practical Leadership Applications

How do we, as leaders, work toward accomplishing God's strategic purpose for our church?

God has created us for a purpose. Globally, we are all here to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. But in a more strategic sense, God has a special plan for every group of believers in every place and time: a way we are to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. In leadership terms, seeking and unveiling this unique plan is called Strategic Planning. Below are some steps and key questions a leadership team must prayerfully wrestle with. Discuss them as a team.



## Strategic Planning:

### Seven Steps to Making a Vision into Reality

#### 1. Prayerfully seek an Organizational Mission: "Why does God have us here?"

- Lord, what do you want us to do here and now?
- What is our call as a church?
- What is our passion?
- What is our drive or motivation?

#### Seek an Organizational Vision

- What does this look like here and now?
- What target group or area are we to seek and serve?
- What is our location? What opportunities have we been given?
- What will it look like if we are successful here and now?

#### 2. Seek an Organizational Structure

- How do we do this? What is the best way this can be done?
- What barriers do we need to overcome?
- How do we structure ourselves to minimize these barriers?  
What methods will work most effectively?
- What needs do we have, or will we have? What resources do we have, or will we need?

#### 4. Plan an Organizational Culture

- What is the best environment to accomplish this?
- What structural and/or staffing environment will help us accomplish our call?
- What particular church "color" or "flavor" or "brand" will be most effective?
- How will we get our team to buy into this call?
- What people do we have, or will we need to be successful?"

### 5. Agree on Organizational Values

- What are the rules of behavior we agree to follow as we do this?
- What are our ethics of operation and standards of conduct?
- What are our core values?
- How will we communicate these widely and clearly?

### 6. List Strategic Objectives

- How do we start this process?
- What steps do we sense God has ahead of us?
- What major milestones flow from the vision?
- What are our organizational benchmarks?
- How will we continually check to see that we are on God's path?
- What timelines do we see ahead?
- Who will measure our progress, and how often?

### 7. Create Narrow Initiatives

- What are the objectives for each department/functional unit that flow from the vision?
- How do we all work together toward this goal or mission?
- What will each specific department's or individual's successes look like? How will we measure each department's or individual's progress?
- How will we set and evaluate each department's or individual's timelines? How will we clearly communicate successes and/or struggles with all involved?

### *Additional Resources*

James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Vol. 3: God and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), pp. 1409-1480.

John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1986). See especially Appendix 1.

John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998). This book republishes Jonathan Edwards' *The End for Which God Created the World*.

# *The Purpose for Which God Created the World*

## *Questions*

*11-1.* Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose for the world is the display of His own glory?

*11-2.* Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose for the church is the display of His own glory?

*11-3.* Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose for you is the display of His own glory?

*11-4.* What truth about God's character is set out in Luke 12:32-34? What about our response?

*11-5.* What does 1 Corinthians 10:31 tell us about glorifying God?

*11-6.* How do churches fail to glorify God?

*11-7.* How does our church's mission or purpose statement line up with God's ultimate purpose for creating the world?

*11-8.* How do we as Christians fail to glorify God?

*11-9.* What opportunities to glorify God are presented in comfortable times? What dangers are there in comfortable times?

*11-10.* What opportunities to glorify God are presented in difficult times? What dangers are there in difficult times?

## CHAPTER 12

# Church Government

We said earlier that our tradition can be described in two ways: *Reformed in faith* and *Presbyterian in government*. So far we have focused on doctrine and have discussed what it means to be Reformed in faith. We will now focus on church government and what it means to be Presbyterian.

### Church Government

There are three basic forms by which churches govern themselves: Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian.

#### Episcopal Church Government

This form is government from the top down and is sometimes referred to as "hierarchical." Individuals are elected or selected by some practice, and a hierarchy of authority is established. The Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church are both hierarchical. The Methodist Church is a modified form of the hierarchical government.



#### Congregational Church Government

This form is at the other end of the spectrum. Each local congregation is separate and independent from any other governing or controlling body. In some cases, such independent churches may affiliate with other like-minded congregations to develop common programs, such as missions programs, youth programs, seminaries, or women's programs, but no held authority supersedes the power and control of the local church. Examples of this kind of church government include the Disciples of Christ (the Christian Church), the Church of Christ, and most Baptist churches.

#### Presbyterian Church Government

This form is, we believe, the best of both worlds. The local congregation has certain inalienable rights and privileges and duties, yet at the same time the unity of the church is maintained through *connectionalism*. The process by which Presbyterian churches are connected is called *review and control*. Because of the rights reserved to the local congregation, the authority of the denomination to dictate the direction of the local

church is limited. But the local congregation is also subject to admonition and check through the review and control process.

The word "presbyterian" comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, meaning "elder," because we are ruled by elders. Presbyterian government is sometimes referred to as "representative" or "connectional" government, or "government of mixed polity."

### **Governing Documents**

Our form of government is established by our governing documents. The Book of Order is comprised of three sections: The Book of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Book of Worship.

## *The Local Congregation*

### **The Work of the Local Church**

Chapter 4 of the Book of Order spells out the work of the local church. The congregation is to worship regularly. The church's first duty is to evangelize, and the fruit of faith will be ministry to those in need. The church is encouraged to provide for instruction of children, the nurture of church members, the welfare of the church, the provision of the sacraments, teaching of the faith, and the observation of special days, including times of prayer and fasting.

### **The Origin of a Local Church**

How is a local church started? Chapter 5 of the Book of Order provides that a mission church is established by the Presbytery. The Presbytery



may do this by appointing an evangelist or a commissioned pastor, arranging a mother-daughter relationship between the Session of an existing church and the mission church, or by appointing an administrative commission to serve as a temporary Session of the mission church. At such time as the Presbytery deems the mission church ready, the mission church will be made a local church, with the right to be represented at Presbytery and with the rights of a congregation described below. A Presbytery also may receive local

churches that are independent or that are leaving another denomination.

### **Membership of a Local Church**

There are three classes of church members provided in Chapter 6 of the Book of Order:

1. *Confirmed members* are adults who have been admitted to membership by the Session by one of the means described below. They are entitled to participate in the governing of the church by way of voting in congregational meetings.
2. *Baptized members* are children who have been baptized and whose parents are confirmed members. They are entitled to nurture, instruction, and pastoral oversight, but may not vote.
3. *Affiliate members* are individuals separated geographically from a home church—usually due to serving in the military or being a college student. They are entitled to pastoral care, but not to vote. Affiliate membership must be renewed annually.

The Session may receive new confirmed members in several ways, as described in the Book of Order, Chapter 8. New members may be received from another church by *transfer of membership*. New Christians may be received by *profession of faith*. If a Christian joins the congregation from another denomination that will not cooperate with a transfer of membership, the member may be received by *reaffirmation of faith*.

### **Rights Reserved to a Local Church**

We said above that each local congregation has certain rights that the denomination cannot take away. The local church has six rights, described in Chapters 6 and 25 of the Book of Government:

1. To elect Elders and officers.
2. To determine if it will have a board of Deacons.
3. To own its property.
4. To call its Pastor, subject to the Presbytery's concurrence.
5. To determine its own benevolence and budgetary objectives.
6. Certain matters of conscience.

### **Dissolution or Dismissal of a Local Church**

Local congregations also have the right to withdraw from the EPC through a specific process. The Presbytery will dismiss a church (with its property) upon the two-thirds vote of the congregation. The Presbytery may also dissolve a church that is no longer viable, and then may receive the church's property.

### ***EPC Church Courts***

As noted above, Presbyterian churches are connected by review and control. In the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, three levels of courts provide review and control: the Session, the Presbytery, and the General Assembly.

### **The Session**

In the local congregation, the people elect individuals as *Ruling Elders* to be their representatives. These Ruling Elders, along with the *Teaching Elders*—the pastors of a congregation—form the *Session*, the body that governs the local congregation.

### **The Presbytery**

But this Session, the court that governs the local congregation, is related to a higher court, called the *Presbytery*. A Presbytery is a governing unit, or a court of the church, that is made up of all of the congregations in a specified geographical area.

