

Leadership Training Guide

**Christian Education and Publications Committee
Evangelical Presbyterian Church**

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Several wording changes authorized by the Christian Education and Publications Committee, typographical corrections and minor reformatting, and have been made in this Edition.

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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. 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 Tim 2:2, NASV)

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 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 or discussion items. At the end of each chapter you will find two additional resources: questions on the chapter material, and a "So what?" section with practical applications for church leaders.

This guide has been birthed by significant work and prayer from many members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Special thanks go to Ruling Elder Tom Werner, who pioneered much of the writing at his own EPC congregation (Greentree Community Church, Kirkwood, MO), and to Teaching Elder Brad Strait for his contributions which added interest to the page and for development of the "So what?" sections. Many churches have added to the process through experimentation and feedback. Additionally, this Guide would not exist without the ideas, energy, and expertise of former Stated Clerk Mike Glodo, Assistant Clerk Ed McCallum, and the General Assembly staff who have touched and crafted many of these pages. For all those who participated in its preparation, and for all those churches who will participate in using this guide, we say simply, *Soli Deo Gloria*.

*The Committee on Theology &
The Committee on Christian Education and Publications*

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, Chapter 14, we find common questions for the ordination vows of *Ministers, Ruling Elders, and Deacons*¹:

ON JESUS CHRIST:

1. Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?

- Read and discuss the Guide, pages 65-69, on “The Effects of the Fall.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, page 69-70, on “God’s Grace on the Cross.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 6, pages 77-85, on “Christology.”

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 Guide, pages 17-18, on the “Five Solas.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 3, pages 37-41, on “Reading the Bible.”
- Read and discuss the *SO WHAT?* section on pages 43-44.

ON A SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE AND THEOLOGY:

3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith² and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 2, pages 17-32, on “The Reformed and Presbyterian Tradition” 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

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

² A traditional language copy of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms is available online at epc.org. A modern language version may be ordered from the Office of the General Assembly.

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 in the Guide on:
 - Pg. 37-38 Scripture
 - Pg. 49-52 Free Will and Providence
 - Pg. 52-54 The Trinity
 - Pg. 63-67 Creation and the Fall
 - Pg. 74-76 Sin
 - Pg. 93-98 Theology of T-U-L-I-P
 - Pg. 98-99 Sanctification
 - Pg. 115 The Visible and Invisible Church
 - Pg. 118-121 Sacraments
 - Pg. 127-129 Death and Immortality
 - Pg. 139-142 God's Purposes
 - Pg. 143-144 Troubling Questions

5. Do you affirm and adopt the “Essentials of Our Faith” without exception?

- Read and discuss the Guide, page 22, on “1729 - Subscription and the Adopting Act.”
- Read and discuss the Essentials of Our Faith and the “Explanatory Statement”, page 28.

ON BEING UNDER PROPER AUTHORITY:

6. Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?

- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 12, pages 153-158, on “Church Government.”

7. Do you promise subjection to your fellow officers in the Lord?

- Read and discuss the Guide, page 157, on “Joint Power.”

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 (the holy Ministry, 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 pages 17-18 of the Guide, and discuss “Sola Deo Gloria.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, pages 49-52, on “The Work and Decrees of God.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 11, pages 139-143.

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 the Guide, pages 98-99, on “The New Nature.”

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 Guide, pages 105-106, on “The Work of the Holy Spirit.”
- Read and discuss the Guide, Chapter 15, pages 173-183 on “Leading Healthy Churches.”

11. Are you now willing to take responsibility in the life of this congregation as a (Pastor, 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 the Guide, Chapter 14, pages 169-172, on “The Life and Character of the Officer.”

CHAPTER ONE: CHURCH HISTORY I

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled...” (Luke 2:1).

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 (Gal. 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).

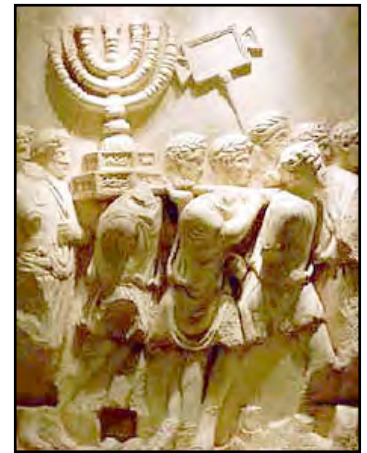
The gospel is rooted in history, and God is the ruler of that history. As the gospel spread, the history of the early church was recorded in the book of Acts, which many Christians have read and know well. However, many of us find our knowledge of the history of the church after the book of Acts to be scanty at best. Yet church history is a rich resource which 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 dates. 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 70 A.D.

70 A.D. – TITUS DESTROYS JERUSALEM

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 the book of 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). 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.



A detail from the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing Titus's victorious forces carrying the sacred Menorah from the Jewish people

In 66 A.D. the Jews revolted against the rule of Rome. The Roman procurator seized money from the temple, and when the Jews objected, 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 Roman siege for nine months before committing mass suicide in 73 A.D.

So, where were the Christians during these events? Some time before, the Christians left Jerusalem to escape the persecutions 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 at Matt. 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, to 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.

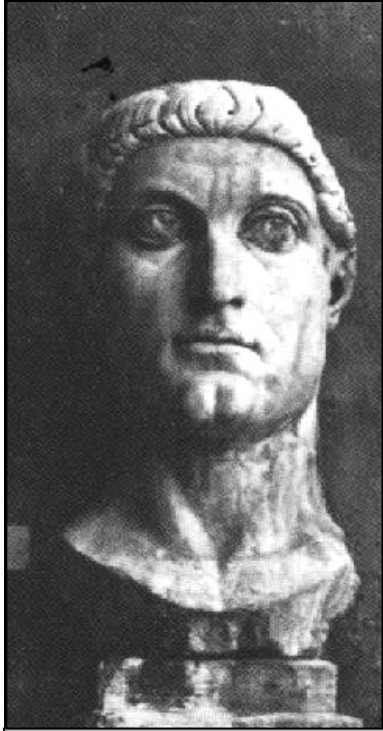
313 – THE EDICT OF MILAN

“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....”

The Edict of Milan shifted Christianity from being an illicit, persecuted sect to being a welcome—and even dominant—religion.

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.

It is frequently said that the Edict of Milan made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. This is less than accurate. The Edict of Milan was a document of religious toleration, although it is true that Constantine was sympathetic to Christianity. For more than two hundred years, the Roman Empire had persecuted Christians, denied Christians positions of authority, seized their property, subjected Christians to terrible tortures, and took their lives. The persecutions were sporadic, depending on who was 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.



Emperor Constantine the Great

With his counterpart Licinius, he gave Christianity legal freedom and restored Christians' confiscated property.

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. How would they respond? Would they 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.

A moment of self-examination is appropriate here. In our times, where do we fit along the spectrum of persecution, to acceptance, to dominance in society, and how does our faithfulness measure up against those who have fought the good fight?

325/451 – THE COUNCILS OF NICAEA & CHALCEDON

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 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 leaders of this group included two men from Alexandria -- Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and his secretary Athanasius, a deacon.

In the course of the debate at Nicea, a creed was suggested to rebut the Arian heresy. 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:

“[T]he 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 anathematizes.”

The Nicene Creed rejects any idea that Jesus is a creature, or a being 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 Greek “*homoousias*,” usually translated as “of the same substance.” This was intended to convey that the Son is just as divine as the Father.

In spite of the hopes of the bishops, the Council of Nicea 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.

Christ is “made known in two natures [which exist] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” (Council of Chalcedon)

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 Nicea and Chalcedon when we discuss the person and work of Christ.

386 – AUGUSTINE CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY



The oldest known portrait of Augustine, from a fresco in the Lateran Palace in Rome. He is depicted as a scholar holding a scroll of his writings and studying an open Bible.

“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 sat under a fig tree and cried at his inability to live the chaste life he wanted. The rhetoric teacher 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” (Rom. 13:13-14). The rhetoric teacher gave way, and he found what he had been searching for. In Christ, the rhetoric teacher 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. Augustine is considered the most influential theologian in the entire Western church, both Protestant and Catholic. 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.

1054 – THE EAST-WEST SCHISM

On June 16, 1054, as the priests of Saint 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 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, 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 superiority to the Eastern patriarchs, but Eastern Christians did not acknowledge the authority of the pope over the Eastern church. There were also theological differences, dealing with the Trinity and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father only, or from both Father and Son.



Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, site of the excommunication of 1054. The building today reflects recent additions of Islamic art and architecture.

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.

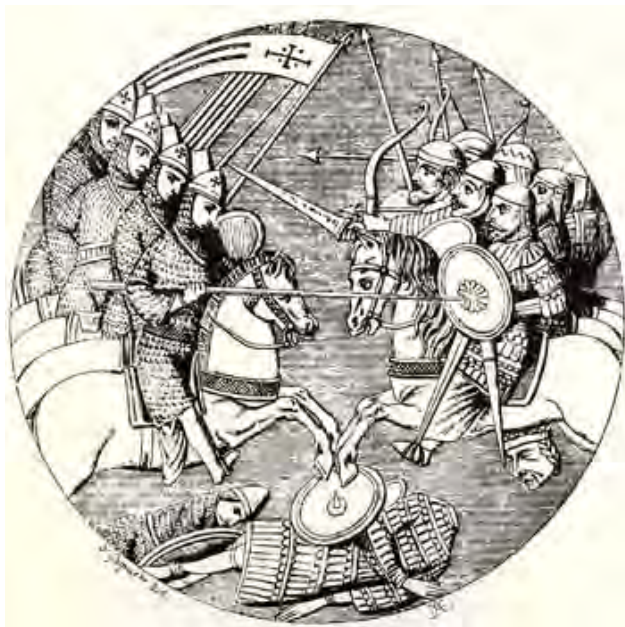
A week after Humbert delivered the excommunication, the patriarch of Constantinople retaliated by condemning Humbert. The actions of 1054 served to formalize what had been building for many years – the gradual drift apart of the two segments of Christianity. As a consequence, millions of Orthodox Christians in the churches of Eastern Europe are separated from millions of Christians in Western Europe, the Americas, and the rest of the world. Christians who share a common belief in Jesus, and accept him as the head of the church, cannot share his Eucharist.

1095 – THE FIRST CRUSADE

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; the 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.



Some of the individuals who participated in the Crusades were people to be greatly admired, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, and Louis IX. However, taken as a whole, it is hard to judge the Crusades as better than folly, and perhaps much worse. In the Second Crusade, many Jews were killed. During the Fourth Crusade, the Crusaders took the city of Constantinople from Eastern Christians by force and established for a while the “Latin Empire of Constantinople.” The Children’s Crusade in 1212 was a particularly miserable episode. By their pureness of heart, a group of children were to retake the Holy Land. Instead, most of the children were drowned at sea, sold into slavery, or slaughtered.

The Crusades contributed to a larger view of the world for Europe, increasing trade with other parts of the world, and the rise of cities and a middle class. The Crusades also engendered a great bitterness toward Western Christians by Eastern Christians, Jews, and Muslims. In 1996, Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian, 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, p. 35).

1517 – LUTHER RECAPTURES 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, 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 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 had hated the righteous God who punished sinners.

Salvation was mediated by the church, through confession. During Luther’s years of turmoil, he would wear out confessors. During confession,



The sale of indulgences as depicted in a woodcut. Luther objected to abuses in what was called “the holy trade.”

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.”

In Luther’s time, the church had largely turned to a justification by works, or a mixture of 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 atone for them (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” spent 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.

1521 – LUTHER AND THE DIET OF WORMS

“Here I stand, may God help me.”

Luther was not the first to call the Catholic church to account. In various ways and in different places, John Wycliffe of England, John Huss 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; Huss was burned at the stake; Savonarola was hanged and burned. Luther knew the danger he was in.

In January, 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”) which met in Worms, Germany in the spring of 1521.

Luther appeared before the Diet on April 17 at 4:00 p.m. Luther’s 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 the emperor 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



Luther defends himself before Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, at Worms.

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 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.

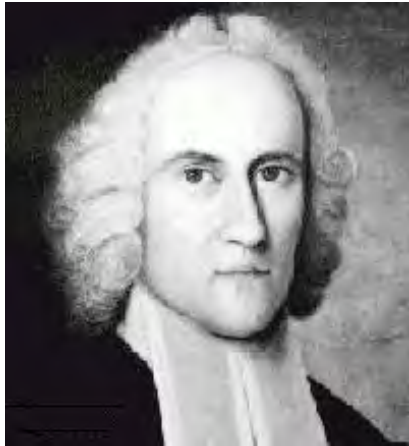
1734-42 – THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

“I ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might.”

Nathan Cole, a farmer in Hartford, Connecticut, described his desire to see and hear revivalist George Whitefield. Cole and his wife hastened to Middletown “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."

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.



Jonathan Edwards, who interpreted the Awakening in his many writings, is considered by many the greatest theologian America has ever produced

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, some believe the greatest mind in America before or since. In 1734 Edwards began to stress evangelism from his pulpit with a series of sermons on justification by faith. There was no immediate effect, but in December, 1734, "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.

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.

CHURCH HISTORY I - QUESTIONS

- 1-1. What was the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans to the Christian church?
- 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 Nicea and Chalcedon?
- 1-4. Who was Augustine? Why was he significant?
- 1-5. What was the first church split?
- 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?

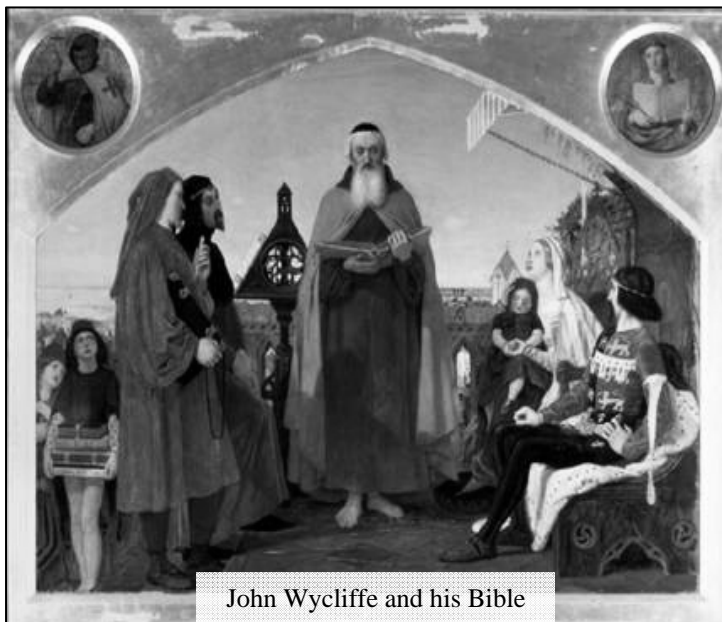
CHAPTER TWO: CHURCH HISTORY II

THE REFORMED AND PRESBYTERIAN TRADITION

An Overview of the Protestant Reformation

The Reformation was the 16th-century religious revolution in the Christian church which ended the supremacy of the Roman pope in the West. It initiated the era of modern 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 Catholic seminaries. 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 a'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 (Holland), Martin Luther (Germany), Zwingli (Zurich, Switzerland), John Calvin (Geneva, Switzerland), and John Knox (Scotland).