The Presbytery also is made up of representatives—"*Commissioners*"—from the Sessions within the Presbytery. Each Session is represented by its Pastors and two Ruling Elders for each Pastor it has. For example, if a congregation has two Pastors, it would be entitled to have the two Pastors and four Ruling Elders at the Presbytery.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has a unique and distinctive feature that no other Presbyterian body in America has. In the EPC, we believe that historically a part of the genius of Presbyterianism has been the participation of the Ruling Elders—laymen—within the life of the whole church. In many Presbyterian denominations in America, control of the body has fallen under the ministers, leading to a clergy dominated church. When that happens, the church tends to drift into one of two directions. If the ministers are very liberal, then the denomination drifts into liberalism that removes the church from its historic moorings. On the other hand, if the ministers are ultra-conservative, the denomination tends to get lost in theological "nit-picking" that also diverts it from its main purpose. Therefore, the EPC has sought to prevent this diversion of the church from its purpose by assuring the important role of laymen and working to prevent it from being dominated by the clergy alone.

We have the Session and we have the Presbytery, which is made up of the pastors and representatives of all the Sessions within the Presbytery boundaries. How are these two courts related? By review and control. This means that the Presbytery reviews the work of the Session to see that it is functioning according to the constitution of the church and conducting its business in accord with its duties. The Presbytery, within the limits of the constitution, has some control over the local Session. For example, if there is serious trouble within the congregation, the Presbytery may come in and do whatever might be necessary to restore peace and harmony.

### **The General Assembly**

Like the local church Session, the Presbytery is under the review and

control of a higher court. In this case, it is the *General Assembly*. The General Assembly is composed of representatives—Commissioners—from all of the churches of the denomination. You might think that the General Assembly would be comprised of commissioners from the Presbyteries, but this is not the case. Commissioners to the Assembly are all of the Pastors, and for each Pastor from a congregation, two Ruling Elders.

### Review and Control

How do these courts exercise review and control? By means described in Chapters 13-24 of the Book of Government. The *minutes of each court are reviewed annually* by the court above, Presbytery reviewing Session proceedings and General Assembly reviewing Presbytery proceedings. Lower courts may ask for a *reference* from a higher court, a request for advice on some sticky issue. A party to a decision or disciplinary matter may file a *complaint* or an *appeal* to the higher court.

In addition, there are certain matters undertaken by higher courts that affect local congregations. Perhaps most importantly, each Presbytery has a hand in the *congregation's relationship with its ministers*. Although the congregation calls its Pastors, the Pastor called will be examined by representatives of the Presbytery who must approve the call (Book of Government, Chapter 10). Each Presbytery has a Ministerial Committee that reviews the relationship between the church and Pastor, his work, and compensation (Book of Government, chapter 21-2).

### *The Authority of the Church*

It is important to understand the kind of authority the church and its officers have. "The authority given to the Church by Christ is moral and spiritual, thus distinguishing the government of the church from civil government. The authority of the Church resides in the Church as exercised in its courts and not in individuals" (Book of Government, 3-1). In the Book of Government, we are told that there are two kinds of authority in the church. First, there is the *responsibility of order*, and second, there is the *authority of jurisdiction*.

### The Responsibility of Order

The responsibility of order is the authority given to a person elected to the office of Deacon or Ruling Elder or Pastor. It is the *authority to serve* (Book of Government, 3-2). It is the authority to proclaim Jesus and to minister in the name of Christ. The responsibility of order especially includes sharing the gospel, reproving the erring, visiting the sick, and letting the fruit of the Spirit be revealed in one's life.

### The Authority of Jurisdiction

However, the authority of jurisdiction is the *authority to rule* (Book of

*The need for oversight—  
wisdom from  
Nachman of Breslov  
(Polish Rabbi, d. 1810)*

*"It was hard  
for Satan alone to  
mislead the whole world,  
so he appointed leaders  
in different locales."*

*"The man who  
can't take criticism  
can't become great.  
When a man is able  
to take abuse with a smile,  
he is worthy  
to become a leader."*

*"God will forget the man  
who stubbornly rejects  
proof that he is wrong."*

Government, 3-3). And here is the important thing: the authority of jurisdiction, this authority to rule, is never an individual authority. *It is always a joint authority.* It is an authority that is exercised collectively as a Session or a Presbytery or a General Assembly.

This means that when an individual is ordained as an officer, that person has the responsibility of order. That is, by the act of ordination, that individual has certain duties to serve. But the authority to rule—the authority of jurisdiction—is a joint authority exercised in a court of the church.

As we have briefly mentioned above, the Board of Deacons is not a court of the church. Later we will examine the role and function of the Deacons, but the authority of jurisdiction is an authority reserved to a church court and the board is not a church court. Instead, it is under the authority of the Session.

### **Joint Authority**

The authority of jurisdiction, or the authority to rule, is a joint authority. No one person rules the local church—not an Elder and not the Pastor. Instead, the church is ruled by the joint oversight of the Session. We believe in the rule of the majority. A governing body deliberates and discusses an issue, and prays together about its decision. When the vote is taken, we have always understood this to be God acting through the majority of the court of the church. Of course, the Session, Presbytery, or General Assembly can err! However, in the ordinary process of governing the church, we must trust that God ordinarily acts through the majority of the governing body.

### **Joint Authority at Work—Church Discipline**

One of the areas where joint power is exercised is in church discipline. One entire book of the Book of Order—the Book of Discipline—is devoted to the subject. Church discipline can have two meanings: the whole government, with its review and control processes, its officers, and its courts; or a narrower meaning referring to judicial process. You will recall that when we discussed the marks of the true church, discipline was one of those marks. *But church discipline need not require frequent judicial process if the broader discipline is being exercised.* Judicial process may be exercised where there is or may be sin within the church or a dispute between members. There is a fairly detailed procedure in the Book of Discipline for carrying out judicial process.

*The purpose of church discipline is always to build up, and not to destroy.* It is exercised under a dispensation of mercy and not wrath. Its ends are the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity, general edification of the church,

and the spiritual good of the offenders themselves (Book of Discipline, chapter 1).

### **The Principle of Subjection to Each Other.**

When you are ordained, you will take a very special vow as a part of your ordination. You will be asked, "Do you promise *subjection* to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?" This means that when a vote is taken, all officers are obligated to support it and maintain the peace and unity of the church. There will be numerous times in your service as an officer when you will be in the minority on some issue. But to be Presbyterian means an officer is in subjection to the majority decision and supports it. If we don't do that, we will damage or destroy the local congregation, as well as violate ordination vows.

### **Conclusion—Who Do the Representatives Represent?**

In conclusion, we have the representative system of government. The local congregation elects representatives called Ruling Elders who have a joint power of jurisdiction to rule the local congregation. The Session then elects representatives called Commissioners to the Presbytery and the General Assembly, who have the power of jurisdiction to rule in those two courts. Now, the question is: whom does this representative government represent? For example, when there are important issues before the Session, is a Ruling Elder to go out and survey the congregation to find out people's wants and wishes and then represent those members at a Session meeting? The answer to that question is "no."

*First and foremost, a representative to a governing body of the church is to represent Jesus Christ. Therefore, the primary job of the Session—above all other options or distractions—is to humbly seek, hear, and obey the leading of our Chief Shepherd.*

This means that a representative, a Ruling Elder, or a Commissioner to a higher court is to vote on issues according to the leading of the Holy Spirit and according to his best conscience. Historically, the church has forbidden a governing body to instruct its Commissioners to a higher court as to how they should vote. So, in our representative form of government, a congregation elects it representatives, but it elects them to represent Jesus Christ as they rule over the congregation as its under-shepherds of the Savior.



# Practical Leadership Applications

How do we, as leaders, work effectively and joyfully for our church?

Church leadership is pressure position. In almost every church, there is a flurry of activity. Ministries are starting up or closing down. Elders are coming on, gaining speed, or going off the Session. Sermons, classes, budgets, or pastoral needs are pressing in. In the midst of this flood of activity, leaders can feel overwhelmed. We may think too much or too little of ourselves. Doing things well can become "just doing things."

## Ten Reminders for Christian Life and Leadership

No matter what other people tell you...