John Wycliffe and his Bible

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 Wycliffe, Hus, and 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*” -- were consistent across the movement:

- *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 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 the Roman church.
- *Who is the mediator of the Church? “Solutus 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.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is rooted in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. You should know something of this tradition. Ten dates important to Presbyterians are examined below.

Some Key Reformation Facts:

- 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 several common languages. Previously all Bibles had been written in Latin, Hebrew, or Greek.
- The Protestant Reformation began on “All Saints Day,” Oct. 31, 1517, when Professor 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.

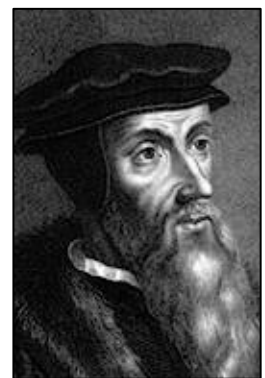
1536 – CALVIN PUBLISHES THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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 up in the history of Christianity” (Philip Schaff, historian).



“Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned...” (Jimmy Swaggart, preacher).

“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).

Calvin was the leading figure of the Reformed movement. Despite chronic poor health, his 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* 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 the *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, for not everyone loved his views on the Bible’s teachings. After three years in Strasbourg, the city leaders again begged him to come to Geneva. Calvin did so and worked there until his death over 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**; 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 work meaning “elder,” and we are ruled or governed by elders. But if you describe us by what we **believe**, we are called **Reformed**. So we are Presbyterian in government and we are Reformed in faith. Our spiritual forefather then is John Calvin.

Both Calvin and Luther took the Bible seriously when it came to reforming 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. What the church has believed and practiced across the centuries is valid, too. Thus, the pope may take the tradition of the church and declare it as an article of faith. For example, the 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 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 was the final authority**.

Being Reformed has two connotations. 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 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**, views we will discuss over the next weeks.

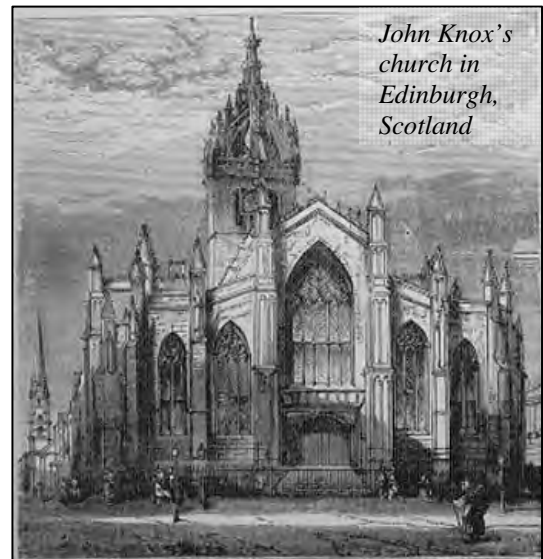
1559 – JOHN KNOX RETURNS TO SCOTLAND

"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 ranks of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church: indulgences were sold; celibacy was claimed but concubines and illegitimate children existed; nepotism flourished; and, biblical preaching had all but disappeared. Against this corruption the Protestants were preaching "The Gospel" as proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures. These differences between the Church of Rome and the Protestants were over 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 released and for the next five years Knox was a leader to Protestants in England. However, when Mary Tudor became queen, she renewed persecution of Protestants, and 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.

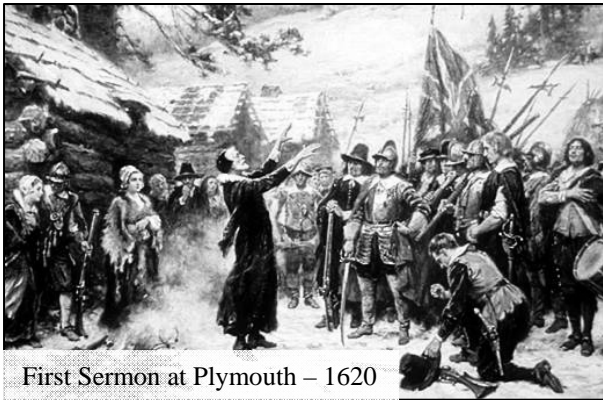


*John Knox's
church in
Edinburgh,
Scotland*

1647 – THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH IS COMPLETED

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, perhaps especially the Confession, have had a profound impact on Presbyterians. Two points about the Confession: (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 is always to be subservient to Scripture.



First Sermon at Plymouth – 1620

1706 – PRESBYTERIANISM COMES TO AMERICA -- THE PRESBYTERY OF PHILADELPHIA

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

The Reverend Francis Makemie, a Scot immigrant to the American wilderness, often has been referred to as 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.

1729 – SUBSCRIPTION AND THE ADOPTING ACT

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 be in agreement 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 Evangelical Presbyterian Church 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

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

In the early 18th century, American Presbyterians determined that it was necessary to adopt a doctrinal statement in order to declare their common faith. The Synod of Philadelphia in 1729 adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as the confession of their faith. In the 1729 Adopting Act, Presbyterians declared their "agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being, in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine."

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 (2002)

Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” (see inset on page 22). Take some time now to read the Essentials and the Explanatory Statement (on page 28). Also, read over questions 3 and 4 in the ordination vows you will take at the time you are to be ordained and installed with regard to the Westminster Confession and the Essentials. If there is any material there with which you disagree, now is a good time to talk to your pastor.

1801 – AGREEMENT WITH THE CONGREGATIONALISTS

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 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 were also 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.

Several factors have caused the introduction of liberal thought to churches. These factors include:

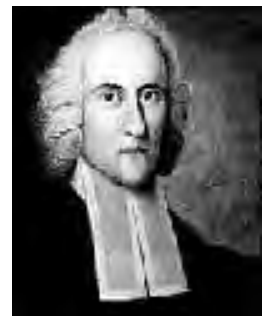
1. The rise of Enlightenment thought. Where God had once been man’s measure, enlightenment thought by Rousseau and others in the 1700s encouraged men to measure themselves by themselves.

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 worldview. Man’s knowledge of science grew explosively. As natural laws were understood, men viewed miracles with increasing skepticism.

5. Historical criticism of the Bible. Academic critiques of the Bible increasingly doubted its historicity and reliability. By the early 1900s, Albert Schweitzer in his book, *The Quest For the Historical Jesus*, doubted we could know anything about Jesus as a historical figure.



Jonathan Edwards



6. Darwinism. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*. Increasingly, Christians felt the need to accommodate evolutionary thought, but could not draw any lines between accommodation and surrender. The “Scopes Monkey Trial” of 1925 brought a direct confrontation between Christians (represented by William Jennings Bryan) and liberals (represented by Clarence Darrow) over the teaching of evolution in public schools.

7. Psychology. Freud and many of his progeny held that most human belief could be explained in terms of our upbringing and sexual development.

All these factors contributed to the rise of liberalism.

1800s – THE WAY WEST

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, Presbyterians did not fare as well on the frontier as the Baptists or the Methodists. Why did the Presbyterians not dominate? There were two related reasons.

First, Presbyterians require more education. Ministers were thus grown slowly and were limited in number. Second, the local Presbyterian church calls its pastors -- go out and find a man who will come. This approach requires believers who wish to be Presbyterians before pastoral leadership can be in place. But the Methodist church instituted circuit riders -- men who were assigned to go out to the people -- and the Baptists called men from among their own number who would serve. So the Presbyterian minister was called, the Methodist minister was sent, and the Baptist minister came with the people.

Some of this issue remains relevant today. It should affect the way in which we evaluate our prospects for church planting and mission work.

1741, 1837 and 1861 -- SPLITS IN THE CHURCH

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 the 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 had also 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?

1935 – J. GRESHAM MACHEN SUSPENDED FROM MINISTRY

Liberals and Traditionalists continued to struggle in the church. Dr. Andrew Jumper, former pastor of Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri, has 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 -- inerrancy of the Scriptures, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and the reality of the miracles of Christ. Conservatives who believed in these five doctrines became known as “Fundamentalists,” and later as evangelicals.

A Baptist minister named Harry Emerson Fosdick became a primary representative of liberal thought. He was named to a Presbyterian pulpit, and there, 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.

IN REVIEW - 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. The members of a presbytery 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.

A sample of Fosdick's writing follows this chapter. You will see that liberals believe strongly that "creating goodness" is the principal focus of Christianity, and the doctrine, while helpful, is not necessary.

Dr. J. Gresham Machen became a prominent proponent of Fundamentalism. Machen was a pastor and author and also the head of a conservative mission board within the denomination. In 1934, the General Assembly voted to shut down the mission board. Machen refused to disassociate himself from the board. He 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 for ecclesiastical errors. In 1935, Machen was suspended as a minister in the Presbyterian Church. Machen helped to form a new denomination, and was elected the first moderator. However, he died within a year thereafter.

An example of Machen's writings is also attached. Note his focus on the problem of sin and man's separation from God as a basic issue that liberals do not wish to address.

The liberal/fundamentalist struggle brings into focus the issues:

- (1) What is essential to faith? and
- (2) How do we view the Bible?



We will address these issues in the next chapter.

1980 – FORMATION OF THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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 near 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 a church that is Presbyterian in theology and church government, as well as evangelical in sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

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 less 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. So 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.

The 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.

In 1981, the 1st General Assembly convened 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 of the 80s 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 1987.³ 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 many missionaries to serve, with EPC support, through missions agencies other than our own. Our global mission plan focuses on planting, developing, and nurturing the church.

Additional resources:

Christian History & Biography magazine, any issue but especially:

Issue 12, Volume V, No. 4, “Meet John Calvin.”

Issue 28, Volume IX, No. 4, “The 100 Most Important Events in Church History.”

Issue 33, Volume XI, No. 1, “The Untold Story of Christianity and the Civil War.”

Issue 46, Volume XIV, No. 2, “John Knox, the Thundering Scot.”

Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.

James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, Geneva Press, 1996.

The “History” section of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church website at <http://www.epc.org/about-the-epc/history/>.

DVD: “A Family of Churches: Introducing the Evangelical Presbyterian Church” and “Roots of the EPC” (produced for the EPC’s 25th anniversary), available from the Office of the General Assembly: phone 734-742-2020; email: epchurch@epc.org; order online at <http://www.epc.org/resources/order-epc-materials/>.

Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (Modern Language Version). Available from the Office of the General Assembly (see ordering information above).

³ The Presbytery of St. Andrews was established as a national church in Argentina in June, 2004.

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, became 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” (Rev. 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” (Eph. 2:10).

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

Explanatory Statement to “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.

“Essentials of Our Faith” is an irenic statement of historic evangelicalism. The purpose of “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. “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 “Essentials of Our Faith” are important documents in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith and “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. “Essentials of Our Faith” preserves our commitment to historic evangelicalism.

Relevant Morality

Modernism's most popular preacher on the hopes of liberals.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

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



Harry Emerson
Fosdick

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.

Getting with it

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 takes into account 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.

Doing good

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.

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A Return to Bondage

Fundamentalism's most gifted theologian critiques liberalism.

J. Gresham Machen

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



J. Gresham Machen

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.

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CHURCH HISTORY II -- QUESTIONS

- 2-1. Who was John Calvin and what did he do?
- 2-2. How can we describe Presbyterians?
- 2-3. What does it mean to be Reformed?
- 2-4. Who was John Knox?
- 2-5. What is the Westminster Confession?
- 2-6. Who was the Father of American Presbyterianism?
- 2-7. What happened in 1706 that was of significance to American Presbyterians?
- 2-8. What was the Adopting Act? What was the issue that spawned it? How does the EPC address the issue?
- 2-9. What was the effect on Presbyterians of the Agreement with the Congregationalists?

- 2-10. Why did Presbyterians not thrive on the frontier like the Methodists and Baptists? State two reasons.
- 2-11. What was the Gardiner Spring resolution, and what was its result?
- 2-12. Who were Harry Emerson Fosdick and J. Gresham Machen?
- 2-13. What did liberals believe to be the primary focus of Christianity? What did Fundamentalists think that liberals were missing?
- 2-14. When was the EPC formed? Who formed it and why?

So what? Practical Leadership Applications

CHURCH HISTORY -- Chapters 1 & 2

How does God's work throughout history affect our leadership today?

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.

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES LEARNED THROUGH HISTORY

1. **GOD IS IN CHARGE.** 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 (Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:29, 30; compare Luke. 12:6; Eph. 1:11, Deut. 32:39; Ps. 135:6; Is. 46:9, 10; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 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!

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*, Vol. 37, No. 12).

4. **ALTHOUGH WE PARTICIPATE, IT IS NEVER ABOUT US.** God often overrules human will. While we may seek to convince ourselves 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 (Rom. 9:15, 16, 18; Prov. 21:1; Acts 16:14; Rev. 17:17; Phil. 2:12, 13; II Sam. 15:31-17:14; Ps. 33:10, 11; Prov. 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?
- 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?
- D. One Christian leader noted that if God moved out of most churches, most people wouldn't notice and ministry would go on as usual. Some hard questions: Is God really in charge in our church? Is Jesus really the Head, giving directions to the Body? Honestly, how do we know? What can we do to make sure we aren't trying to control and manage without God's leadership?

CHAPTER THREE: READING THE BIBLE



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 (Matt. 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.”

The Westminster Confession says about the Bible that it is “the rule of faith and life...the Bible speaks authoritatively and so deserves to be believed and obeyed. This authority does not depend on the testimony of any man or church but completely on God, its author, who is himself truth. The Bible therefore is to be accepted as true, because it is the Word of God.” (*WCF*, ch. 1, para. 2 and 4)

We assume here 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 does one 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 was also a clergyman). 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” (II Tim. 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.

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

“canon” *n.* =
from the Greek
word *kanon*:
“ruler, rule,
standard, or
model; a
criterion of
judgment.”

The Canon of Scripture is the list of books that comprise the Bible. How were the books of the Bible chosen? Were only wrong books chosen and valuable books omitted? This is a complex subject and we will not be able to spend enough time on it.

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 books in the Bible were initially questioned. Two or three books were considered and then omitted; 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 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 history on the level of other secular history. 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 Catholic Bible only in 1546 at the Council of Trent.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

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



“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.



Charles Hodge

“(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.

“(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.”

There are good and helpful rules that can aid the reader in understanding particular literary forms used in Scripture, such as understanding parallelisms used in poetry, interpreting Jesus’ parables, and so forth. 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 of interpreters, the Dispensationalists, see the Scriptures 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. Dispensationalist expositors include Scofield, Charles Ryrie, and faculty members from Dallas Seminary.

A text frequently cited by Dispensationalists is II Tim. 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 Gen. 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 (Eph. 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 (Heb. 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 that, “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 give adequate consideration to the continuity of the Old and New Testaments. For example, is the Old Testament applicable to us? Are Christians today free of all obligations to obey the Law, since the Law was a part of the Old Testament dispensation? Do Christians still 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 absolute authority of Scripture and our utter 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.
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 (I Corinthians 15:52 and Rev. 11:15).

Dispensationalists are 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 adequate consideration to the continuity of Scripture, particularly the Old and New Testaments.

Additional resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1

James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1979; contains Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy; also available on the web at <http://www.gty.org/~phil/creeds/chicago.htm>.

Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message--A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, P&R Publishing, 1996.

John H. Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism*, P&R Publishing, 1982.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Edition, P&R Publishing, 1992, pages 75-98.

Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, Zondervan, 1987.

R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992, Part I, pages 3-28.

Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, Eerdmans, 1957.

So what? Practical Leadership Applications

SCRIPTURE -- Chapter 3

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.

AS THE SHEPHERD GOES...

"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,
The Epistle of Theonas
(c.300)**

"Nearly 9 out of 10 churching teenagers said their church experience exposed them to Bible stories (95 percent), taught them about the lives of great people in the Bible (92 percent), and gave them fun experiences related to religion (89 percent). But only half (53 percent) 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. Give me real faith; give me warmer zeal; inflame me with more fervent love; grant me the grace of meekness; make me more like Jesus.'"

**- Charles Spurgeon,
Morning and Evening,
June 12, 1880**

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 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.

Some ideas for 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. We can finish a chapter wondering what we've just read. 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. 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:**
 - a. Lord, why is this passage here for me today?
 - b. Lord, what is the main point (subject, issue, or action) here?
 - c. Lord, who were you speaking to first here, and why?
 - d. Lord, what does this teach me about You, Father-Son-Spirit?
 - e. Lord, what example is there for us to follow?
 - f. Lord, are there any words I should look up to clarify the meaning?
 - g. Jesus, what do I need most from this passage to apply to my life today?

CHAPTER FOUR: 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 six areas, which progress logically through the basic truths of the faith. Each of these six areas will be a topic for study over the next six classes. These topics of doctrinal study are: first, the doctrine of **God**, or **theology**, sometimes called “theology proper” to distinguish this area from the study of all six doctrines generally; second, the doctrine of **the human condition**, or **anthropology**; third, the doctrine of the person and work of **Christ**, or **Christology**; fourth, the doctrine of the means of **salvation**, called **soteriology**; fifth, the doctrine of the **church**, together with the **sacraments**, or **ecclesiology**; and sixth, the doctrine of the **last things**, called **eschatology**.

KNOWING GOD

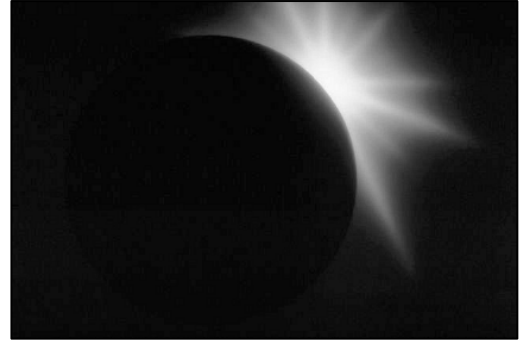
John Calvin wrote, “If we wish to have real wisdom we must know two things: we must know God and we must know ourselves. In order to know one of these properly, we must also know the other.

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 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 the *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" (Rom. 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" (Rom. 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 747 jumbo jet? Or consider a watch. Does it not imply that there is a watchmaker, and 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. Does this not imply a lawgiver and judge who has commanded men absolutely?

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, *Proslogiaon*, 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 (see inset box).

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.

THE DEFINITION AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Can we define God? Of course it is impossible for us to define him in the sense of putting bounds around him. We can say that God is a spirit, for Jesus tells the Samaritan woman so. (John 4:24). He is therefore immaterial, invisible and without parts.

God is, by nature, incomprehensible to us. 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. Finite minds will never understand an infinite God.

Theologians 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

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 work *Cur Deus homo* ("Why the God-Man"), a masterpiece of theology, 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 *Proslogiaon*, Anselm says: "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 in that 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*.)



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 out on a camping trip and looked up at the stars and wondered what lay beyond them? A feeling of metaphysical vertigo 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 his 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 (Ex. 33-34) Samson's father, Manoah, said, "We shall surely die; for we have seen God!" (Judg. 13:22). Isaiah felt his uncleanness, crying out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 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, in what sense is this so? God is not immobile. God does change in some respects. In fact, God is constantly active in the world and our lives. God’s immutability refers to the idea that he is **unchanging in his character and purposes**.

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. Attached is a longer list of God’s attributes. 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.

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.

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 the eleventh chapter, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command” (Heb. 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. In Rhode Island, there is a major city named Providence. The name of the city points out the gap in thinking between the twentieth century and that of our forebears. We are so secular in our thinking 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 heart beat 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 Westminster Confession says, “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” (WCF, ch. 5, para.1).

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.

“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 the thing that 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 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 have to 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*

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.” (*WCF*, ch. 5, para. 2 and 3).

“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” (*WCF*, ch. 5, para. 4).

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 around 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 is also free to suspend these laws at any time to accomplish his will. God has 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) where useful to accomplish his purposes.

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 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. 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 <http://www.epc.org/about-the-epc/pastoral-letters/>.

It is God's sovereignty which 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" (Rom. 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 is also 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.

THE TRINITY



We will consider the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with theology.

The Trinity as such is not taught in the Bible; that is, if you were to review a concordance or a Bible dictionary for the word "Trinity" in the Scriptures, you would not find it. 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" (Deut. 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 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. The Westminster Confession says:

“In the unity of the Godhead, there are three persons, having one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Father exists. He is not generated and does not come from any source. The Son is eternally generated from the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally comes from the Father and the Son” (*WCF* ch. 2, para. 3).

A longer, more complete formulation of the Trinity from Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* is attached at the end of this chapter. A diagram depiction is also attached.

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.

Additional resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 2-5

CHARLES HODGE ON THE TRINITY

(from *Systematic Theology*, abridged edition, pp. 166-168. P&R Publishing, 1992. Used by permission)

“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’ (Deut. 6:4). ‘I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God’ (Isa. 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
(*con’t next page*)

Hodge (*con't*)

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 distance 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.”

Definitions of the Attributes of God

From H. Wayne House, Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, Zondervan Publishing, 1992. Used by Permission.

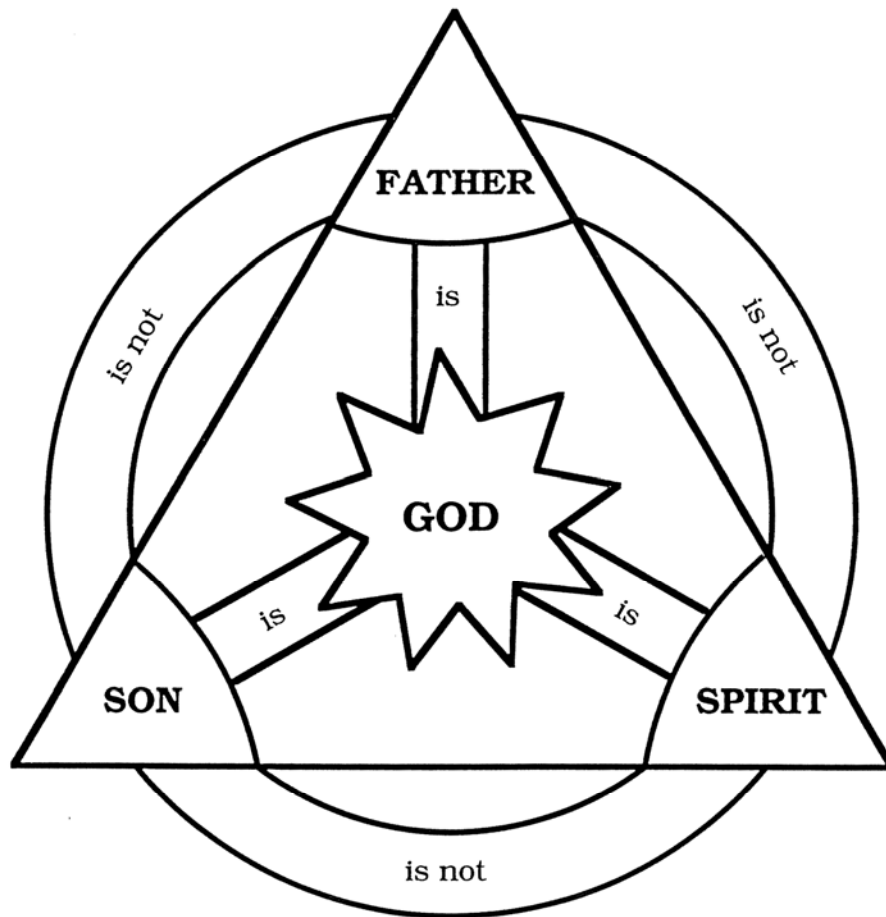
| Attribute | Definition | Scripture Reference |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Simplicity / Spirituality | God is uncompounded, incomplex, indivisible, unique, and spirit in essential being. | John 1:18; 4:24; I Tim 1:17; 6:15-16 |
| Unity | God is one. | Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:6 |
| Infinity | God is without termination and finitude. | I Kings 8:27; Ps. 145:3; Acts 17:24 |
| Eternity | God is free from succession of time. | Gen. 21:33; Ps. 90:2 |
| Immutability / Constancy | God is unchanging and unchangeable in His being. | Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17 |
| Omnipresence | God is present everywhere. | Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 22:23-24 |
| Sovereignty | God is the supreme ruler, independent of any authority outside of himself. | Eph. 1, esp. v. 21 |
| Omniscience | God knows all actual and possible things. | Ps. 139:1-4; 147:4-5; Matt. 11:21 |
| Omnipotence | God is all-powerful. | Matt. 19:26; Rev. 19:6 |
| Justice | God has moral equity; He does not show favoritism. | Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11 |
| Love | God seeks the highest good of humans at His own infinite cost. | Ps. 103:17; Eph. 2:4-5; I John 4:8, 10 |
| Benevolence | God has unselfish concern for the welfare of those he loves. | Deut. 7:7-8; John 3:16 |
| Grace | God supplies those he loves with undeserved favors according to their need. | Ex.. 34:6; Eph. 1:5-8; Titus 2:11 |

Definitions of the Attributes of God (continued)

| Attribute | Definition | Scripture Reference |
|---------------|---|--|
| Goodness | That which constitutes the character of God and is shown by benevolence, mercy, and grace. | Ex.. 33:19; Ps. 145:9 |
| Freedom | God is independent from his creatures. | Ps. 115:3 |
| Holiness | God is righteous, perfect, set apart, or separate from all sin or evil. | I Peter 1:16 |
| Righteousness | God's holiness is applied to relationships; God's law and his actions are exactly right. | Ps. 19:7-9; Jer. 9:24a |
| Truth | There is agreement and consistency with all that is represented by God Himself. | John 14:6; 17:3 |
| Genuineness | God is real/true. | Jer. 10:5-10; John 17:3 |
| Veracity | God speaks the truth and is trustworthy. | I Sam. 15:29; John 17:17, 19; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2 |
| Faithfulness | God proves true; He keeps his promises. | Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:2; I Thess. 5:24 |
| Personality | God is personal. he has self-cognizance, will, intellect, self-determination. | Ex. 3:14; Gen. 3 |
| Life | God is life and the ultimate source of all of life. | Ex.. 3:14; Jer. 10:10; John 5:26 |
| Mercy | God is tenderhearted, showing compassion toward the miserable, needy people He loves and not bringing on fallen people what they deserve. | Ex. 3:7, 17; Ps. 103:13; Matt. 9:36 |
| Persistence | God is long-suffering and patient toward His people. | Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22 |

Ancient Diagram of the Holy Trinity

From H. Wayne House, Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, Zondervan Publishing, 1992. Used by Permission.



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?

So what? Practical Leadership Applications

THEOLOGY -- Chapter 4

How does theology affect our daily work as leaders?

Look around. We live in a world of both truth and perception. For example, what if we watch an airplane take off from a runway and fly away to the north. In our fixed reality from the ground, the plane seems to grow smaller until it disappears. Did its size and mass really change? Is it really gone? Of course not. Our view, or our perspective, of the plane has simply 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, but our perceptions do—and our perceptions of reality also have an impact on our lives.

Our system of beliefs about God – our theology – also touches both our reality and our perception. Our theological suppositions give meaning and perspective to the events of our lives. 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 stands in tomorrow already (omnipresence, eternity) and remains in charge of all things (sovereignty). (Ps. 147:5; Isa. 40:28, Gen. 14:19; Acts 17:24-28; Gen. 18:14; II Tim. 2:13).

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: Every choice we make when we come to a “Y” in the road -- or key decision we make at a meeting -- is NOT (no, never) 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?

WHY DO WE NEED THEOLOGY?

Millard J. Erickson, Theologian

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.

*Christian Theology, Second Edition
(1998)*

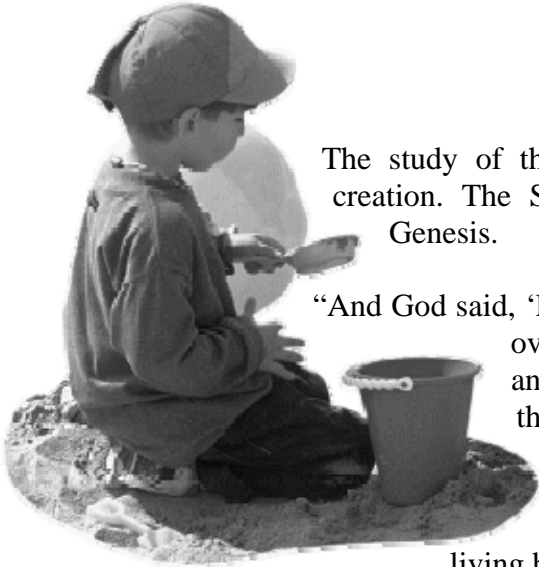
For Group Discussion or Reflection

Another example of practical theology is offered below. After reading it, spend a few minutes coming up with other examples where our THEOLOGY gives birth to our PRACTICAL THEOLOGY.

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 (reflected in Hosea; John 3:16; I John 4:16; and other passages). If God is unchanging and consistent (immutable), this remains 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?

CHAPTER FIVE: ANTHROPOLOGY



THE CREATION

The study of the human condition and our position before God starts with creation. The Scriptural account of the origin of humanity is contained in Genesis.

“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.” (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:8)

This account tells us several things about human beings.

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 in that way we are tied to the physical realm of creation. But God went on to breathe into man the breath of life. So to his earthiness God added something absolutely different--a soul. Therefore, man has **a body and a soul**. One is material, the other non-material; the one is physical, the other spiritual. These two 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**.

Some would add a third element to human beings--a spirit. 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.250-1; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 193).

Created in the Image of God. Man was also created in the **image of God**. What does it mean that man was created in the image of God? Our likeness to God includes our intellectual and moral nature. God is a spirit and the human soul is a spirit. 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. If we were not like God in these respects, we could not know God.

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.

The situation after creation and before the Fall is summarized in the Westminster Confession as follows:

“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 this commandment, they were happy in fellowship with God and had dominion over the other creatures” (*WCF*, ch. 4, para. 2).

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.”

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; and (e) expulsion from the garden.