1. **Don't think that you have all the answers.**  
*That omniscient position has been permanently and effectively filled.*
2. **Don't think that you should have all the answers.**  
*Just wrestling with the right questions is hard enough.*
3. **Don't think you know exactly what others should do.**  
*We can lead in biblical paths, but must leave the final footprints to God.*
4. **Don't think you can resolve every problem.**  
*If you could, Jesus would be unnecessary.*
5. **Don't ever motivate someone by using guilt or manipulation.**  
*While it may seem to work in the short-term, it always creates deep wounds and anger.*
6. **Don't ever absorb someone else's guilt.**  
*Martyrdom is a call to be accepted, not a long-term profession to be perfected.*
7. **Don't think that ministry is supposed to be easy.**  
*If you do, you haven't been reading your Bible enough.*
8. **Don't allow secrets but keep confidences.**  
*Secrets are based on maintaining power. Confidentiality seeks to protect the weak.*
9. **Don't forget that trust is a powerful but fragile, priceless thing.**  
*Once trust is broken, the glue of repair seems to take forever to dry.*
10. **Don't think you can change others.**  
*You can teach them, lead them, support them, love them, and model health for them. Only the Holy Spirit does long-term transformation.*

## *Church Government Questions*

*12-1.* Name and describe the three basic forms of church government.

*12-2.* Name the governing document of EPC church government and the three parts that comprise it.

*12-3.* What are the three methods for how a local church can get started?

*12-4.* What are the three types of members in an EPC church?

*12-5.* What are the three ways a person can become a confirmed member of an EPC church?

*12-6.* What are some of the rights reserved to a local congregation?

*12-7.* What are the three courts of the EPC? How are they related?

*12-8.* What are some of the means of review and control in the EPC?

*12-9.* What are the two kinds of authority in the Presbyterian church? How are they different?

*12-10.* Who do the representatives in EPC government represent?

## CHAPTER 13

# *The Officers of the Church*

In this chapter, we will examine the qualifications and responsibilities of church officers. In addition to the Scripture passages below, read Book of Government Chapter 9 (also skim Chapters 10-13), and Book of Worship Chapter 2, paragraphs 2-4A, 2-5D, 2-6D, 2-7B, 4-2 Introduction, and 4-2A.

### *Some Scriptures Regarding Officers*

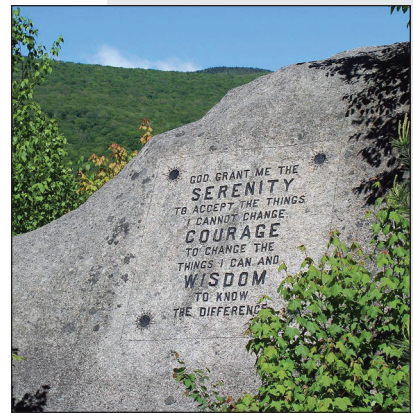
#### **1 Timothy 3:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup>(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup>He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

<sup>8</sup>Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. <sup>11</sup>In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. <sup>12</sup>A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. <sup>13</sup>Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **Exodus 18:13-27**

<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup>When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"



*The Lord of the Church,  
Jesus Christ,  
has given three offices  
to the Church.  
These are Teaching Elders,  
Ruling Elders, and Deacons.  
Teaching and Ruling Elders  
are also known as  
Presbyters or  
Commissioners  
and share in the  
governing of the Church.  
These offices are  
not indications of  
special pre-eminence  
by those who hold them,  
but rather indicate a call  
to service, to ministry,  
to special discipleship,  
and the evidencing  
of the fruit of the Spirit  
in every part of life.  
~Book of Government, 9-1*

<sup>15</sup>Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. <sup>16</sup>Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."

<sup>17</sup>Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup>You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. <sup>19</sup>Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. <sup>20</sup>Teach them the decrees and laws and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. <sup>21</sup>But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. <sup>22</sup>Have them serve as judges for the people at all times but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. <sup>23</sup>If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

<sup>24</sup>Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. <sup>25</sup>He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. <sup>26</sup>They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

<sup>27</sup>Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

#### **Acts 6:1-7**

<sup>1</sup>In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>So, the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word."

<sup>5</sup>This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup>The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

### Acts 20:17-38

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup>When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup>I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup>You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. <sup>21</sup>I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

<sup>22</sup>And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup>I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup>However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

<sup>25</sup>Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup>Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. <sup>27</sup>For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. <sup>29</sup>I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup>Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

<sup>32</sup>Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

<sup>33</sup>I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup>You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup>In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

<sup>36</sup>When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

<sup>37</sup>They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup>What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

### 1 Timothy 5:17-18

<sup>17</sup>The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

*The biblical image of a shepherd caring for his flock—standing long hours ensuring its safety, leading to fresh pasture and clear water, carrying the weak, seeking the lost, healing the wounded and sick—is precious. The whole image of the Palestinian shepherd is characterized by intimacy, tenderness, concern, skill, hard work, suffering, and love. It is ... as Derek Tidball remarks in his book, *Skillful Shepherds*, a "subtle blend of authority and care" and "as much toughness as tenderness, as much courage as comfort."  
~Alexander Strauch, "Biblical Eldership," 1995*

*In seeking knowledge from God, the first step is silence, the second listening, the third remembering, the fourth practicing, and the fifth, teaching others.  
~Solomon ibn Gabirol  
Jewish Rabbi, Spain  
c. 1050*

# *Practical Leadership Applications*

As leaders, how can we be more godly, effective, and durable  
as we fulfill God's call for us at this church?

A number of churches use this affirmation to remind their leaders of their commitment to Jesus as church leaders:

*A person most fit  
for high station is not  
the one who demands it.*

*~Moses ben Jacob ibn Ezra  
(11th century Spanish rabbi)*

*The true opposite  
of love is not hate  
but indifference.  
Hate, bad as it is,  
treats the neighbor  
as a "thou," whereas  
indifference turns the  
neighbor into an "it,"  
a thing.*

*~Joseph Fletcher,  
social ethicist.*

*"Situational Ethics:  
The New Morality"  
(1966)*

*He who falls in love  
with himself  
will have no rival.*

*~Benjamin Franklin,  
American author/statesman  
(d. 1790)*

## **Our Pursuit**

As Elders, Deacons, and Leaders, we are to collectively represent the "mind of Christ" for this, His church. This includes a commitment to pray, listen, discuss, and seek unity. It also means we apply energy toward the well-being and growth of individuals and families who call this church home. We are shepherds leading those God has placed under our care to green pasture, helping them to find and follow God's agenda for their lives as they grow in physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and relational maturity.

## **Our Pattern**

In all areas of our leading and serving, our ultimate guide is the truth found in the Bible. Therefore, we choose to place ourselves under the standards of love, obedience, and accountability as contained in God's Word.

## **Our Passion**

As ordained Elders or leaders, our desire to serve others stems from God's command of love to us: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as you would love yourself." It is our heartfelt desire to use our time, training, skills, aptitudes, and spiritual gifts only for purposes consistent with this command.

## **Our Power**

As undershepherds, we cannot oversee Christ's church without Christ's help. No matter how good our intentions, we cannot do what needs to be done by ourselves. Therefore, our vision, our wisdom, and our strength must be provided to us by Jesus, the Head and Chief Shepherd of this church.

*"For we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

## **Leadership Ethics**

The 35th General Assembly adopted the "Ethical Affirmations for EPC Leaders" statement for use with Candidates Under Care, and strongly encouraged its use in EPC presbyteries and churches. This lays this groundwork for the ethics and behavior required for Christian leadership.

# *Ethical Affirmations for EPC Leaders*

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all His glory. So, put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world (Colossians 3:1-5).

As EPC leaders called by God to the gospel ministry, we must recognize the eternal significance and responsibility of that call and understand that we are being watched, our actions are being evaluated, our words are being critiqued, and our attitudes are being assessed by others in the church and in the world. Because our highest call is to *do all for the glory of God* we must hold ourselves to a high standard of behavior. Therefore, we should:

## **Exalt God as Sovereign Lord of the Universe**

We should always endeavor to honor, glorify, and worship God, representing Him well in every relationship and in every endeavor.

*Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; worship the LORD in the splendor of His holiness (Psalm 29:12).*

## **Emphasize Integrity**

We are called to walk in humility, but with confidence because God is with us. There is no justification for selfishness, self-centeredness, or ego-driven goals.

We will hold ourselves to the same level of accountability that we ask of those whom we are leading.

We desire to be wise stewards of money whether personal funds or ministry funds. Theft, fraud, or the misappropriations of ministry funds or property are inexcusable. We should give an honest accounting of ministry expenses. Gifts of money or other gifts of value should not influence our decisions.

We should not speak critically of other churches, nor should we purposefully recruit believers from other churches to join our fellowship.

*Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity (1 Timothy 4:12).*

## **Expect Excellence**

We are called to be faithful to the Bible, applying it to our own lives first as we seek God's guidance. We should share the truth of the Scriptures with wisdom, grace, and conviction—speaking the truth in love.

We should model integrity when preaching and teaching, acknowledging outside sources when their words or ideas are used.

We should study diligently to understand and promote doctrinal and theological orthodoxy.

We should lead with holiness, humility, and boldness, *looking to the interests of others* (Philippians 2:4).

We should strive to be trustworthy, to work well with others, and to work wisely. We should strive to be promise-keepers, not compromising spiritual or personal values.

We should welcome opportunities (workshops, seminars, classes) that will challenge our hearts and minds, stimulating spiritual growth.

We should lead with the authority that Jesus gives, coupled with the sacrificial life and attitude that He lived.

We should read the Scriptures regularly, meditate upon them, listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit, and pray for a moldable heart and a spiritually receptive mind.

We should strive to conform to God's will rather than surrender to human desires and agendas.

*And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Colossians 3:17).*

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you (Romans 12:1-3).*

## **Embrace Compassion**

We are called to care for those in our charge with love, grace, and forgiveness. We should listen to understand, speak to heal, lovingly confront, and make decisions that promote reconciliation, peace and unity.

We should remember that those we are speaking with are created in the image of God. We should be kind and accepting towards all, although not accepting of unbiblical behavior or values.

We should ensure confidence in private conversations, acknowledging that it may occasionally be necessary to disclose confidential information, e.g. if that information concerns the immediate danger of bodily harm/loss of life, or when applicable laws mandate reporting.

We should always speak truth in love, recognizing that uncontrolled anger is unacceptable, and that neither gossip nor slander will be tolerated. We should avoid establishing unrealistic expectations for others or ourselves.

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:29-32).*

We should care for ourselves as well as others spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally.

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).*

## **Excel in Holy Behavior**

*But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do (1 Peter 1:15).*

*Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11).*

*Do not love the world or anything in the world (1 John 2:15).*

We are called to holy living so we should not place ourselves in compromising situations, either personally or professionally. We should resist the devil and flee from temptation. We should try to identify our vulnerabilities and make specific provisions to safeguard our hearts and minds from these temptations.

We affirm sexuality as a gift from God and seek to honor this gift by conforming to biblical standards.

We should be intentional about regular self-examination.

We should strive towards a life of surrender and a repentant spirit.

## **Engage Heart-to-Heart**

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17).*

It is vital to deliberately place ourselves in relationships where mutual accountability occurs, constructive criticism can be shared without being concerned about responding defensively, where encouragement is the heart beat of these gatherings, and where focus and direction can be shaped in the presence of people who share a similar journey of personal and spiritual growth.

We should welcome accountability from spiritual partners and peers in ministry. We should willingly submit to spiritual discipline should we violate our ordination vows as leaders in the Church.

*And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three {strands} is not quickly torn apart (Ecclesiastes 4:12).*

## Empower God's People

We should motivate, prepare, and mobilize the people of God to impact the world for Christ. This includes inspiring co-workers and other believers to be missional and to intimately connect with the passions of God's heart.

We should esteem our co-workers as fellow laborers in the gospel ministry.

We should not consider our co-workers as better than other believers, nor should we take for granted our co-worker's gifts and abilities, time and treasure.

*Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).*

As a leader in Christ's Church, and as one who represents the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, I commit to these Ethical Affirmations for EPC Leaders.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

## *The Officers of the Church Questions*

*13-1.* Name the three offices that Jesus Christ has given to the Church.

*13-2.* What are some of the characteristics that officers of the Church should exhibit?

*13-3.* What qualifies an individual to hold office in the Church?

*13-4.* Name and describe the five callings that the EPC recognizes within the office of Teaching Elder.

*13-5.* What role does the Teaching Elder have in providing for corporate worship?

*13-6.* Describe how a Ruling Elder fulfills his/her responsibility of order.

*13-7.* Under what circumstances may a Ruling Elder serve as a Commissioned Pastor?

*13-8.* What is the first duty of the Deacon in the Church?

*13-9.* Under whose authority does a Deacon serve?

CHAPTER  
14

# *The Life and Character of the Officer*

The EPC Book of Government wisely advises that before nominating a person to church office, the congregation "should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture ... and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office." This is necessary because God Himself gives us the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. It is He who describes the qualifications for those who are to be chosen. Our task is not to select "the best people we have," but rather to elect only those who fit God's description given to us in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-13, 2 Timothy 2:24-25, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Titus 1:6-9, Ezra 7:9b-10, and others).



## *Qualifications of the Officer from the Bible*

1. Attributes of an officer should be present already—candidate must examine himself/herself.
2. Focus should not be on personality but on character—the fruit of godliness.
3. Candidate must commit to pursuit of Christ-like character and the attributes required of an officer.
4. Candidate must be an example.

## *Biblical Summary of Christ-like Character Required for an Officer*

### **1. Godliness**

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, we find 12 adjectives to describe the character requirements for leaders. The first character trait summarizes all of the others: elders must be "above reproach." This is not speaking of perfection, but rather the direction of one's life. Elders must not be marked by any kind of disgrace, as this would limit their influence and authority.

- Temperate, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined (Titus 1:7-8).
- Sincere (1 Timothy 3:8).

- Not pursuing money or dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:3,8; Titus 1:7).
- An example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).
- Full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3-5).

**2. Desire to serve with humility**

- 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Peter 5:2, Acts 6:2.

**3. Genuine love for others—hospitable, gentle, patient, not quarrelsome**

- 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7-8.

**4. Good reputation**

- Above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).
- With good reputation among outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7).

***From the EPC Book of Government***

**1. Elder:** Book of Government, Chapters 9-8, 9-9, 9-10.

**2. Deacon:** Book of Government, Chapters 9-12, 9-13, 9-14.

***Solid Commitments***

The ordination vows required by our Constitution comprehend the expected commitments of the officer and his or her prayerful examination of each of the following commitments. The ordination vows and the examination each should elicit may be summarized as follows:

**1. To Jesus Christ as Lord**

Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?

- Has no known sin in his life in which he/she is repetitively and unrepentantly engaged?
- Prepared to share his/her testimony of faith in Christ with others?

**2. To the Bible as the Word of God**

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks?

- Obviously submits to the Scriptures in belief and lifestyle?
- Regularly reads and studies the Bible?

**3. To Reformed Theology**

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures? Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the essentials of the faith you will, on your own initiative, make known to your church Session the change that has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

- Thinks carefully and theologically?
- Committed to distinctives of Evangelical and Reformed faith?

#### **4. To Presbyterian Polity**

Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church? Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?

- Can work well with others under a common structure for a common goal?
- Thinks independently and also works well with others for a common solution?
- Known for brotherly/sisterly affection and mutual trust in working relationships?

#### **5. To the Glory of God**

Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to accept the office of (Ruling Elder, Deacon) from love of God and sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son? Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise to you on that account?

- Obviously motivated by the love of God?
- Courageously stands for God regardless of cost to self?
- Seeks to lead unchurched people to Christ and to his church?

#### **6. To the Office of Elder or Deacon**

Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as (Ruling Elder, Deacon) whether personal or relative, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before this congregation of which God will make you an officer?

- Sets an example that others should follow?
- Will participate fully in leadership training?
- Will serve communion (Elders) unless providentially hindered?
- Regularly takes initiative to accomplish assigned ministry?