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. Nevertheless, it is hard for us to understand why they made the choice they did. However, we do know that God is never the author of sin, and therefore, 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, and 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 can also 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 Scriptures.

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 section of this study, 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 had the ability to obey or the ability to disobey God. However, after Adam's fall, he no longer had the ability not to sin. The Bible also says that when Adam fell, he fell as our representative. Adam acted as the representative of the entire human race. He was placed in the garden to act not only for himself, but also for all his future descendants. His sin is ours by imputation. This means that we also no longer have the ability not to sin.



Two terms are helpful here. 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.

"Imputation" is the idea that we are attributed with credit or responsibility for the acts of another. Those of you in accounting know the term "imputed interest," where related parties borrow and lend money at below-market rates. One party may have interest imputed for tax purposes, even though it was not really paid, because it is fair that that party pay tax on the loan as if the interest had been paid. We will see that the imputation of Adam's sin to us works to our terrible detriment; however, another imputation works to our wonderful benefit.

When the Fall took place, not only Adam was forced to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; we were, too. Not only was Eve forced to experience pain in childbirth; 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” (Rom. 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” (Rom. 5:12, 15, 18, and 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 have impure thoughts, speak sinful words and do sinful deeds. Because we are sinners, we sin. The Westminster Confession again expresses it well:

“By this sin they [Adam and Eve] 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. 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. 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” (*WCF*, ch. 6, para. 2-4).



We must be careful to note that there is a difference between total depravity and utter depravity. After all, we could be worse. We are not as wicked as we could possibly be. I look good compared to Hitler, and even Hitler probably loved his mother. However, God does not grade on a curve. While I may look good compared with someone else, I do not measure up to God’s standard, which is absolute perfection. After all, God measures both my actions and my 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.

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” (Rom. 3:10); “They are altogether unprofitable” (Rom. 3:12); we are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1); we are “sold under slavery to sin” (Rom. 7:23) and we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

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

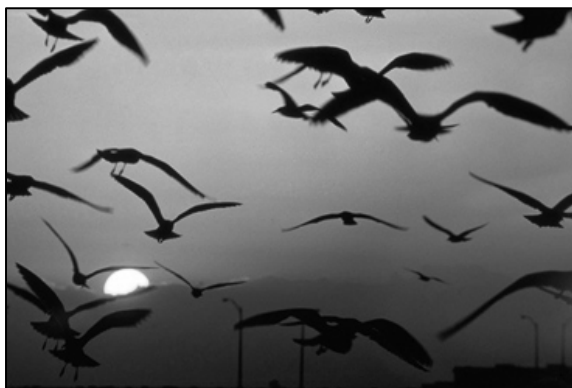
in our sins, totally unable to please him. It is no longer in our natures to seek to please God. We are as dead spiritually as Lazarus was dead physically before Christ called him from the grave.

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 would never 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.



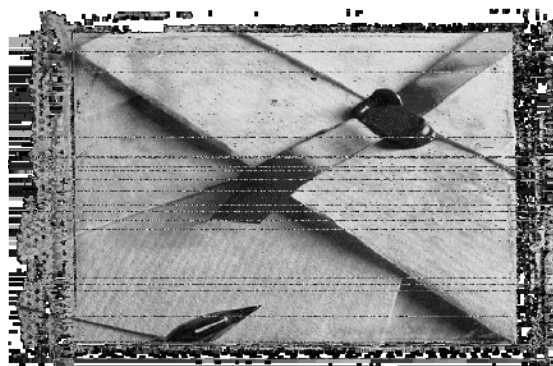
Free will must also be exercised within certain limits. We are not free to fly as birds fly. Birds are free to fly, but (to our knowledge) not free to do advanced mathematical calculations. No matter how I might wish to do so, I am not free to change my skin pigmentation. Freedom is always exercised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

THE EFFECT 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 is still 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, the exchange of possessions, or the eating of a covenant meal together.



We have the 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. (Ex. 24:1-8). The book of Deuteronomy contains the blessings for obeying and the curses for disobeying the Law (Deut. 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 (II Sam. 23:5) by which God promised that a descendent of David would always be the ruler of the kingdom (II Sam. 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.

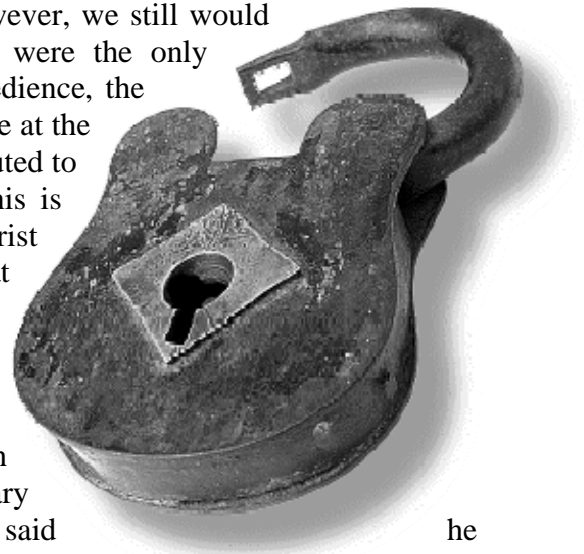
But what about the original Covenant of Works? Was it ever fulfilled? What about the punishment of death that Adam deserved? Did God just forget about the penalty that went with Adam's disobedience?

GOD'S GRACE ON THE CROSS -- 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.

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 have earlier talked about J. Gresham Machen. On New Year's Eve, 1936, in a Roman Catholic hospital in Bismarck, North Dakota, J. Gresham 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" (Matt. 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.

A new nature and eternal life, won for us by Jesus on the cross. Praise God for his wonderful work on our behalf!

Additional resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 6-7

O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants*, Great Commission Publications, 1987.

O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, P & R. Publications, 1980.

R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1986.

R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1992.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Version, P&R Publishing, 1992, pp. 239-319, 337-350.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 181-301.

ANTHROPOLOGY -- QUESTIONS

- 5-1. What does the Bible say was the origin of man? What does this tell us 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?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications **ANTHROPOLOGY -- Chapter 5**

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 and naked, and so 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 (Isa. 64:5-6; Rom. 3:10-11.) The problem is sin. Eccles. 7:20 is clear, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

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.”

- Atheist Sigmund Freud (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.”

- Author, poet Carl Sandburg (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.”

- Writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (b. 1918)

“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.”

- Actor, Christian Mickey Rooney (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.”

- Elder Cyril of Alexandria (5th century)

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 arms 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 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 and consumed 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
- 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 -- live a life of sacrifice and more sacrifice

CHAPTER SIX: 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, (2) He was fully divine, and (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. He displayed normal bodily responses to physical and mental stimulation. Jesus had all human emotions, but without sinning.

Theologian B.B. Warfield surveyed the gospels for the emotional make-up of Jesus in his study “The Emotional Life of Christ.” 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 (Matt. 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.

The Nicene Creed (325 AD)



We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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 meat 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 (Heb. 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 (Heb. 1:4), Moses (Heb. 3:3) and Melchizedek, the high priest (Heb. 7). Paul says that the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus (Col. 1:19). He is described as the creator, upholder and ruler of the universe (Col. 1:16-18). There are other passages even more direct, which we will discuss under “The Pre-existent Christ” below.

Christ is One Person. 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* ch. 8, para. 2). The Scriptures reveal 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.

THE PRE-EXISTENT CHRIST

The clearest statements of the nature of Christ are set out in John 1:1-14; Phil. 2:5-11; and I John 1:1-3. From these passages we see that Christ was with God in the beginning (I 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). Jesus is also called “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). Both 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 Nicea 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 two books that refer to Jesus as begotten (John 1:14 and 18 and Heb. 1:5) are also the books with the clearest and highest Christology -- that is, these same books proclaim the exalted position of Jesus. 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 Nicea 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 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 **he went to all lengths to live a life of active righteousness**. When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize him, John protested, but Jesus said, "Let us fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 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 not 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 ROLE OF 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.



"Passion" by Velacruz

For example, one view of the necessity of the cross 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 first 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.

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 called the **vicarious substitutionary view**. From Chapter 3, you will recall that Anselm was a very influential thinker, and he 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.



"Christ the Judge" by Michelangelo

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" (Isa. 53:6). Or, as we read in II Cor. 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 Gal. 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us..." and Heb. 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 some 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 and 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.

We can say this about the cross: **reconciliation** really 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.

SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

So 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" (Rev. 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 that 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 that people of the Old Testament lived by faith (Heb. 11). And what was the object of that faith? Jesus Christ, to the extent he had been revealed to those people.

Prefiguring and 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 foreshadowings, 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. (I Cor. 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 (Mic. 5:2), out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1), from the lineage of David (Isa. 9:7). He would minister primarily in Galilee (Isa. 9:1), would be a shepherd stricken, causing the sheep to scatter (Zech. 13:7), would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12), and would suffer and be insulted and have lots cast for his clothing (Ps. 69). But this Messiah would emerge victorious to sit at the right hand of the Father (Ps. 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 foreshadowings, 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

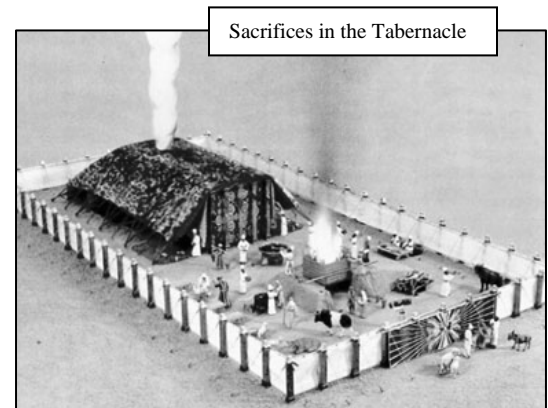
bears on the work of Jesus. Jesus was a mediator of the relationship between God and his people as prophet, priest, and king.

JESUS AS PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

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” (Heb. 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. (Heb. 8:1; Rom. 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 says, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also in vain.... you are still dead in your sins” (I Cor. 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.

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” (I Cor. 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.
3. The empty tomb was never explained.
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 and 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.

Additional resources:

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 305-414.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Version, P & R Publishing, 1992, pp. 337-420.

R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1992.

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.

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.
 - A.

 - B.

 - C.

 - D.

 - E.

- 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?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

CHRISTOLOGY -- Chapter 6

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.”⁴

What does this have to do with Christian leadership? Simply – everything! For Jesus is not only our Lord and leader, but he is also our example to follow. Author Laurie Beth Jones has compiled several examples of how Jesus led his life and his disciples.⁵ Some of these “Leadership Style of Jesus” items are listed below in the 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

- A. He knew who he was.
- B. He kept in constant contact with his Boss.
- C. He stuck to his mission.

⁴ Source unknown

⁵ Laurie Beth Jones. *JESUS – C.E.O.* (Hyperion Press, 1995)

INCARNATIONAL LIVING

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

- Jesus of Nazareth, *John 13:13-17*

“Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held and patterned by a leader.”

- John W. Gardner, *On Leadership (1990)*

“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 Derrick Timball 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)*

- D. He had internal anchors.
- E. He was transparent.
- F. He did difficult things.
- G. He took a stand.
- H. He was willing to look foolish.
- I. He asked people to join his plan.
- J. He worked through his fears.
- K. He had a passionate commitment to the cause.

Jesus Modeled Strength of Action.

- A. He saw the big picture.
- B. He took action.
- C. He had a plan.
- D. He asked for a commitment.
- E. He was visible.
- F. He took the long view.
- G. He troubled himself on behalf of others.
- H. He trained his replacements.
- I. He said, “Why *not* me?”
- J. He rose above the distractions.
- K. He came to be a blessing to those around him.
- L. He knew he was never alone.

Jesus Modeled a Strength of Relationships

- A. He gave them a vision of something larger than themselves.
- B. He “beheld” others. He was willing to interrupt his own plans for them.
- C. He believed in them.
- D. He treated them as friends.
- E. He set an example for them.
- F. He was willing to teach them.
- G. He held them accountable.
- H. He prayed for their best.
- I. He acknowledged them in public and in private.
- J. He looked out for the little guy.
- K. He had high expectations for them.
- L. He kept urging them on.
- M. He had compassion for the crowds.
- N. He served them. He defended them. He forgave them.
- O. He delegated authority to them.
- P. He saw them as God’s gift to him.
- Q. He saw them as his greatest accomplishment.
- R. He loved them until the end.

CHAPTER SEVEN: 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** to bring us to a **saving knowledge of God**. What makes Christ's sacrifice effective for us? There are a relatively few people,

called **universalists**, who 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 question of the Philippian jailer, "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 S-C-O-R-E-S!" 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. As we will see, Martin Luther and John Calvin both searched the Scriptures to develop a biblically grounded soteriology. Many Protestants will agree that the following are at the heart of salvation:

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

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 work of God in the person hearing the message is also referred to as **effectual calling**.

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 a few opinions, or changing some 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.

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.

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, 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 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 church commonly taught that salvation is mediated by the church, through confession. 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 [God’s] 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.**

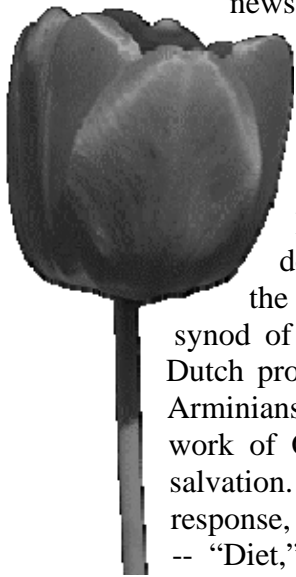
HOW ARE WE SAVED? THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

If Luther’s contribution to our understanding of salvation was the re-discovery 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.

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 Eph. 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 salvation propounded by a Dutch professor of theology, Jacobus Arminius. Those holding the views of Arminius, the 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 (you will remember that “canon” means “rule” -- “Diet,” “Canons,” “Worms,” “Dort” – did these Reformers have any sense of public relations or of brand-name appeal?). Students later summarized the position with five positions captured by T-U-L-I-P. We will examine the Reformed doctrine of salvation by reviewing TULIP.

T-U-L-I-P

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 **T**otal Depravity; **U**nconditional Election; **L**imited Atonement; **I**rrresistible Grace; and **P**erseverance 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, because it 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 from Ps. 51:5; Isa. 53:6; Jer. 17:9; John 8:34; Rom. 5:12,15,17; 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1,4,5.



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, 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” (WCF ch. 3, para. 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.

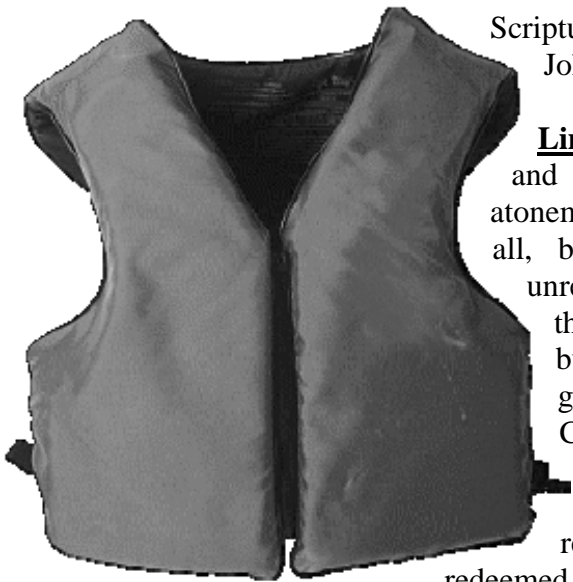
You will recall that Reformed thinkers and Arminians disagree as to the effect of the Fall. Arminians believe humanity is adversely affected by the Fall, but that we are still capable of choosing God. Arminians believe that God has foreknowledge of our decision, and so God chooses for eternal life those 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 is at Ex.33:19; and Rom. 9:15; Matt. 22:14; John 15:16; Rom. 9:11-23; Eph. 1:4-5, 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 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” (WCF ch. 3, para. 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” (Ex 7:1-5; Rom. 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” (Jer. 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 is at Matt. 1:21; John 10:26-28; John 6:44; John 6:65.



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. The Westminster Confession says:

“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 mighty power leads them to what is good. And so he effectually draws them to Jesus Christ. But they come voluntarily, having been made willing by God's grace.

“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” (WCF ch. 10, para. 1-2).

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 one 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.

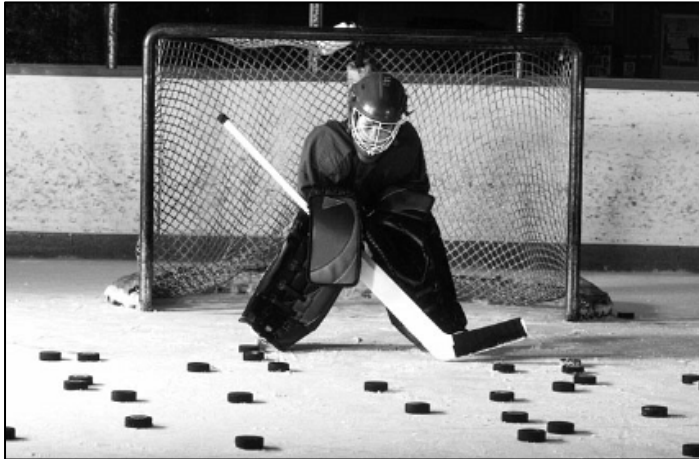
Scriptural grounding is at John 6:37; Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:15-16; I Cor. 2:14; Phil. 2:13.

Perseverance of the Saints. The “P” in the mnemonic “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 and Paul's concern about being “disqualified” (I Cor. 9:27), and some examples

such as King Saul, and conclude that we can fall fully and finally from grace. However, none of these Scriptures say directly 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” (I John 2:19).

Further scriptural grounding for eternal security is found in Jesus’ assurance that no believer can be snatched from the Father’s hand (John 10:27-30). The priestly work of Christ praying on our behalf assures us that he intercedes for us. The “golden chain” of Rom. 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

One may ask whether this is entirely an intellectual exercise, or whether the means of our salvation has practical import. One can surely 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, John 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, only for our faithfulness in proclaiming the message. This approach frees us up 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 Christ-like 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.

The Westminster Confession traces the changes in our wills all the way to the state of glory as follows:

“God has given man a will, which by nature is free, i.e., it is not forced or necessarily inclined toward good or evil.

“In his state of innocence man had complete freedom and the natural ability to will and to do what is good and pleasing to God. God also made man so that he could lose that freedom.

“Man fell into a state of sin by his disobedience and so completely lost his ability to will any spiritual good involving salvation. Consequently, fallen man is by nature completely opposed to spiritual good, is dead in sin and is unable by his own strength either to convert himself or to prepare himself for conversion.

“When God converts a sinner and brings him into a state of grace, he frees him from his natural enslavement to sin. By God’s grace alone, freely given, sinful man is enabled to will and to do what is spiritually good. However, since the old sinful nature also remains, the believer cannot consistently or perfectly will to do what is good but also wills evil.

“The will of man is perfectly free and permanently inclined to good alone only in the state of glory” (WCF ch. 9, para. 1-5).

R. C. Sproul in *Chosen By God* (p. 66) has portrayed our moral abilities and inabilities by this chart:

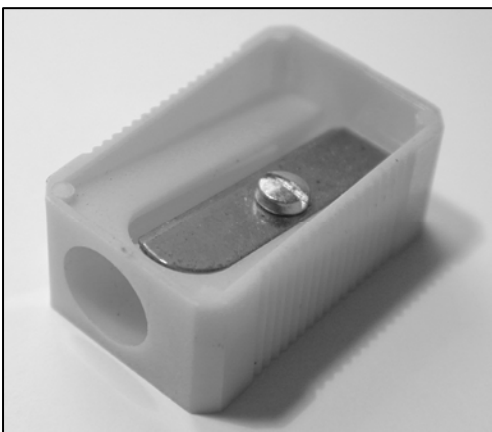
| <i>Pre-Fall Man</i> | <i>Post-Fall Man</i> | <i>Reborn Man</i> | <i>Glorified Man</i> |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| able to sin | able to sin | able to sin | |
| able to not sin | | able to not sin | able to not sin |
| | unable to not 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 who believe 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!” (Rom. 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...” (Phil. 2:12-13). The 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 is also 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 believism. "Shall we sin then because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Rom. 6:15). This view may be expressed as follows:

Faith = Justification – Works..... FALSE

Faith and good deeds can never be separated. James says that 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 one who professes Christ, there is reason to doubt whether the profession is genuine. This view is expressed:

Faith = Justification + Works TRUE!

Additional resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 11-18

Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1932.

J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, InterVarsity Press, 2001.

R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God*, 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?
- A. T =
 - B. U =
 - C. L =
 - D. I =
 - E. 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?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

SOTERIOLOGY -- Chapter 7

How should leadership encourage the salvation process?

THE PROCESS OF SALVATION AND GROWTH

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 paradigm⁶:

1. STABILITY

Here the current system or place in life seems to work fine. Some examples are:

- 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, there is no famine for the Israelites.
- 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. Some examples:

- 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.

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. (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. (Translation: Evangelism is everyone’s job.)
- “Pull thy brother’s boat across, and lo, thine own hath reached the shore.” India. (Translation: God amazingly allows us to participate in the salvation process of others, and we get blessed, too.)
- “When the wind blows, garbage flies.” India. (Translation: Don’t try to figure out whom the Spirit is going to draw. After all, God chose you.)
- “Every day is a fishing day, but not every day is a catching day.” Virgin Islands. (Translation: We are called to do the work of sharing an answer about our faith, not producing a faith crop. That is up to God.)
- “Some men grow; others only swell.” U.S.A. (Translation: Salvation is never about us.)
- “Monday to Saturday is the test of Sunday.” U.S.A. (Translation: Actions speak louder than sermons.)
- “The man who makes no choice makes a choice.” Jewish Proverb. (Translation: The man who makes no choice about salvation, just did.)

⁶ As modified and adapted by Brad Strait from Alan Roxburgh’s stages in *The Terranova Project*; and from Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

- 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.

3. DISEMBEDDING

We begin to disconnect from the current system or process of thinking in many ways, stepping outward. Some examples:

- 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” or “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.

5. TRANSFORMATION

We decide to commit to the new world or new paradigm. Some examples:

- 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.

For Group Discussion or Reflection

- a. How have we, as individuals, experienced this process?
- b. How is faith required at each step?
- c. How are conversion and continuing transformation significantly different?
- d. How would we reach out to a person at each step?
- e. What barriers would we find in our church if we were at each stage?
- f. Is there something specific we can do now to reach out to people at each stage?

CHAPTER EIGHT: 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.

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, saying, “The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God... No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:10-11). The Spirit is described as omnipresent in Ps. 139, “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 (Gen. 1:1-2), consistent with omnipotence.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Revelation of Truth⁷. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals truth to us. The Holy Spirit brings us to salvation, and reveals spiritual truth for our sanctification.

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” (I Cor. 12:3).

The prophets were moved to speak by the Holy Spirit, and it was by the Holy Spirit that the Scriptures were inspired (I Peter 1:21; II Tim. 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.

⁷ Arthur Pink, in his book *The Holy Spirit*, ascribed twenty-two roles to the Holy Spirit. Only a few are mentioned here.

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” (II Tim. 1:7). “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” Jesus promised (Acts 1-8). The word for 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” (Rom. 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. Persons serving 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).



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Gal.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.

FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Filling of the Holy Spirit. The passage that best discusses the filling of the Spirit is Eph. 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.

First, 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.

Second, the verb is in the **plural form**. Being filled is not optional. It is a command for all Christians.

Third, 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.

Fourth, 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” (I Cor. 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” (Rom. 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 we should encourage 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 -- I Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-12; and I Peter 4:10-11. In I Cor. 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 he or she has no gift to share. This is emphasized in each one of the passages

on the gifts. “For I say to **every one** of you...” (Rom. 12:3); “one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to **each one**, just as he determines...” (I Cor. 12:11); “But to **each one of us** grace has been given...” (Eph. 4:7); “**Each of you** should use whatever gift he has received...” (I Peter 4:10).

Next, Paul makes several points by his 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) 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? But a single toe brought glory and pride and celebration to one coast; and a single toe brought anxiety and fear to the other coast (Mr. 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 I Cor. 12, and nine at the end, and four of the latter ones are new. There is also a list of seven in Rom.

12, five of which are not in I Corinthians; a list of five in Ephesians, two of which are new; and two gifts in I 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 Romans¹², Paul names serving, teaching, and encouraging as spiritual gifts (v. 7), and says that he who contributes should do so generously; he who shows mercy should do so cheerfully (v. 8). In I Cor. 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 (I Cor. 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 I Cor. 12:27. Some of these people will argue that certain gifts were temporary, limited to the apostolic age, and others were permanent.⁸

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 and wherever they were. Those questioning 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, consistently exercising those gifts.

⁸ Martin Lloyd-Jones in *God the Holy Spirit* 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.

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 is a good place to note that in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church there is freedom. The motto of the EPC 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 of the Spirit 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 <http://www.epc.org/about-epc/position-papers/holy-spirit.html> and in a paper pamphlet.

Additional resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 34 (note: this is one of the “American Chapters” added to the Confession in 1903)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church, “Position Paper on the Holy Spirit.”

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Version, P&R Publishing, 1992, pp. 185-192.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit*, Crossway Books, 1997.

John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, InterVarsity Press, 1964.

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

THE HOLY SPIRIT – Chapter 8

How should our church reflect the leadership of the Holy Spirit?

Even after salvation, we all are in need of changing. 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, guaranteeing what is to come (II Cor. 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 -- 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, 33)
- A shared attitude (4:32)
- A shared sacrifice (4:32b, 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 prophesies 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 and mind" shared picture (vision) in their Spirit-filled

MARKS OF THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH--Acts 4:31-35

31 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.

32 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.

33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 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 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need (NASU).

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!”

Questions:

- 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 one spirit as well. 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.

Questions:

- 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

We can make two major mistakes when we examine this passage. 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. “**No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own.**” 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, a Holy Spirit community, with a willingness 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.

Questions:

- Honestly, 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?

CHAPTER NINE: 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.



Air Force Academy Chapel

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 (Josh. 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. Others may 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 Des Peres Presbyterian Church in St. Louis County, one of the oldest churches west of the Mississippi River. The sign says, “1833 Meeting House/Des Peres Presbyterian Church.” The sign is an acknowledgment that the building is a meetinghouse, not the church. The church is the people who are the community of saints. The Catholic Church tended to emphasize the externals

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, para. 2). The visible church is that church acknowledged by the world. However, no church is wholly pure, and 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 is also both organism and organization. Paul compares the church to a body made up of different cells and organs (I Cor. 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, you 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; and (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.**

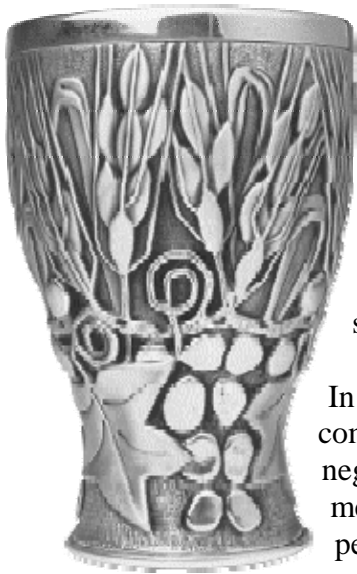
All of us know people who are not believers, but who have high moral standards. All men have some sense of right and wrong, of the need for truth. This is the operation of common grace. Christians frequently degrade the value of charitable work outside the church, such as works promoting medical care, research, and the arts, since they do not provide salvation. What a misunderstanding of God's common grace!

However, there are also 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, and there has been 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 if that person 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, or 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 I Corinthians when he talks about the foolishness of preaching being the wisdom of God.

LAW AND GOSPEL

So 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.

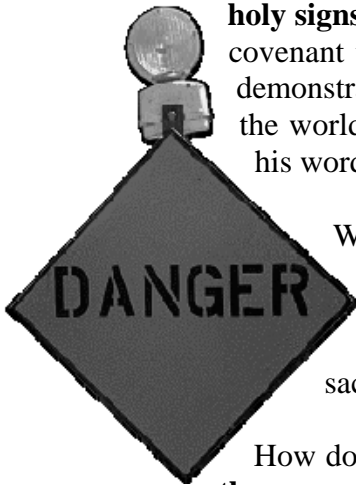
What is the Law? **The Law is anything in Scripture that reveals God's will in the form of a prohibition or a command.** The Law reveals to us the bad news that we are sinners and cannot be justified on the basis of our own works according to the Law. *What is the Gospel?* **The Gospel proclaims the 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 is also a guide to the believer, a rule of life, which 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 and guide.

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, ch. 27, para. 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 the document sealed. The sacrament reminds us of God's authority exercised through the church.

How does a sacrament provide grace? As we have said, **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, Paul says 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



(I Cor. 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 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" (Gen. 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, the church 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 (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16). So 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; 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 gathered 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. In other traditions, there is a direct link between baptism and regeneration. The Roman Catholic Church says that baptism results in regeneration. In some Protestant denominations, baptism is not permitted unless one is already believed to have been regenerated. 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 may properly be called by a number of names. It may also 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 the sacrifice of Jesus frees us from spiritual bondage to sin, and the meal becomes a communion with God. As you can see, 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.

In the Roman Catholic Church, it is believed that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. The 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**.

Calvin rejected both of these views. Calvin believed -- as do we Presbyterians -- that the Lord's Supper is first a memorial, a remembering of the death of Christ. But even more importantly, he believed that Christ, while not bodily present as the Roman 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.

Next we will look at the ultimate destiny of the church and of the individual members who comprise it.

Additional Resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 19, 25-29

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Version, P & R Publishing, 1992, pp. 477-508,.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 555-660,.

ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE SACRAMENTS – QUESTIONS

- 9-1. When did the church begin?
- 9-2. What is the visible church? The invisible church?
- 9-3. What is the militant church? Why is the church also the triumphant church?
- 9-4. What is the catholic church?
- 9-5. What are the marks of a true church?
- 9-6. What is common grace? What does it have to do with our salvation?
- 9-7. To whom is special grace limited, and what does it do?
- 9-8. When we say the Word is a special means of grace, what “Word” are we talking about?
- 9-9. What are the two parts of the preached Word?

- 9-10. What role does the Law play?
- 9-11. What role does the Gospel play?
- 9-12. Is the Law limited to the Old Dispensation and the Gospel to the New?
- 9-13. What are the sacraments of the Old Dispensation?
- 9-14. What does it do to a sacrament if the person who administers it is not of good character?
- 9-15. Who may administer the sacraments? Who may preach the Word?
- 9-16. What one thing did circumcision and baptism represent?
- 9-17. How do we believe baptism is related to regeneration?
- 9-18. What is the real difference between Presbyterians and immersionists as regards baptism, and who is a proper candidate for baptism for Presbyterians and immersionists?

9-19. Were infants a part of the Old Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace?

9-20. What is transubstantiation? Who holds this view?

9-21. What is consubstantiation? Who holds this view?

9-22. How do Presbyterians believe Christ is present in the bread and wine?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications **ECCLESIOLOGY AND SACRAMENTS – Chapter 9**

How does our theology of the church affect the way we lead?

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is founded and established on clear Reformed principles. Yet our structures and Book of Government allow a great range of freedoms. A great breath of church styles can be found inside our denomination. Worship styles vary widely. Some churches reflect a traditional spirit, while others are more contemporary, and others are even considered “emerging.”

Look at the chart on the next page showing. It shows “A Continuum of Protestant Worship.” The chart, compares different, broad branches of Protestant churches. While the comparisons are general, they show a wide variety of theology and worship. Some branches or denominations are highly structured, centralized, and controlled. Others are totally independent and autonomous, shaped by the local leadership alone. In the middle, groups such as the EPC, allow a combination of local and denominational influence in their churches.

“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
(1997)

As you look at the chart, notice that the Presbyterian stream of the EPC is often influenced by other streams. For example, some churches are affected by the Bible Church stream, or the broader Evangelical stream, or even the Puritan stream. Notice how leadership styles vary from one style 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:

- Where does our church best fit on the chart?
- How does our place on the chart have an impact on how we lead this 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 types of backgrounds are reflected in our congregation?
- What conflicts arise based on the presence of these different 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?

A CONTINUUM OF PROTESTANT WORSHIP⁹

| DENOMINATION GROUPING | MEANS OF SALVATION | LEADERSHIP | BASIS OF TRUTH | FOCUS FOR SANCTIFICATION | NATURE OF WORSHIP |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| Anglican Episcopal | Participation in the Sacraments (Baptism) | Institutional and Hierarchical (Bishops) | Church Tradition and Scripture | Membership & Sacraments | Outward & Sacramental |
| Lutheran | Doctrine of Faith | Hierarchical and Pastoral (Herr Pastor) | Lutheran Doctrine and Scripture | Membership and Continued Orthodoxy | Historical & Conforming |
| Methodist | Baptism and confirmation | Hierarchical and Pastoral | Methodist Doctrines and Scripture | Membership and Continued Orthodoxy | Historical and Traditional |
| Nazarene Keswick Wesleyan Victorious Life | Personal Perfection and Holiness | Leaders chosen from the Discipled Community | Scripture and Doctrine | Personal Perfection through Continual Surrender | Focus on Holiness and Surrender |
| Bible Church Anabaptist Baptist Mennonite Amish | Personal Conversion and Membership in Church | Leaders of the Discipled Community | Fundamental Doctrines from Scripture | Obedience / Separation from Culture | Individualist, Formal and Conforming |
| Presbyterian Reformed CRC RCA | Grace through Faith Alone | Multiple Ordained Rule (Elders) | Scripture Alone | Preached Word and Persistence | Formal and Historic |
| Evangelical | Personal Conversion | Varies, Often based on Perceived Maturity | Scripture Alone | Daily Relevance | Individual, Revivalist, and Relevant |
| Puritan | Persist in Community of the Word | Chosen by Congregation | Scripture Alone | Personal Bible Study | Simple and without Rituals |
| Charismatic Pentecostal | Baptism “in” the Spirit | Independent / A Leader’s Internal Call | Scripture, and Subjective Signs | Sign Gifts & Encountering God | Inward, Personal Experiences of God |

⁹ From Dr. Bruce Shelly, Marshall Shelly, and Brad Strait (Denver Seminary)

CHAPTER TEN: 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 Private 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.

And 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* Is. 2:2; Mic. 4:1), the "last time" (*eschatos ton chronon*, I Peter 1:20), and "the last hour" (*eschate hora*, I 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 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 a 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. In Eccles.12:7, we read 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), and when Stephen died, he asked God to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59).



In late 1998, the Unknown Soldier from the Vietnam War interred in Washington, D.C., was identified. Using DNA technology previously unavailable, authorities identified him as Michael Blassie, and 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." Since believers are justified, however, and are 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. After all, 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. I 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" (*WCF*. ch. 32, para. 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, a shadowy region to which the dead descend. For instance, Ps. 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 Ps. 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" (II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 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" (12:23). There are also Old Testament references, 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 around

in line, no state without consciousness, and no place 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 "venial sins," those committed after baptism and not resulting in damnation, but requiring purging. The period of purgatory can be shortened by the prayers and Masses of the living, according to Catholic teaching. Purgatory is supported by II Macc. 12:42-45. However, Maccabees is part of the Apocrypha, not a book 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 (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10; Rom. 11:25). These passages refer to the evangelization of the world as the goal of history. If this is true, 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 Rom. 11:25-29 connects this to the return of Christ.

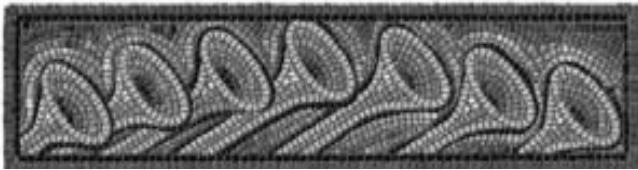
The Great Apostasy and Great Tribulation. Many will fall away in the end times, and many will suffer persecution (Matt. 24:9-12, 21-24; Mark 13:9-22; Luke 21:22-24; II Tim. 3:1-4).

The Coming of the Antichrist. There will be one who opposes Christ and his people (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; I Thess. 2:3-4, Dan. 11:36).

Signs and Portents. At the end of the age there will be signs, which include 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 (Matt. 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" (Matt 24:36). The return of Christ will be personal and physical, not just spiritual, as the angels told the disciples: "This same 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 (Matt. 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 (Heb. 9:28). The clouds of heaven will be his chariot (Matt. 24:30), the angels of heaven his bodyguard (II Thess. 1:7), and the saints his escort (I Thess. 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 (I Cor. 15:25; Rev. 19:11-16; Phil. 2:10-11).

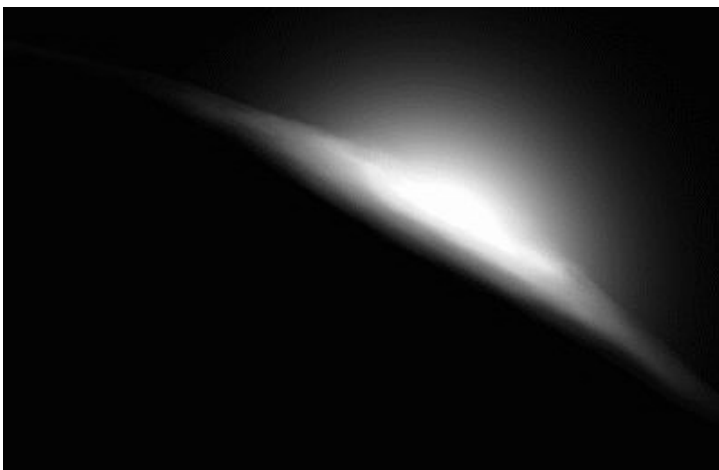
The General Resurrection. With Christ's return, the dead will rise. The resurrection body will be like our present bodies, and yet changed. We will be physical, not just spirits. Jesus was raised physically, as Thomas learned, and Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection, implying we will be like him. In Rom. 8:11 we are told clearly 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" (I Cor. 15:42-44). Both 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.



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 (Matt. 11:22, 24; Luke 12:47-48; Dan. 12:3).

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 (Matt. 25:31; John 5:27; Acts 10:42; Phil. 2:10). We will all be judged based on our response to Christ, and be

Consummation of the Kingdom -- The 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. It is described in Revelation 21 as a Holy City of incomparable beauty and light, 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 of a millennium is based on Rev. 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, meaning a substantial period of time. Those favoring a figurative meaning point out that Ps. 50:10 says that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God, and Job 9:3 says that 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 that Christ will return before the millennium are “**premillennialists.**” Those who hold that Christ will return after the millennium are “**postmillennialists.**”

But there are also large numbers of believers who 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 have discussed Dispensationalism earlier. 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, and 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 point out that the passage in Revelation 20 is 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 are also 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.

Attached 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. Louis Berkhof in his systematic theology 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.

Additional Resources:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 32-33

Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, Intervarsity Press, 1992.

R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1992.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Abridged Version, P & R Publishing, 1992, pp. 509-542.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 661-736.

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 |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Second Coming of Christ | 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 |
| Resurrection | 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. |
| Judgments | 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. |
| Tribulation | 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 |
| Millennium | No literal millennium on earth after second coming | Present age blends into millennium because of progress of 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 |
| Israel and the Church | 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 |
| Adherents | L. Berkhof; O. T. Allis; G. C. Berkhouwer | Charles Hodge; B. B. Warfield; W. G. T. Shedd; A. H. Strong | G. E. Ladd; A. Reese; M.. J. Erickson | L. S. Chafer; J. D. Pentecost; C. C. Ryrie; J. F. Walvood. |

ESCHATOLOGY – QUESTIONS

10-1. In what way does general eschatology differ from individual eschatology?

10-2. What happens to the soul when we die?

10-33. What events will occur before the return of Christ? (There are six of them -- be able to name most.)

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.

10-4. When will Jesus come?

10-5. Describe Jesus' return -- five characteristics.

- 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? What will be the basis of these rewards and punishments, and how does this differ from how one is saved?

10-9. What is the primary difference among premillennialists, postmillennialists, and amillennialists? Briefly describe the different positions.

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

ESCHATOLOGY – Chapter 10

How does the coming of the “End Times” impact our leadership today?

The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” and the answer is “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

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:

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² 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. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ 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)

WHY ARE WE HERE?

“American Christianity is more like busy Martha than like the pensive Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus. 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)**

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 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?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN: 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 first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” and the answer is “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

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.

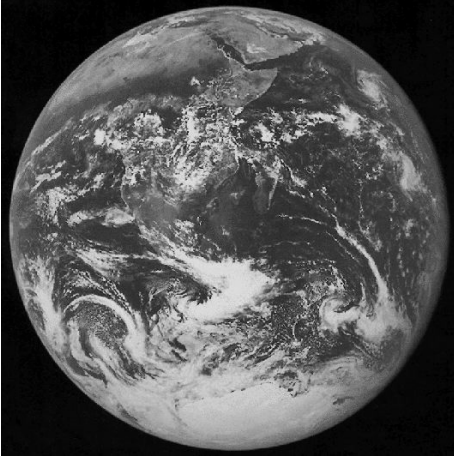
The Reformers had five Latin phrases by which they set out the distinctives of what they believed. Each used the Latin word “*solus*,” meaning “alone.” The Reformers affirmed “Christ alone” (“*Solus Christus*”); “Scripture alone” (“*Sola Scriptura*”); “Faith alone” (“*Sola Fide*”); “Grace alone” (“*Sola 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.**

Jonathan Edwards wrote “The End for which God Created the World,” recently republished in *God’s Passion for His Glory* by John Piper. References to Edwards here are from *God’s Passion for His Glory*.

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 or 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, is also referred to as his glory.** So Paul would "pray that out of the riches of his glory he may strengthen you..." (Eph. 3:16) and promise "that my God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory..." (Phil. 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" (II Cor. 2:7).

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" (Ps. 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." (Ps. 79:9). **God's fame**, that he is known to the nations, is also his glory.

In summary, then, 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 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. My good follows. For instance:

The entire creation gives glory to God. Isa. 6:3 says, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.” “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and the heavens” (Ps. 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...” (Eph. 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 (Gen. 11:4). He called Abram to make Israel a nation in which God could display his glory (Isa. 49:3). When he gave the Law, God declared that no other gods would be glorified before him (Ex. 20:3-5). God’s preservation of the rebellious wanderers in the dessert (Ez. 20:21-22), the conquest of Canaan (2 Sam. 7:23), the establishment of the monarchy (I Sam. 12:19-23), the building of the temple (I Kings 8;41-45), Israel’s return from exile (Isa. 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 chapter 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, and God 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 Isa. 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 GIVES GLORY TO 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 Bible says that ***even reprobates, the wicked and the unrighteous, those most in rebellion, are for God’s glory.***

How can this be? Proverbs 15:4 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 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 willing to honor God voluntarily 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” (Ex. 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’” (Rom. 9:17; Ex. 9:16). Of course, this happened when Pharaoh’s army drowned. God’s glory is also 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 (Rom. 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. **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 go to the pharmacy to fill a prescription. In going to 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 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.

God is described as “the alpha and the omega” (Rev. 1:8), “the beginning and the end” (Isa. 48:12). 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.

TRUUBLING 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” (Isa. 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 MacArthur was the commander of the Pacific front. 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 received the adulation to which he thought he was entitled. It was 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’. 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” (p. 169). **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 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.

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... (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**" (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 (Eph. 1:4). Jesus is the lamb slain from the beginning of the world (Rev. 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 (I Cor. 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 (Rom. 8:28).

And we know that God has only good for us in the future as we enter into the joy of our master (Matt. 25:21) and live with him in a place in which there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 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: GOD IS MOST GLORIFIED IN US WHEN WE ARE MOST SATISFIED IN HIM.

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.**

Paul gives us the key to glorifying God in everything in I Corinthians 10. 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"** (I Cor. 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, or money, or status, or education, or any 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” (Ps. 37:4). “**Rejoice** in the Lord and **be glad** you righteous” (Ps. 32:11). “**Shout for joy** to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps. 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” (Matt. 13:44). That 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!**” (Phil. 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...” (Phil. 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” (Heb. 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 from God. Consider Jer. 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 Jer. 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” (Rom. 1:21-22). Although modern idols may be different, no longer carved images, they are still 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, and 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. C. S. Lewis says, “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.**” (*The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*, p. 2)



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.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF GOD'S GLORY AS THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR THE WORLD

So 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, 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.

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. Charles Colson went from the White House to prison, but said that the glory of the White House was so much 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.

Additional resources:

John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, Crossway Books, 1998 (containing Jonathan Edwards' "The End for Which God Created the World").

John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, Multnomah Press, 1986 (see especially Appendix 1).

James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 3: God and History*, Baker Books, pp. 1409-1480.