#### **7. To the Church**

Are you now willing to take responsibility in the life of this congregation as a (Ruling Elder, Deacon), and will you seek to discharge your duties, relying upon the grace of God, in such a way that the entire church of Jesus Christ will be blessed?

- Has no known unreconciled relationship in local church body?
- Faithfully attends Sunday worship?
- Faithfully tithes?
- Regularly encourages others to grow in their faith?

## *Discerning Gifts and Competence for Officers*

Scripture teaches that there are some gifts and abilities that officers should have in order to be properly equipped for service. We must prioritize character over gifts, but the offices of Elder and Deacon are based on gifts also. A common problem is the fact that people in large congregations do not know those nominated for office and an effort must be made to discern the giftedness and competence of those nominated.

### *1. The Bible*

A deacon should know his/her Bible well and should believe it deeply (1 Timothy 3:9). The elder should know his Bible, and be growing in his knowledge, but should also be able to teach it to other (Titus 1:9-11) and to pray for the flock in public and private (Acts 6:4).

### *2. The Family*

An officer may be either single or married.<sup>1</sup> A good way to test a person's ability to lead in the church is to observe his/her management in the home (1 Timothy 3:11). The children of an officer must be believers in Christ who are (as minors) obedient to their parents. (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 1 Timothy 3:12, Titus 1:6). The spouse of an officer must be a believer who is godly, loving, and supportive of the officer's ministry.

### *3. The Church*

The candidates must be well-tested (1 Timothy 3:6, 1 Timothy 3:10). Many Sessions recommend that a person be a member of their local church for a minimum of three (3) years before nomination as an officer in order for the local body to have time to get to know and observe him/her. The candidates must have gifts of leadership; that is, people in the congregation are already gladly following them and benefiting from their ministries.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Presbyterian Church believes that a person who is divorced in accord with biblical principles, whether remaining single or having remarried, may serve as a church officer. We must exercise special care, however, in the case of persons considered for church office who have divorced or remarried on unbiblical grounds. In such situations, guilt must be acknowledged and repentance for sin expressed. The individuals concerned must have been rehabilitated sufficiently in the confidence and respect of other Christians as to be able to fulfill in an exemplary way the requirements of church office with regard to marital and family relationships. The local Session should consider that even when such care is exercised, there may be circumstances in which it would be inadvisable, even though technically permissible, for such divorced or remarried persons to serve as church officers. Community awareness of the situation might also be considered so that not even apparent scandal is attached to the church. For further guidance, refer to the EPC's "Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage."

# Practical Leadership Applications

As leaders, what qualifications should we be exhibiting in our lives?

In Luke 6:40, Jesus gives this answer, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained *will be like his teacher.*"

*Our call is to be like our Teacher, maturing into the image and nature of Jesus.* Practically, what does this look like? One answer comes from an Italian Franciscan and professor from the 13th century, Bonaventure, who wrote some of the earliest works on spiritual leadership. A compilation of these 23 "characteristics" follows—broken into Bonaventure's major categories. Since we are all both weak and strong in areas of "Christlike" character, this is a great evaluation exercise for a leadership team to take together.

- How do we feel these early characteristics transfer to our world today?
- Why is each one important?
- In which two or three do I think I am most mature, accomplished, or strong?
- In which two characteristics am I weakest—needing the greatest support?

## Spiritual Devotion

1. Faith in the Cross alone.
2. A Biblical worldview.
3. Biblical wisdom.
4. A zeal for righteousness.
5. A devotion to prayer.
6. Deep relationship with God in worship and prayer.
7. Mindfulness of God in all of life.

## Moral Sensitivity

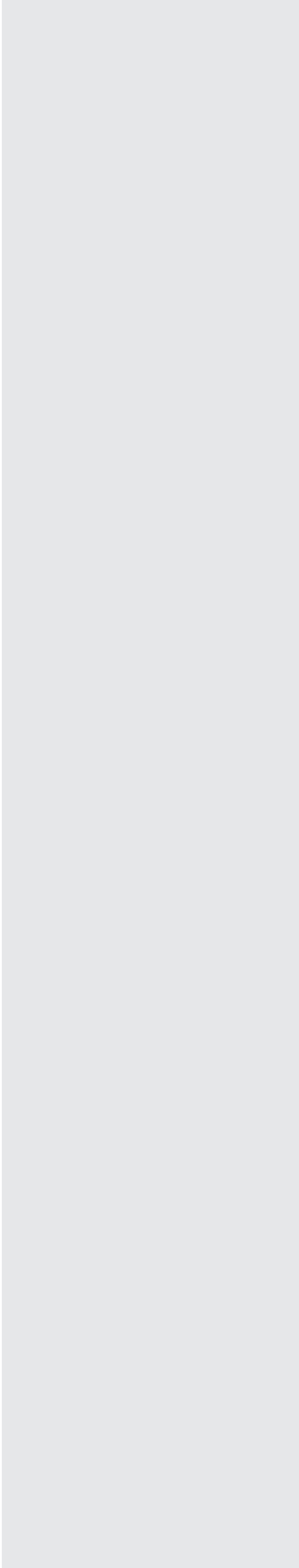
8. A spirit of humility.
9. Self-examination.
10. Perpetual surrender.
11. Listening to/discerning God's voice.
12. Intimacy with God.

## Compassion and Heart

13. A servant-hearted nature.
14. Living a life of compassion.



*Bonaventure was the cardinal of Albano, Italy, and the minister general of the Friars Minor. He was born in Bagnorea, Italy, in 1221, and died at Lyons in 1274. As a leader, Bonaventure is credited with assisting St. Francis in founding and giving structure to the Franciscan order, and his specialties were preaching and teaching. In helping monks and Christian leaders to mature, St. Bonaventure wrote a very practical work on spiritual leadership in the 13th century. In this work he describes the major qualities of growing into "Christ-likeness" as a spiritual shepherd and leader.*

- 
15. Hopefulness.
  16. Patience.
  17. Content and thankful in Christ.

***Good Example***

18. Consistency and balance in life.
19. Reflecting God's glory and holiness.
20. Available to be used by God.
21. Having healthy relationships.
22. A teachable nature.
23. An ability to guide others.

## CHAPTER 15

# Leading Healthy Churches

A healthy church needs healthy leaders. To say it another way, it is not likely that unhealthy leaders will lead a healthy church.

A speaker quoted a survey of high school students in which 60% of the respondents felt they were in the top 10% of athletically talented people. On one hand, it's amusing. On the other hand, it reveals how easily we deceive ourselves and "think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think" (Romans 12:3). The same can be true of believers' spiritual health. There is far more unhealthiness than people will readily admit. People tend to develop systems that keep them blissfully unaware of the effects of the sin nature in their lives.

This chapter offers tools for diagnosing an individual's spiritual health, and a tool for assessing the health of a church. Do the self-diagnosis honestly. On one hand, be encouraged as you may well find yourself farther along than you were in earlier years. On the other hand, let the self-diagnosis lead you once again to repentance and faith in the One who has made us new, dwells within us, and restores the image of God in us (2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 4:22-24, 1 John 1:8).

### *Questions to Diagnose Spiritual Health<sup>1</sup>*

#### **1. Do you have a healthy thirst for God?**

Christians may experience the thirst of a dry soul from drinking too much of the brackish waters of the world and too little from the living water. A dry soul may have its source in prolonged mental or physical fatigue. But there is also the thirst of the satisfied soul. A.W. Tozer prayed, "O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made thirsty still."<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Selected from Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (NavPress, 2001).

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).*

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2).*

To gain and maintain a healthy thirst for God, you might decide to set aside regular time to meditate on Scripture, pray through Scripture, or read some classic devotional writings.

### **2. Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?**

The church needs the same kind of leaders that God provided for ancient Israel—people who understand the times and know what the people of God should do (1 Chronicles 12:32). It is important to know the content of the Bible and equally if not more important to know how to apply the correct scriptural principle to a specific situation. This is the way of wisdom.

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws (Psalm 119:106).*

*We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The man who says, "I know Him," but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His Word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:3-6).*

To grow in this area you might decide to make more time for God's Word in your life, to train yourself to ask, "How does the Bible speak to this matter?" or you might write down an issue you have not recently considered from a biblical perspective, and then prayerfully search Scripture for several days.