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. Read Luke 12:32-34. What truth about God's character is set out in the passage? What about our response?
- 11-5. What does I Cor. 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?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

PURPOSE – Chapter 11

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 listed some of the steps and key questions that a leadership team must wrestle with prayerfully. 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?”

2. Seek an Organizational Vision: “What does this look like here and now?”

“What target group or area are we to seek and serve?”

“What opportunities have we been given?”

“What is our specific location?”

“What will it look like if we are successful here and now?”

3. 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 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: “What major milestones flow from the vision?”

“How do we start this process?”

“What steps do we sense God has ahead of us?”

“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 ministry/ 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?”

CHAPTER TWELVE: CHURCH GOVERNMENT

We said earlier that our tradition can be described in two ways. We are **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.

AN OVERVIEW OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT



There are three basic forms by which churches govern themselves: Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian.

Episcopal Church Government is government from the top down. This form of government is sometimes referred to as "hierarchical." Persons 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 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 authority held supercedes 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 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 called "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 Particular Church. A local church is referred to in the EPC as a "particular church." Chapter 4 of the Book of Order spells out the work of the local congregation. The church 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 Particular 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, arranging a mother-daughter relationship between the Session of an existing church and the mission church, or by appointing a

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 particular church, with the right to be represented at Presbytery and with the rights of a congregation described below.

A Presbytery may also receive local churches that are independent or that are leaving another denomination.

Membership of a Particular Church. There are three classes of church members provided in Chapter 6 of the Book of Order. Most of us would think first of **confirmed members**, 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 voting in congregational meetings.



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.

Affiliate members are persons separated geographically from a home church, usually military people and college students. 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 (Chapter 9 of the Book of Order). New members may be received from another church by **transfer of membership**. New Christians may be received by **profession of faith**. If a Christian comes 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 Particular Church. We said above that each local congregation has certain rights that the denomination cannot take away. Chapters 7 and 17-5 of the Book of Government provides for these as follows:

- **Election of officers** is reserved to the local church.
- The local church has the right to determine if it will have a **board of deacons**.
- The local church has **ownership of its property**.

- The particular church has the right to *call its pastor*, subject to the Presbytery's concurrence.
- Certain *matters of conscience* are reserved for the local church.
- The local church determines its own *benevolence and budgetary objectives*.

Dissolution or Dismissal of a Particular Church. The Presbytery will dissolve a church that is no longer viable, and receives the church's property. The Presbytery also will dismiss a church (with its property) upon the two-thirds vote of the congregation.

REVIEW AND CONTROL -- EPC CHURCH COURTS

We said above that in Presbyterian churches we 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 persons 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 within a specified geographical area.

The Presbytery is also made up of representatives, called **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. Here again the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has a unique and distinctive feature that no other Presbyterian body in America has. In the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, we believe that historically a part of the genius of the Presbyterian system has been the participation of the Ruling Elders, the laymen, within the life of the whole church. In recent years within many Presbyterian denominations in America, the control of the church has fallen under the ministers and the churches have become clergy-dominated. When that happens, the church then tends to drift off into either one of two directions. If the ministers are very liberal, then the denomination drifts off into liberalism that takes the church away from its historic moorings. On the other hand, if the ministers are ultra-conservative, the denomination tends to become lost in theological “nit-picking” that also diverts it from its main purpose. So the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has sought to prevent this diversion of the church from its purpose by assuring the important role of the layman and an effort to prevent the church from falling into the hands of the clergy alone.

So, 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. And 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. By the same token, 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, or commissioners, from all of the churches of the denomination.

You might think that the General Assembly would be made up of commissioners from the Presbyteries, but this is not the case. The commissioners to the Assembly are all of the Pastors, and two Ruling Elders from each congregation for each Pastor.

Review and Control. How do these courts exercise review and control? By means described in Chapters 14-18 of the Book of Discipline. 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. Most importantly, perhaps, 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 13). Each Presbytery has a Ministerial Committee that reviews the relationship between the church and Pastor, his work and compensation (Book of Government, chapter 16-27).



THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

It is important to understand the kind of power and authority the church and its officers have. “The power given to the Church by Christ is moral and spiritual, thus distinguishing the government of the church from civil government. The powers of the Church reside in the Church as exercised in its courts and not in individuals” (Book of Government, chapter 3-1). In the Book of Government, we are told that there are two kinds of power in the church. First, there is the **power of order**, and second, there is the **power of jurisdiction**.

The Power of Order. The power of order is the authority given to a person elected to the office of Deacon or Ruling Elder or Pastor. It is the **power to serve** (Book of Government, chapter 3-2). It is the authority to proclaim Jesus and to minister in the name of Christ. The power 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 Power of Jurisdiction. But the power of jurisdiction is the **power to rule** (Book of Government, chapter 3-2). And here is the important thing: the power of jurisdiction, this power 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 a person is ordained as an officer, that person has the power of order. That is, by the act of ordination, that individual has certain duties to serve. But the power to rule, the power 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 power 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 Power. So the power of jurisdiction, or the power 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, prays together about its decision, and 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 or the Presbytery or the General Assembly can err! However, in the ordinary process of governing the church we must trust that God does ordinarily act through the majority of the governing body.



Joint Power 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 -- either the whole government, with its review and control processes, its officers and 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 and 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. And 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.” **A representative to a governing body of the church first and foremost is to represent Jesus Christ.**

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 undershepherds of the Savior.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT – QUESTIONS

- 12-1. Name and describe the three basic forms of church government.
- 12-2. What is the governing document of EPC church government and the three parts that comprise it?
- 12-3. How can a local church get started? Three methods.
- 12-4. What are the three types of members in an EPC church?
- 12-5. How may a person become a confirmed member of an EPC church? Three ways.
- 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 power in the Presbyterian church? How are they different?
- 12-10. Who do the representatives in EPC government represent?

So What? Practical Leadership Applications **CHURCH GOVERNMENT – Chapter 12**

How do we, as leaders, work effectively and joyfully within the structures of our church?

Nachman of Bratslav (*Polish Rabbi, d. 1811*):

“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.”

“It was hard for Satan alone to mislead the whole world, so he appointed leaders in different locales.”

Church leadership is a pressure position. In almost every church, there is an ongoing 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 hard-pressed and under the gun. We tend to think too much or too little of ourselves. Doing things well and in order becomes instead, “just doing things.” We would like to offer some “down-home advice” to all those who have the great privilege of serving God and his people. We’ve entitled these thoughts on the next page...

**TEN REMINDERS FOR CHRISTIAN
LIFE AND LEADERSHIP**

No matter what other people tell you...

Don't think that you have all the answers.
(That omniscient position has been permanently and effectively filled.)

Don't think that you **should** have all the answers.
(Just wrestling with the right questions is hard enough.)

Don't think you know exactly what others should do.
(While we can lead in biblical paths, we must leave final footprints to God.)

Don't think you can resolve every problem.
(If you could, Jesus would be unnecessary.)

Don't ever motivate someone by using guilt.
(While it may seem to work in the short-term,
it always creates deep wounds and anger.)

Don't ever absorb someone else's guilt.
(Martyrdom is a call to be accepted, not a long-term profession to be perfected.)

Don't think that ministry is supposed to be easy.
(If you do, you haven't been reading your Bible enough.)

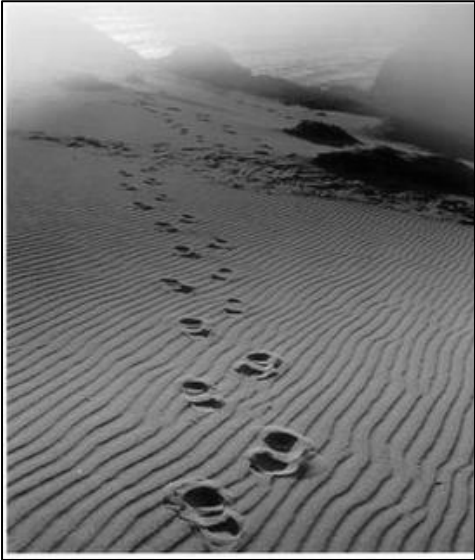
Don't allow secrets, but keep confidences.
(The difference is that the first is based on maintaining power,
while the latter seeks to protect the weak.)

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.)

Don't think you can change others.
(You can teach them, lead them, support them, and love them
and model health for them, but you cannot change them.
Only the Holy Spirit does long-term persuading.)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

The Qualifications and Responsibilities of Church Officers



Read the following materials: 1 Tim. 3:1-13, Ex. 18:13-27; Acts 6:1-7; 20:17-38; I Tim. 5:17-18 (**all below**), Book of Government Chapter 10 (skim also Chapters 11-14); Book of Worship, Chapter 2, paragraphs 2-4A, 2-5D, 2-6D, 2-7B, 4-2 introduction, and 4-2A.

SCRIPTURES REGARDING OFFICERS:

I Tim. 3:1-13: Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Jesus Christ.

Ex. 18:13-27: The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 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?" Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 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." Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 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. 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. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 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. 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. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves. Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

Acts 6:1-7: 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. 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. 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 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” 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. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

The Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, has given three offices to the Church. These are Ministers of the Word (Teaching Elders, Pastors), Ruling Elders, and Deacons. The particular church should prayerfully search the Scriptures and choose for officers those who are best qualified. Teaching and Ruling Elders are known as Presbyters 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 10-1*)

Acts 20:17-38: From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 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. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. 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. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 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. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 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. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 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. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or

clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 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.'" When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

I Tim. 5:17-18: The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

CHURCH OFFICERS – Chapter 13

How can we, as leaders, be more godly, effective, and durable as we fulfill God’s call for us at this church?

Our Commitment to Jesus as Leaders

OUR PURSUIT As Elders and/or Leaders, we are to collectively represent the “mind of Christ” for this, His church. This includes a commitment to 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 touchstone and 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” (II Cor. 4:7).

“A man most fit for high station is not the man who demands it.”

- **Moses ibn Ezra, *Sirat Yisrael* (11th century Spanish rabbi, “The Poetry of Israel”)**

“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, *Situational Ethics: The New Morality* (Social Ethicist, 1966)**

“He who falls in love with himself will have no rival.”

- **Benjamin Franklin (American author and statesman, d. 1790)**

“In seeking knowledge from God, the first step is silence, the second listening, the third remembering, the fourth practicing, and the fifth, teaching others.”

- **Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol (Jewish Rabbi, Spain, c. 1050 AD)**

“There are many ways to lead. Some people, like Franklin Roosevelt, inspired with stirring speeches. Others, like Joe DiMaggio, led by example. Winston Churchill and Douglas MacArthur were both exceptionally brave and excellent speakers. Ronald Reagan led through the strength and consistency of his character – people followed him because they believed in him. Ultimately... (Leadership) is your ability to get people to do what they have to do.”

- **Rudolf Giuliani, *Leadership* (New York City Mayor, 2002)**

A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP COVENANT

- A.** *I agree with the premises put forth above, and with the need for accountability under both the Bible and those church leaders whom God has called me to serve with. If I ever find myself outside these premises or the standards below, I will confess and submit myself to my fellow leaders in the Lord (Matt. 18:15-17; I Cor. 5:11-15; Gal 6:1-10; I Peter 5:1-4).*
- B.** *I pledge to do my very best, with God's help, to serve and to live in a way that is consistent with the ethics and intent of Scripture, and pleasing to my Heavenly Father (I Tim. 2:22-26).*
- C.** *Since leadership must always fall under the direction, empowering, and accountability of the Ultimate Leader -- he who is High and Lifted Up -- we must be careful not to misuse our positions as leaders. Therefore, I will seek God's wisdom and instructions from prayer, Bible study, and sound teaching, while accepting responsibility for my own actions. As a leader I will trust God to honor my small sacrifices with great fruit! (Prov. 2:1-11; I Tim. 4:15-16).*
- D.** *I recognize that being a leader is a high calling. I will do my best to grow in maturity even as I lead others. As per Titus 1:5-9; I Tim. 3:1-7; and I Peter 5:1-4, I will seek to be above reproach, unimpeachable, devout, and a good example in how I live my life, both in public and private (2 Kings 5:6; I Thess. 2:4; Phil. 3:17; I Tim. 6:11).*
- E.** *I will strive to maintain unity, both spiritually and practically, within this church and within the Leader team. For Christian living, we are commanded to work together, as a single "body" might; in Scripture there is no mention of "solo" ministry (I Tim.3:3; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:3).*
- F.** *In working out this Christian unity, I will also recognize our individual diversity. God has created us differently because, for any team to function and win, a diversity of players, each with their own specialized skills, is required. I will recognize my own worth, and strive to maximize my own strengths and gifts without putting down those who have been created differently (Eph. 4:11-13).*
- G.** *I will do my very best to be aware of my own human limitations and struggles. I will openly admit that I am not perfect, as a Christian or as a church leader. I will admit that I am not always right, objective, or spiritually mature; nor do I always have the best or desired answers. If I stumble or fall, I will seek out and share my struggles with a church Pastor or leader (James 5:16; I Thess. 3:12-13).*
- H.** *Recognizing my call and commitment as a leader, I will make diligence, attendance, and timeliness a high priority, always endeavoring to do the job Jesus has asked of me in a way which honors him (Eph. 4:1, 6:7; I Tim. 4:13-14; II Tim 2:14-15; Titus 1:5-9).*
- I.** *I commit to regularly and specifically pray for my church, its leaders and staff, and my fellow leaders (James 5:13-16).*
- J.** *I will maintain an unbending confidentiality and proper speech within the proper bounds of being a Christian leader (Prov. 16:23; 17:9; I Tim. 3:2, Titus 2:7-8).*
- K.** *I will seek to be **enthusiastic and joyful in serving God**, always displaying a godly attitude. My hope is that my enthusiasm will be catching! (Phil. 2:14; I Cor. 14:12; I Peter 5:2-3).*
- L.** *While being unflagging as a shepherd over God's flock, I will also seek to **lead a balanced life**, gently and in love resisting those things which urge me to exceed significantly my available time constraints, or sacrifice my family life or my spiritual walk (I Tim. 4:15-16; 5:7-8),./.,,*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE OFFICER

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church 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; and 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.

Qualifications or Attributes of the Officer

A. From the Bible: I Tim. 3:1-13; II Tim. 2:24,25; I Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:6-9; Ezra 7:9b-10:

* Attributes of an officer should be already present -- candidate must examine himself/herself.

* Focus should not be on personality but character -- the fruit of godliness.

* Candidate must commit to pursuit of Christ-like character and attributes required of an officer.

* Candidate must be an example.

Biblical Summary of Christ-like Character Required for an Officer:

1. Godliness -- In I Tim. 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 among the flock.

- a. Temperate, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined (Titus 1:7,8)
- b. Sincere (I Tim. 3:8)
- c. Not pursuing dishonest gain (I Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7), not a lover of money (I Tim. 3:3)
- d. An example to the flock (I Peter 5:3)
- e. Full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3,5)

2. Desire to serve -- (I Tim. 3:1; I Peter 5:2) in humility (Acts 6:2)

3. Love for others -- hospitable, gentle, patient, not quarrelsome (I Tim. 3:2,3; Titus 1:7,8)

4. Good reputation

- a. Above reproach (I Tim. 3:2)
- b. With good reputation among outsiders (I Tim. 3:7)

B. From our Book of Government

Elder -- 10-4; 10-5; 10-6

Deacon -- 10-7; 10-8; 16-7

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 ministry assigned to him/her?