### **3. Are you more loving?**

"Cultivation [of Christian love] requires nothing less than the reversal of every instinct in our fallen natures ... What the unregenerate cannot do, true Christians may and must."<sup>3</sup>

If God's love is growing in believers, they will find their love for other Christians strengthening and find themselves expressing God's love by

---

<sup>2</sup>A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Christian Publications, 1948), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Maurice Roberts, "The Supreme Grace of Christian Love," from *The Thought of God* (Banner of Truth, February 1989), p. 3.

doing good to all people, and especially to fellow believers (Galatians 6:10). They will find their love growing for the lost, as well as for their families. The love commanded by God is not so much affection as it is sacrificial giving of one's life for another.

Try rewriting 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 by taking the phrases and describing what the opposite looks like. For example, instead of "Love is patient," you might write, "To be unloving means rushing ahead impulsively." Instead of "Love is not proud," you might write, "Being unloving means desiring what rightfully belongs to someone else." Then ask yourself, "Does my life look more like the way Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13, or does look like the opposite?"

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).*

To grow in your practice of God's love you might decide to pray regularly to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19). Or you might decide to identify relationships in which you most need to grow and begin praying for those people and act in concrete, loving ways toward them.

#### **4. Do you delight in the bride of Christ?**

Delighting in the church—the bride of Christ—is another facet of growing in God's love. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I'm fine with Jesus, but I don't want anything to do with the church." But Christ loved His people so much that he gave His life for them. How can believers despise the very thing that Christ loved so dearly? Jesus' charge to Peter still rings: "Feed my sheep."

Because God's love is at work in their hearts, believers (especially leaders) persist in their loving service to God's people in the face of disappointment, conflict, and setbacks. Leaders have the humbling privilege of receiving delegated responsibility from God to be part in His work of presenting Christ with a "radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

Perhaps you have thought of the familiar verses below in their application to you as an individual. But Paul wrote them with a plural "you" and "we." Think of them now in their application to God's covenant people, the church:



*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).*

*What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (2 Corinthians 6:16).*

*And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).*

To grow in this area, develop a list of specific ways in which you can demonstrate your delight in the bride of Christ—in ways that will make a difference—and begin to practice one of them.

### ***5. Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?***

Donald Whitney describes spiritual disciplines as "the God-ordained means by which we bring ourselves before God, experience Him, and are changed into Christlikeness."<sup>4</sup> They are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. Practicing spiritual disciplines is a way to apply Paul's instruction to Timothy: "... train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Some of the disciplines commonly listed are biblical meditation, prayer, fasting, silence, solitude, and celebration. For the purposes of our study, take stock of your practice of spending time with God.

We learn to pray by praying. To grow in this discipline, you might decide to make and keep an appointment with God to pray for a specific period of time. You might use the Psalms, or the prayers of Paul, or the Lord's Prayer as guides. You might decide to read and meditate on a passage of Scripture and then write your prayer. You might decide to find a prayer partner who is mature in the spiritual discipline and willing to be a mentor. But whatever you decide, pray!

### ***Discipleship and Emotional Health***

"The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (NavPress, 2001), p. 92-93.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Zondervan, 2003), p. 20.

In *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, Peter Scazzero argues that evangelicals have, to their detriment, ignored emotional and relational health as part of spiritual maturity. He cites this as the main reason many doctrinally sound churches remain relationally ill. Scazzero identified six principles of emotional and spiritual health for individuals and churches:

**1. Looking beneath the surface**

People invite God to bring to their awareness—and to transform—those beneath-the-surface layers that hinder them from becoming more like Jesus Christ.

**2. Breaking the power of the past**

People understand how their past affects their present ability to love Christ and others.

**3. Living in brokenness and vulnerability**

People live and lead out of an understanding that leadership in the Kingdom of God is from the bottom up, a noticeably different way of life from that commonly modeled in the world.

**4. Receiving the gift of limits**

People joyfully receive the number of "talents" God has distributed, and are not frenzied, covetous, and trying to live a life God never intended. They are marked by contentment and joy.

**5. Embracing grieving and loss**

People understand that rather than seeking a quick end to pain, embracing grief is the only pathway to becoming a compassionate person like Jesus.

**6. Making incarnation your model for loving well**

People follow the model of Jesus' life in order to love others—entering another's world, holding on to yourself, and hanging between two worlds.

An Emotional/Spiritual Health Inventory based on these principles is printed at the end of this chapter. After taking the inventory, discuss the implications of emotional health for leaders and for the discipleship and outreach ministries of the church. Consider ways to move as leaders and as a church into greater emotional and relational maturity.



## *Leading a Healthy Church*

In his research on how churches grow, Christian Schwarz<sup>6</sup> has concluded that churches don't grow by copying a successful model but by becoming healthy. Schwarz identified eight essential qualities of healthy churches. Each one has important considerations for church leaders.

### **1. Empowering leadership**

Effective leadership begins with an intimate relationship with God, resulting in Christlike character and a clear sense of God's calling for leaders' lives. As this base of spiritual maturity increases, effective pastors and leaders multiply, guide, empower, and equip disciples to realize their full potential in Christ and work together to accomplish God's vision.<sup>7</sup>

### **2. Gift-oriented ministry**

The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives to every Christian spiritual gift(s) for the building of God's Kingdom. Church leaders have the responsibility to help believers discover, develop, and exercise their gifts in appropriate ministries so that the Body of Christ "grows and builds itself up in love."

### **3. Passionate spirituality**

Effective ministry flows out of a passionate spirituality. Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways. A godly vision can be accomplished only through an optimistic faith that views obstacles as opportunities and turns defeats into victories.

### **4. Functional structures**

The Church is the living Body of Christ. Like all healthy organisms, it requires numerous systems that work together to fulfill its intended purpose. Each must be evaluated regularly to determine if it is still the best way to accomplish the intended purpose.

### **5. Inspiring worship service**

Inspiring worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God. Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God, resulting in times of joyous exultation and times of quiet reverence. Inspiring worship is not driven by a particular style or ministry focus group, but rather the shared experience of God's awesome presence.

---

<sup>6</sup>Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 4th Edition (ChurchSmart Resources, 2000).

<sup>7</sup>Definitions of the quality characteristics are taken from [www.coachnet.org](http://www.coachnet.org)

## 6. Holistic small groups

Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities that endeavor to reach the unchurched, meet individual needs, develop each person according to his God-given gifts, and raise leaders to sustain the growth of the church. Like healthy body cells, holistic small groups are designed to grow and multiply.

## 7. Need-oriented evangelism

Need-oriented evangelism intentionally cultivates relationships with pre-Christian people so they can become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, actively participating in the life of the church and community. Using appropriate ministries and authentic relationships, believers can guide others into the family of God.

## 8. Loving relationships

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said people will know we are his disciples by our love. Practical demonstration of love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God's kingdom.

The EPC has a number of leaders trained to coach churches through the "Natural Church Development" model. The process begins with a survey to measure the eight quality characteristics, followed by coaches assisting churches in developing and implementing strategies to address their weakest characteristics. Churches repeat this process over a number of years. Schwarz's research has demonstrated that when churches reach a certain measurable level of strength in all eight characteristics, the church will be growing.

If you or your church is interested in learning more about Natural Church Development, contact the Church Revitalization Task Force (The GO Center) through the Office of the General Assembly or contact the Church Development Committee Chairman or Church Development Director of your presbytery.

## *Leadership in a Presbyterian Church*

A core principle of leadership in a Presbyterian system is the "plurality of elders." Presbyterians practice this principle not because it is convenient, but because of their conviction that it is biblical. When we sing, "O come, let us adore Him" we recognize that our faith life is something which is corporate. There are no examples in the Bible of a church being led by a single individual, but rather by a group of elders (e.g., Acts 14:23, Acts 15, Acts 20:17, 1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5). Literature on leadership today will challenge this principle, saying things such as "Groups of people can't lead," or "The quickest way to kill an idea is to send it to a committee." In

*The splendor of  
a human heart  
that trusts and is loved  
unconditionally gives  
God more pleasure than  
Westminster Cathedral,  
the Sistine Chapel,  
Beethoven's  
Ninth Symphony,  
Van Gogh's  
Sunflowers,  
the sight of  
10,000 butterflies  
in flight, or the scent of  
a million orchids in bloom.  
Trust is our gift  
back to God, and He  
finds it so enchanting  
that Jesus died  
for love of it.  
~Brennan Manning  
"Ruthless Trust: The  
Ragamuffin's Path to God"*

reality, these statements challenge ways that leadership by a plurality of elders has been misused rather than the principle itself.

If leadership by "plurality of elders" is biblical, then each Session, Pastor, church staff, Deacon body, Presbytery, and General Assembly must face the challenge of how to practice the principle in a way that advances the church's mission, rather than standing in its way. Functional structures (see quality characteristic #4 above) may have a different look now than they had fifty years ago. Small groups of leaders that hold power tightly are not practicing "empowering leadership" or "gift-oriented ministry" and may, in fact, be showing signs of emotional unhealthiness.

Pastors and church officers should continually think creatively about how to trust God more with His church. If He loves us and has a purpose for us (and He does), He will empower us. Leading a church today takes all of our gifts and a "plurality of elders" to accomplish both the Great Commission and the

Great Commandment. It is a high call, as seen in the "Letter to Church Leaders" on page 217.



# *A Letter to Church Leaders*

*Created by adapting The Message version of Acts 20, James 5, and Titus 2.*

From Paul, Peter, and James—Apostolic servants of Jesus for your sake.

To our dear fellow Elders and Deacons, the influential mentors and guides of God's people there. Grace and peace be yours in our Lord Jesus.

We have a special concern for you church leaders. We know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory. Here's our concern: that you offer persistent care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way. Our question is, "Are you watching over these eternal treasures of God?"

You have been given oversight by God. Now it's up to you. Be on your toes—both for yourselves and the congregation of God's sheep. The Holy Spirit has put you in charge of these people—God's people they are—to guard and protect them. God Himself thought they were worth dying for. You must pray for them when they are sick or weak, and praise God with them when their lives are going well. Love them! They are on God's mind all of the time—and they should be on your minds as well.

Your job, as spiritual leaders, is to speak out to them on the things that make for solid doctrine. Be an example. Guide older men into lives of temperance, dignity, and wisdom. Build up healthy faith, love, and endurance. Guide older women into lives of reverence, avoiding drunkenness and gossip, but being models of goodness. By looking at the wise, the younger women will learn how to love their husbands and children, be virtuous and pure, be good mothers and wives. The younger men will live more disciplined lives and be godly and loving husbands and dads. We don't want anyone looking down on God's Message because of anyone's behavior.

But mostly, show them all this by doing it yourself, incorruptible in your teaching, your words solid and sane. Then anyone who is dead set against us, when he finds nothing weird or misguided, might eventually come around to the gospel. This is our prayer.

Our brothers and sisters, you are to be down to earth with each other, for "God has had it with the proud but takes delight in humble people." Be content with who you are, and don't put on airs. God's strong hand is on you; He'll promote you and use you at the right time. Stop worrying. Live carefree before God; He is most careful with you. When God, who is the best shepherd of all, comes out in the open with His rule, He'll see that you've done it right and commend you lavishly.

# Emotional and Spiritual Health Inventory

Answer these questions as honestly as possible.

## A: General Formation and Discipleship

Not very true  
Sometimes true  
Mostly true  
Very true

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I feel confident of my adoption as God's son/daughter and rarely, if ever, question His acceptance of me.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | I love to worship God by myself as well as with others.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | I spend regular quality time in the Word of God and in prayer.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | I sense the unique ways God has gifted me individually and am actively using my spiritual gifts for His service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | I am a vital participant in a community with other believers.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | It is clear that my money, gifts, time, and abilities are completely at God's disposal and not my own.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. | I consistently integrate my faith in the marketplace and the world.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

## B: Emotional Components of Discipleship

### Principle 1: Look Beneath the Surface

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | It's easy for me to identify what I am feeling inside.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | I am willing to explore previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself, allowing Christ to transform me more fully.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | I enjoy being alone in quiet reflection with God and myself.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | I can share freely about my emotions, sexuality, joy, and pain.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | I can experience and deal with anger in a way that leads to growth in others and myself.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | I am honest with myself (and a few significant others) about the feelings, beliefs, doubts, pains, and hurts beneath the surface of my life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

### Principle 2: Break the Power of the Past

- |     |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.  | I resolve conflict in a clear, direct, and respectful way, not what I might have learned growing up in my family, such as painful putdowns, avoidance, escalating tensions, or going to a third party rather than to the person directly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8.  | I am intentional at working through the impact of significant "earthquake" events that shaped my present, such as the death of a family member, an unexpected pregnancy, divorce, addiction, or major financial disaster.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9.  | I am able to thank God for all my past life experiences, seeing how He has used them to uniquely shape me into who I am.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | I can see how certain "generational sins" have been passed down to me through my family history, including character flaws, lies, secrets, ways of coping with pain, and unhealthy tendencies in relating to others.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | I don't need approval from others to feel good about myself.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | I take responsibility and ownership for my past life rather than blame others.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

Not very true  
 Sometimes true  
 Mostly true  
 Very true

**Principle 3: Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability**

- 13. I often admit when I'm wrong, readily asking forgiveness from others. 1 2 3 4
- 14. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes. 1 2 3 4
- 15. Others would easily describe me as approachable, gentle, open, and transparent. 1 2 3 4
- 16. Those close to me would say that I am not easily offended or hurt. 1 2 3 4
- 17. I am consistently open to hearing and applying constructive criticism and feedback that others might have for me. 1 2 3 4
- 18. I am rarely judgmental or critical of others. 1 2 3 4
- 19. Others would say that I am slow to speak, quick to listen, and good at seeing things from their perspective. 1 2 3 4

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principle 4: Receive the Gift of Limits**

- 20. I've never been accused of "trying to do it all" or of biting off more than I could chew. 1 2 3 4
- 21. I am regularly able to say "no" to requests and opportunities rather than risk overextending myself. 1 2 3 4
- 22. I recognize the different situations where my unique, God-given personality can be either a help or hindrance in responding appropriately. 1 2 3 4
- 23. It's easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else's burden and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden. 1 2 3 4
- 24. I have a good sense of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities, intentionally pulling back to rest and fill my "gas tank" again. 1 2 3 4
- 25. Those close to me would say that I am good at balancing family, rest, work, and play in a biblical way. 1 2 3 4

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principle 5: Embrace Grieving and Loss**

- 26. I openly admit my losses and disappointments. 1 2 3 4
- 27. When I go through a disappointment or a loss, I reflect on how I'm feeling rather than pretend that nothing is wrong. 1 2 3 4
- 28. I take time to grieve my losses, as David and Jesus did. 1 2 3 4
- 29. People who are in great pain and sorrow tend to seek me out because it's clear to them that I am in touch with the losses and sorrows in my own life. 1 2 3 4
- 30. I am able to cry and experience depression or sadness, explore the reasons behind it, and allow God to work in me through it. 1 2 3 4

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principle 6: Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well**

- 31. I am regularly able to enter into other people's world and feelings, connecting deeply with them and taking time to imagine what it feels like to live in their shoes. 1 2 3 4
- 32. People close to me would describe me as a responsive listener. 1 2 3 4
- 33. When I confront someone who has hurt or wronged me, I speak more in the first person ("I" and "me") about how I am feeling rather than speak in blaming tones ("you" or "they") about what was done. 1 2 3 4
- 34. I have little interest in judging other people or quickly giving opinions about them. 1 2 3 4
- 35. People would describe me as someone who makes "loving well" my number one aim. 1 2 3 4

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principle 7: Slow Down to Lead with Integrity**

Not very true  
Sometimes true  
Mostly true  
Very true

36. I spend sufficient time alone with God to sustain my work for God.	1	2	3	4
37. I regularly take a 24-hour period each week for keeping the Sabbath—to stop, to rest, to delight, and to contemplate God.	1	2	3	4
38. Those closest to me would say that my marriage and children take priority over church ministry and others.	1	2	3	4
39. I am not afraid to ask difficult, uncomfortable questions to myself or to others when needed.	1	2	3	4
40. I do not divide my leadership into sacred/secular categories. I treat the executive and planning functions of leadership as meaningful as prayer and preparing sermons.	1	2	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____			