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?

C. Discerning Gifts and Competence for Officers

The Bible teaches that there are some gifts and abilities that officers should have in order to be properly equipped for service. We must place a priority of character over gifts, but the offices of elder and deacon are also based on gifts. A common problem is the fact that people in large local 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 (I Tim. 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.¹ A good way to test a person's ability to lead in the church is to observe his/her management in the home (I Tim. 3:11). The children of an officer must be believers in Christ who are (as minors) obedient to their parents. (I Tim. 3:4,5, 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 (I Tim. 3:6,10). Many Sessions recommend that a person be a member of their local church for a minimum of 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.

¹ *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 persons 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, please refer to EPC position paper on "Divorce and Remarriage."

So What? Practical Leadership Applications

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTER – Chapter 14

What qualifications should we, as leaders, be exhibiting in our lives?

Characteristics of a Christian Leader

From St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) *The Character of a Christian Leader*¹⁰

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, July 16, 1274. As a leader, Bonaventure is credited with assisting St. Francis in founding and giving structure to the Franciscan order. 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 six qualities of a spiritual leader:

- **Zeal for righteousness.** Moral sensitivity to anything unjust in himself or herself (first) or others. This quality highlights the importance of seeking holiness and purity.
- **Compassion.** This consideration should be demonstrated to those who are facing both physical and spiritual weaknesses. Today, Bonaventure might describe this aspect as being a servant to all those in need.
- **Patience.** Bonaventure reminds leaders of the critical need for patience. Why? He notes several reasons: leadership is exhausting and demanding work; there is little apparent return for all the efforts a leader makes; many who are on the receiving end are ungrateful, and God’s timing is not ours. “The godly man waits.”
- **Good example.** Leaders are models to whom other people look up. They are examples in both good and bad. Bonaventure stresses the need for humility and maturity, recognizing that the leader is no better than those who follow, just more visible.
- **Discernment.** This quality guides the leader in knowing both what to do and how to do it. Leaders are to encourage the spiritual and moral growth of the community. To do this, they must discern God’s desires for his people. Bonaventure also reminds his readers of the need for delegation and the danger of becoming buried under the heavy load of administration, and so missing the important “spiritual guide” nature of leadership. (Remember – this was written in the 13th century!)
- **Devotion to God.** While listed last, this is the most important quality to Bonaventure. Everything else depends on it. A close personal relationship with God guides us in all our leadership responsibilities. Here, Bonaventure mentions the need for public and private prayer, and for cultivating an awareness or mindfulness of God in all of life.

For Group Discussion or Reflection

- How do we feel these early characteristics transfer to our world today?
- Why is each one important?
- As we each look at the six items, is there one in which we feel we are strong?
- In the same way, is there one which could stand some improvement?

¹⁰ Summarized from St. Bonaventure. *The Character of a Christian Leader* (originally titled *The Six Wings of the Seraph*), trans. Philip O'Mara. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978.

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 the one hand it's amusing, but on the other hand it reveals how easily we deceive ourselves and "think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think" (Rom. 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 peacefully unaware of the effects of the sin nature in their lives.

This chapter offers two tools for diagnosing an individual's spiritual health and a tool for assessing the health of a church. Do the self-diagnosis honestly. On the 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 (II Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24; I John 1:8-10).

QUESTIONS TO DIAGNOSE SPIRITUAL HEALTH¹¹

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."¹²

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 (Ps. 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? (Ps. 42:1-2).*

Answer the diagnostic question on a scale of 1-4:

1 = never true; 2 = sometimes true; 3 = true most of the time; 4 = always true

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 (I Chron. 12:32). It is important to

¹¹ Selected from Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, NavPress, 2001.

¹² A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1948), p. 8.

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 (Ps. 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).

Answer the diagnostic question on a scale of 1-4

1 = never true; 2 = sometimes true; 3 = true most of the time; 4 = always true

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."¹³

If God's love is growing in believers, they will find their love for other Christians strengthening. They will find themselves expressing God's love by doing good to all people, and especially to fellow believers (Gal. 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 I Cor. 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 I Cor. 13 or 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 Cor. 13:4-7).

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

Answer the diagnostic question on a scale of 1-4:

1 = never true; 2 = sometimes true; 3 = true most of the time; 4 = always true

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" (Eph. 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.

¹³ Maurice Roberts, "The Supreme Grace of Christian Love," *The Banner of Truth*, February 1989, p. 3.

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 Christ, 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? Because it is God's love 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" (Eph. 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 (I Cor. 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" (II Cor. 6:16).

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:22).

Answer the diagnostic question on a scale of 1-4:

1 = never true; 2 = sometimes true; 3 = true most of the time; 4 = always true

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."¹⁴ 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" (I Tim. 4:7-8). Some of the disciplines commonly listed are biblical meditation, prayer, fasting, solitude, and celebration. For the purposes of this guide, take stock of your practice of prayer.

Answer the diagnostic question on a scale of 1-4:

1 = never true; 2 = sometimes true; 3 = true most of the time; 4 = always true

One learns 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

¹⁴ Whitney, *Ten Questions*, pp. 92-93.

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.

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.”¹⁵

Peter Scazzero, in his book *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 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 and covetous, 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.

¹⁵ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*, Zondervan, 2003, p. 20.

Leading a Healthy Church

In his research on how churches grow, Christian Schwarz¹⁶ 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.¹⁷
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.
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.

¹⁶ Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 4th Edition, St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2000.

¹⁷ Definitions of the quality characteristics are taken from www.coachnet.org.

The EPC has a number of leaders trained in coaching churches through the “Natural Church Development.” 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 your church is interested in learning more about Natural Church Development, contact the National Outreach Director 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. 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; 20:17; I Tim. 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 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 Board, Presbytery, and General Assembly must face the challenge of how to practice the principle in a way that advances the mission of the church 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 lead a church in a 21st century context using the ancient biblical principle of “plurality of elders” to accomplish the Great Commission and live out the Great Commandment.

Recommended Resources:

- Gerard Berghoef, Lester Dekoster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders*, Christian’s Library Press, 1979.
- John C. Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*, Second Edition, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.
- Don K. Clements, *Biblical Church Government*, Presbyterian Primers, Volume I, Narrows, Va: Metokos Press, 2003.
- EPC Long Range Planning Committee White Paper. Available online at www.epc.org/general-assembly/documents-LRP/LRP-WhitePaper-2006.pdf.
- Paul E. Engle, Series Editor, *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Darrel L. Guder, Editor, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*: Eerdmans 1998
- Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, Editors, *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2004.
- Peter Scazzero, with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*, Grand Rapids: 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: NavPress, 2001.

Emotional/Spiritual Health Inventory

Please answer these questions as honestly as possible.
Use the following scoring method:

Not very true
Sometimes true
Mostly true
Very true

PART A: General Formation and Discipleship

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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 quality, regular 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 _____ | | | | |

PART B: Emotional Components of Discipleship

Principle 1: Look Beneath the Surface

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. It's easy for me to identify what I am feeling inside (John 11:33–35; Luke 19:41–44). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I am willing to explore previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself, allowing Christ to more fully transform me (Rom. 7:21–25; Col. 3:5–17). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I enjoy being alone in quiet reflection with God and myself (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I can share freely about my emotions, sexuality, joy, and pain (Ps. 22; Prov. 5:18–19; Luke 10:21). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I am able to experience and deal with anger in a way that leads to growth in others and myself (Eph. 4:25–32). | 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 (Ps. 73; 88; Jer. 20:7–18). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| TOTAL _____ | | | | |

Not very true
Sometimes true
Mostly true
Very true

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 (Matt. 18:15–18). | 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 (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 51). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I am able to thank God for <i>all</i> my past life experiences, seeing how he has used them to uniquely shape me into who I am (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28–30). | 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 (Ex. 20:5; compare Gen. 20:2; 26:7; 27:19; 37:1–33). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I don't need approval from others to feel good about myself (Prov. 29:25; Gal. 1:10). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I take responsibility and ownership for my past life rather than to blame others (John 5:5–7). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| TOTAL _____ | | | | |

Principle 3: Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. I often admit when I'm wrong, readily asking forgiveness from others (Matt. 5:23–24). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes (2 Cor. 12:7–12). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. Others would easily describe me as approachable, gentle, open, and transparent (Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 13:1–6). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. Those close to me would say that I am not easily offended or hurt (Matt. 5:39–42; 1 Cor. 13:5). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. I am consistently open to hearing and applying constructive criticism and feedback that others might have for me (Prov. 10:17; 17:10; 25:12). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| | Not very true | Sometimes true | Mostly true | Very true |
|--|---------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|
| 18. I am rarely judgmental or critical of others (Matt. 7:1–5). | 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 (James 1:19–20). | 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 (Matt. 4:1–11). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. I am regularly able to say "no" to requests and opportunities than risk overextending myself (Mark 6:30–32). | 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 (Ps. 139; Rom. 12:3; 1 Peter 4:10). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. It's easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else's burden (Gal 6:2) and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden (Gal. 6:5). | 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 (Mark 1:21–39). | 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 (Ex. 20:8). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| TOTAL _____ | | | | |

Principle 5: Embrace Grieving and Loss

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. I openly admit my losses and disappointments (Ps. 3:1–8; 5:1–12). | 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 (2 Sam. 1:4, 17–27; Ps. 51:1–17). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 28. I take time to grieve my losses as David (Ps. 69) and Jesus did (Matt. 26:39; John 11:35; 12:27). | 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 (2 Cor 1:3–7). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| | Not very true | Sometimes true | Mostly true | Very true |
|--|---------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|
| 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 (Ps. 42; Matt. 26:36–46). | 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 (John 1:1–14; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:3–5). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. People close to me would describe me as a responsive listener (Prov. 29:11; James 1:19). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 33. I have a healthy sense of who I am, where I've come from, and what are my values, likes, passions, dislikes, and so on (John 13:3). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 34. I am able to accept myself just the way I am (John 13:1–3; Rom. 12:3). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 35. I am able to form deep relationships with people from different backgrounds, cultures, races, educational, and economic classes (John 4:1–26; Acts 10–11). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 36. People close to me would say that I suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 37. I am good about inviting people to adjust and correct my previous assumptions about them (Prov. 20:5; Col. 3:12–14). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 38. 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 (Prov. 25:11; Eph. 4:29–32). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 39. I rarely judge others quickly but instead am a peacemaker and reconciler (Matt. 7:1–5). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 40. People would describe me as someone who makes "loving well" my number-one aim (John 13:34–35; 1 Cor. 13). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| TOTAL _____ | | | | |

Inventory Results

For each group of questions on pages 60–63:

- Add your answers to get the total for that group. Write your totals on the top portion of page 65, as the sample below illustrates.
- Next, plot your answers and connect the dots to create a graph on the bottom portion of page 65, again following the sample below.
- Finally, see page 66 for interpretations of your level of emotional health in each area. What patterns do you discern?

SAMPLE

| | Questions | Total |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Part A | | |
| General Formation and Discipleship | 1–7 | <u>24</u> /28 |
| Part B | | |
| <i>Principle One—Look Beneath the Surface</i> | 1–6 | <u>20</u> /24 |
| <i>Principle Two—Break the Power of the Past</i> | 7–12 | <u>11</u> /24 |
| <i>Principle Three—Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability</i> | 13–19 | <u>12</u> /28 |
| <i>Principle Four—Accept the Gift of Limits</i> | 20–25 | <u>14</u> /24 |
| <i>Principle Five—Embrace Grieving and Loss</i> | 26–30 | <u>16</u> /20 |
| <i>Principle Six—Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well</i> | 31–40 | <u>23</u> /40 |

Part A

General Formation and Discipleship 1–7 /28

Part B

Principle One—Look Beneath the Surface 1–6 /24

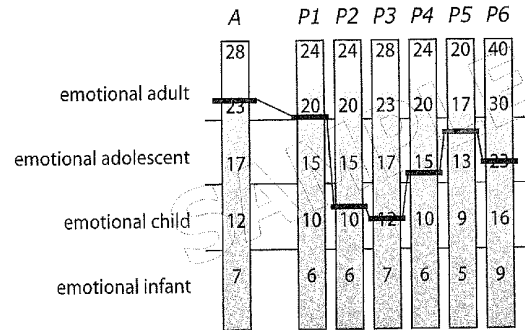
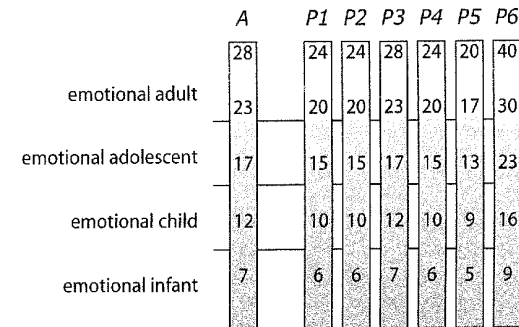
Principle Two—Break the Power of the Past 7–12 /24

Principle Three—Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability 13–19 /28

Principle Four—Accept the Gift of Limits 20–25 /24

Principle Five—Embrace Grieving and Loss 26–30 /20

Principle Six—Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well 31–40 /40



Interpretation Guide: Levels of Emotional Maturity

Emotional infant. Like a physical infant, I look for other people to take care of me more than I look to care for them. 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, and am unaware of how my behavior is effecting/hurting them. People sometimes perceive me as inconsiderate, insensitive, and self-centered.

Emotional children. Like a physical child, when life is going my way and I am receiving all the things I want and need, I am content and seem emotionally well-adjusted. However, as soon as disappointment, stress, tragedy, or anger enter the picture, I quickly unravel inside. I interpret disagreements as a personal offense and am easily hurt by others. 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 have difficulty calmly discussing with others what I want and expect from them in a mature loving way.

Emotional adolescents. Like a physical adolescent, I know the right ways I should behave in order to “fit in” mature, adult society. I can feel threatened and alarmed inside when I am offered constructive criticism, quickly becoming defensive. I subconsciously keep records on the love I give out, so I can ask for something in return at a later time. When I am in conflict, I might admit some fault in the matter, but I will insist on demonstrating the guilt of the other party, proving why they are more to blame. Because of my commitment to self-survival, I have trouble really listening to another person's pain, disappointments, or needs without becoming preoccupied with myself.

Emotional adults. I can respect and love others without having to change them or becoming critical and judgmental. I don't expect anyone to be perfect in meeting my relational needs, whether it be my spouse, parents, friends, boss, or pastor. I love and appreciate people for who they are as whole individuals, the good and the bad, and not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. When under stress, I don't fall into a victim mentality or a blame game. 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 and freely discuss them with others. Deeply in tune with my own emotions and feelings, I can move into the emotional worlds of others, meeting them at the place of their feelings, needs, and concerns. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ, that I have nothing to prove.

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LEADING HEALTHY CHURCHES – QUESTIONS

In addition to the questions in the chapter, consider the following:

- 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 taken up with 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?

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?
8. 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?
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?
10. 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?
11. 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?