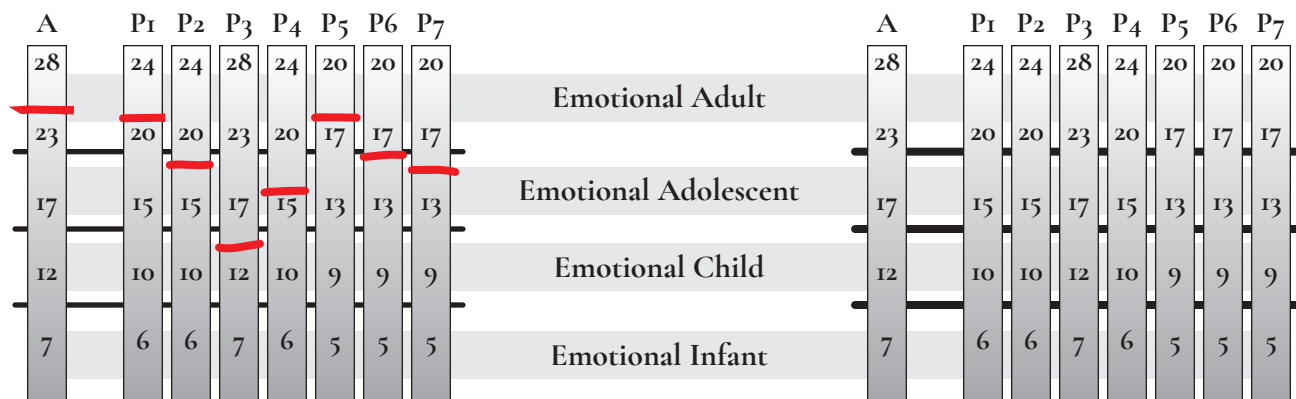
**Inventory Results**

For each of the eight groups of questions, add the point values of your answers to get the total for that group. Write your totals on the section below. Next, plot your answers and connect the dots to create a graph (use the "Sample" graph below as an example). Finally, see the Interpretation Guide on pages 221-222 for description of the levels of emotional health in each area. What patterns do you discern?

**Assessment Totals:**

	Questions	Total
<b>Part A</b>		
General Formation and Discipleship	1-7	____/28
<b>Part B</b>		
Principle 1: Look Beneath the Surface	1-6	____/24
Principle 2: Break the Power of the Past	7-12	____/24
Principle 3: Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability	13-19	____/28
Principle 4: Receive the Gift of Limits	20-25	____/24
Principle 5: Embrace Grieving and Loss	26-30	____/20
Principle 6: Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well	31-35	____/20
Principle 7: Slow Down to Lead with Integrity	36-40	____/20

**SAMPLE**



# *Interpretation Guide: Levels of Emotional Maturity*

## **Emotional Infant**

I look for other people to take care of me emotionally and spiritually. I often have difficulty in describing and experiencing my feelings in healthy ways and rarely enter the emotional world of others. I am consistently driven by a need for instant gratification, often using others as objects to meet my needs. People sometimes perceive me as inconsiderate and insensitive. I am uncomfortable with silence or being alone. When trials, hardships, or difficulties come, I want to quit God and the Christian life. I sometimes experience God at church and when I am with other Christians, but rarely at home or work.

## **Emotional Child**

When life is going my way, I am content. However, as soon as disappointment or stress enter the picture, I quickly unravel inside. I often take things personally, interpreting disagreements or criticism as a personal offense. When I don't get my way, I often complain, throw an emotional tantrum, withdraw, manipulate, drag my feet, become sarcastic, or take revenge. I often end up living off the spirituality of other people because I am so overloaded and distracted. My prayer life is primarily talking to God, telling him what to do and how to fix my problems. Prayer is a duty, not a delight.

## **Emotional Adolescent**

I don't like it when others question me. I often make quick judgments and interpretations of people's behavior. I withhold forgiveness to those who sin against me, avoiding or cutting them off when they do something to hurt me. I subconsciously keep records on the love I give out. I have trouble really listening to another person's pain, disappointments, or needs without becoming preoccupied with myself. I sometimes find myself too busy to spend adequate time nourishing my spiritual life. I attend church and serve others but enjoy few delights in Christ. My Christian life is still primarily about doing, not being with him. Prayer continues to be mostly me talking with little silence, solitude, or listening to God.



*As a young man  
I must have tried  
a dozen techniques  
that people said  
were sure to guarantee  
a measure of passion  
that would transport me  
above the ordinary  
and ineffective.  
In each case,  
I eagerly embraced  
whatever it was  
I was supposed to do  
or say.  
But the results, if any,  
were short lived,  
and what I discovered  
was that there are no  
shortcuts, no gimmicks,  
no easy way to cultivate  
intimacy with God  
and attain the resulting  
passion that should carry  
one through life's journey.*

*~Gordon MacDonald  
"Restoring Your  
Spiritual Passion"*

## **Emotional Adult**

I respect and love others without having to change them or becoming judgmental. I value people for who they are, not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. I can state my own beliefs and values to those who disagree with me—without becoming adversarial. I am able to accurately self-assess my limits, strengths, and weaknesses. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ, and as a result do not look to others to tell me I'm okay. I am able to integrate doing for God and being with Him (Mary and Martha). My Christian life has moved beyond simply serving Christ to loving Him and enjoying communion with Him.

Taken from Pete Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: Updated and Expanded Edition* (Zondervan, 2009).

## **Additional Resources**

Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 1979).

Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Editors), *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004).

John C. Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations, Second Edition*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

Don K. Clements, *Biblical Church Government: A Presbyterian Primer, Volume I*. (Narrows, VA: Metokos Press, 2003).

Paul E. Engle (Series Editor), *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

Daniel L. Guder (Editor), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

Peter Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development, 4th Edition*. (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2000).

Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001).

## *Ordination Vows*

One mark of mature character is the willingness and ability to keep one's word. An officer is oath-bound to his or her calling to office (See Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 22, "Lawful Oaths and Vows"). As you prepare to become an officer of the Lord's church, read through these vows and consider whether you have any reservations:

1. Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?
2. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
4. Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with the system of doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this church you will, on your own initiative, make known to your church Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
5. Do you affirm and adopt the "Essentials of Our Faith" without exception?
6. Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?
7. Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord? (Ruling Elders)
8. Do you promise subjection to your fellow Church Officers in the Lord? (Deacons)
9. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to accept the office of Ruling Elder/Deacon from love of God and sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son?
10. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise to you on that account?
11. Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a Ruling Elder/Deacon, whether personal or interpersonal, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before this congregation of which God is making you an overseer?
12. Are you now willing to accept the call of this church as a Ruling Elder/Deacon and, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties required of that office?

## *Leading Healthy Churches Questions*

*15-1.* As you diagnosed your spiritual health, where did you find yourself the weakest? The strongest? What are some ways in addition to those suggested in the text to strengthen your weak areas? What one area will you commit yourself to work on first?

*15-2.* John C. Carver (see Recommended Resources) has worked extensively with governing boards in the non-profit and public sectors. He contends that effective boards are groups that set policies with budgetary and ethical parameters, and then give staff the authority and means to accomplish the goals and deal with the day-to-day management issues. Board time is spent refining vision, goals, and policies and with reviewing staff progress, holding them accountable to their mutually agreed-upon goals. Are Carver's ideas consistent with the biblical principle of government by a plurality of elders? If so, how does your board function in relationship with Carver's model? What needs to change?

*15-3.* Why is "sharing leadership" so difficult sometimes?

*15-4.* Why is a multiplicity of elders so helpful?

*15-5.* Christian Swartz's 8 characteristics of healthy churches are discussed on pages 214-215.  
As a church, where are you strong? Where are you the weakest?

*15-6.* In tangible and practical ways, what would "loving the Bride of Christ" look like?



5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 510  
Orlando, FL 32822  
[www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org)